

The Scots Language in Curriculum for Excellence

Scots in Curriculum for Excellence, SLS Collogue, Musselburgh, 21.5.11

While I'm mair than happy tae speak aboot Scots in education, I hae tae confess that, apairt fae ma last couple o year in teachin I didnae hae a Curriculum for Excellence tae keep me richt. I sometimes wunner how I managed! Ane o ma colleagues tellt me he retired cause he didnae hae a box in his heid cawed CfE! We jist got on wi it an did oor best, sometimes mibbie excellent, sometimes mibbie no.

Probably lik maist folk here, ma ain 'traditional' Scottish education taught me nuthin aboot the Scots tung an nuthin aboot the wider aspects o language, apairt fae drummin into oor heids the racist attitude that maist o us spoke an wrote a great deal o 'bad' English. This kinna ignorance is somethin I hae faucht agin for nearly forty year as an 'English' teacher an tho I hae seen huge progress in that time, whiles I still cannae believe whit I'm hearin.

No lang afore I retired, twa year syne, I heard a wean bein giein a row for jist sayin 'ay,' an then in Nov (2009) I heard a final year drama student at the RSAMD in Glesca tellin us how he wis brocht up tae speak Scots at hame but it wis 'beltit oot o him' bi his teachers in the Borders!

Whit I hope tae dae in ma talk is firstly leuk at some o the barriers / prejudices Scots still faces in education an hou I think they can best be owercome / saicondly tae leuk at whit CfE says or disnae say aboot Scots an thirdly discuss the challenge o teachin literacy in baith Scots an English, an suggest whit support is needit tae help teachers dae this an finally outline whit needs tae be duin tae gie Scots its richtfu place in Scottish education.

Tho auld 'speak proper' attitudes are a lot less common than they uised tae be, they still appear in various shapes an forms an even amang younger teachers there is often still a deep ruitit ignorance, an sometimes fear, o the vernacular, sae it's nae wunner we still hae supposedly 'educatit' folk, perpetuatit ignorance an prejudice aboot ony form o Lowland Scots, rural or urban, makkin weans believe that it is at best a 'corrupt' dialect o English, an at worst, pure dead common 'slang,' the language o the sheugh.

Yet in defiance o aw the educational an social prejudices tryin tae kill aff Lowland Scots in aw its varieties, it thrawnly refuses tae wither awa, for its roots are teuch an deep an maist Scots weans still speak some form o Scots, tho they micht no yaise it tae their teachers or even their parents, an it micht no even be thocht o as 'Scots'. An even mair hertenin sign is that, in spite o aw this inbiggit negativity, a majority (55% accordin tae the attitudes survey, 2010) want tae see Scots bein yaised in schuils.

Yet faur owre monie Scottish weans still hae linguistic shakles pit on them fae the meenit they enter the classroom, or even the playgroup, as they suin learn that some forms o speech are approved o an ithers arenae, or at least that some are mair approved o than ithers, a sort o linguistic kincher that they hae tae learn tae unfankle as suin as possible afore some teachers will actually listen tae whit they're sayin, instead o how they're sayin it, shairly a racist attitude that shoud hae nae place in the educational system o ony modern democratic society.

Houever, prejudice agin Scots isnae the same for aw forms o Scots, a gey thorny issue at times, as a lot o folk still seem tae think that auld rural dialects are 'guid' Scots an modern urban anes 'bad' Scots. Yet we'll never build the linguistic confidence o aw Scots weans unless we stert by respectin how they already talk, instead o inflictin on them the double discrimination o tellin them that they neither speak 'good' English, nor 'guid' Scots.

In fact the reality o Scottish speech the day is that it is gey inconsistent, or gey fluid, or souple /

flexible, dependin on hou ye see it, for maist Scots in fact vary the nummer o Scots features in their speech, rangin fae a mair local Scots tae a middle gruin whaur we style shift or drift intae a distinctive Scots form o Standard English that is fu o mony Scottish linguistic features, especially covert 'Scotticisms.' (pinkie, flittin, skelf, messages, the cauld etc.)

