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Language Rights

A Resource for Teachers

with the support of

An Chomhairle um Oideachas
Gaeltachta & Gaelscolaíochta



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Educational Resource of the Office of An Coimisinéir Teanga

I am very pleased to introduce this bilingual educational resource. I hope that both teachers and students will find it useful and enjoyable.

We have provided this material, with the support of An Chomhairle um Oideachais Gaeltachta agus Gaelscoilaíochta, for use in the Junior Certificate Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) course, with the aim of improving students' understanding of language rights.

Irish is the national language of this country and has been spoken here for at least 2,000 years. It is also the oldest written language in northern Europe that still survives as a spoken community language. However, Irish is not the most commonly spoken language in this country and, notwithstanding its status as our first official language, it is under pressure as are many other lesser used languages throughout the world.

The Irish language is of fundamental importance to the identity of the Irish people and it plays a central role in our culture. We also have a duty to protect the language as part of world heritage.

It falls to the people of this country to keep our national language alive. This can be done by making sure we create a place and a space for it in the life of the country rather than having it marginalised or sidelined. It is important that, as part of the educational system, young people are given a chance to develop their understanding of language rights and that they are made aware of the importance of protecting and promoting our national language.

The language rights of the people are confirmed in the Constitution of Ireland and also in various pieces of legislation, in particular in the Official Languages Act 2003. The Office of An Coimisinéir Teanga was established under that Act to protect the language rights of the public. One of the functions of the Office is to provide advice to the public about those rights.

Consequently, we have developed this series of lessons on language rights as an educational resource for teachers and students of the CSPE course. It provides an insight into language rights generally and Irish language rights in particular, in the overall context of human rights. The material has been prepared bilingually and it includes a teacher's manual, posters, CD Rom, DVD of video clips and online resources (www.coimisineir.ie).

I hope that this educational resource will encourage debate on language rights among students and will improve their understanding of this important subject. I hope it will also help them develop their sense of identity as citizens of a country which has two official languages, Irish and English.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank sincerely all those who helped in the development of this resource; particular individuals are listed in the section entitled 'Acknowledgements' but many others also facilitated the project by giving advice and other forms of assistance.

I hope that students will benefit from and enjoy learning more about language rights.

Seán Ó Cuirreáin

An Coimisinéir Teanga