



An Bosca 
Leabharlainne
Evaluative Report



ABOUT LAUREATE NA nÓG:

Laureate na nÓg is an initiative of the Arts Council. It is managed and delivered on the council’s behalf by Children’s Books Ireland, and also supported by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. By honouring an artist of exceptional talent and commitment, Laureate na nÓg champions and celebrates literature for children and young people, inspiring generations of writers, illustrators and readers.

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ABOUT CHILDREN’S BOOKS IRELAND

Children’s Books Ireland is the national charity and arts organisation that champions every child’s right to develop a love of reading. Through our many activities and events we aim to engage young people with books, foster a greater understanding of the importance of books for young people and act as a core resource for those with an interest in books for children in Ireland.

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THANKS TO:

We would like to offer our thanks to all of the schools who participated in the An Bosca Leabharlainne evaluation process, and in particular to the students and teachers who gave their time in focus groups and field work. Our thanks to the eleven Artists in Residence for their work throughout the project, and for the valuable feedback they contributed to this report.

An Bosca Leabharlainne was funded by the Arts Council and Foras na Gaeilge

Creidim go n-athraíonn an léitheoireacht meon an duine óig. Más féidir leat léamh sa dara teanga creidim go n-osclaíonn sé fuinneog ar chultúr na teanga sin. Tá súil agam go mbainfidh páistí ar fud na tíre sult agus spraoi as an mBosca Leabharlainne seo agus go n-osclóidh sé an fhuinneog sin ar ár gcultúr dúchais féin.

I believe reading can change a young person's outlook on the world. If you can read in another language, it opens a window on the culture of that language. I hope children all over the country enjoy An Bosca Leabharlainne and that it opens a window for them on our native culture.

Áine Ní Ghlinn, Laureate na nÓg 2020-2023

Introduction

Laureate na nÓg is an initiative of the Arts Council. It is managed and delivered on Council's behalf by Children's Books Ireland, and also supported by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. By honouring an artist of exceptional talent and commitment, Laureate na nÓg champions and celebrates literature for children and young people, inspiring generations of writers, illustrators and readers.

Áine Ní Ghlinn is the first Laureate na nÓg, or children's literature laureate, to write exclusively in the Irish language. Her appointment marked a departure in the history of the laureateship and presented an opportunity for a high-profile campaign to promote reading for pleasure in Irish in primary schools. The Bosca Leabharlainne project inspired children of all ages in primary school classes, provided schools with excellent quality books written in the Irish language and supported teachers with a playful, fun activity pack which helped them to bring the Bosca to life in the classroom.

An Bosca Leabharlainne, meaning The Library Box, was Laureate na nÓg Áine Ní Ghlinn's flagship project during her tenure (2020-23) and was developed, delivered and supported by the team at Children's Books Ireland. It was a hugely ambitious project, and we expected its impact to be felt proportionately by children all over the island of Ireland. The project received funding from Foras na Gaeilge, and the Arts Council, and was supported by regular funding for Laureate na nÓg from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. 2,200 boxes of An Bosca Leabharlainne were sent to 1,831 schools, including every Gaelscoil and Gaeltacht school on the island of Ireland. This is the first project of its kind, in terms of scale, implementation, number of artists work represented, and number of children accessed. There had been guidance on reading in Irish provided to schools before, but this is the first project to exclusively focus on reading in Irish for pleasure and to provide the books and resources. The following is an insight into the structure of the project.



Pictured: (from left to right) Sarah Bannan, The Arts Council; Elaina Ryan, Children's Books Ireland; Regina Uí Chollatáin, Foras na Gaeilge; Áine Ní Ghlinn, Laureate na nÓg; Norma Foley T.D., Minister for Education.

Aims and Outputs

The primary aim of An Bosca Leabharlainne was to promote independent reading for children and enjoyment of reading in the Irish language. Further aims were:

- to promote Irish language literature and publishing;
- to raise awareness of Irish language literature among the public;
- to increase the number of high-quality, engaging Irish language books available in primary schools;
- to develop teachers' capacity to encourage their students' reading in Irish in innovative, creative ways.

An Bosca Leabharlainne was an ambitious island-wide book-gifting scheme, where a box of 25 new books in Irish was received by 1,831 schools. There were 2,200 boxes, totalling 55,000 books in phase one of the project.

The second phase of the project focused on book ownership and the lack of books in many homes. In the 21 schools where there was an artist in residence, each student received two books to take home and keep, and an additional gift was given to each school for their libraries.

Further outputs were:

- a high-quality activity pack which was included in the Bosca and freely available online to support all schools to engage creatively with excellent, original Irish children's literature in playful ways;
- colourful, vibrant posters to raise project visibility in schools;
- artists' residencies in twenty-one schools to promote reading in Irish;
- videos commissioned from three of these artists were also made freely available on the Laureate na nÓg website to promote engagement with the project by those schools who did not have an artist in residence, and to support the public in engaging with reading in Irish.

A media and social media campaign under the title 'GiveLeabharGaeilge' was launched for Seachtain na Gaeilge 2022 in partnership with Dubray Books to encourage adults to buy a book in Irish for a child in their life. This complemented the launch of An Bosca Leabharlainne and worked towards the same overarching goal of raising the profile of excellent Irish language literature.

Impact

The planned impact of An Bosca Leabharlainne centred on five main elements:

1. Increase Irish language reading frequency in schools.
2. Increase visibility and knowledge of high-quality Irish books for children in schools.
3. Support teachers to make reading in Irish fun.
4. Give children the opportunity to have an artist in residence in a small number of schools.
5. Support Irish language publishers.

This has been achieved by the scheme in all five areas:

1. Children in primary schools all over the island are reading more in Irish, reading more widely and reporting increased enjoyment of reading in Irish, independently or as part of a group.
2. Visibility of excellent Irish books for children has been significantly increased. In some English-medium schools An Bosca Leabharlainne were the first Irish language books they received.
3. Teachers and school staff feel supported to be creative and playful when working with Irish language literature and are better informed as to the books available.
4. Children in twenty-one schools have had direct, prolonged contact with a writer or illustrator, and are excited about Irish books.
5. Irish language publishers were significantly supported with the purchase of 71,000 books.

Laureate na nÓg Áine Ní Ghlinn's motivations for the scheme

Áine Ní Ghlinn decided that sending An Bosca Leabharlainne to schools was the best distribution mechanism, as this would give every child the same opportunity to engage with the books. 'A lot depends on the teachers. Some teachers have a very high standard of Irish and will engage totally with a project that encourages children to read. Others are less interested in reading in Irish. The advantage of promoting the Bosca Leabharlainne through the schools is that it opens the project to all children. Every child in the school has the same access to the books.'

Áine believes that, by exciting children about reading in Irish, adults can be encouraged to revisit the language too: 'I know quite a few adults who have very little confidence in their standard of Irish. Some were not encouraged as children - either at home or in school. During the pandemic, however, quite a lot of people seem to have re-engaged with the language through Duolingo or through attending Irish classes online.' When asked about the importance of confidence for using An Bosca Leabharlainne, Áine said: 'Self-confidence is so important. Some teachers may have very little confidence in their own standard of Irish. They may have lost both confidence and fluency since their college days. However, there are lots of easy-to-read books in the Bosca Leabharlainne and there are ideas in the accompanying booklet on how to use picturebooks or easy-to-read books with children of all ages.'

Áine believes that the key to promoting reading for pleasure is to separate reading from homework. The ideas included in the booklet which accompanies An Bosca Leabharlainne are about fun. 'Some of the books in the Bosca Leabharlainne could be used in History, Art or other subject areas. The books were not selected to teach either a subject or a language but if used in a fun way the games and activities in the accompanying booklet could bring extra life to another subject area. We have to acknowledge, however, that we can gift the Bosca Leabharlainne to the school but it's up to the teachers to use the games and activities and to make reading fun.'

In explaining why children give up reading for pleasure in Irish, Áine highlights that there are fewer books in Irish and children run out of content at around age eight or nine. 'There are some good translations available for this age group. However, if children are reading only translations from English, they may assume that the only writers worth reading are authors writing in the English language. Some people see these translations as a bridge to keep children reading. They may be correct, but we need to ensure that it's not a bridge to reading only these authors. Sadly, we have a shortage of Irish language writers writing for the 8/9+ age group.' Outside of this project, Áine's GiveLeabharGaeilge campaign was designed to highlight the excellent Irish books that do exist.

When asked if increased availability of Irish picturebooks in public libraries is a result of her campaign, Áine doesn't think so. 'There are wonderful original Irish language picturebooks available. These are in shops and libraries because they are excellent books. Picturebooks are a wonderful way to encourage reading for pleasure at any age. They foster a love of books and reading and they also build a special relationship between the child and the adult reader. I spent lots of time reading to my children when they were very young. As they grew older, I read with them and when they were reading independently, I discussed their books with them.'

Áine's main wish for the project is for schools to enjoy and have fun with An Bosca Leabharlainne. 'I hope the Bosca Leabharlainne will remain visible in schools and that schools will add new books from time to time. I hope the books will inspire both teachers and children and that children will continue reading in Irish for pleasure.'

Another positive development from the project is the strengthening of the relationship between Children's Books Ireland and Foras na Gaeilge. 'There's a strong working relationship between these organisations. I hope this continues into the future.'

The activity booklet was an important dimension of An Bosca Leabharlainne for Áine, as it focuses on reading for fun. Áine sees schools as the starting point for encouraging reading for pleasure in Irish.

Áine hopes An Bosca Leabharlainne will help teachers to develop a positive longterm attitude towards reading in Irish. 'If teachers continue to use the activities they observed in the sessions with the artists in residence, other children will benefit well into the future. We must remember that every teacher has an influence on thirty different children per year. Overall, I am very happy with the response to the Bosca Leabharlainne. I was absolutely thrilled to see all the photos shared on social media. It was brilliant to see so many photos of children enjoying and having such fun with Irish language books.'

Text based on interview conducted with Áine Ní Ghlinn on 17 February 2022.



Pictured: Áine Ní Ghlinn, Laureate na nÓg, and pupils from Gaelscoil Lios na nÓg, Ranelagh.

Phase One



Choosing the Books

The first task was the selection of books to be included in An Bosca Leabharlainne. There was a consultation conducted on 'Reading in Irish for Pleasure' by Sandra Roe, 2021 and Dr Claire M. Dunne referenced how this consultation document was taken on board in the creation of the activities booklet. The research also informed book selection. Early in the process a decision was taken to create two selections - one for English language schools, which make up the vast majority of schools on the island of Ireland, and a second selection specifically tailored to Gaelscoileanna and Gaeltacht area schools.

Áine Ní Ghlinn herself made the final selection - based on providing books for a range of abilities, ages and interests. Consideration was also given to a range of publishers and authors being included though ultimately the key consideration was the quality of the books. In total forty-five books were selected - twenty for each box type, with an overlap of five books which would appear in both versions.

Choosing the Schools

In Phase one of the project, €300,000 was provided by Foras na Gaeilge to supplement the Arts Council's investment in Laureate na nÓg. It was agreed that every Gaelscoil and Gaeltacht school both in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland would receive both types of boxes created for An Bosca Leabharlainne.. All other schools selected would receive the box best suited to their students' level of comprehension. Schools were also selected in Gaeltacht Service Towns - towns situated in or adjacent to Gaeltacht areas in Ireland, that have a population of over 1,000 people, and which play a significant role in providing public services, recreational and commercial facilities for Gaeltacht residents - and Irish Language Networks outside of the Gaeltacht which have strong Irish language plans. An open application process began in September 2021 which invited other schools to apply to receive An Bosca Leabharlainne. All 525 schools that applied were successful. In an effort to maximise impact on schools in receipt of An Bosca Leabharlainne, it was decided that the remaining boxes should go to DEIS schools, where many students may be experiencing disadvantage, and to smaller schools, where 25 books would be likely to have a greater impact than in a larger school. A list of 727 schools in this category was drawn up, with specific efforts made to ensure a good geographical spread across the island. In total, 1,831 primary schools received An Bosca Leabharlainne.

In order to deepen the impact of An Bosca Leabharlainne in a smaller number of schools, an Artist in Residence (AIR) programme was created. In total 542 schools applied for an artist, 21 schools were selected, including two small island schools sharing one artist's time in a joint residency.

An open call to recruit artists was published in October 2021. Artists applied with an outline of their approach to promoting reading for fun as *Gaeilge*. Due to the relatively small number of writers working in the Irish language, a number of additional artists were approached and asked to participate in the scheme. In total eleven artists in residence were selected.

Between April and June 2022, the artists spent 7.5 days in total working with each school. That time included preparation work, and in some cases online workshops where Covid restrictions were still a factor.

Three of the artists in residence recorded additional video workshops that were made available to the public as part of a package of support materials.

Phase Two



Additional funding

In December 2021, Foras na Gaeilge was able to provide €116,000 of additional funding to the An Bosca Leabharlainne project. Due to the complex logistics, timeline and significant cost involved in compiling large volumes of books from a variety of publishers and packing and distributing these books, it was not practical at this stage to use the additional funding to create more of the same boxes to send to schools. As such, a decision was made to fund the purchase of additional books for the schools participating in the AIR scheme - schools who had at this point been through a detailed selection process and as such were considered to be committed to the overall goal of the project.

The funding meant that in those 21 schools, each student would receive two high quality Irish language books to bring home and keep for themselves. In each case, one was a book written by Laureate na nÓg Áine Ní Ghlinn, and the other was selected by Áine based on the age and language ability of the students. In total this meant 8,296 books were given to 4,148 students across those schools.

The final element was a selection of books provided to each of the 21 schools themselves - a further 8,451 books in total with libraries of between 153 and 1,217 books sent to each of those schools (an average of two books per student, based on the number of pupils per school).

Methodology



Introduction

The evaluation of An Bosca Leabharlainne was conducted and written up between February and October 2022. It consisted of a mixed-methods approach with quantitative elements (surveys) and qualitative elements (focus groups, interviews and fieldwork using arts-based methods). This range of data collection methods catered for adult and child audiences and ensured rich data was available on which to base this report.

Quantitative surveys were conducted with:

- schools that received An Bosca Leabharlainne but did not have an artist in residence,
- schools that did have an artist in residence, and
- artists in residence themselves.

Originally a survey for children was planned but it was later decided that children's voice was sufficiently represented in the evaluation process through the fieldwork and focus groups, and that more in-depth insights could be gained in these ways than from surveys.

Arts-based methods were employed for the fieldwork strand of the evaluation. These methods are in line with the childhood studies argument that considers children as makers and social actors and not as 'adults in the making' (González, Hill and Véliz, 2022). This means that the adult researcher's position in a study should be secondary to facilitate children's voices and participation.

Children's participation in arts activities allows for a largely independent and empowered approach. This allows us to deepen our understanding about the child's perspective on a given subject. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child reminds adults of their responsibility to create opportunities for young children to express their views, rather than expecting children to prove their capabilities. This means adapting to the child's 'interests, levels of understanding and preferred ways of communicating'. Arts-based methods allow potential to adapt to children's own 'ways of being' and modes of expression (Alderson, 2008).

Within this study, the children's drawings and models showed their interest in the overall project and the book. The methods ensured that children worked directly with the books themselves, representing their own interpretation and their own visual perception of their favourite books. These interpretations were sometimes individual, sometimes inspired by peers or influenced by an artist in residence in the school. It is potentially as undiluted a response as is possible in a classroom setting.

Consent procedures and ethics protocols

Consent procedures were followed throughout the evaluation. All participants (adults and children) involved in fieldwork and focus groups signed a consent form. Written consent was obtained from the parents/guardians of children participants and from the children who participated in the fieldwork and focus groups.

Following parental consent, informed consent and assent was then secured from the participant children after explaining the purpose of the evaluation at the outset of the fieldwork session in each school. Consent is viewed as an active and ongoing process and although fieldwork constituted only one day in each setting, this approach was adopted and children's willingness and comfort in participating was actively monitored and considered as the fieldwork was conducted.

Children's contributions and their voices in this evaluation have been respected as has their right to anonymity and privacy in their drawn and modelled artworks. There are no identifiable details and names have been removed.

Summary of data collected

- Opening survey of the twenty-one schools that received an artist in residence (abbreviated below as AIR schools) after they received An Bosca Leabharlainne.
- Closing survey of AIR schools towards the end of the school year when artists' residencies were completed.
- Fieldwork using arts-based methods with two AIR schools, one Irish-medium school based in Northern Ireland, one Irish-medium, Gaeltacht-based school in the Republic of Ireland.
- Fieldwork included a worksheet on 'reading for fun in Irish' (see Appendix 1) and this was completed by children in both fieldwork sites to include written responses as well as arts-based data.
- Focus groups were conducted with four schools. There were two conducted with teachers (one online, one in-person) and two with children (one online, one in-person). Both artist in residence schools and schools without an artist were represented.
- Survey of schools that received An Bosca Leabharlainne.
- Survey of artists in residence.
- Interviews with two artists in residence to consider the experience in more depth.

Details of data	Context	Responses/ Number of items
Survey of AIR schools - opening	Sent to all AIR schools	20/21
Survey of AIR schools - closing	Sent to all AIR schools	17/21
Survey of all schools that received An Bosca Leabharlainne	Sent to all schools that received An Bosca Leabharlainne except those who also received an artist in residence. Conducted when schools had the experience of their books for over three months. 79 schools were those who applied (79/525 total), 38 were Gaelscoileanna or schools from the Gaeltacht (38/317) and 13 were in either Bailte Seirbhíse Gaeltachta or Lónraí Gaeilge (13/262). Of the 164, there were 45 Northern-Ireland based schools.	164/1831
Survey of AIRs	Sent to all artists in residence	10/11
Modelling clay pictures	Used in both fieldwork contexts	51
Storyscapes - drawings	Used in both fieldwork contexts	51
Reading for pleasure in Irish questionnaires	Used in both fieldwork contexts	51
Focus group Q and A	Used in both focus group contexts (children)	2 groups
Initial questions for class groups	Used in both fieldwork contexts	2 groups
Focus group transcripts	There were two conducted with teachers (one online, one in person) and two with children (one online, one in person).	4 groups
Interviews with AIRs	Two follow up interviews with artists	2
Interview with Laureate na nÓg	Start-up interview to gauge expectations for the scheme	1

Current landscape



Reading habits

Before receiving An Bosca Leabharlainne, schools were asked if their students' families value reading and literature (Figure 1) and if their homes were print rich (Figure 2). Families generally value reading and literature with some and most of them marking the majority and there were no schools that responded 'none of them' which was an answer option. Most schools stated that some of their students' homes were print rich (58%) and this highlights the importance of the school library for access to reading material for children.