Indeed ane o the maist interestin aspects o contemporary Scots is that it potentially offers a mair souple form o expression than English can, for it contains a wider range o contrastin styles than ony ither dialect o English. This has buin described bi a skeely translator o foreign plays intae Scots, the late Bill Findlay, as 'a very rich resource, perhaps unique in the English speaking world'. It's jist a muckle peety that maist teachers in Scotland hae buin gey slow tae appreciate the tremendous linguistic richness in their verra midst.

Yet bi the back-end o the twintieth century at least some folk in the Scottish educational system had sterted tae open their een an their lugs tae the possibility that in bein bilingual we actually hae a great cultural asset, the ability tae express oorsels wi equal confidence in baith Scots an English.

Nae doot the 5-14 English Language Guidelines were a big step furrin, wi comments aboot cultural an linguistic diversity, tho it had nothin tae say aboot bilingualism an the positive educational advantages o this. While it spellt oot the schuils' need tae 'strive to promote the state of all the languages used in the school community in significant ways,' it wis really left up tae the Gaelic Guidelines tae spell oot 'the advantages of bilingualism for teaching and learning - not least for the acquisition of yet more languages.' For their is nae doot that bi-lingual weans are gleg an skeely weans wi words.

Mair than a decade later, the new Curriculum for Excellence English document does seem tae appreciate the 'richness and breadth' o oor leids but it still disnae hae onythin tae say aboot bi-lingualism. CfE does gie positive support tae the Scots language, but in ma opeenion it faws weel short o whit is required tae persuade, never mind help, monie teachers an parents tae escape fae the bottleneck dungeon o their ain prejudices.

In the past, teachers were gey often obsessed wi makin weans learn the 'rules' based on the assumption o some absolute form o 'correctness' rether than the aptness o language for its purpose. While this micht hae seemed a linguistic anathema tae the teachin profession a generation ago, the concept o yaisin an studyin the different language features o different registers is noo weel established, or shuid be, as ane o the main aims o language policies in primary an secondary schuils.

Whit I believe we noo need tho is tae build on this an aim tae contextualise a policy o linguistic diversity an soupleness richt throu the curriculum, fae primary tae secondary, richt across the curriculum in aw subjects, for there is nae pynt in forderin this as pairt o their language programmes when their Maths or Home Eccy teacher is gaun tae gie them pelters or punnies for yaisin whit they see as 'bad' English, especially when CfE maks 'literacy across the curriculum' a key development, wi talk an discussion at the hert o learnin in every subject.

As baith 5-14 an CfE spell oot, oor weans shuid develop the skill tae yaise different language styles for different purposes, an learn that the main criterion o 'correct' language is hou effective it is for the subject, situation an audience. Yet as they develop mair confidence in this they shuid learn tae extend the range o their ain mither tung, as weel as Standard Scots English, for the norms o acceptability an appropriateness arenae fixed in time an will evolve in the future, jist as they hae duin in the past.

Tae reassure parents an employers (a muckle challenge) we obviously hae tae mak it clear that at the core o onie language programme is a duty tae teach the basic skills o literacy an develop confidence in aw the communication skills, but instead o daein this only via Standard English,

we shuid be aimin tae extend their linguistic confidence an skills bi explorin an celebratin aw the different dialects o Scotland in their main Scots an English forms (as spellt oot in Effective Learning and Teaching English, 1992)

At the same time we really need tae spell oot that if teachers only gie an odd period tae Scottish language an culture (e.g. the annual Burns piece) they are failin in their duties as defined in CfE Principles and Practice that ‘an appreciation of Scotland’s vibrant literary and linguistic heritage and its indigenous languages and dialects ... suffuses the outcomes and experiences.’ In effect it really has tae be gien its richfu place at the very hert o the language programme in every year o primary an saicondary.

Jist as it is vital that talkin an listenin shuid involve a mixture o Scots an English, shairly readin an writin skills shoud folla naturally on fae this, for if we only gie oor bairns readin material in Standard English an ask them tae dae aw their screivin in it, we are no only failin tae teach them a sufficient range o linguistic skills an registers, but micht weel be guilty o discrimination if we neglect or discourage the main language varieties o their ain community. It’s haurdly surprisin that weans sometimes complain that they fin Scots hard tae read for the conventions o written Scots are alien tae them since their teachers hae made them illiterate in their ain literature.

