Scots Wha Hae or Scots Who Have:
ambivalence about Scots in adult literacies

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COMMONSENSE thinking about Scots in education throughout recent decades holds that the Mither Tongue, a child's first language, stays in the playground and stops at the classroom door. During my school days (1960-74), official sanction for the speaking of Scots was given only for Burns competitions and the odd whimsical poem, such as Walter Wingate's 'The Sair Finger'. Teacherly scorn fell on any pupil making the prosaic pronouncement that 'the bell's went'. Before abolition of corporal punishment in 1987, some children were belted for speaking Scots. One literacies practitioner told me that 'Miss Taylor' belted him as a boy of seven or eight for saying his goldfish was deid, insisting it was dead. Yet she had given him a gold star for reciting Burns's 'Tae a Moose'. Scots from the Bard was permissible but 'speaking slang' was not.

Yet it was not always thus. Scots was the language of education, the court, the law and government until the 17th century, when James VI left for London, taking the court and the enriching effects that had created a golden age of Scots language and literature. Standard English, meanwhile, originated as an East Midland dialect linked to London's merchant class in the late medieval period. Norman Fairclough (2001: 56) notes that these were the first capitalists, linking the rise of standard English to the rise in their wealth and power. How they spoke eventually colonised important social institutions such as government, literature, the law, religion and education. Fairclough links the power of standard English with the stigmatisation of other dialects, such as Scots, for this established the dominance of the capitalist class and ensured that the speech of the emergent working class became labelled slovenly, low, vulgar, barbarous and so forth, or in the case of Renfrewshire poet Tom Leonard, 'disgraceful'. Paulo Freire (1972) has observed that when one world view imposes itself upon another, it is essential for the success of this 'cultural invasion' that the invaded come to see their reality with the outlook of the invaders rather than their own: to want to walk, dress and talk like them. They come to share the view of the invaders as superior and themselves as inferior. This is why Foucault (1977: 114) declares that when discussing language, one's point of reference should be war and battle: 'The history which bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that of a language: relations of power, not relations of meaning.'

My first skirmishes on this battlefield were in 2009, on a course that introduced would-be adult literacies tutors to the social practice model. This keystone of literacies practice in Scotland, set out in the 2001 ALNIS (Adult Literacy and Numeracy in Scotland) report, enshrines literacies work as firmly learner-centred. This requires literacies tutors to value, respect and build on learners' life experience, including the language of home and community. To quote the Scottish Qualifications Authority: 'The social practice model of provision in literacies learning builds on the

skills, knowledge and understanding a learner has acquired through lifelong learning. It values the learner's preferences and practices, focusing on the learner's expressed goals, which derive from that person's real-life situation and need' (SQA 2011).

Working as a volunteer tutor assistant had shown me how swiftly a learner gained in interest and motivation when teaching resources drew on matters important to life outside class, be it a young man creating a comic reflecting his musical tastes, a care worker compiling a pocket guide of terms to use on her daily shift, or two women discovering the mysteries of textspeak. This was relevant, motivated, essential learning: lifelong learning.

However, reading for an assignment last year brought into focus a potentially problematic aspect of literacies practice: the discrepancy between learners speaking Scots, but poring over teaching materials in standard English. While Scots is the language of home and community for many adult literacies learners in Scotland, literacies provision is usually delivered in standard English, so the dominant discourse marginalises community literacies (Tett 2000). Although the social practice model focuses on the learner's lived experience, including their language, literacies teaching is largely conducted in this different linguistic form, sometimes by practitioners with little or no knowledge of Scots. Indeed, literacies sessions provide evidence that some learners have a sense of shame about speaking Scots (Addison in Crowther, Hamilton and Tett, 2001; Crowther and Tett, 1996; Crowther and Tett, 1998; Crowther, Tett and Galloway, 1999). Are tutors aware of these seeming contradictions and, if so, how to reconcile them in practice? Might there even be a tacit assumption that learners' voices do not meet a notional 'standard' and therefore require correction? If so, that would confound the social practice model, based as it is on 'issues of social justice, equality, and democracy in everyday life' (Crowther and Tett 1998: 3). In this matter, the key is the attitudes of practitioners towards Scots.