If the parents enjoy reading, the children have books at home.

English-medium school, Galway

There is a lack of books in disadvantaged homes and we live a long distance from libraries.

English-medium school, Mayo

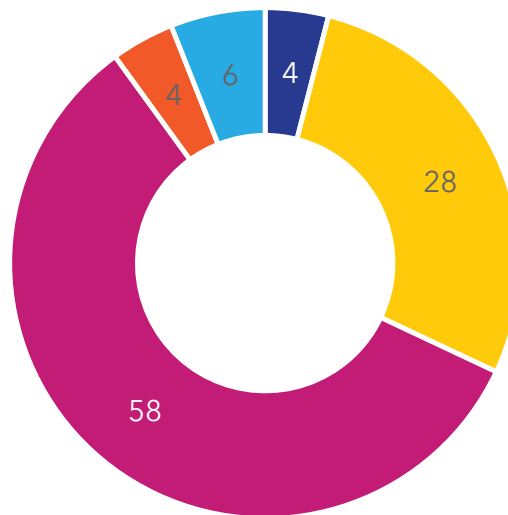
We are a DEIS Band 1 school where a lot of the children are coming from backgrounds with little or no reading materials.

English-medium school, Kilkenny

Reading would be encouraged in English but not to as Gaeilge, parents perceive themselves as not being literate in Gaeilge and this filtered down to the children.

English-medium school, Cavan

Students' home environments are print rich



■ All of them ■ Most of them ■ Some of them ■ None of them ■ Don't know

Figure 1

Students' families value reading and literature

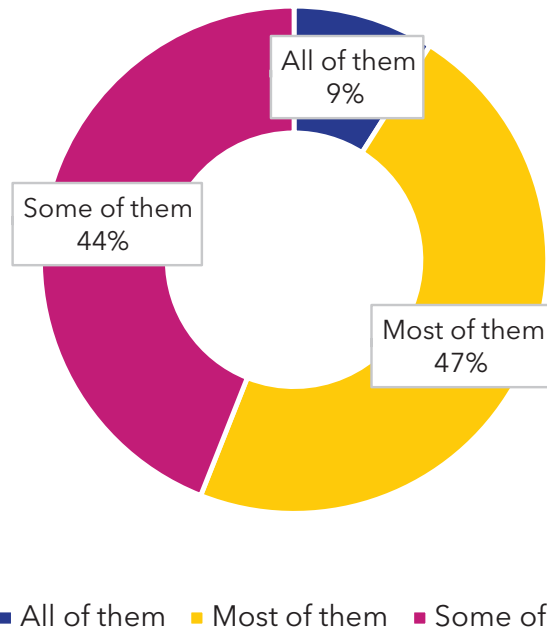


Figure 2

Pupils entering into Junior Infants do not have the know how or skill to turn pages one by one. Gross motor skills are lacking as is how to hold, open and enjoy the magic of illustrations and words.

English-medium school, Tipperary

Some schools emphasised their responsibility, and that of public libraries to ensure that children had access to reading materials if they didn't have books at home.

We have a school of opportunity here. Although there is a lot of emphasis on reading, not every home has reading material available. We have a library at school and now the children have the chance to learn Irish.

English-medium school, Meath

We are a DEIS Band 2 school. We encourage use of our local library as a resource for accessing reading material for our children ... it's free.

English-medium junior school, Dublin

Television and screens in general are perceived to be in direct competition with reading.

It is impossible for a book to compete against the screen ... time outside the classroom is spent on screens.

English-medium school, Dublin

We have a big challenge in schools because children are so addicted to screens and social media and there are young people who are losing reading skills.

Gaelscoil, Dublin

Most families have four or five televisions in the house and don't spend time reading at night. This is the culture we are trying to change.

Gaelscoil, Dublin

In school itself, when asked if students were enthusiastic about reading, most schools responded that the majority of children were enthusiastic as shown in the graph below (Figure 3). Most of them were enthusiastic (67%), almost a quarter of schools said that some of them were (24%) and a small percentage said that all of them were (9%).

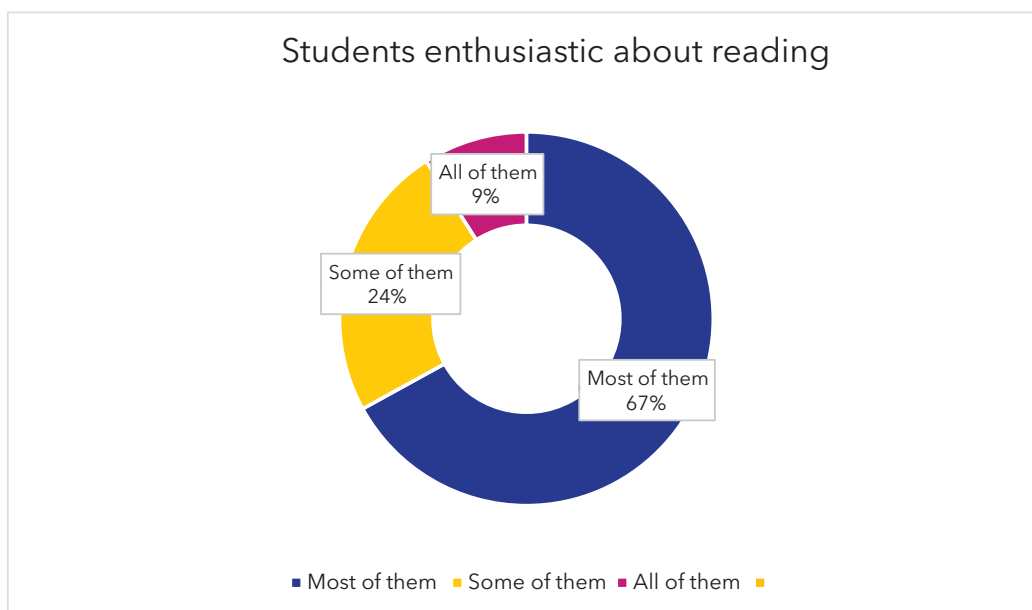


Figure 3

A high proportion of students were reported to 'like to talk about what they are reading' with schools aware of children's reading interests and discussions taking place between them. As Figure 4 shows, 60% of schools said most of them. A quarter of schools said some of them and 15% of schools said all of them.

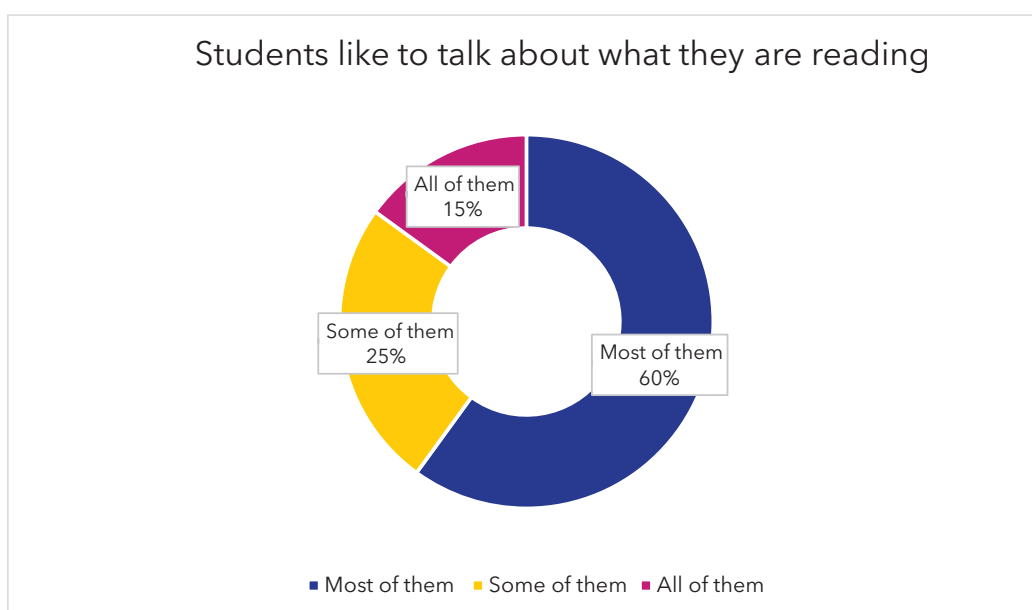


Figure 4

Like any class, there are some who don't like reading, but they are a minority!
Irish-medium school, Northern Ireland

A group of ten-year-old children in an Irish-medium school in Northern Ireland were asked what is nice about reading a book as part of a reading for fun in Irish exercise (see Appendix 1), they talked about humour, drama and illustrations as important factors.

It is wonderfully peaceful and really great.

Boy

It is dramatic. You are nice and comfortable and it is good for you to be reading books.

Girl

When it has funny characters, nice pictures and drama.

Girl

There are lots of pictures and you can work out the story and it makes you wonder.

Girl

When the pictures are lovely and when there is excitement in the story.

Boy

Children aged ten to thirteen in another fieldwork setting, a Gaeltacht-based Irish-medium school in the Republic of Ireland, were interested in the information and knowledge that they could get from books. They talked about retreating to other worlds and relaxing.

You are comfortable when reading and thinking about other worlds.

Boy (aged 12)

I like reading books because you are able to be inside the book and on your own. It is very interesting. I like spending time by myself.

Girl (aged 13)

It is informative. It is good for your mind.

Girl (Age 12)

It is a quiet and calm thing to do.

Girl (aged 12)

Books allow you to create pictures in your mind.

Girl (aged 12)

When the ten-year-olds in the first group were asked what would make them pick up an Irish book and read it, many of the children talked of the pride they have in being able to speak Irish and how not everyone can. They also talked of wanting to encourage others at home or beyond to use Irish. This idea seemed to come from the children themselves – some of them mentioned it during the fieldwork unprompted and the teacher seemed surprised and pleased.

It is nice that I have Irish and on school holidays other people are not able to read Irish books.

Girl

If I was red with anger I would prefer an Irish book.

Boy

It is nice to have Irish and I want to encourage Irish in others more.

Girl

I read because I am really proud of my language and the ideas in Irish books are more interesting.

Girl

The picture on the cover could draw you in.

Girl

Because Irish is our language.

Boy

The children in the Gaeltacht school in the Republic of Ireland spoke mostly of the book's aesthetic: the cover, the colours, the illustrations and the title were mentioned frequently. Some children mentioned learning, and having a book set in Ireland.

I read to learn more Irish and if the title is funny and sounds good, like Moncaí Dána.

Girl (aged 11)

I would pick up an Irish book because it has a good title and a good cover but I open the book then to look further as you are not able to say what type of book it is until you do this. Púca sa Teach is a good example.

Girl (aged 13)

The book has a good title and nice colours. I liked Lúba.

Girl (aged 11)

When it is about your own country and it is a true story.

Boy (aged 12)

I like when a book has a nice title, when it's nicely written and when it's interesting. I liked Púca sa Teach too.

Girl (aged 10)

The children in the Northern Irish school talked about a few things that would stop them from reading in Irish; namely that there is more choice and books available in English, they might be busy with other hobbies, if there were no books in Irish available or if the books in Irish were too difficult to understand. A number of children said nothing would stop them reading in Irish and some left this question unanswered in their worksheets.

When there are more books in English than Irish available. Or if there is no book in Irish around.

Girl

I am very busy with sport and I play football, Gaelic and camogie.

Boy

If I had no Irish books or if there were words that I didn't recognise

Girl

Nothing.

Girl

Books in Irish are more difficult.

Girl

The students in the Gaeltacht school focused very much on ability: they would not read a book in Irish if it were too hard, too big, the writing is too small, it's boring or there are no pictures.

When schools surveyed were asked about their students' preference for reading in Irish the number was lower than in English. The highest proportion of schools reported that some of them liked to read in Irish (66%), a lesser number said most of them (17%) and just 4% said all of them. Unlike enthusiasm for reading generally, 13% of schools said that none of their students liked to read in Irish (Figure 5). This interest in reading in Irish differs from enthusiasm in reading generally (Figure 3) where schools reported that most of their students were enthusiastic (67%). The percentage of schools that stated that said all of their students were enthusiastic (9%) was relatively similar to the percentage of schools that said all of their children liked to read in Irish (4%). Figure 6 comparatively charts interest in reading in English and Irish. Although reading in English is a preference in schools, there is clearly an appetite for reading in Irish which will have been increased through the increased provision of Irish language literature through An Bosca Leabharlainne.

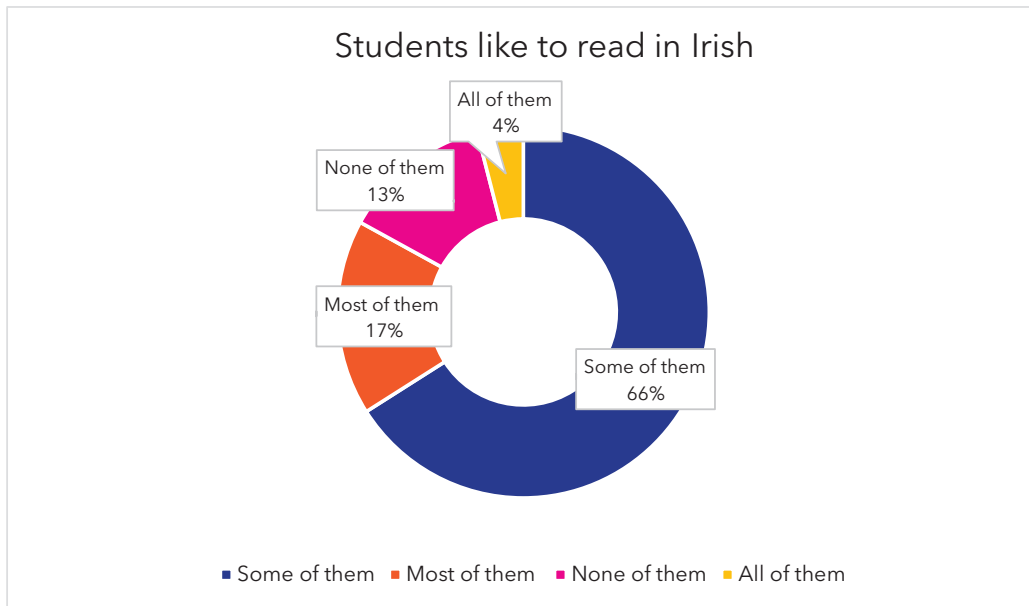


Figure 5

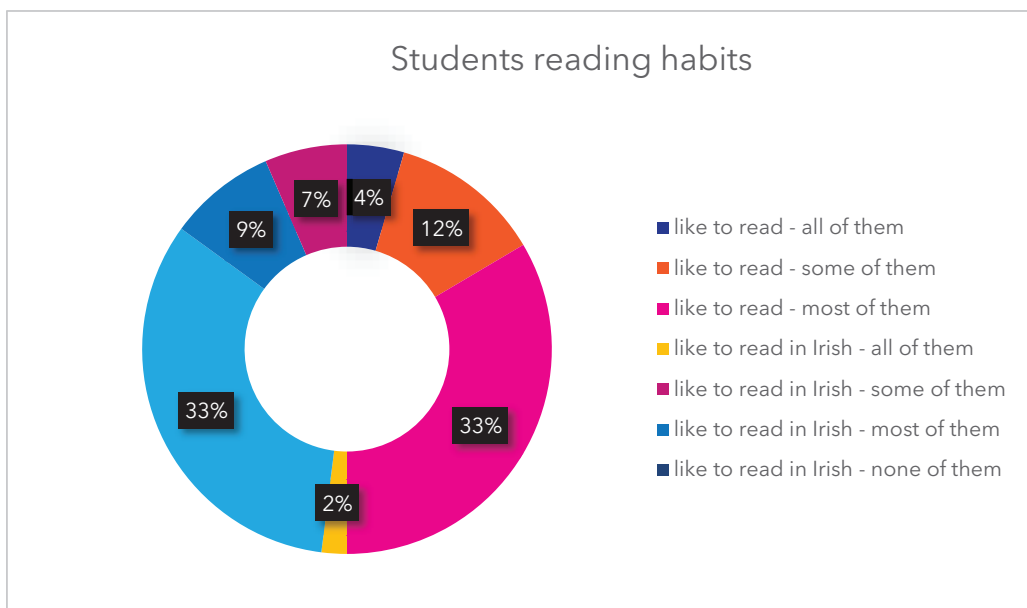


Figure 6 – comparative table on reading in English or Irish

At one online focus group with an Irish-medium Gaeltacht-based school, the children were asked what would prevent them from choosing an Irish language book in the library. One said, 'because the English books look easier, you pick it up and then you continue with the book'. Another child said 'they are hard to find. On a shelf that is too high.' When asked if they were bought a book by their parent or guardian whether they would prefer a book in English or Irish, the children all replied that they would choose an English book, because it is easier for them to read it themselves, and there are more options in English. All seven children in this focus group read at home, and five had lots of books at home. These five all had some books in Irish.



Figure 7

It was clear from the outset that there would be a broad spectrum of language capacities and that attitudes to reading in Irish would likely vary wildly given the large number of disparate schools selected for An Bosca Leabharlainne. Two fieldwork groups were engaged as part of this evaluation: in the first, an Irish-medium primary school based in Northern Ireland, the vast majority of the children, aged ten, like reading for fun, with only three out of twenty-four saying they do not. However, only thirteen read for fun in Irish, with eleven saying they do not. Ten children found reading in Irish hard, with fourteen finding it easy (Figure 7).

