

# **Developing Learner Autonomy in Primary School Students to Improve English Literacy Levels in an Increasingly Diverse Irish Society**

**Research by Collette Dunne (2007 Bursary scheme)**

## **Rationale and Aims**

This study investigates ways of enabling sixth class students to plan, monitor and evaluate their own learning and to work co-operatively and collaboratively to develop autonomous learning skills. The wider focus of the study is on motivating students to improve their literacy skills.

## **Overview of the Research Topic**

The researcher draws from a range of literatures to discuss learning styles and learner autonomy and to argue for the use of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) combined with Portfolios (IEPPs) as the means of analysing students' needs and of developing students' autonomy in planning and in self assessment. The researcher also argues for an integrated approach to the development of literacy skills including an emphasis on listening, speaking, reading and writing and for the use of authentic texts. Learner autonomy is developed in the context of a collaborative deconstruction and reconstruction of meaningful texts in which the relevant literacy skills are also the focus for teaching and learning.

## **Methodology**

The study is designed as an action research study and was conducted in two phases over two periods of twelve weeks. The researcher adopts a predominantly qualitative approach to data collection including teacher observations, class discussions, and reflective notes by the teacher/researcher. Some quantitative data were also collected through questionnaires and the use of standardised tests.

## **Findings and Recommendations**

The findings from this study are multi-layered and provide interesting and extremely useful information on both the process, and content, of children's learning. We also get information on children's learning styles as well as rare and valuable insights into children's views of themselves and others as learners. The findings also afford insights into children's views of how we structure teaching and learning in classrooms. The layers of enquiry within the study provide findings on children's literacy achievements, on the benefits of cross-cultural study, on children's attitudes to, and behaviours during, group work and on the growth of their skills and developing autonomy as learners.

## **Summary**

This is an innovative study which includes a number of layers of enquiry to do with both the content and the process of teaching and learning and it yields valuable insights into how teachers can help children to be more active agents in their own learning. The study

focuses on improving literacy achievements, enhancing children's motivation and developing their autonomy as learners. The recommendations for further research identify the need for evaluation of the differentiated effects of this work on children's achievement over time.