If these observations suggest the possibility of problematic attitudes among literacies tutors, this ambivalence is also mirrored in Scotland's educational policy. The social practice model is enshrined in Adult Literacy and Numeracy in Scotland (ALNIS, Scottish Executive: 2001), which sets three priorities for adult literacies: lifelong learning, social inclusion and active citizenship. Breaking with the functional approach to literacies adopted in England and Wales, which works from a deficit model and towards a set framework of basic skills for every learner, ALNIS identified learner-centred programmes as critical to success. In practice, this involves the learner and tutor jointly negotiating individual learning plans (ILPs), based on the learner's stated life goals and preferences. This replaces a deficit model of literacies learning – defining people in terms of what they cannot do – with the concept of lifelong learning, which acknowledges that learning continues and is developed throughout our lives to meet the changing needs and demands that society places on us. It recognises that adults bring a lifetime of learning to literacies sessions. Juliet Merrifield, reviewing Scottish literacy policies for the National Research Development Council in 2005, observed that the Scottish Government's curriculum framework empowers teachers and learners by refraining from dictating in fine detail what should be taught and learned on literacies courses, focusing on the differences learning can make to people's lives with regard to self-confidence, self-esteem, improved attitudes towards learning, and improved capacities for social

engagement/civic participation. This, she notes, provides a tool for dialogue, then leaves everything to the tutor and learner - placing a degree of trust in both.

There are signs, however, that the market demands of the Great Recession may have caused policymakers to lose faith in that trusted relationship. The past five years have seen policy initiatives (including Skills for Scotland: a Lifelong Skills Strategy, the Single Outcome Agreement concordat and the refreshed Skills for Scotland in 2010) emphasising the need to improve levels of adult literacy and numeracy in order to promote economic competitiveness. Finally, Adult Literacies in Scotland 2020 (Scottish Government 2010) ranks as its highest priority 'the importance of literacies for employability and work'. Noting the passing of 10 years since the introduction of the 'internationally celebrated' social practice model, ALIS 2020 author Ralf St Clair states glumly that now 'we live in a different world' in which 'the challenge is to achieve more, often with fewer resources' (Scottish Government 2010: 6).

He himself notes a double standard at work:

> On the one hand, Scottish policy sets out an open and relativistic agenda around literacy and its value in a wide range of contexts, but on the other it shuts literacy down again to a particular form and level of literacy that is seen as economically viable.

> (St Clair 2010: 16)

Can language be linked to market values? Pierre Bourdieu (1977: 652), defining a linguistic market, argues that 'a language is worth what those who speak it are worth' in terms of power and authority in their economic and cultural relations. Unger (2010: 102) states that in those terms, in contrast with standard English, 'Scots is worth almost nothing outside Scotland'.

Yet policymakers are heeding other voices, with guid Scots tongues in their heids. In the run-up to the Scottish National Party winning an outright majority in 2011 and pledging a referendum on independence during the lifetime of this parliament, the Ministerial Working Group on the Scots Language made six urgent recommendations relating to Scots in education, including teacher training in the Scots language, a nationwide network of co-ordinators able to deliver it and funding for the necessary resources. These Scots language advocates, who include teachers, novelists and poets, welcome 'the Government's new commitment to a policy of active support for Scots'. By this they appear to mean the first document to formulate a languages strategy for Scotland (A Strategy for Scotland's Languages, 2007), which appears to construct Scots in positive terms as an important feature of national identity, heritage and culture. Also, for the first time, Scotland's Census (2011) asked respondents whether they can understand, speak, read or write Scots. And, in a virtual reversal of the pedagogical policy of previous generations, Scots now has an important place in the Curriculum for Excellence: 'The languages of Scotland will include the languages which children and young people bring to the classroom.' Miss Taylor and her belt are consigned to history's dustbin.