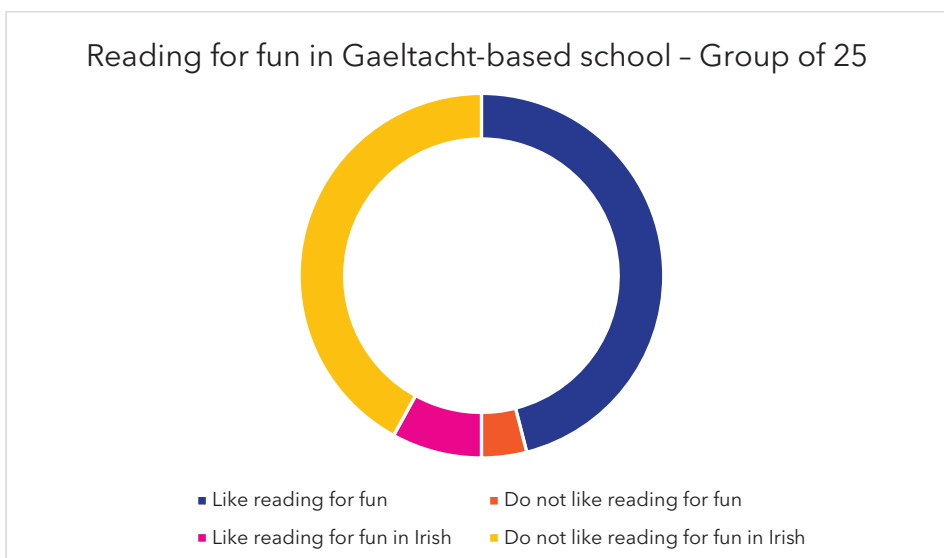


Figure 8

The second context school was Gaeltacht-based in the Republic of Ireland. There were twenty-five children in the class from Fourth to Sixth Class, largely aged between ten and twelve, with one thirteen-year-old. In this group, again, the vast majority of the children like reading for fun, with only two out of twenty-five saying they do not. In this school only four of the twenty-five read for fun in Irish, and only five say it is easy, a significantly lower number than in the Northern Irish school (Figure 8).

Some schools commented on their difficulty encouraging reading for pleasure in Irish both at school and at home when it is a struggle for them to encourage reading in English. Reading in Irish was seen as more difficult, and was not the first priority for some schools. Some also referenced families' attitudes and abilities in relation to reading Irish:

Reading is encouraged for pleasure and learning in our school but because this is an English school and a junior school the emphasis would be on teaching English reading. Some infants are able to recognise and repeat Irish words. In First and Second Class they can read sentences or a series of sentences. We as teachers were delighted to receive the box and the pupils had the experience and pleasure of watching those who were able to read some of the books themselves.

English-medium school, Dublin

We have difficulty getting our parents to read English books with their children, so Irish books are certainly not read at home.

English-medium school, Tipperary

Irish language literature is important, but it must be understood that parents who are disheartened with Irish reading are not able to share it with their own children.

English-medium junior school, Dublin

One focus group of teachers in an English-medium school explained that they had good interest in reading for pleasure in English but that not all children have English; 40% of the 445 children in the school have English as an additional language. Children's parents and guardians had requested simple books in Irish for their children to read and the school was delighted to receive the books in An Bosca Leabharlainne. Others felt that the books would be too difficult for those who already struggle to read in English or don't have strong Irish.

Some of the books were at a standard way beyond our children's levels and therefore, these did not act as a good stimulus to encourage reading in Irish.

English-medium school, Cork

We are a junior DEIS Band 1 school, so our focus is on learning to read in English.

English-medium junior school, Dublin

We have a huge population of EAL [English as an Additional Language] families (82%) and so English is our main priority but now we want to bring Irish up to a higher standard

English-medium school, Dublin

When asked if Irish language literature is a helpful resource for engaging children in the classroom, one principal's response indicated that reading for pleasure in Irish had not been taking place at all:


Absolutely ... some children in our school did not realise that there are reading books in Irish and children can read Irish for pleasure!!

English-medium school, Tipperary

Building awareness of the quality of publishing in Irish language is key:

Pupils and some teachers were not aware of the high-quality books that exist.

English-medium school, Tipperary



An Bosca
Leabharlainne
in schools

School libraries

School libraries tended to have a very small selection of Irish books. The most reported quantity of Irish books was 0–20 and this represented 71 of 164 responses (44%). This was followed by 20–50 (47 of 164 responses, or 28%), 50–100 (31 of 164 responses, or 19%) and finally only 15 schools (9%) reported that they had 100+ Irish books in their school library. This would suggest that the impact of An Bosca Leabharlainne was significant in providing high quality Irish language books for school libraries, where the majority of schools had little to no representation.

In some cases, the larger numbers reported are misleading, in that some libraries included multiple copies each of individual titles rather than a richer range of books.

There would be 50–100 but these books would be in packs of ten as sometimes it is better to get them confident reading as a group and understanding phrases and vocabulary. This will help lay the foundation for more independent reading.

Irish-medium school, Mayo

One English-medium school explained that they had 0–20 Irish language books in the library because it was difficult enough to get families to read together in English, let alone Irish. Access to a school library was also an issue:

At the start of this year we didn't have a library because the school was making big changes and although the buildings were here, we didn't get our library back until this term.

English-medium junior school, Dublin

Some schools commented that their collection of books was old or outdated, wider representation was needed for younger children, most of the books are part of reading schemes and not for reading for pleasure, some books are old fashioned and uninteresting, and finally that it would be wonderful if new books that came out could be given to Irish medium schools.

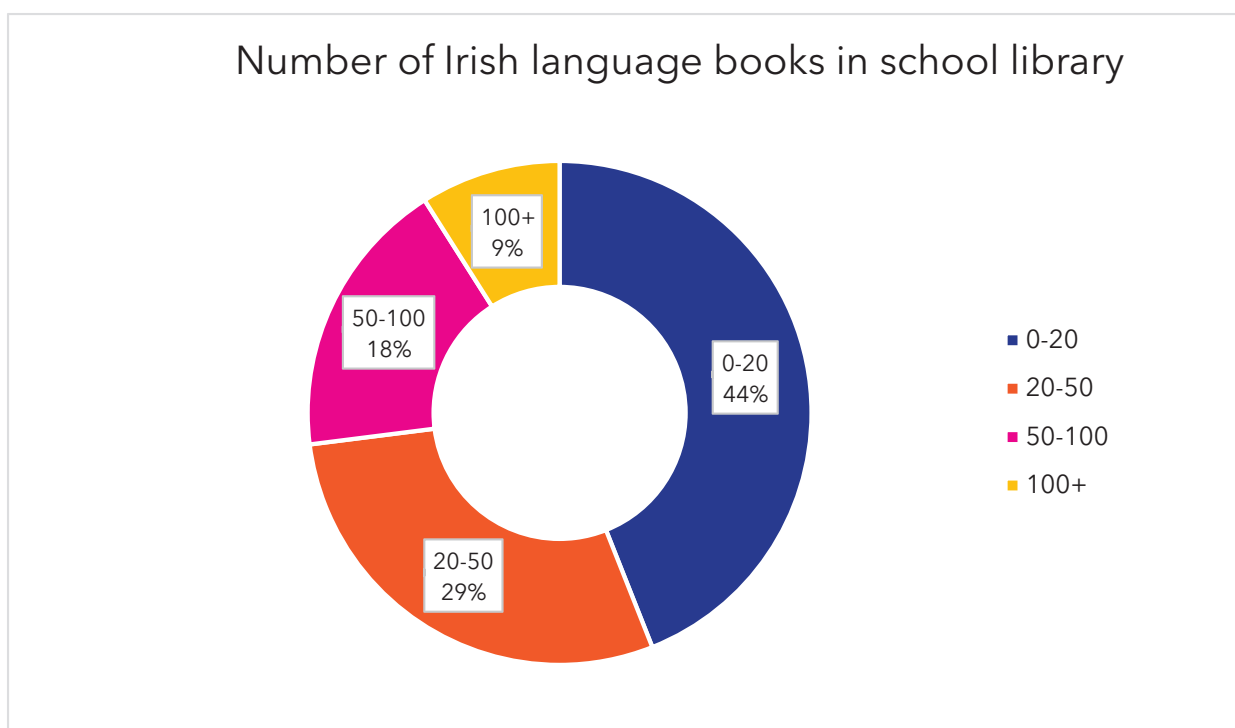


Figure 9

An Bosca Leabharlainne - how was it used?

When asked how often they use the books in An Bosca Leabharlainne with their students, the most popular choice from respondents to the general survey was a few times a month (41%), followed by a few times a week (31%). By contrast, in our survey of the schools that received an artist in residence, a minority said every day (10%), the majority (60%) said a few times a week and 25% said a few times a month (Figure 10). One school commented that they would like to use the books as often as possible but that it would depend on the themes taking place the class.

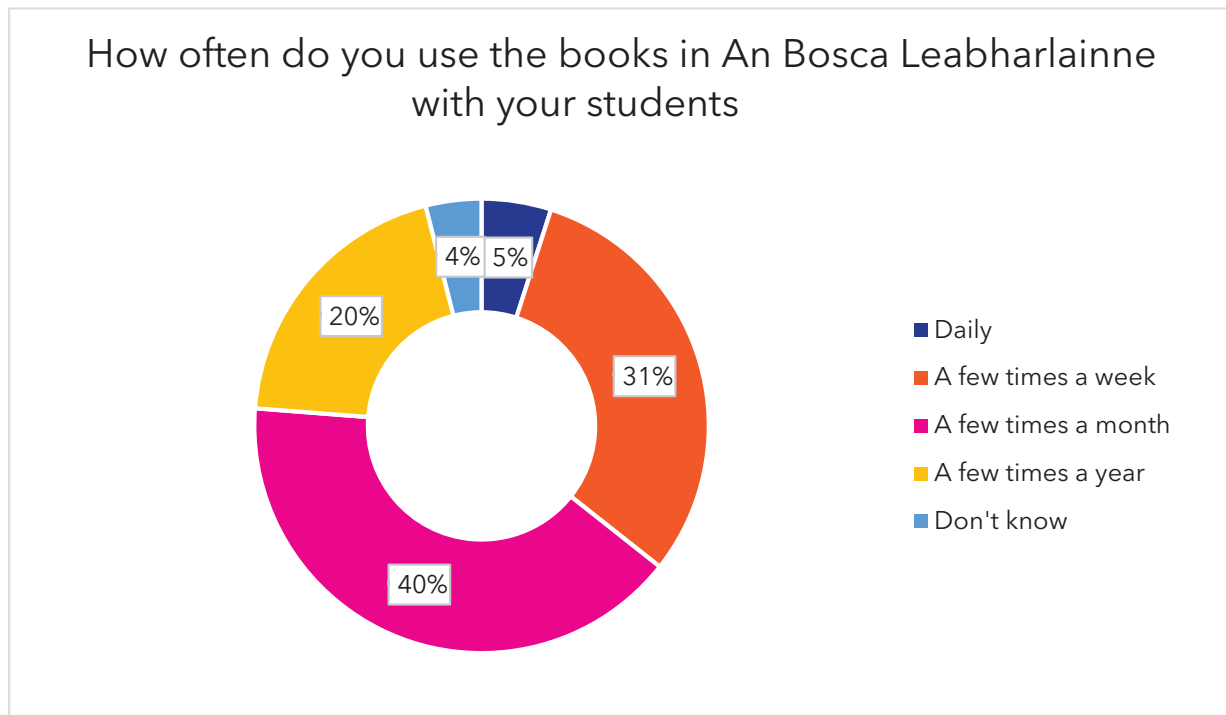


Figure 10

An Bosca Leabharlainne was shared in different ways in the schools. One Northern Ireland-based Irish-medium school had a weekly exchange between classes. Several schools had a dedicated trolley to share the books between classes. Some had the books located centrally in the school library or a classroom for timetabled access. One school created displays in each classroom in dedicated shelving and bought additional boxes of the books provided in An Bosca Leabharlainne to ensure that every class in the school had access to the books that had been provided at all times. The distribution of books on trolleys or in classrooms meant that the term 'book box' created confusion in one school when the books were no longer in the box.

The box of beautiful books are displayed in the hall and pupils are allowed to browse and choose. Teachers read aloud at least one book a week to their class.
English-medium school, Tipperary

One school whose artist in residence made them a 'Café au Leamh' kept it and the books permanently in the Junior Infants classroom. This was very successful as the picturebooks were all displayed, accessible and enjoyed. Having easy and frequent access to the books is crucial for the children to become familiar with them and to normalise the experience of reading in Irish. This was clearly shown in the Northern Ireland-based school where additional books were provided so that every class had the books that were provided in An Bosca Leabharlainne for everyday use.

During the fieldwork sessions with children it emerged that increased availability of books in the classroom builds familiarity which in turn directly impacts the success of An Bosca Leabharlainne in the school. Children in one fieldwork context were very familiar with all the books as they were stored in the classroom in a specialised shelving unit and a set of the books (and display stand) had been purchased for each of the classrooms to ensure a whole school approach. Children in another fieldwork context were less familiar with books as they were stored elsewhere. This is encouraging for schools who received An Bosca Leabharlainne without an artist in residence, as teachers can make the books accessible and available in the first instance and they will have the resource book to aid interpretation of the titles.

One focus group of teachers in an English-medium school noted that the children were happiest when not being assessed and enjoyed engaging with the books outdoors. This evidence along with testimonials from the artists in residence suggests that separating the use of An Bosca Leabharlainne from the curriculum and, where possible, having fun with it outside the classroom, can be a helpful strategy.

It is very important that the experience of the books in the bosca is separated from the formal learning process. It is important for children that in meeting the objectives of the scheme, activities on the books are delivered and enjoyed at a non-academic and unofficial level. It should not be tied into the curriculum.

Réaltán Ní Leannáin



Pictured: Aine Ní Ghlinn, Laureate na nÓg, and pupils from Gaelscoil Mhíchíl Cíosóg, Ennis.

Impact of An Bosca Leabharlainne on reading for pleasure in Irish

The impact on schools of An Bosca Leabharlainne on reading for pleasure in Irish has been significant. This impact is particularly evident in English-medium schools where the existence of Irish language literature for children is less well known. An Bosca Leabharlainne has been a process of discovery for these children. One teacher described an individual case of impact in his class explaining that the books had increased his students' enjoyment of Irish:

We were doing free reading and one of our Third Class boys was reading his book. I asked him 'an bhfuil sé go maith?' and he started to explain something from the book but did so in Irish without meaning to. He was lost in the story and in the language of the story.

English-medium school, Monaghan

Many schools that responded to the survey had very few books in Irish in their school libraries and some schools had none at all except for what they received as part of the scheme (44% had 0-20 books and 29% had 20-50 books). For one school in Northern Ireland, the scheme came at exactly the right time as they had decided to begin promoting Irish in the school for the first time and the books they received were the perfect introduction.

This is an all-English school in Northern Ireland and Irish is not part of the curriculum. The school made the decision to promote Irish in the school at the beginning of the year. The children were not aware that books were available in Irish. The children are learning a lot of vocabulary from the books. The children are using that vocabulary when they can. I think that's great. The children love being creative with the tasks from the booklet we received from An Bosca Leabharlainne.

English-medium school, Northern Ireland

The scheme has informed an enhanced reading culture for Irish in some schools.

Every Wednesday morning, we encourage 'Maidin Gaeilge' when all classes are asked to focus on using more informal oral Irish and do more activities through Irish. We use these new books to have additional story time as Gaeilge during Maidin Gaeilge.

English-medium school, Galway

We have implemented 'am na Gaeilge' every fortnight in our school which is to increase enjoyment in Irish - not a lesson - just for fun. These books can be read by [the] class teacher at this time for the sole objective of enjoyment and participation. Having resources to do this has been invaluable.

English-medium school, Monaghan

Two other schools used the books to make a reading space for the children and a mobile library.

We created a designated area in our school for these books. Children were involved in the design.

English-medium school, Donegal

We made a mobile library to house the lovely storybooks we received sa Bhosca Leabharlainne. During the two weeks of Seachtain na Gaeilge the teachers used it more. We are in short supply of easy texts as Gaeilge

English-medium junior school, Dublin

A DEIS Irish-medium school in County Donegal that had 20-50 Irish books in their library has observed a big impact from the scheme.

This scheme gives the children a chance to look at new written material because we are a DEIS school and would not otherwise buy these books. It is likely that other things would perhaps be deemed more important. It's an experience the children wouldn't have without the gift of the books.

It encouraged children to choose Irish books to read for pleasure for a Northern Ireland-based Irish-medium school as they had dedicated shelving in their classroom. In another school children were choosing Irish books instead of English books to for independent reading in school.

The children love hearing both familiar and unfamiliar stories in the Irish language. During Drop Everything and Read time I have seen children gravitate to Irish language books.
English-medium school, Louth

Some schools have reported significant impact from the books on individual children in their schools. These were all in English-medium settings and in two instances the books were the catalyst for the children to engage with Irish for the first time or with renewed interest.

One girl in Sixth Class in our senior ASD Class who doesn't engage much with Irish - she would have integrated with her mainstream class for Gaeilge in the early years but it just wasn't appropriate (as the content got more difficult her frustration levels would increase etc). One of the books had a main character that shared her name! I brought it straight to her and read it with her and the sheer joy she felt was just beautiful. I went and bought her a copy of the book after so she could keep it.
English-medium school, Kerry

A child who is exempt from Irish took huge interest in the books and actually started participating in Irish lessons.
English-medium school, Cavan

One little child for example, was completely intrigued with the beautiful drawings in one particular book and looked for this book every time. The wonderful stories gave them a real taste of Irish literature.
English-medium school, Wexford

Below are a selection of testimonials received from schools on the positive impact of An Bosca Leabharlainne. Approximately 10 English-medium schools referenced the importance of Seachtain na Gaeilge for beginning and establishing the use of the books in the classroom and highlighting their importance:

It greatly increased our ability to encourage reading for fun in Irish. We used it in class so that people who finished the work early could read an Irish book and they got an extra point in the class competition for choosing an Irish book!
Irish-medium school, Belfast, Northern Ireland

We received a wonderful creative resource from yourselves. The children enjoyed looking and reading some of the books they were able for. We are pushing the Irish library reading with the children. Resources like these help children to see that Irish books can be enjoyed as much as English books ... These books will provide much joy once we become more versed in the joys of Irish reading.
Irish-medium school, Mayo

It is a fabulous resource and makes reading books in Irish attractive and engaging.

