



Taking 'Say Yes to Languages' beyond the classroom

Languages Connect are delighted to bring you the third in a series of articles focusing on schools and teachers who have taken part in *Say Yes to Languages*, which is rolling out for a second year. Ronan Barrett, a teacher in Rathfarnham Educate Together National School, Dublin, talks about integrating the programme beyond the language class, useful ways to invest the grant funds and interesting ideas on how to progress from one year to another.

Rathfarnham ETNS, a small suburban school tucked away off Nutgrove Avenue in Rathfarnham, is a mainstream, multi-denominational school with approximately 220 pupils and a staff of about 30. Most of the pupils attending Rathfarnham ETNS live in the surrounding area and whilst we are small for a Dublin school, with only one class in each year group, we have a really great sense of community.

Bringing diversity to the fore

As a multi-denominational school, we have quite a diverse community at Rathfarnham ETNS. We welcome pupils of all nationalities and celebrating languages and culture has become a regular occurrence in the school calendar.

For me personally, having previously taught in the UK and the United Arab Emirates, I am very aware of the importance of language and culture in raising awareness of diversity. My love of travelling and proficiency in Spanish has also allowed me to appreciate the value and the great benefit of being able to communicate in different languages.

The *Say Yes to Languages* programme provided an opportunity to bring these themes together and take them to

another level within the school setting. It looks to give pupils an insight into learning a spoken foreign language or Irish Sign Language (ISL) and develop an appreciation for the diverse range of languages and cultures that surround them daily. As soon as we became aware of the programme, we signed up without hesitation and were delighted to secure a place in the very first year.

Beyond the classroom

We applied to run *Say Yes to Languages* in two classes, with Spanish being our chosen language, and were keen to get started. We were fortunate to have two staff members with proficiency in Spanish, so we were able to deliver the programme from within the school staff.

Even though we chose Spanish as our language focus, we identified over 20 different language connections among the two classes taking part, which opened discussions around the important link languages play within our communities and how they reflect various cultures and traditions.

The programme also gave us an opportunity to create greater awareness of the school's dedication to language, culture, and diversity, as we promoted the

module through the school website using the press release provided. Extending the message beyond the school gates, we also looked to involve parents by challenging them to share a word or phrase in a foreign language in return for a sticker or the highly coveted *Say Yes to Languages* trolley token. This put our new language learning on the parents' map too. We encouraged pupils to practice and use their new phrases in the wider classroom setting but also to integrate the new learning with other subjects, especially geography and PE, which the pupils were very receptive to.

One of the ways that we used the *Say Yes to Languages* grant was to purchase listening and recording devices, which gave pupils a readily accessible tool to help. Digital technology was also used to support pupils using their new phrases in stop-motion animation and the creation of simple e-books. This was one of the highlights for the pupils, as they commented on how they enjoyed working collaboratively and using their new phrases.

As a teacher I could see the confidence growing and that technology was assisting all our pupils to access the programme.