To tease out these observations: adult literacies practitioners adhering to Scotland's social practice model ought to be acknowledging and working with the learners' language. The Scottish Government devolves that decision to tutors: do they take it or

leave it? Some, apparently, leave it. Meanwhile, even as policy changes bind the aims of literacies learning ever more tightly to the needs of the UK's hirpling economy, the SNP government wants to know how many Scots read/speak/understand the Mither Tongue and valorises the Scots language enough to assert its place in the curriculum. Students of Scottish literature note a duality between good and evil in such classics as Hogg's Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner (1824) and in Stevenson's The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr Hyde (1886): is this another example of a Caledonian divide? Are we Scots Wha Hae or Scots Who Have?

Last summer I interviewed two adult literacies practitioners. Both passionately advocated Scots as emancipatory in learning sessions by validating the learners' own language and combating the sense of stigma that can make Scots feel inferior about how they speak – an example of what Beveridge and Turnbull (1989) call the 'Scottish Cringe', or learned inferiorism. One practitioner believes forcing a child to learn a different way of communicating on starting school represents a huge barrier, one that some, including himself, may never wholly overcome. (Scots Makar Liz Lochhead's poem Kidspoem/Bairnsang, used in Scotland's Census to help people decide whether they are Scots speakers, recounts the impact of this experience in her own childhood.) Both practitioners quoted learners as saying they feel empowered by using Scots in class and hearing tutors speak it too. 'Ah've goat ma speech back,' said one learner.

To find out more about practitioner attitudes towards Scots in literacies, I conducted an online questionnaire in June/July 2011. More than two-thirds of respondents say they do use Scots, mostly in spoken form. The majority want more training and resources for Scots and support it featuring in SQA materials – an apparent endorsement of Scots now finding a place in CfE. Practitioners commented on how they used Scots as a learning resource, from 'word of the week' to a DVD in Doric. Again, some noted how using Scots gave their learners a sense of validation and empowerment, challenging feelings of inferiority or shame. The vernacular offers a talking point and/or cultural reference, and can help learners from other countries to integrate and communicate.

Yet even those who offered positive comments about Scots raised issues about stigma, signalling that Scots still carries associations of inferiority even as tutors are thinking critically about questions of status and validity. References to register switching, or changing one's speech according to context, crop up frequently. One respondent claims Scots are bilingual but the whiff of stigma hangs in phrases such as 'a Queen's English route to satisfy convention', 'replaced by "proper" English', ' "poor" use of English in a Scottish accent', 'slang'. Some respondents showed downright hostility to Scots as a learning resource, claiming it was pointless, unhelpful, unacceptable in the workplace, less useful than basic English and discouraged participation. In spurning the vernacular, these tutors are arguably turning their backs on the biggest resource learners bring to class – their own tongue.

Scotland's policy context for literacies meanwhile shows two sides, one upholding learner-centred social practice and the other colonising learning for market imperatives. At a time when Scots is finding a place in the curriculum, its potential as a literacies learning resource is undermined by demands to prioritise learning for

employability. One practitioner said he did not want to feel he was 'sneaking Scots in through the back door', signalling a lack of faith in support from the educational establishment. So much for a literacies framework that trusts the tutor and learner, when this tutor suspects that in providing learner-centred education, he has transgressed.

In conclusion, there is much ambivalence around Scots in adult literacies. Some practitioners ignore or abhor it, even though Scots is now in CfE. Is the likelihood that these tutors may be neglecting the chief resource a learner brings to class ever called into question? Might not the option of training and provision of materials/resources at least raise awareness of arguments in favour using Scots? Other practitioners champion and value Scots, but are left doubting whether the educational establishment supports them when recent policy initiatives in adult literacies concentrate so heavily on their use for employability to the exclusion of family and community-based literacies. These developments take Scotland closer to a deficit model, turning away from the social practice model's foundations in lifelong learning, democracy and social justice, even as the trajectory of Scots in schools moves from shame to pride. Surely it is time educational authorities acknowledged this policy divide that leaves everyone still asking: are we Scots Wha Hae or Scots Who Have?

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