English-medium school, Cork

An Bosca Leabharlainne provided the motivation and inspiration for the teachers and students. The books were very attractive, and the students were more interested in reading in Irish.

English-medium school, Co. Dublin

The quality of the books alone was just brilliant, and it really made me rethink our access to reading in Irish in our school.

English-medium school, Co. Kerry

I first used the books during the Seachtain na Gaeilge and read stories to the classes. The teachers saw the children's interest in the stories and followed them from then on - three or four teachers are now using the stories daily in class.

English-medium school, Co. Wicklow

In a large school, like ours, it is difficult to create the culture to promote reading through Irish. It is a process and I think we are at the beginning of the ways. It is a hands-on job but since we have the books, I hope we will be effective in our efforts.

English-medium school, Co. Roscommon

Teachers who took part in a focus group in an English-medium school said that An Bosca Leabharlainne has sown a seed in the school. It has had a positive impact and the school are already discussing establishing an Irish corner in the library, where they hope to add further books in Irish each year. They have ten children on the committee for Gaelbratach, a scheme which supports and encourages schools in their efforts to promote the Irish language, and An Bosca Leabharlainne is an excellent support for this.

Schools' plans to add to the bosca

An overwhelming majority of schools hope to add to the bosca each year. Out of 151 respondents to this question, 130 said they would add further books in the coming year or that they had already started the process of ordering books. Some schools planned to purchase class sets of given titles and others talked about dedicated spaces, reading corners or library sections that had been established as part of the scheme.

Yes, we certainly will, we now have an Irish section.

English-medium school, Tipperary

Yes, we hope to add some more Irish picturebooks to our junior room and look into any comics or graphic novels that may be available for our older classes.

English-medium school, Donegal

Absolutely! This has really inspired us to look at adding a wider choice of books as Gaeilge.

English-medium school, Dublin

I already have more books ordered!

English-medium school, Cork

Yes, we will definitely be building on An Bosca Leabharlainne.

English-medium school, Offaly

Yes. Especially ones in the middle age group/level. 8-10 years.

English-medium school, Donegal

We will certainly be watching for new books in Irish to add to the richness of the children's experiences.

Gaelscoil, Wicklow

I would hope to, we are limited to suppliers that we can buy from, it is difficult to find good quality Irish books through our suppliers.

English-medium school, Meath

A small number of schools reported that they now had enough books to work with through the scheme and would use these before buying more for the school.

Truth ... probably not next year ... at the minute we have 25 and rising different nationalities here in our wonderful rural school of just over 300 pupils. Part of literacy funding for next year will be spent on updating our tired library and we will try to source books that include nationalities of our school.

English-medium school, Tipperary

We have enough now at the minute anyway.

English-medium school, Leitrim

I will try use the ones I have to the best effect next term and see how I get on.

English-medium school, Galway

The scheme appears to have acted as a catalyst for schools to build further on Irish language books as a resource in the classroom and schools are enthusiastically embracing opportunities to extend their book stock.

Comment on the books

Each box contained twenty-five excellent, original books in Irish, selected by Laureate na nÓg Áine Ní Ghlinn. There were two types of box: one for Irish-medium schools and one for English-medium, acknowledging that the language levels of the students would vary between the two. Each box had twenty distinct titles, and five books feature in both boxes. Gaelscoileanna and Gaeltacht schools received both the Irish- and English-medium boxes, a total of fifty books per school. Below is some feedback on the advantages and disadvantages of having one copy of each book rather than class sets or multiple copies:

Advantages of a selection of 25-50 books

- Excellent selection for teachers and students
- Demonstrates the range of books that have been published in Irish
- Caters for a wide range of interests, age groups and reading levels
- Allows for diverse engagement with the books over time
- Provides ongoing opportunities for teachers using the activities book
- Provided the artists in residence with a broad selection of books on multiple themes

Disadvantages of a selection of 25-50 books

- Single titles limit the experience to individual students or students in pairs; one school commented that 'The books are wonderful, but more copies are needed to make an impact. Class sets of high-quality literature would support higher engagement.'
- Difficult to share single titles across a whole school environment
- Popular titles more in demand with multiple students waiting to read
- Created a challenge for artists in residence to prepare for visits; most artists read all forty-five books

One artist in residence described the books as the heart of the scheme and said when they arrived at the school it was like a box of treasure arriving.

As evidenced by the children's commentary during the fieldwork, the attractiveness of the books was a key factor in the success of An Bosca Leabharlainne. If they did not have strong illustration and cover design, a young reader would be less likely to choose it. The book cover and titles were important to the children, particularly those who were less familiar with the content of the books. The provision of colourful and engaging high-quality books in Irish in the library boxes attracted children to explore the books on first and subsequent encounters. The importance of the book covers to children will be of interest to the Irish publishing sector.

The book covers and illustrations have an immediate effect on the children, they want to see the books and flick through. Initially that was the hook to get them to read and engage with the books
English-medium school, Cavan

For most of our pupils Irish is a subject they 'have to do' and it doesn't exist outside the classroom. For them to see that there are books available in Irish that aren't 'school-y' is a revelation.
English-medium school, Monaghan

When asked about their top three books from the bosca to use with the children, 82 schools surveyed selected a first-choice book, 77 selected a second choice and 70 selected a third. Others either responded that all the books were helpful, none in particular, picturebooks or books for younger children, for example. The most popular books for these schools included, *Bliain na nAmhrán*, *Caoimhe agus an Bogha Baistí*, *Geansaí Ottó* and *Rita agus an Lampa Draíochta*. The most popular book for the schools with an artist in residence was *Bliain na nAmhrán*, followed by *Cluasa Capaill ar an Rí* and *An Féileacán agus an Rí*. The most successful book for the Artists in Residence themselves was *MÍP* followed by *Scunc agus Smúirín*, *Percy Péacóg*, *An Táin*, *An Eala Órga*, *Cluasa Capaill ar an Rí* and *An Féileacán agus an Rí*.

Teachers in one focus group in an English-medium school found that books where the story was familiar or books with humour were the most successful with the children. The survey of schools confirms this: one quarter of schools that responded chose *Cinnín Óir agus na Trí Bhéar* – a retelling of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* by Áine Ní Ghlinn and illustrated by Laura Jane Phelan – as their favourite book. When asked if An Bosca Leabharlainne increased children's enjoyment of Irish, one school replied with specific reference to this book and the value of already being familiar with the story. Another school commented:

I have the junior end of the school so they loved when we were doing Cinnín Óir agus na Trí Bhéar as we had the story covered in English and they seemed to make a connection that it could be in Irish also. They felt very confident as they understood the story before we turned the next page. They love the rhyme and repetition and dramatising the stories.
English-medium school, Cork

Cinnín Óir is one of the books that the children really like. They made a play out of it and put it on for me to watch as Principal. The children have learned more Irish language orally than they did from the Irish program we generally use. The teaching of Irish in the school has also come to life.
English-medium school, Dublin

The books are beautiful. The infant classes really liked the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears because of the humour in the story and how daring the young girl was. They felt sorry for Baby Bear.
English-medium school, Co. Galway

When children in our focus groups were asked about their favourite authors, they named perennial favourites and bestsellers. When asked about their favourite authors who write in Irish, they could not name authors, but named book titles, all of which (with the exception of series like the Rita books by Máire Zepf and Mr Ando) were in An Bosca Leabharlainne. It is clear that the provision of these books is helping to build children's awareness of the books available in Irish and of their creators.

One teacher in an Irish-medium school focus group said it was a challenge that, when parents and guardians have shown enthusiasm for their children reading in Irish, they often buy them a translation of a book series they are already reading. They said it is much better that 'they are not just reading a translation and there are [original Irish] books available that interest them, are not too complicated and at a level that suits them. I thought that was great'.

In one children's focus group, it was clear from the outset in discussion that *MÍP* was the favourite book and character for the children. This was due to the children's prior engagement with the story and with one of its creators. Their artist in residence was Máire Zepf, the author of the book, and their teacher explained that the children were delighted to hear that *MÍP* was based on a true story and that they were able to explore how the book was made with Máire. Over half the children in the class chose to depict *MÍP* in their drawings or clay work; the majority did this exclusively and some children featured some other books alongside *MÍP*. Out of the group of twenty-five children, nineteen chose to include *MÍP* in their pictures in one scene or all.

In an Irish-medium school focus group, the Third Class teacher said that she found *MÍP* the most useful book to use with her class:

Because they are interested in space and there was no specific gender associated with it, everyone in the class liked it a lot. It was also good for those with reading difficulties because there was a lot of emphasis on the pictures in that book and they were still able to understand the story. The book also came with a video, and that was also great as an added convenience. Out of all those books MÍP was the one they liked the most. They were still discussing it two days later, how good that book was, that was the star in our class!

Another teacher in the focus group reported that the older children were interested in *An Táin*:

Because it's a kind of graphic novel and the kind of thing they read themselves anyway. The book is also about sports, a lot of the boys in my class are very interested in football and they liked that too, just a different twist on the story maybe.

In the same focus group, the teachers discussed *Jimín Mháire Thaidhg* by Pádraig Ó Siochfhradha and illustrated by Andrew Whitson as one of the more challenging books that their artist in residence used with Third Class.

The language was so difficult for them, our artist had to stop reading and to explain to them, what exactly is written here, what does this mean, and although it is great from the point of view of language acquisition, culture, and everything, they didn't pay as much attention to that book as the other books because the language was so difficult, and even at the end when she was asking a question, there was still a small group that was not 100% in terms of what happened.

This book was, however, seen as very useful with an older age group in another Gaelscoil.

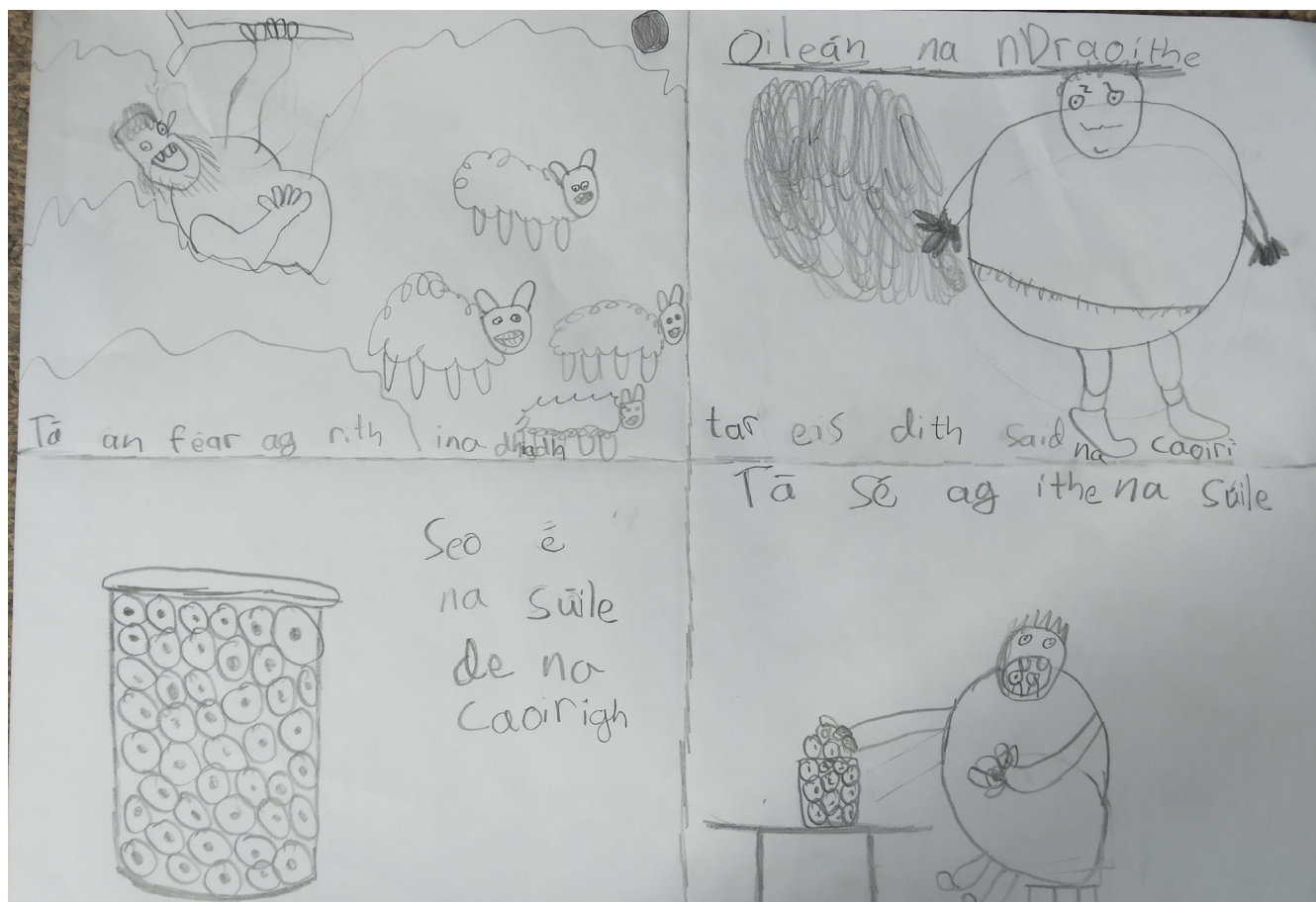
We loved the Jimín book. I'm thinking of getting that book as a class novel for Sixth Class. It is difficult to find enjoyable novels at the right level for Sixth Class in a Gaelscoil.
Gaelscoil, Meath

Some books were seen as challenging for their students. In approximately a quarter of English-medium settings, schools singled out the novels as too difficult. The focus group with an English-medium school also explained that they were unable to use the novels.

The novels were less useful as our children are age four-to-eight years.
English-medium junior school, Dublin

The longer novel books are much too difficult for our children. With little pictures, it is hard to keep them interested.
English-medium school, Cork

In another fieldwork site, two eleven-year-old boys who worked on depictions of *Oileán na nDraoithe* by Proinsias Mac a'Bhaird, illustrated by Caomhán Ó Scolaí, thoroughly enjoyed the gruesome dimension of the story. Their four-scene stories featured identical drawings and accompanying narrative. Their favourite scene that they both selected to create in modelling clay was the jar of sheep's eyes placed on a table that were to be eaten by the farmer.



Four scene depiction of Oileán na nDraoithe, Boy, aged 11, Fifth Class

One artist in residence described the children's delight when they found a book that they already knew or owned themselves. On those occasions, the artist asked the child to tell the story to the others in the class before they began the book, building the excitement and allowing the child to be at the centre of the reading experience. Children in this school were particularly impressed with *Cluasa Capaill ar an Rí* as it was written in their own dialect. Their artist in residence pointed out the village that the author Bridget Bhreathnach came from across the bay and the children were very interested in this aspect. Although some English-medium schools reported in the general survey that this book was difficult for their students, others found it useful with one in particular citing it as a primary focus:

We used the book Cluasa Capaill ar an Rí in my class. It was available in hard copy in An Bosca Leabharlainne and then also as one of the free books on World Book Day, so we ordered one for each child in my class and we studied it together like a novel. They really enjoyed it and saw it as a modern fairy tale.

English-medium school, Galway

One focus group conducted in-person in an Irish-medium school in Northern-Ireland showed that, despite the disparate interests of the children, within An Bosca Leabharlainne there was enough variety for the range of children's interests in fiction, non-fiction, fantasy and realism. Children gravitated towards the books that they would enjoy generally, and all these books were represented.

Books to
keep



Books to keep

Additional funding of €116,000 came from Foras na Gaeilge at the end of 2021 and the plan made was to do something 'extra' for the 21 AIR schools who had already been through a detailed selection process. Research published in 2021 from the National Literacy Trust on World Book Day has demonstrated the importance of children having a book to keep. For many children they become book owners for the first time and potentially begin their journey to life-long readership. The additional funding scheme from Foras na Gaeilge was in two parts the first building on the importance of book ownership for children - every child in each school would get two books to keep themselves, one by Áine and one by another artist. The individual books were selected for each class group by Áine. Each school got a substantial number of additional books; essentially a small 'library'. The 'libraries' were based on past lists from earlier stages of ABL and recommendations from Áine.

The books to keep were an important dimension of the scheme and they were seen as an integral element of the overall experience of ABL as two schools explained:

I want to thank you all from the bottom of my heart. This scheme was excellent. The children were so happy with their books to keep, and the school library has now improved greatly due to the wide range of books that were given to us. Réaltán was excellent as an artist in residence with us. The scheme will certainly help to encourage the children to read more books in Irish and choose them in the shop from now on.

Gaelscoil, Co. Meath

We were delighted to take part in the An Bosca Leabharlainne scheme last year. One of the nicest things for the boys was the books they were given to keep at home. When the parents saw the array of beautiful, colorful books that went home, they were all very impressed. I now hope that there will be much more interest in Irish books. I see myself, that the children are choosing Irish books from the school library more often than before.

The books themselves were very enjoyable and contained a mix of novels, poetry and short stories. This gives us a lot of help as we prioritize Irish under the Gaeltacht Recognition scheme, and the parents now understand that it is a living, vibrant language and that facilities are available to them, and to all of us to strengthen and enrich it.

Gaelscoil, Co. Galway

Children having books of their own appears to have led to long-term benefits of the scheme as one school has highlighted;

The children in this school enjoyed and benefited long-term from this scheme.