Efter aw, teachin weans tae be literate in their ain dialect, as weel as the standard variety, is jist askin for the same democratic richts for aw dialect speakers that only speakers o the standard variety hae enjoyed it up tae noo. Whit’s the pynt o teachin that aw forms o prejudice an racism are wrang if we still leuk doon on oor native languages an regard them as jist no guid enough tae read an write in?

In this respect, ane o the biggest challenges is the need tae introduce or increase the amount o readin material in the local dialect an tae develop their confidence by makin weans familiar wi seein their ain community speech in print fae an early stage. Anthologies lik *The Kist*, the Itchycoo books an the Scottish National Dictionary’s support material shuid no only gie weans the ingate tae a wide range o Scots but kittle up schuils tae develop their ain anthologies in the local dialect, for we really need tae challenge the assumption that weans speakin ane dialect hae tae learn the skills o literacy only in Standard English, a dialect that for monie weans has a haill range o alien souns an patterns.

Anither disappyyntin aspect o CfE is that it doesnae really say oniethin aboot teachin weans tae screive in Scots, when it was at least implied in 5-14. Whit’s the pynt o giein weans mair confidence tae speak in their ain tung, if we dinnae tak this a step further intae writin in it, i.e. teachin them tae express theirsels in a variety o written registers an learnin aboot the different norms o each, fae word choice, grammar an syntax tae spellin. Indeed when it comes tae spellin, it is possible that the souple spellin o Scots micht hae some distinct advantages as it has never buin set in a fixed form wi only ane acceptable 'richt' spellin, tho there are distinctive Scots norms an conventions (e.g. in the Concise Scots Dictionary or The Scots School Dictionary) that shuid be taught, but whaur these dinnae fit the local soun patterns, I think the best advice tae weans is tae yaise their lugs!

As pairt o the CfE programme they shuid learn aboot accent, dialect, Standard English an different registers etc in the context o their language work, but mair anthologies like *The Kist* material etc are needit tae offer Scots weans an awareness o the history an development o their language, plus a familiarity wi some o its different varieties an forms (see p.7 of 5-14 Guidelines) sae that they really develop an ‘appreciation of Scotland’s vibrant literary and linguistic heritage and its indigenous languages and dialects.’

Yet, while CfE spells oot the important role o Scottish culture in the curriculum, it doesnae say how we can mak shair this’ll happen. The SNP’s plans for Scottish Studies is a brow idea if

it's a core element at every level richt across the curric, wi qualifications at every level, but if it's only an optional unit in saicondary, it will be fechtin for a place in a gey crowded curriculum, a minority subject left tae enthusiastic individuals, jist as it has aye been, an willnae mak muckle difference.

Ane simple wey o makkin siccar that aw schuils tak this duty seriously is via a mandatory element in courses an exams, as we hae in Higher History and Drama, but these are baith minority subjects, efter S.2 or even earlier. Shairly it is noo ayond debate that we need a compulsory core o Scottish literature an language at every level in the SQA English exams, the only subject taen by aw pupils (+ a compulsory core in aw Social subjects). This wid jist bring Scotland intae line wi whit maist ither countries in the world hae lang taen for granted, somethin the Association for Scottish Literary Studies (ASLS) has buin advocatin for mony a lang year.

Tho the SQA are at least noo willin tae consider some mandatory Scottish literature element, they dinnae think this is 'the richt time' tae dae it because o the qualifications review. Mibbie there'll neer be a 'richt time' as faur as the authorities are concernt! Yet as a result o oor pressure, ASLS are at least representit on the CARG (Curriculum Area Review Group) and on the QDT (Qualifications Design Team) for English, but the draft course outline only recommends that 'at least one Scottish text should be studied.' 'At least' + 'should be studied' seem tae me gey feeble recommendations that will lea us nae further furrin. If the new courses an exams are tae reflect CfE they shuid at least say something lik 'a range o Scottish texts, coverin aw the languages o Scotland should be studied in every year an there will be a mandatory exam task / question at every level.'

*(P.S. The Scottish Government announced on 25th January, 2012 that there will be a mandatory exam question on Scottish literature fae 2014).

Yet sayin a thing an actually daein it are twa quite different maitters aw thegither, for generations o cultural brainwashin isnae easy tae owrecome an mony teachers still need time an support tae adjust their attitudes an approaches.