They were delighted to receive the books to keep, this certainly increased the children's interest in Irish books. Above all, the skirmish raised awareness, among the children, and among the teachers, of the large number of wonderful and beautiful books that are available through the medium of Irish for all primary school age groups.

Many thanks again for an excellent scheme!

Gaelscoil, Co. Wicklow

One school found that the books to keep were viewed as more important to the younger classes than the older children. They built directly on this learning through continuing to gift books to the incoming students to the school;

Would you believe that today I will be talking to the children about the beautiful books we received last year! I have Third Class this year and I believe that the books that went home affected the early classes more than the upper classes.

We gave one of the books meant for junior infants to the boys who came in for the new junior infants Open Day. You'd think they were given gold!

Thank you again for your generosity, we are truly grateful

Gaelscoil, Co. Galway

**Artists in
residence**



Artists in residence

Twenty-one schools were selected to receive an artist in residence. Artists in residence (AIRs) were selected based on an application process that took place in November 2021. When this process was finished there were not enough artists recruited and some additional artists were approached to increase the number and geographical spread. A contract was in place for individual artists which outlined what was involved. This included 7.5 days of assigned work per school, to include any/all preparation hours. Some artists adopted a very structured approach. Some spread out their days and others packed it all into a short space of time. They were given the freedom to take their own approach.

In their opening survey, 80% of these schools believed that An Bosca Leabharlainne would greatly increase their ability to promote reading for fun in Irish, and 20% believed it would somewhat increase their ability. In the closing survey, this had further increased to 94% of schools reporting that it had greatly increased their ability and 6% saying that it had somewhat increased this ability, showing that An Bosca Leabharlainne exceeded the schools' expectations.

The artist in residence was seen by 85% of schools as a very helpful dimension of the scheme and by 15% as reasonably helpful. Some schools had not begun visits from their artist at time of survey and they commented that it would be a great opportunity for the children or that it would encourage their class to consider the life of an author. Another school in the early stages of visits commented:

Only two visits have been made so far, but it is already clear that the children are having a very positive impact, all age groups are enjoying and benefiting greatly from these visits. They are talking about the visits/books at school and at home.
Gaelscoil, Wicklow



Pictured: Muireann Ní Chiobháin, artist in residence, and pupils from Gaelscoil Phóirt Láirge.

In the closing survey the artist in residence was cited as very helpful by 88% of schools and as reasonably helpful by 12%. Two schools explained the extent of what their artists had achieved.

Sadhbh was wonderful with the kids. She planted seeds with them. She sent them to write little stories themselves. She sent the children from the upper classes to work with the children of the primary classes. She was very positive about Irish language literature, and she awoke interest and enthusiasm in us and in the children.

Gaelscoil, Dublin

A special experience guaranteed for the children of the school and the art wizard, Diarmuid de Faoite, working together with the school. A magical glimpse of books handed over to our young readers over a period of eight weeks.

Gaelscoil, Clare

Both fieldwork groups had an artist in residence, and it was apparent that this was seen as an instrumental part of bringing the books to life – only one child of forty-nine in total did not see the artist in residence as a helpful way to bring the books to life. Children in the fieldwork groups commented that it was easier to understand the books when they were read by their artist in residence; when the words were difficult, the artist acted them out. They referenced humour in the telling or reading of the stories. One child said: ‘He brought everything to life.’

Teachers in the focus group in an Irish-medium school felt that having an artist in residence was invaluable in distancing reading for fun in Irish from the curriculum and from teaching and learning.

She would say that she wasn't a teacher and had no red pen in her pocket, so the children naturally enjoyed the experience of reading the books. All the activities were entered into wholeheartedly as a result. She said from the beginning that she didn't want to make a school lesson out of it, and that's a very important thing because when they see us coming into class, it's a class lesson, no matter how fun it is, we are teachers, that is the attitude, so it certainly makes a huge difference when someone who is not a teacher is coming in.

The same group of teachers also valued having the artist's insights into the process of making a book:

She was telling us where that inspiration came from, the family, and stories from when she was young, and it was beautiful for us and the children to hear where these ideas came from, and how she started writing, and that is so valuable, we wouldn't always have that ourselves, it was beautiful to hear that from her.

One of Máire Zepf's schools reported similar excitement when the students heard the true story that inspired *MÍP* and news of a sequel before it was even published. Another artist also referenced the process of making a book as a source of interest for the students.

I think that the greatest success of the resident artist was that it was interesting and important for the students (and the teachers) to meet someone who works in the creation of a book and to be able to see part of the process involved, see and discuss and understand that anyone can do this themselves if they are interested.

Dómhnaí Ó Bric

The videos made by artists were seen by most artist in residence schools as very helpful (65%), by 30% as reasonably helpful and by 5% as somewhat helpful. One school commented that they had not yet had the opportunity to view the videos. The general survey provided different feedback with only 22% finding the videos very helpful, 37% as reasonably helpful, 29% as somewhat helpful and 11% as not helpful. It should be noted, however, that half of the respondents stated that they had not seen the videos, accessed them yet or known about them. Some schools stated that they would look forward to watching them with the children the following term.

The artists interacted with their schools in a variety of ways, bringing their own expertise to the project, and finding imaginative ways to share the books and engage with the students. One artist, Jackie MacDonncha, would begin each session with reading some of the books to the children or the children would take turns to read. He reported that they all loved reading out loud and would reach out enthusiastically for the book to take their turn to read. They also acted out parts of the books, particularly where there was dialogue. Another chose a theme for each lesson, for example a lesson on space would include selecting books on this theme that were suitable for all age groups, from infants up to Sixth Class.

Themes were referenced both by teachers and the artists in residence and proved a useful way to explore the books. One teacher who took part in a focus group in an English-medium school said that *Mamó ar an Fheirm* by Mary Arrigan was very helpful, as the theme of the farm, food and the outdoors tied in with the curriculum. The children loved the illustrations and the humour, for example where the woman thought that milking a cow was done through twisting the cow's tail. Having a range of books on diverse themes showed the children that a book can be written about anything.

Artists in residence brought passion and dedication to their work in schools, going above and beyond to ensure the success of An Bosca Leabharlainne. One artist, Muireann Ní Chíobháin, brought a scrapbook for Fifth and Sixth Class children to make a collage of all the picturebooks that they had read. The collage was designed on an iPad and the final collaborative group book was then left in An Bosca Leabharlainne as the children's contribution to the library. The same artist established a 'Café au Léamh' in both of her schools to create excitement. She built a child-sized café structure and included a membership card with reading challenges, e.g. read a book to a younger child, read a chapter and have a friend read the next to compare story development. These strategies helped reluctant readers and those who found reading in Irish more difficult as it broke the book into smaller parts.

I laid out all the books on tables with posters and decorations around them. I arranged them by genre rather than by age. (e.g. traditional stories, short stories, history, science/space, etc). I explained the scheme to Sixth Class first and they had the opportunity to discuss the books they liked and we tried to find similar books in the collection. Sixth Class spent the rest of the day with me, helping to make suggestions to the other classes, class by class, and reading with the younger classes. The whole school got to know the library box that way.

Sadhbh Devlin

We looked at the different covers on the books and what they tell us about what is in the book itself. We discussed the titles and the font. We imagined what kind of book and title would be interesting to us and what the cover would be and we drew them on a simple model.

Dómhnal Ó Bric

I started with big sessions with three or four classes in the hall at one time. I spoke to them about the scheme and reading. The books were put out as a display and they had the opportunity to pick them up and look at them (one class at a time). Then, I had two sessions with each school class. At the beginning of each session, they had the opportunity to get to know the books. We played very simple games - matching things in the pictures and guessing the subjects/stories. The class sessions were based on one book each time. We read the story, had a class discussion and an arts/craft activity based on it. I've tried grouping books together - other books on the same theme (e.g. mythology or robots), or other books by the same author/illustrator. In the first school, we ended up with 'reading parties' in the hall - kitchens, decorations and popcorn (and the books, of course!).

Máire Zepf

I based paper puppets on characters from the picturebooks for Infants and First and Second Class. The pupils had the opportunity to make them themselves based on a model I showed them. They really enjoyed this and I used it as a way to discuss characters and character creation.

Bridget Bhreathnach

I had a tea ceremony at one school. I explained to them that people start telling stories when they have a cup of tea. So before we started the session I poured tea (from an empty teapot) into each student's hands. They were excited to get the 'tea' before the stories.

Seamus Mac Annaidh

The following are some comments directly from the artists:

It is a great achievement that the scheme was set up, that it was given very significant funding, that most primary schools in Ireland have a large box of glossy, attractive books and that a handful of schools had the opportunity to receive visits from a resident artist.

Anna Heussaff

On the successes of the scheme, one of the artists spoke about using the books in various spaces so as not to restrict the experience solely to the classroom:

Conducting sessions with all classes in the school so that the whole school felt that the scheme belonged to them; having the books in two separate boxes, and making an event of opening the boxes at the two big presentations I made in the hall; use different spaces - the hall, the library, the music room (for discussion because there is space and chairs) and the garden, as well as the classrooms.

Anna Heussaff

The artists in residence were confident that the objectives of the scheme had been achieved in their schools:

Every day we went to the library and let the boys relax while reading Irish books. We read a lot of Irish books and the boys had opportunities to read them themselves. The young people had many opportunities to look at the pictures. They picked up lots of new words, expressions, etc.

Geraldine Ní Mhidheach

They really enjoyed the activities on a non-academic, unofficial level. These aspects of the scheme are very important.

Réaltán Ní Leannáin

I think the scheme achieved its goals. The students have a much better knowledge of the choice of books available, there is more access to high-quality Irish books in primary schools, the pupils have more experience with Irish books as a result and have a richer experience of reading Irish.

I think that An Bosca Leabharlainne is increasing students' enjoyment of the Irish language in general because they are getting more information about the books and increasing their comfort with the Irish language. There was a boy in one class who spoke to me in Irish all the time and his teacher told me that he was usually very reluctant to speak Irish. I think it was an eye-opener for some students and a recognition for other students that Irish is their first language, that excellent books are available in Irish and that it is a source of pride for them.

Bridget Bhreathnach

There were already high-quality Irish books in the library but the Bosca certainly provided an additional supply and that was worth it; and because there were sessions with each class while I was at school on different dates, the scheme became an 'event'. All students are certainly aware that contemporary, polished books are available in Irish.

I think it boosted the reading of Irish that there were special occasions dedicated to it, and that I, as a writer, was a visitor at the school, which made the sessions different. I was told that some of the pupils in Fifth Class would be rather difficult to motivate but it was clear that the sessions with them were very successful and some boys in particular were more impressed with the Bosca than previously thought.

Anna Heussaff

The scheme succeeded in meeting its aims. There was a 'buzz' in both schools, children were talking about the books, fighting about the books (a very good sign, I think?!) and they undoubtedly got to know the books in the box.

Máire Zepf

In the first place I feel that the schools were proud that they had received [An Bosca Leabharlainne] and that they had it to read and use in many different ways. They were very interested in the diversity of all the books and the understanding that all these possibilities were to be discussed. It was clear to me that they took great pleasure in having the different books among them. Now that they have the books there and from now on I am sure they will have some influence and motivation on students and teachers.

Dómhnaíl Ó Bric

On the challenges of the scheme, the artists spoke of the difficulties scheduling their sessions and catering for all age groups across the whole school. One artist who worked with two particularly small schools, each with less than forty students, reported that the children were always waiting for him at the door and that they cried on his last day, such was the bond that had been built up. Artists working in larger schools could not be expected to have this kind of relationship with every student in the school.

Many artists wanted to be familiar with all the books provided to the schools and took time to read all or most of the forty-five individual titles selected for the two versions of An Bosca Leabharlainne. Given the ambition of the scheme to engage all students in a school with reading in Irish, artists felt that one term was not enough time for the residency, and would have preferred it to run across the school year to take the pressure off both the artist and school.

Finding space for the sessions within the school's busy schedule.

Bridget Bhreathnach

The travel, energy (I had up to fourteen sessions to do per week). The age range of the children.

Seamus Mac Annaidh

It was also a challenge to work with each class; and devising a suitable timetable was a major challenge. I realised after a few sessions that I had put more time into the scheme than I would have been paid for; I cut out two half days but it was still too much time at the end. I think that was because I had to read a lot of the books to be able to present them, and although I did the same activities in general with R1 and R2, with R3 and R4 and so on, of course, the preparation still took me a lot of time.

Anna Heussaff

In the surveys and interviews with the artists in residence, a number of suggestions were made for how the scheme might have been improved:

- Residency for a year rather than 7.5 days per school would have more impact.
- More preparation time for the residency would be helpful. One artist wrote her own handbook with lesson plans differing for each of two schools due to difference in levels of Irish.
- Inclusion of a small arts and crafts or materials budget for each artist to use if needed.
- Children's Books Ireland's Clinic Leabhar to visit the twenty-one AIR schools for this year and next. These are events where children's book experts recommend books based on each child's individual interests and abilities.

Impact on **teachers**



Impact on teachers

As well as exciting the students about reading for fun in Irish, a key aim of An Bosca Leabharlainne was to inform teachers, principals and other school staff of the excellent books available in Irish, and to build their confidence in using them in the classroom.

One of the artists in residence commented on the impact of her presence in the school in relation to teacher confidence, making a direct link between teachers' lack of confidence to read in Irish and the students' lack of awareness of what is available.

I think that the scheme motivated both the teachers and the pupils. Teachers were short of ways to encourage Irish reading and were afraid to do so and the students were unaware of the range of books available to them. At the end of my tenure, I think teachers will have the confidence to set up classes around books and the students will now welcome that.

Muireann Ní Chíobháin

The teachers felt that the books were an invaluable resource for encouraging reading for pleasure Irish in innovative ways.

Absolutely. They engage with the children's imagination and tap into their love for reading. This will help us teachers encourage them to learn and use the Irish we are learning in school.

English-medium school, Dublin

Several teachers spoke of effort and work when they talked about reading in Irish, showing that An Bosca Leabharlainne had a positive impact but that reading in Irish is still seen as more difficult than reading in English, and is done less frequently.

I am making more of an effort to read Irish books to [the children] since I got the new books in the Bosca.

English-medium school, Co. Galway

Much work and enthusiasm is required from the class teacher to have the children using peer tutoring etc to further support vocabulary and use phrases from texts for creative writing.

Irish-medium school, Mayo

It helped greatly during Seachtain na Gaeilge. Other than that, it's a struggle, except with one Irish-speaking household.

English-medium school, Wexford

Others found the arrival of An Bosca Leabharlainne a chance to share their enthusiasm with their class:

It gave me a great opportunity to show my excitement over the books and to plan activities where the children had 'real' books to read. They really enjoyed practicing reading the books and preparing resources so they could read books with younger children.

English-medium school, Cavan

When asked if Irish language literature is a helpful resource for engaging children in the classroom, teachers' standard of Irish and attitudes to Irish were explicitly referenced:

Yes but it all depends on the teachers' attitude to Irish and Irish reading.

Irish-medium school, Mayo

Yes but workshops/travelling teachers who are fluent in Irish would help. A lot of teachers lack the confidence to read to children in Irish. The standard of Irish among teachers is an issue.

English-medium school, Galway

Activities booklet

One of the key supports to encourage teachers to use the books was the activities booklet, which was full of games and activities that would help students engage with the books. There was a consultation conducted on 'Reading in Irish for Pleasure' by Sandra Roe, 2021 and this helped inform the activities booklet. The booklet was written by Dr Claire M. Dunne of Marino Institute of Education (Department of English and Roinn na Gaeilge) and was free for all to download from the Laureate na nÓg website, giving all schools the opportunity to benefit from it. The activities included do not focus on the Irish curriculum, but instead encourage young readers to give the books in the Bosca a try, to boost their confidence in picking up a book in Irish and to help them to get the most out of the selection.

The activities booklet that came with the bosca was considered very helpful by most of the artist in residence schools (79%) and reasonably helpful by 21%. One school commented that, 'As we are an English school, it will take some time before we are able to cover all stages'. Another said the booklet included nice thoughts that were connected to the books. A third school said they hadn't seen the booklet. In the general survey, the numbers differed with 27% of schools reporting the booklet was very helpful, 35% reasonably helpful, 35% somewhat helpful and 3% not helpful. Out of the 152 respondents, however, more than 20 schools stated that they had either not used it yet or not seen it. Five schools said that they hoped to use it in the future and three schools said the Irish was of too high a standard to understand or that they didn't have time to translate the activities in an English-medium setting.

Found the leabhrán tacaíochta do mhúinteoirí [support booklet for teachers] excellent for ideas and gave me a renewed interest in using Irish story books with the whole class.

English-medium school, Cork

We used a lot of activities that were mentioned in the booklet

Gaeltacht based school, Donegal

There were new methodologies in the book that we hadn't done in school before.

Gaelscoil, Co. Galway

I don't recall getting one. Sorry perhaps I did. I was enthralled with books so maybe it was left aside.

English-medium school, Mayo

During a focus group in an English-medium setting, the teachers reported that art activities were the best way to engage the children with the books (like the approach with arts-based methods employed in fieldwork), along with drawn and painted responses, comic strips, drama and role play. These teachers felt that the activity booklet has a wealth of excellent activities but that it would have been helpful to have summaries translated into English, rather than being entirely in Irish, for time-poor teachers in English-medium settings. Teachers in the Irish-medium school focus group had not yet engaged with the booklet on account of having an artist in residence; they felt they hadn't needed it yet. Another school which did not have an artist in residence had not yet engaged with the booklet due to the demands of the school year.

The activity booklet was also intended to be a support to the artists in residence, though they were not confined to using it if they wished to take their own approach to encouraging reading in Irish across the school. There was a mixed response from the artists, with three feeling that it was very helpful, three feeling that it was reasonably helpful and four describing it as somewhat helpful. Some artists saw it more as a support for the teachers when the residency was finished.

I really liked the section on stories and I used many of the activities. The suggestions regarding exploring the library box were very helpful and the suggestions regarding promoting reading in the school. I really benefited from it and it was very interesting and I am sure I will be returning to it in the future.