At least we noo hae a clear statement in Curriculum for Excellence aboot its richt tae an important place in the schuils:

Content

The languages, dialects and literature of Scotland provide a rich resource for children and young people to learn about Scotland's culture, identity and language. Through engaging with a wide range of texts they will develop an appreciation of Scotland's vibrant literary and linguistic heritage and its indigenous languages and dialects. This principle suffuses the outcomes and experiences ... valuing the languages which children and young peoe bring to school.' (CfE Principles and Practice)

Therefore folk in posts o senior management hae a responsibility tae see that this is in fact bein taen seriously, an no jist left tae enthusiastic individuals guddlin awa on their ain wee burn. Statements aboot oor 'vibrant literary and linguistic heritage' etc, are guid tae hear, but it's a lot harder tae gie credence tae the claim that 'this principle suffuses the outcomes and experiences' efter the final draft o the Experiences and Outcomes cut oot the explicit reminders about texts in Scots under Reading and Writing Outcomes.

Noo it only says in the introduction that weans shuid develop ‘an appreciation of the richness and breadth of Scotland’s literary and linguistic heritage’ but faur worse is the fact that it only says ‘writing by Scottish authors **may** also include writing in Scots, and Gaelic in translation,’ i.e. there is nae explicit requirement tae mak shair our weans will read texts in Scots etc, as it only says ‘may include,’ a gey dwaible statement, meanin this is jist optional. This fuishionless statement isnae in step wi the supportive statement in CfE Principles and Practice an we shairly need tae ask the Scottish Government tae replace ‘may include’ wi ‘must include,’ a crucial ane word difference that would gie oor rich literary and linguistic heritage etc a faur better chance o ‘suffusin’ the curriculum.

But wi the removal o the explicit reminders unner Reading and Writing, many teachers micht weel conclude that it is nae langer sayin that Scottish texts an the languages they are writtin in shuid be at the very hert o the curriculum at every stage, so they’ll mibbie no be ‘suffusin’ the curriculum efter aw. Will HMI go about the country checkin up on how weel teachers are ‘suffusin’ an mibbie devise a set o criteria or ‘performance indicators’ for degrees o suffusability? (e.g. fully suffused / pairtly suffused / no very weel suffused / no suffused at aw) Somehow I cannae see it!

This seems tae me tae be a serious weaknesss in the final version o CfE, arguably makin it even less convincin than the 5-14 Language Guidelines that actually spellt oot how ‘Scottish writing and writing about Scotland should permeate the curriculum from an early stage.’

Sae, whit is needit tae support CfE an mak shair at least some suffusion taks place? Afore onythin else we’d need a lot mair investment in Scots language resources lik *The Kist* anthology, Scotsoun disks (George Philp), the pure dead brilliant Itchycoo Publications an the SNDA’s *Grammar Broonie*, the Schuil Wab an the SLC’s online material tae implement it. In terms o online material, whit Scots really needs is the equivalent o the Storlan Gaelic website, but that wuid need faur mair substantial fundin than whit Scots gets at the meenit.

Saicondly, teachers need mair in-service on material like this as weel as time tae produce their ain resources tae support weans talkin, listenin, readin an scribevin in their ain dialects. Clearly it has tae be supportit bi in-service, furstly for primary an ‘English’, but eventually for aw teachers, in aw subjects. In the langer term this possibly involves a faur mair fundamental shift o educational thinkin an practice than ony tinkerin wi SQA Exams, or even than CfE itsel.

Sadly this is whaur official statements an practice are still gey faur apairt, for there isnae a lot o evidence that the real importance o aw this has really sunk in at every level. As faur as I can tell, few heidies or ither senior staff seem tae hae muckle awareness o the real linguistic implications o the CfE. Its literacy across the curriculum dimension means a lot mair than jist everybody helpin tae improve spellin an punctuation!

At the same time there is shairly an urgent need tae leuk at teacher trainin, (especially wi CfE placin sae muckle emphasis on literacy across the curriculum) an tae question whither it’s still acceptable that maist teachers learn nuthin or next tae nuthin at college aboot ane o the maist vital aspects o teachin, the nature o language, especially the language o the weans in front o them. An I believe it is jist rideeculas that ‘English’ teachers can enter Scottish classrooms without haein studied onie Scottish literature or language at aw, tho that is less common than it uised tae be.