Bridget Bhreathnach

I think the booklet for teachers contains very valuable material and I suggested that they draw on it but I don't know if that happened.

Anna Heussaff

Impact on communities



Impact on communities

The artists in residence, by virtue of the extended time they spent in the school, had a profound impact on the students. One artist met a few parents and guardians, and they said their children had become more interested in reading as a result of the scheme and were now reading any chance they had.

The following are a few examples of students whose interest in reading in Irish (and reading for pleasure in general) reached outside the school and into the home for the first time.

I received a few messages from parents afterwards asking where they could buy certain books because the children wanted to read them at home - I was very happy with that!

Máire Zepf

It gave me a heart lift one day when I was leaving school, a parent met me in the yard. She asked me if I was doing the book sessions at school. I said I was and she told me she had never heard her daughter talk about books in her life before and she was coming home talking about 'this woman' who was reading books with them and they were making up characters in the class. The mother was sure that it would be books in English and she was very happy that we were reading Irish books and that her daughter was taking so much interest in them.

Bridget Bhreathnach

I received feedback from parents saying that the children were going home trying to buy the books they liked themselves. When the extra books were given to the students, these were the first Irish books for relaxing reading that they ever had at home. That's a historic thing for a family.

Muireann Ní Chíobháin

The teachers in one focus group in an Irish-medium setting felt it would be helpful to extend the opportunity for the scheme beyond school to public libraries and parents and guardians.

Perhaps guidance can be developed for parents about how to ... bring an Irish book into the house. Even if you don't speak Irish, links could be provided to YouTube to have families listening to Irish.

Fieldwork



Introduction

As discussed in the methodology, children's 'voice' reflecting their status as full participants in research can be realised more adequately through arts-based research, where the researcher does not rely on verbal or written contributions from children but instead includes visual responses. Storyboarding, for example, as was seen in the children's four-scene narrative pictures, is helpful for allowing everyone a voice to demonstrate their understanding of a given project (Wall, 2017). In this case their voice reflects their interpretation of the book and character(s) that they selected to represent in their drawings and models. This voice could be 'missed or unheard' if only verbal research methods were used (Wall, 2017: 327). Children conduct their 'meaning-making' (Rinaldi, 2011) of a given story through producing a picture. Narrative understanding has been identified as the primary meaning-making tool (Lyle, 2017). Their 'artwork is a vehicle by which to express a personal story or journey' (Barton, 2015: 64). By making children's learning visible in this creative process, their experience is also made visible (Rinaldi, 2001).

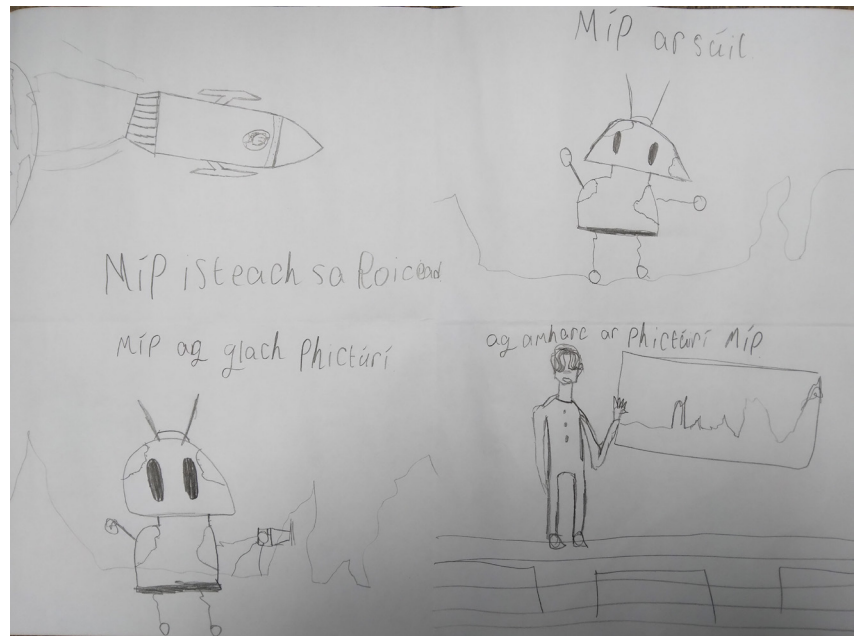
Consequently in the fieldwork, the children's drawings and models represented their personal story or journey through An Bosca Leabharlainne. These visual products act as documentary evidence of their experience of the books and the scheme; their favourite books and characters, the most memorable events, and scenes in the story. They allow us an insight into the experience of the books through their eyes.



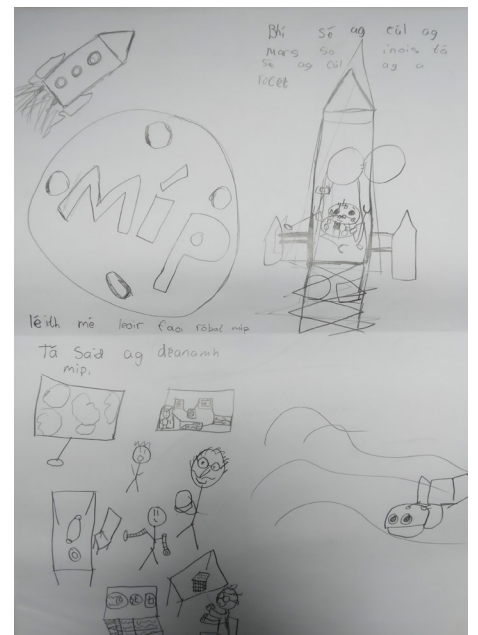
Pictured: Aine Ní Ghlinn, Laureate na nÓg, and pupils from Scoil an Droichid, Belfast.

Fieldwork site I

For one fieldwork school where the artist Máire Zepf focused on exploring her book *MÍP*, children in Primary 7 (children aged ten) demonstrated the impact of this experience where they engaged fully with the robot character and her travels. The pictures and models of *MÍP* showed fascination and investment in the story and the artist's workshops. Children demonstrated reader recognition of books within the box from the cover and title. In the drawings and models included below there is evidence of the story elements that engaged the children most. They produced their four-scene drawing first and then modelled a representation. It is interesting to note that the modelled depictions, for the most part, take a key scene or character from their drawing to work up in more detail. These drawings and the short sentences of narrative that accompany them illustrate the children's experience of the individual books. In the first series of drawings and models, it is clear that although the children are all representing *MÍP*, their experience of the character and personal journey through the story is relatively individual with every child representing different aspects or scenes from the story.



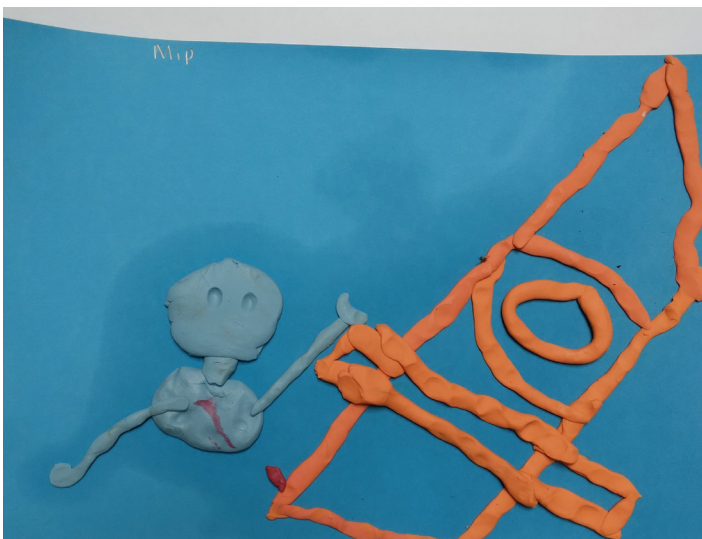
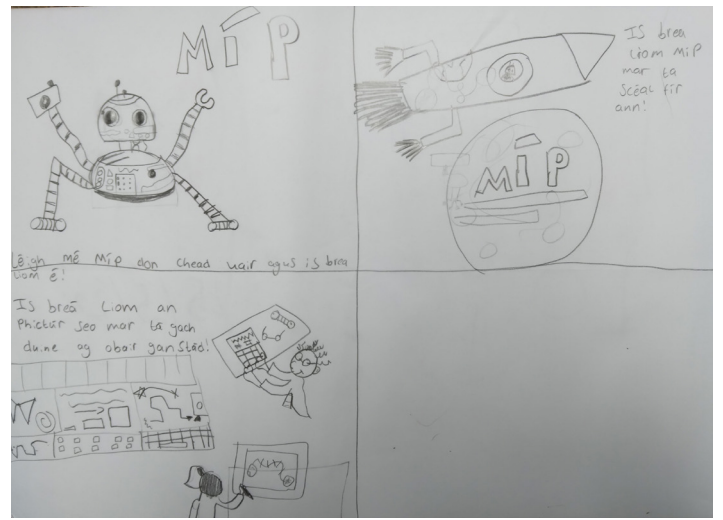
MÍP (1), Girl aged 10



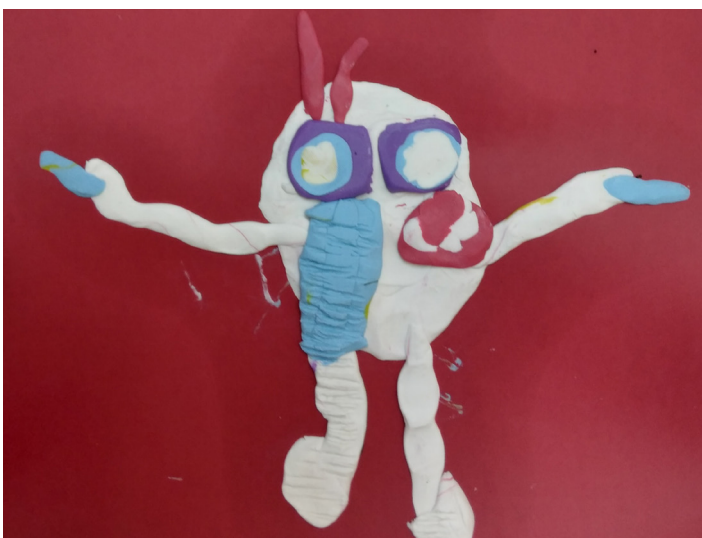
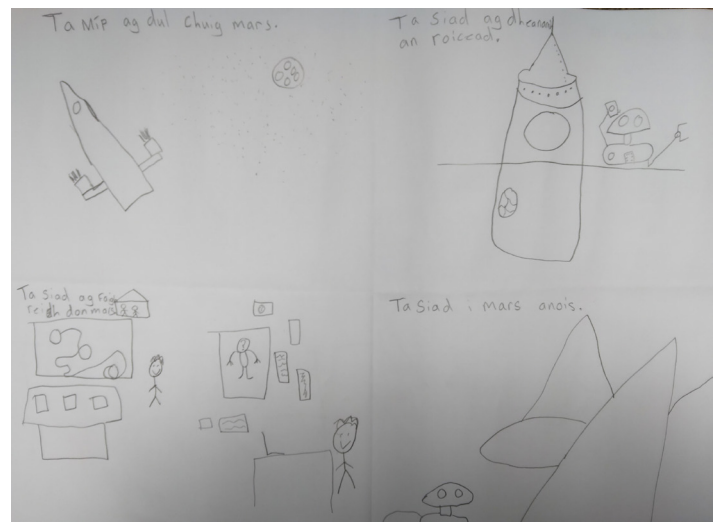
MÍP (2) Girl aged 10



MÍP (3), Girl aged 10



MÍP (4), Boy aged 10

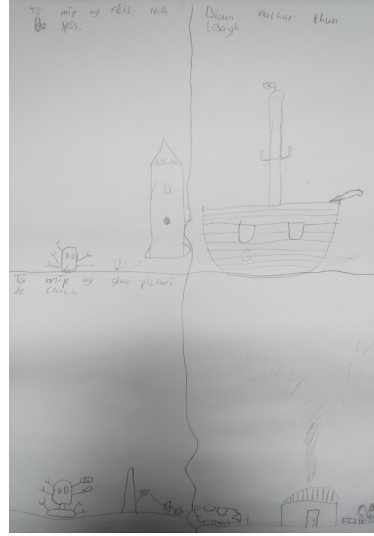


MÍP (5), Boy aged 10

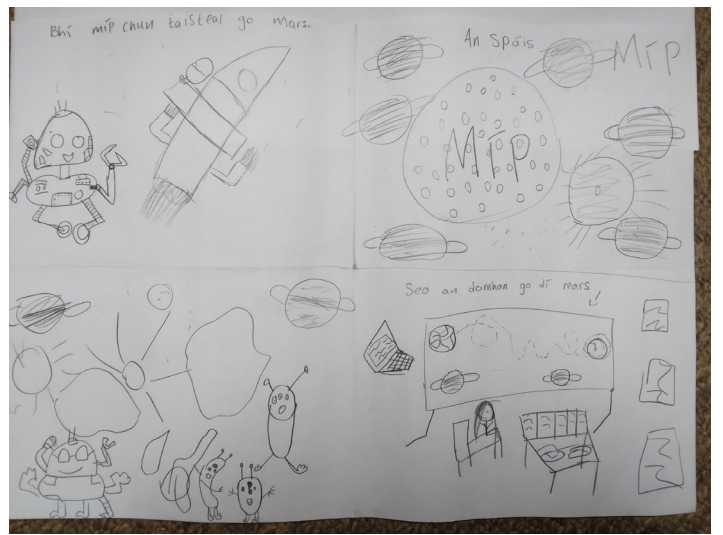




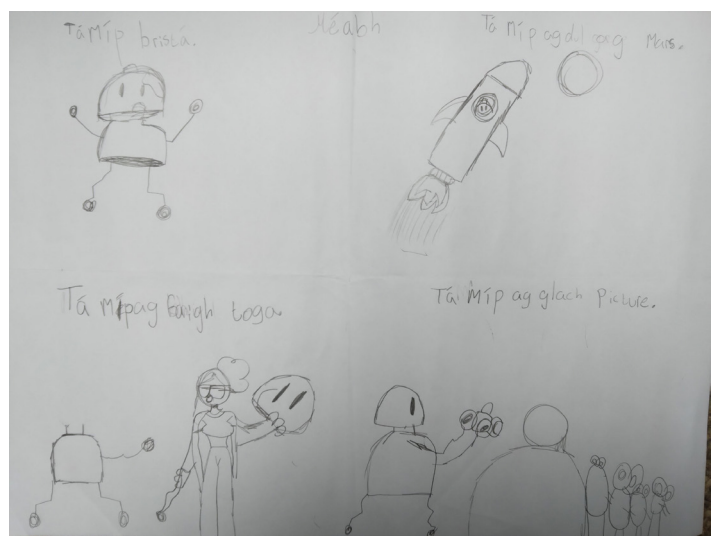
MÍP (6), Boy aged 10



MÍP (7), Girl aged 10



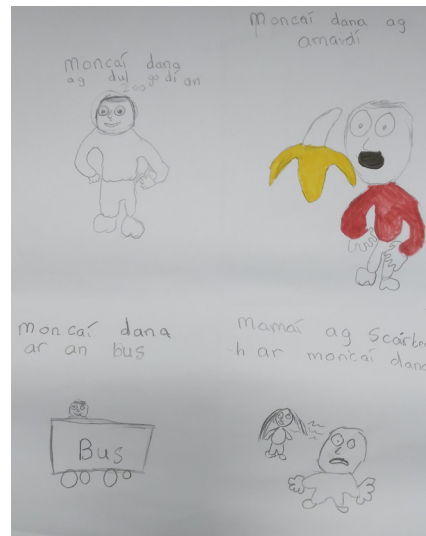
MÍP (8), Girl aged 10



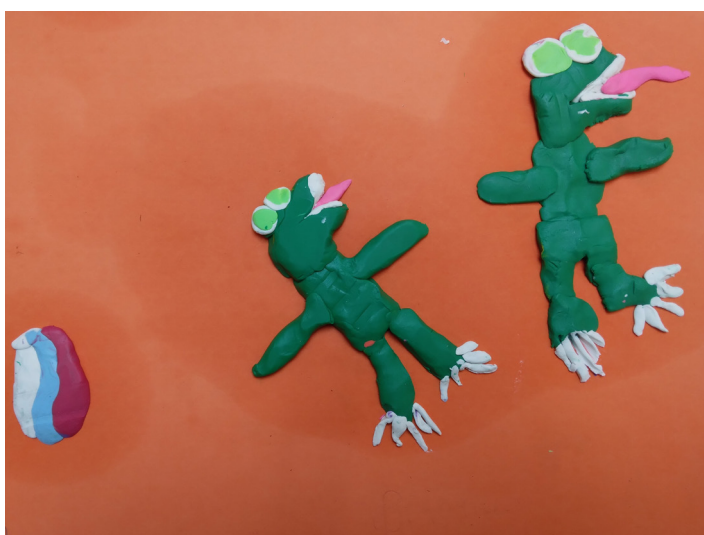
Other books that were selected included *Geansaí Ottó*, *Bliain na nAmhrán*, *Crogaillín*, *Rita agus an Lampa Draíochta*, *An Féileacán agus an Rí*, *Moncaí Dána* and *Cluasa Capaill ar an Rí*.