I believe it shuid be an essential pairt o aw teachers’ training tae dae a short course on linguistic variety an diversity in Scottish culture, while it shuid be obligatory for primary an saicondary

English teachers tae hae duin at least a basic university course on Scottish literature an language an even tae hae duin a short course on actually yaisin the language, tae improve their bilingual confidence. While a teacher's education disnae end at the college, it wid certainly mak them a lot better qualified tae teach the subject an mibbie a lot mair enthusiastic about it, if they had studied at least a few classes on Scottish literature an language at university. (as recommendit in the Excellence in Eng Report, 2011)

While there has been some financial support owre the past 20 year fae central government for the development o support material lik the Scots Language Project (*The Kist*) or the support material on Scottish literature for Higher Still courses, Itchycoo Publications, the Scots Language Centre etc, these hae been nae mair than 'a daimen icker in a thrave.' An, as faur as I ken, the Scottish Government has nae plans tae increase investment in Scots in education. Yet on the plus side, they at least carried oot a survey on attitudes tae Scots (an pit Scots in the 2011 census), set up Ministerial Workin Groups on Scottish Literature and Language and on Scottish Studies (an nae ither pairty wid hae duin this). *

They reports hae made a when o positive an practical recommendations, monie o them anes I hae buin arguing donkeys for, an their sub-committee on education asked Matthew Fitt tae bring thegither a wide range o folk tae share an develop ideas in support o Scots fae aw owre the country, an this group has identified an promotit guid work bein duin in the likes o Aiberdeen, Dundee, West Lothian, Falkirk or South Lanarkshire, somethin that needs tae happen in every area, supportit bi Scots language specialists an co-ordinators etc. At least some o the teachers involved were giein official recognition via GTC awards at the Parliament earlier this year, quite a historic event, wi Tony Finn, the GTC heidbummer, addressin the audience in baith Scots an English.

Yet when we dae ask for a wee bit mair siller, the response is often gey grippy an canny (or shuid that be cannae?) Mony folk thocht that the Cultural meenister's response tae the MWG's Scottish Literature Report (Rosemary Goring) was gey lukewarm, an no very muckle seems tae hae happened since then, though the Education meenister's repone tae the Jan 2011 Open Letter tae the Scottish Government (signed bi owre 100 academics an screivers etc, askin for a permanent post at Teaching Scotland tae deliver CPD in Scots + immediate implementation o a mandatory Scottish lit element in the exams) wis mair encouragin, as no lang efter this he cam up wi a 'new vision' for Learnin an Teachin Scotland an ootlined his plans for developin Scottish Studies, but time alane will tell. *

(*P.S. Again there hae been hertinin developments since then, wi the Studying Scotland website at Teaching Scotland an the Scottish Studies Workin Group Recommendations.)

Hooever, the Ministerial Working Group Report on the Scots Language (Derick McLure) is a gey important an weel argued document, an the Meenister's Response wis, encouragin up tae a pynt, but mibbie no aye as convincin as it seemed an it often seemed tae me tae pass the buck, especially tae local authorities that hae even less money.

Anither landmark report in ma opeenion is the **English Excellence Group Report** (2011, chaired by Mark Lambert) The ASLS made lengthy submission tae it an the ootcome is jist about the maist positive endorsement o the central place of Scottish Literature an Language ever printit.

In its **Principal Findings** section the Report states that:

A strong representation of Scottish Literature, especially contemporary work, is essential.

..... *All teachers of English in Scotland should be encouraged to study at least one course in Scottish literature in their first degree.*

Local Authorities should encourage schools to develop a Scots language policy, providing support through relevant CPD and access to modern Scots resources. (also a key recommendation of the Ministerial Working Group on the Scots Language).

In the body of the Report the endorsement of Scottish Literature as an essential part of a **rich diet of literature** is expanded to emphasise that the teaching of Scotland's native texts should be seminal and that *access to words and insights inspired by their own landscape, language-use and modern mindset should be both inspiring and confidence -building* for Scottish children.