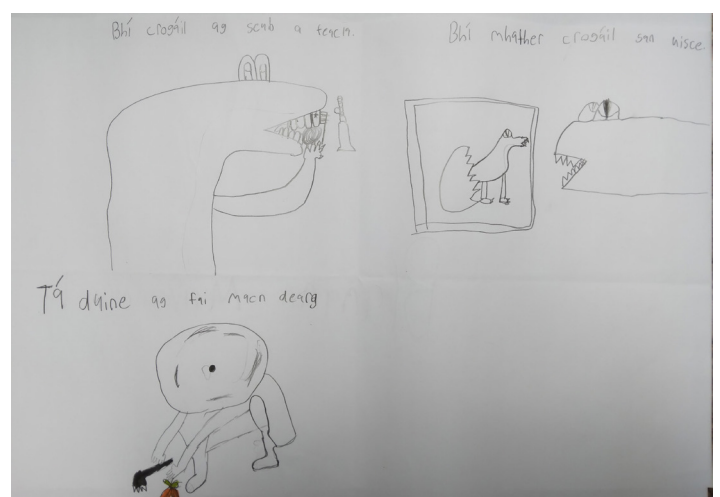
Moncaí Dána, Boy aged 10



Rita agus an Lampa Draíochta, Boy aged 10



Crogaillín, Boy aged 10





Cluasa Capaill ar an Rí, *Boy aged 10*



Crogailín, *Boy aged 10*



Geansaí Ottó, *Boy aged 10*



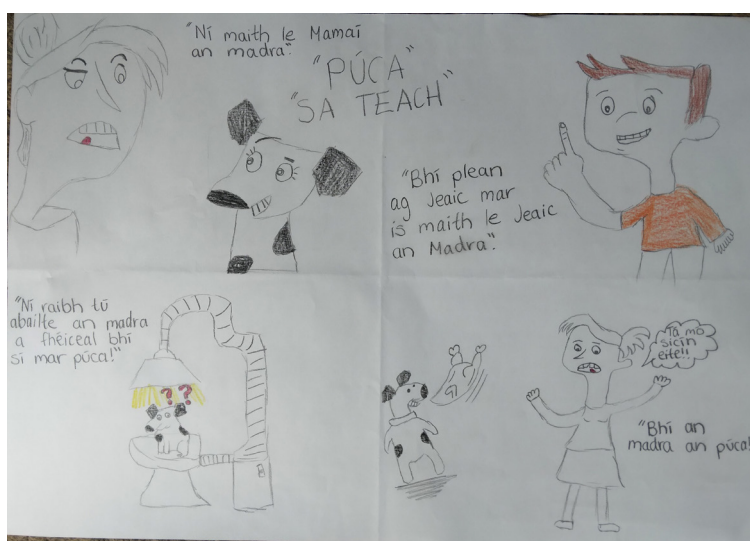
An Féileacán agus an Rí, *Girl aged 10*

Fieldwork Site II

Children focused on a single book for their drawings and modelling clay representations of their favourite title from the bosca. Many children worked in pairs, sharing a book to work from and influencing each other in their selection of scenes and treatment. This practice originated from the fact that within the boscaí, single titles were provided so children often elected to work together with a given book that interested them both when creating their depictions. It is likely that this type of practice would not have occurred (and certainly not to this degree) if multiple book copies of titles, or class sets, were provided.

This was observed to be an important and dynamic aspect of the fieldwork, where children worked alongside one another, discussing the book, enjoying key scenes, laughing and joking about elements of the story, selecting scenes to represent, and comparing the pictures as they created them. As there were two activities with arts-based methods, the children had the opportunity to deepen their knowledge of a given book further with a peer, through discussion and engagement. If the activities had not had two stages, then the impact, level of engagement and peer interaction would have been considerably lessened. The most popular books for pair work that emerged included: *Cinnín Óir agus na Trí Bhéar*, *Tubaiste ar an Titanic*, *Ar Strae*, *Oileán na nDraoithe*, *Scoil na bPáistí Deasa*.

This pair work in the fieldwork was seen as important as it built on existing reading practices in the school where children engaged in shared reading activities. It also highlighted that the books have the potential to spark conversation about reading for pleasure and engagement with the books through discussion while working through visual depiction. This peer-to-peer experience appeared to deepen engagement and enhance the children's experience of the scheme, underlining their own personal journeys with the books.



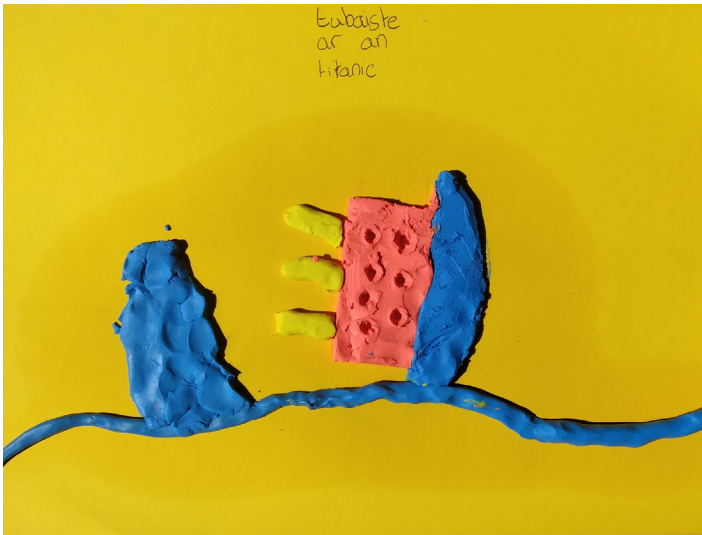
Púca sa Teach, *Girl aged 11*



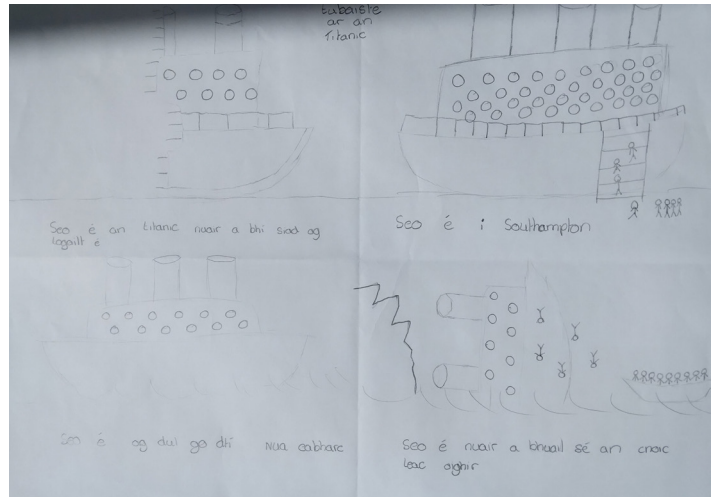
Oileán na nDraoithe (1), Boy aged 11



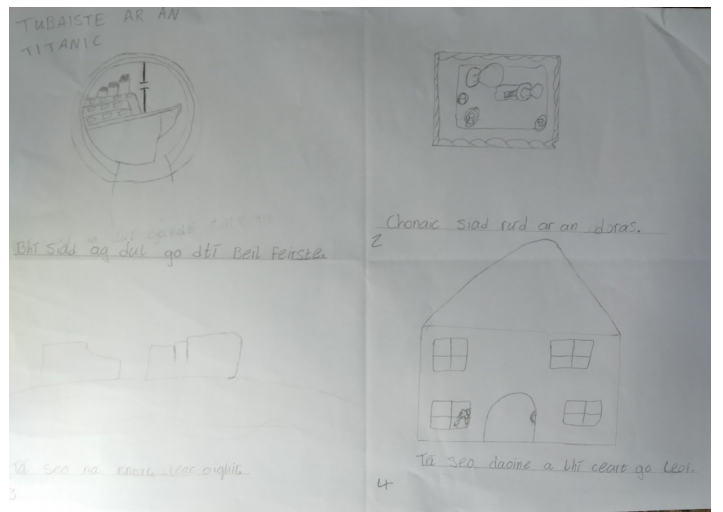
Oileán na nDraoithe (2), Boy aged 11

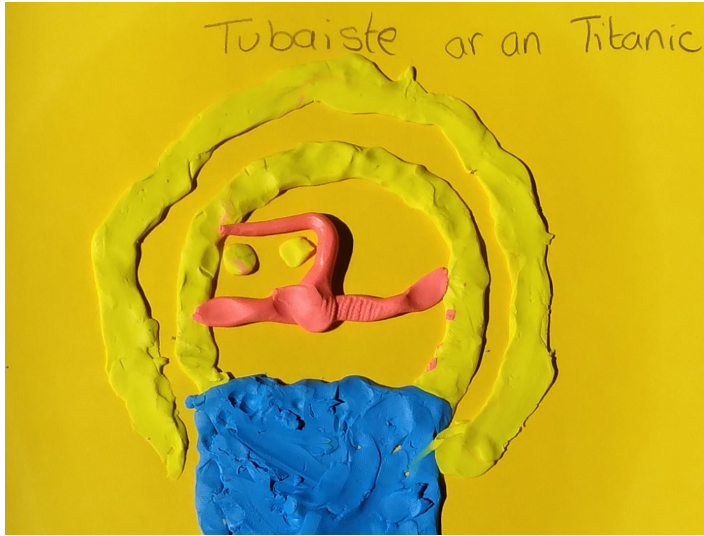


Tubaiste ar an Titanic, Boy aged 12

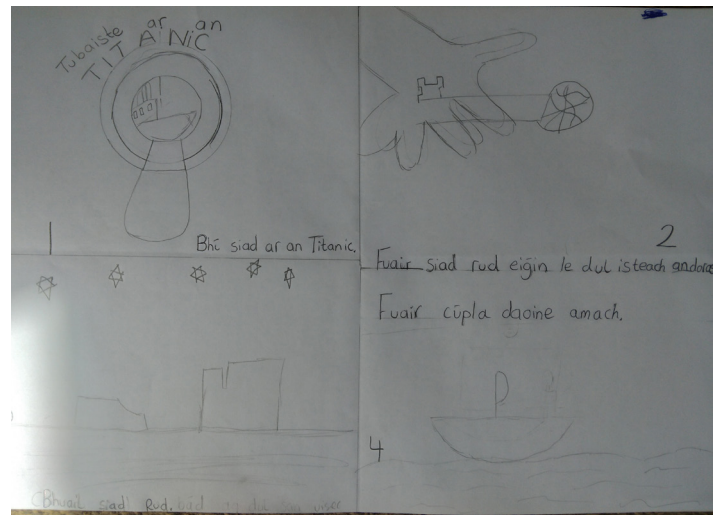


Tubaiste ar an Titanic, Girl aged 12





Tubaiste ar an Titanic, Girl aged 12

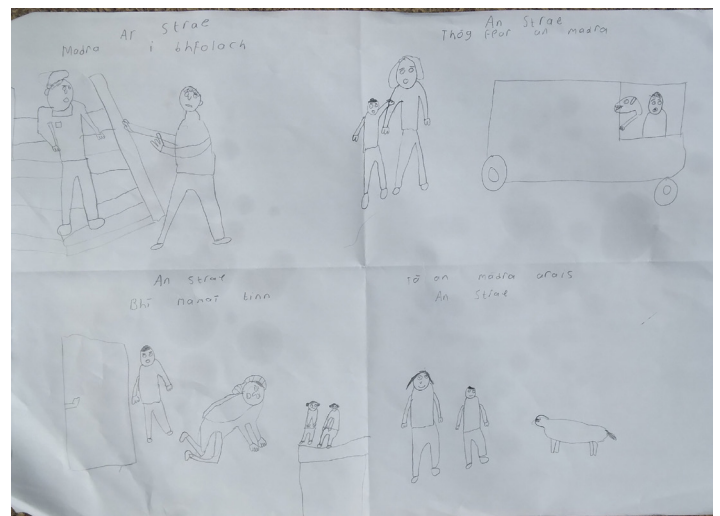


Tubaiste ar an Titanic was selected by three children (aged 11-12) from Sixth Class who were seated at one group table. The boy focused on the historical story of the Titanic's maiden voyage and his modelling clay depiction shows the ship as it sinks following its collision with an iceberg. His accompanying story also depicts this moment as the final scene. The other three scenes depicted in sequence are the Titanic being built, the ship stopping at Southampton as passengers embark and the ship en route to New York. For this boy, what he knows of the story of the Titanic is seen as most important, with the storyline of the book itself as secondary. The two girls, in contrast, have focused more completely on the book itself and the story within. They begin with the cover of the book and reproduce this picture visually in both their modelled depiction and in the first scene of their accompanying story. They then focus on the action in the book where a key is found (in one depiction) and a strange feature is spotted on a door (in the other) so that the characters can enter the past and the Titanic itself. The final two scenes for the girls centre on the history of the voyage again, where it hits the iceberg and only a small amount of people survive. The girls have, like the author, taken the history (in two scenes) and merged it with the book (in two scenes) to communicate their favourite book in the bosca. The boy admitted that he was most interested in the history of the Titanic itself and that was why he chose to focus on this dimension as opposed to the book.

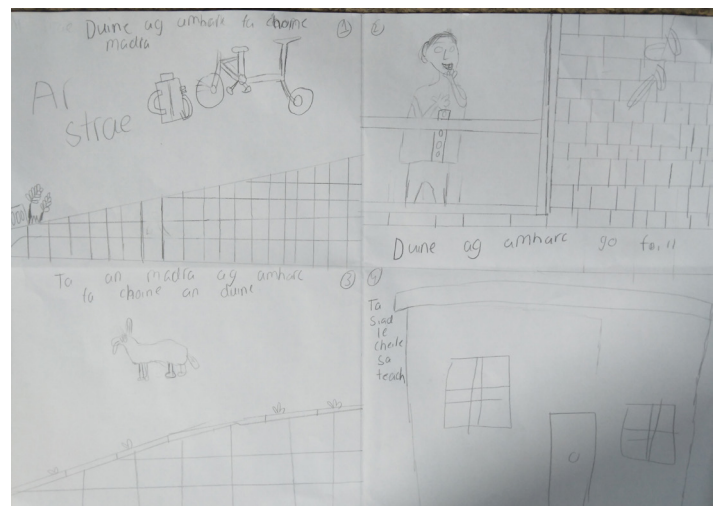
Similarly *Ar Strae* was also selected by three children. This was a very popular book in both the fieldwork and focus groups. The children enjoyed the theme about the boy befriending and helping the stray dog.



Ar Strae, Girl aged 10



Ar Strae, Girl aged 11



There were some exceptions to this where children worked individually and books selected included *An Rún Mór*, *Morf*, *MÍP*, *Deirdre agus an Fear Bréige*, *Anansi agus Scéalta an Domhain*, *An tSióg Mhallaithe*, *Na Bleachtairí Zombai*, *An Bradán Feasa*. These modelling clay pictures tended to focus on one central character that the children found of most interest. They brought the character to life through their representations and depicted the character's story in four scenes in their accompanying drawings.



Na Bleachtairí Zombai, Girl aged 12



Anansi agus Scéalta an Domhain, Girl aged 13



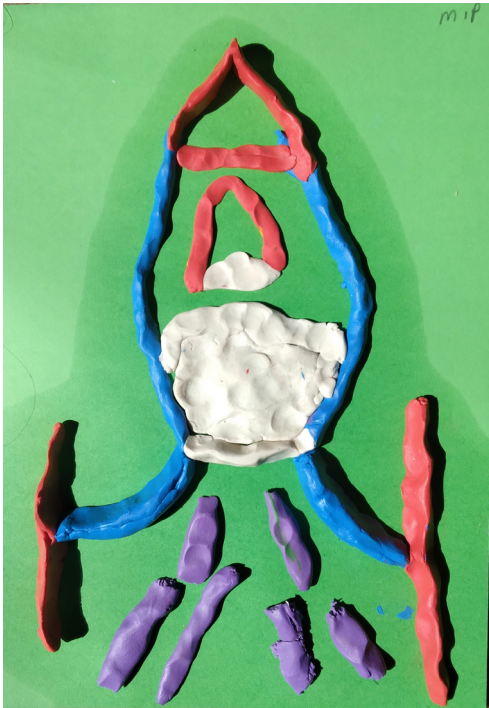
An Meaisín Ama, Girl aged 10



An Rún Mór, Girl aged 11



An Bradán Feasa, *Girl aged 12*

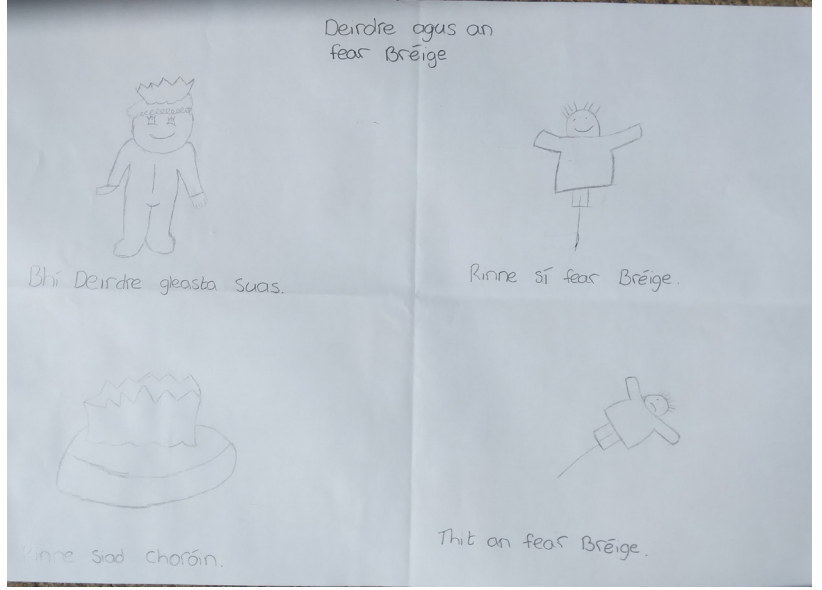


MÍP, *Boy aged 10*





Deirdre agus an Fear Bréige, Girl aged 12



Mamó ar an Fheirm, Boy aged 10



An tSióg Mhallaithe, Boy aged 10



Some observations:

- It appears that increased availability of books in the classroom builds familiarity. Children in this fieldwork context were less familiar with the books as they were stored elsewhere.
- Pair work was demonstrated as Important for building understanding of the books.
- The children shared fun, and enjoyment and peers encouraged each other to engage with the books through their process of discovery.
- Arts-based methods proved useful for children to engage fully with the titles and communicate their understandings.
- Children sitting beside each other and at group tables influenced one another's choice of books as well as the selection and treatment of scenes.
- Children enjoyed selecting one main character to portray or to produce their own reading of the cover illustration of a given book.
- The four-scene format usually saw a one sentence to one scene approach.