In the section entitled **A Rich Diet of Language** the Report states that *The Scots language is a valuable part of our traditional and contemporary culture, making it an important feature of the rich diet of language our children and young people are entitled to through Curriculum for Excellence.*

Expanding on its recommendation that Local Authorities should develop a Scots language policy, the Report recommends that *Schools should appoint a Scots language co-ordinator* and at a national level, *a Scots Makar for children should be appointed to lead development of a network of writers and teachers able to deliver high quality Scots language CPD training and author visits. (also MWG)*

The Report also recommends that *Scots language should feature in Initial Teacher Training Programmes for all stages (as does MWG?)* A revolutionary recommendation.

Section 3 of the Report includes a list of resources and online contacts. *Teaching Scottish Literature: Curriculum and Classroom Applications*, edited by Alan MacGillivray, EUP 1997 and *Treasure Islands* edited by Jim Alison and Ronnie Renton, ASLS 2003, were cited as key resources for the study of Scottish Literature and *Understanding Grammar in Scotland Today*, John Corbett and Christian Kay, ASLS 2010, was cited as a key resource for the study of language.

The ASLS Education Committee meeting felt that this Report in its draft form went much further than previous reports in its support for Scottish Literature and Language.

Tae sum up ma ain recommendations, (monie o them are in the MWGR and the Excellence in Eng Report) i.e. whit I see as essential is, amang ither things: mair investment in resources, the appyntment o mair folk tae develop an support the teachin o the Scots language in oor schuils, baith nationally an locally, the settin up o local clusters o teachers tae develop teachin material, wi the support o Co-ordinators, faur mair in-service time devotit tae language issues, links forged wi ither institutions an organisations, hail-schuil an local authority language policies, management responsibility, Scots language teacher trainin courses, entry qualifications in Scottish literature and language, a minimal SQA exam requirement, an abuin aw, a public debate tae mak siccar that Scots gets the financial an political support it needs, an has a richt tae, on the same kinna level as Gaelic. The devolved government in Northern Ireland spends faur mair in supportin Ulster Scots than oor ain Government does in supportin the Scots tung in its

ain hameland! Gey bamboozlin tae say the least.

Anither idea that I hae lang advocatit is the creation o a set o key principles for Scots based on the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (an we could learn a lot fae the Ulster Assembly policies an fae the Gaelic plans for the future o their leid, e.g. the Macpherson Report.) We need a cultural policy at central government level that really celebrates oor rich linguistic diversity, wi equal richts an legal status for Scots as weel as Gaelic, somethin that wid be the duty o every local authority an education directorate tae implement, jist as they hae tae dae for Gaelic. Pit the MWG Report an the Excellence in English Report thegither an we shairly hae the framework for that.

Efter aw the EU Parliament Civil Liberties Committee is on record as sayin that ‘the right to speak and to be educated in one’s mother tongue is one of the most basic fundamental rights.’ Shairly this is the wey furrin for Scots as baith the present an future Scottish Governments will hae tae face up tae their obligations unner the European Charter.

Scots has a richtfu place in Scottish education an in oor public life, no only in the context o CfE, but in terms o ither issues, lik inclusion an equality (Priority 3 of the Government’s Five National Priorities in Education), multi-cultural an anti-racist education, as weel as the European dimension o protectin an developin cultural diversity. Abuin aw it has a richt tae be there in terms o respectin oor ain cultural identity, an identity that is linguistically complex an diverse, somethin we should be celebratin as an inherent cultural strength, no a weakness.

Scotland has aye buin a multi-racial an multi-lingual culture, an we noo need tae come tae terms wi this throughoot oor educational system an in the media. If we really are serious aboot defendin oor diverse cultural identity, an mibbie tryin tae cure oor perverse cultural cringe, we need tae mak siccar that aw weans lea the schuil literate in their ain native tungs as weel as oor ain distinctive forms o Standard English.

Consultations an reports are fine, but jist sayin something in a report disnae mean it will happen. I’ve seen monie encouragin reports etc in ma time, but the time for fine words is noo past. We noo need action, but instead o token gestures, we need real action an fundin that will mak a real difference owre the langer term.

We micht then hae a Scottish educational system tae be prood o, but if we cannae learn how tae cope wi educatin oor weans in their native languages, sae that Scots an English complement ane anither, oor educational system will continue tae fail or even betray Scottish culture as it has duin in the past.

John Hodgart