Conclusion

As stated at the outset of the evaluation, An Bosca Leabharlainne was a hugely ambitious project. Its impact has been felt by children all over the island of Ireland in 1,831 schools, including every Gaelscoil and Gaeltacht school on the island of Ireland. The primary aim of the scheme was to promote independent reading for children and enjoyment of reading in the Irish language and this has been achieved with evidence in this evaluative report from all schools that have acknowledged receipt of their books. The scheme has also achieved its additional aims:

- Promoting Irish language literature and publishing – many schools did not know about the range of high-quality Irish language literature;
- Raising awareness of Irish language literature among the public – children are talking about the books and sharing their experiences with their teachers and families;
- Increasing the number of high-quality, engaging Irish language books available in primary schools – in some English-medium schools An Bosca Leabharlainne represented the first Irish language books they had access to;
- Developing teachers' capacity to encourage their students' reading in Irish in innovative, creative ways – many teachers talked of their increased confidence in storytelling and using Irish language books in the classroom.

Key **Learnings**



Key Learnings

An Bosca Leabharlainne ensured that a huge number of schools, including every Irish medium primary school on the island of Ireland as well as every school that applied, received high-quality Irish language books for reading for pleasure. This significantly increased their school library Irish book stock. In the general survey, schools reported that they had very low representation of Irish language books in their school libraries. 44% of schools reported that they had 0-20 books in their library and 91% had under 100 books. Many of these were reported to be out of date, damaged or unappealing. This would suggest that the impact of An Bosca Leabharlainne was significant in providing high-quality Irish language books for school libraries, where the majority of schools had little to no representation.

The name 'An Bosca Leabharlainne' did not always function consistently across the schools. This was because the books didn't necessarily stay in the box. Some boxes stayed intact, others were put onto a trolley to share between classes, others were shared between junior and senior classes and others were given a small, dedicated library space or displayed in shelving units in the classroom. Some teachers were confused by the 'bosca' term. Furthermore, children's familiarity with and access to the books in An Bosca Leabharlainne was key to the project's success, as demonstrated by the fieldwork. In schools where the books were available in the classroom for the children to read, work with and discuss, the project was seen at its most effective.

Artists in Residence emphasised that a series of visits by an artist is preferable to one-off visits. This builds an expectation for the children and teachers of the artist's presence. They can prepare for visits, anticipate them and discuss them afterwards. There is strength in this consistency. An artist in residence underlined the importance of separating the experience of the books in the bosca from the formal learning process, as children enjoyed independent reading for pleasure in Irish without the pressure of assessment of learning. There were challenges in that the scheme asked a lot of individual artists in residence: working with entire schools, working across multiple age groups and advance preparation on activities over a residency of 7.5 days. Many of the artists understood that they needed to be familiar with all forty-five individual titles selected for An Bosca Leabharlainne, which was not the intention when the AIR scheme was conceived.

The resource of the activity book was considered by the artists to be a very useful tool to help the teachers bring the books to life after their residencies were completed. Other artists felt that this was a better tool for teachers than for the artists to use, and that it would help teachers to use the books after the residency had concluded. The resource of the activity booklet was seen as less successful in English-medium schools, as demonstrated in the teachers' focus group, where teachers have Irish but felt that they did not have sufficient time to work in detail with an all-Irish booklet. These teachers recommended a shorter version of each of the activities in bullet format in both Irish and English.

The most popular book in An Bosca Leabharlainne was *Cinnín Ór agus na Trí Bhéar*. It was chosen by a quarter of all schools who responded to the general survey. Schools selected this book as it was a retelling of a familiar tale and the children found that a useful way into the story which helped their understanding and enjoyment.

The impact of An Bosca Leabharlainne was more significant in English-medium schools as there were less high-quality Irish language books in these settings and the resource had a dramatic impact in most of these schools. Schools noted a change to their Irish language reading culture particularly in English-medium schools where Irish language literature was, for the most part, underrepresented. Most schools noted that the books provided were modern, colourful, engaging and most noted that the books encouraged children to pick up a book in Irish, many for the first time.

Additional Information



Appendix 1

Example of reading for fun questionnaire used in fieldwork

Reading for fun in Irish
Leabhair Ghaeilge a léamh ar mhaithe le spraoi

What is nice about reading a book?
Cad atá deas faoi leabhar a léamh?

Nuair atá pictiúir deasa agus nuair atá dráma ann.

What would make you want to pick up an Irish book and read it?
Cén fáth a phiocfá suas leabhar Gaeilge?

Tá sé deas go bhfuil Gaeilge agam agus ar laethanta saoire ní beidh duine ábalta é a léamh.

What does this book look like? draw a picture:
Cén chuma atá ar an leabhar sin? Tarraing pictiúr de:

An ceol ar an trá

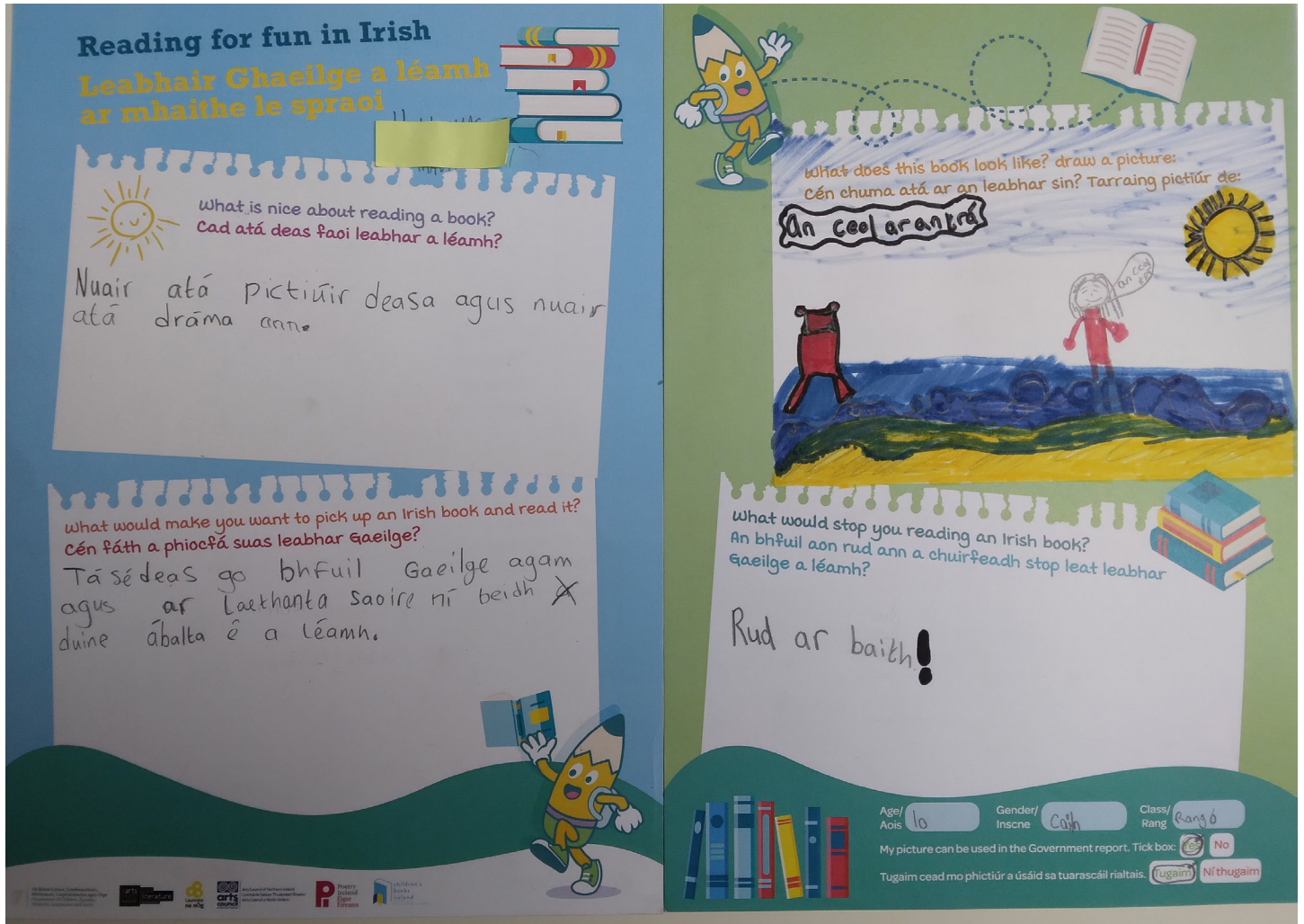
What would stop you reading an Irish book?
An bhfuil aon rud ann a chuirfeadh stop leat leabhar Gaeilge a léamh?

Rud ar baithh!

Age/Aois: 10 Gender/Inscne: Cath Class/Rang: Rangó

My picture can be used in the Government report. Tick box: Yes No

Tuagaim cead mo phictiúr a úsáid sa tuarascáil rialtais. Tuagaim Ní thugaim



Appendix 2

Breakdown of schools selected for An Bhosca Leabharlainne

Saghas scoile	Iomlán
Scoileanna Gaeltachta	113
Gaelscoileanna (nach bhfuil lonnaithe sa Ghaeltacht)	169
Gaelscoileanna i dTuaisceart Éireann	35
Scoileanna DEIS	408
Scoileanna beaga	319
Lionraí/Bailte Gaeltachta	262
Iarratais	525
Foriomlán	1831

Appendix 3

List of artists in residence

Anna Heussaff
Séamus Mac Annaidh
Realtán Ní Leannáin
Máire Zepf
Jackie MacDonncha
Sadhbh Devlin
Muireann Ní Chíobháin
Geraldine Meade
Bridget Bhreathnach
Diarmuid de Faoite
Dómhnal Ó Bric

Appendix 4

List of books in An Bosca Leabharlainne Box for Irish-medium/gaelscoileanna

TEIDEAL	FOILSITHEOIR	ÚDAR & MAISITHEOIR
Anansi agus Scéalta an Domhain	An Gúm	Éamonn Ó Ruanaí & Kieron Black
An Eala Órga	An Gúm	Gabriel Rosenstock & Brian Fitzgerald
Lúba	An Gúm	Alan Titley & John White
Morf	An Gúm	Orna Ní Choileáin & Olivia Golden
Ceol na Sióg	An tSnáthaid Mhór	Gráinne Holland & Mr Ando
Jimín Mhaire Thaidhg	An tSnáthaid Mhór	Pádraig Ó Siochfhradha & Andrew Whitson
Sárú	Cló Iar-Chonnachta	Anna Heussaff
An Táin	Cló Mhaigh Eo	Colmán Ó Raghallaigh & Barry Reynolds
Tubaiste ar an Titanic	Cló Mhaigh Eo	Máire Zepf & Olivia Golden
Boscadán	Cois Life	Áine Ní Ghlinn & Kirsten Shiel
Sin Iad na Rudaí	Coiscéim	Máire Ní Laoithe Uí Shé & Dómhnal Ó Bric
Mór agus Muilc	Éabhlóid	John Óg Hiúdaí Neidí Ó Colla & Kim Sharkey
Oileán na nDraoithe	Éabhlóid	Proinsias Mac a'Bhaird & Caomhán Ó Scolaí
An Féileacán agus an Rí	Futa Fata	Máire Zepf & Shona Shirley Macdonald
Ar Strae	Futa Fata	Patricia Forde & John White
Bliain na nAmhrán	Futa Fata	Tadhg Mac Dhonnagáin, Tarsila Krüse, Jennifer Farley, Christina O'Donovan & Brian Fitzgerald
Cluasa Capaill ar an Rí	Futa Fata	Bridget Bhreathnach & Shona Shirley Macdonald
Go Ceann Scríbe	Futa Fata	Ailbhe Nic Giolla Bhrighde
An Gruagach	Leabhar Breac	Peadar Ó Cualáin
An Meaisín Ama	Leabhar Breac	Máire Ní Ghallchobhair & Peter Donnelly
Eachtra ar Oileán na Rún	Leabhar Breac	Brian Ó Broin
Síscéalta Lios Lurgain: Éalú as an Lios	Leabhar Breac	Aoife Ní Dhufaigh
Na Bleachtairí Zombaí	The O'Brien Press	Gabriel Rosenstock & Alan Nolan
Thar an Trasnán	The O'Brien Press	Áine Ní Ghlinn & Paul Bolger
Deirdre agus an Fear Bréige	The O'Brien Press	Úna Leavy & Maeve Kelly

Box for English-medium schools

TEIDEAL	FOILSITHEOIR	ÚDAR & MAISITHEOIR
Ó Bhó, na Beacha!	An Gúm	Pauline Devine & Róisín Curé
Caoimhe agus an Bogha Báistí	An Gúm	Siobhain Grogan & Róisín Curé
Cinnín Óir agus na Trí Bhéar	An Gúm	Áine Ní Ghlinn & Laura Jane Phelan
Crogaillín	An Gúm	Liam Prút & Róisín Curé
Gairdín Mháire na mBláth	An Gúm	Tatyana Feeney
Mamó ar an Fheirm	An Gúm	Mary Arrigan
Muireann agus an Teach Solais	An tSnathaid Mhór	Malachy Doyle, Máire Zepf & Andrew Whitson
Rita agus an Lampa Draíochta	An tSnathaid Mhór	Máire Zepf
Ceol na Sióg	An tSnathaid Mhór	Gráinne Holland & Mr Ando
Rirá le Ruairí!	Cló Mhaigh Eo	Colmán Ó Raghallaigh & Anne Marie Carroll
Mór agus Muilc	Éabhlóid	John Óg Hiúdaí Neidí Ó Colla & Kim Sharkey
Ar Strae	Futa Fata	Patricia Forde & John White
Beag Bídeach	Futa Fata	Sadhbh Devlin & Róisín Hahessy
Bliain na nAmhrán	Futa Fata	Tadhg Mac Dhonnagáin, Tarsila Krüse, Jennifer Farley, Christina O'Donovan & Brian Fitzgerald
Cluasa Capaill ar an Rí	Futa Fata	Bridget Bhreathnach & Shona Shirley Macdonald
Geansaí Ottó	Futa Fata	Sadhbh Devlin & Róisín Hahessy
Lisín-Scoil na bPáistí Deasa	Futa Fata	Patricia Forde & Joëlle Dreidemy
MÍP	Futa Fata	Máire Zepf & Paddy Donnelly
Percy Péacóg	Futa Fata	Gemma Breathnach & Tarsila Krüse
Scúnc agus Smúirín	Futa Fata	Muireann Ní Chíobháin & Paddy Donnelly
An Bradán Feasa	Leabhar Breac	Darach Ó Scolaí
An tSióg Mhallaithe	Leabhar Breac	Aoife Ní Dhufaigh
Púca sa Teach	Leabhar Breac	Máire Ní Ghallchobhair & Peter Donnelly
An Rún Mór	The O'Brien Press	Caitríona Ní Mhurchú & Tatyana Feeney
Moncaí Dána	The O'Brien Press	Áine Ní Ghlinn & Aileen Caffrey

Appendix 6

Literature Review - Research on listening to stories in a second language

This is a short literature review on the importance of listening to stories to aid understanding of a second language. It provides strong research-based evidence for the approach of An Bosca Leabharlainne in its provision of artists in residence (authors and illustrators) to bring stories to life in the boscaí to encourage reading for pleasure in Irish. This will also occur through teachers' activation of stories in the classroom using the activity booklet¹.

Listening to stories is 'the bridge' to independent reading (Wang and Lee, 2007). There is a huge role for stories in the early experience of reading generally and reading in a second language, this role has an ongoing importance in childhood and adolescence. 'Stories provide the linguistic competence that makes reading possible, and they also stimulate interest in reading' (Krashen, 2019).

It has been argued that the goal of helping children learn to read is to develop the habit of reading for pleasure. This is the best means of achieving reading competence as it improves; reading ability, vocabulary, writing, spelling and grammar (Krashen, 2019). It is important to note that reading for pleasure is independent and has been defined as: 'reading that we do of our own free will, anticipating the satisfaction that we will get from the act of reading. It also refers to reading that having begun at someone else's request we continue because we are interested in it.' (Clark and Rumbold 2006, 6). To encourage reading for pleasure, we need to receive 'comprehensible input', we understand what we hear or read and process it. The best way to receive input is to make this input compelling and the most compelling input is through good stories; whether we read or hear stories, if they are compelling we will engage to develop and maintain this essential habit of reading for pleasure (Krashen, 2019).

Storytellers are invaluable as mediators of stories and reading for children in the early stages of reading (Krashen, 2019). Storytellers aid listening and understanding through 'comprehension-aiding supplementation' (Krashen, Mason, and Smith, 2018). Methods to assist comprehension include; background information on the story in advance of sharing it with children; telling stories in familiar settings; incorporating visual descriptors - pictures or drawings; linguistic information (synonyms, descriptions, translation for those reading in a second language). These story listening methods are applied in the work of Mason (2014).

Listening to stories is the best way to increase vocabulary and this has been evident in the research (Mason and Krashen, 2004; Mason, Vanata, Jander, Borsch, and Krashen, 2009). It is not essential that children understand a story in its totality or the meaning of every unfamiliar word; 'each time listeners hear a new word in a comprehensible context, they acquire a small part of the meaning. If they hear enough stories, and the stories are reasonably comprehensible, substantial vocabulary growth will take place' (Krashen, 2019). Research has compared listening to unfamiliar words in a story context aided by comprehension-aiding supplementation with the efficacy of direct teaching of this vocabulary (Mason and Krashen, 2004; Mason, Vanata, Jander, Borsch, and Krashen, 2009; McQuillan, 2019). All studies agreed that hearing unfamiliar words in stories results in more acquisition per minute (Krashen, 2019).

¹ *There was a consultation conducted on 'Reading in Irish for Pleasure' by Sandra Roe, 2021 and Dr. Claire M. Dunne who wrote the activity booklet references how this consultation document was taken on board in the creation of the booklet.*

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