

CUDDY BRAE: LANGUAGE AT LETHAM

The Scots Language in a Scottish Primary School

August 2006 – June 2007

A Year of Monitoring the Scots Language
at Letham Primary School, Livingston, West Lothian



Ah'm no fan o writin, but Ah like writin in Scots.

P7 pupil, Letham Primary

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1. PROJECT BACKGROUND

In November 2005, Matthew Fitt of Itchy Coo Education invited Cathrin Howells of Literature in Learning to observe a Scots Language class at Glebelands Primary School in Dundee. There was a generally positive reaction from the P7 group to listening and learning in Scots but the class teacher commented on the surprisingly enthusiastic response from several children whose levels of attainment, she said, were normally lower than average. She also reported a marked improvement in those pupils' behaviour during the session in Scots.

Matthew mentioned to Cathrin that he had witnessed similar positive responses by pupils to Scots Language in a large number of local authorities before but that there was only the informal testimony of teachers to support this. Following this conversation, it was suggested that Literature in Learning and Itchy Coo Education might be able to work together to record evidence of this and to produce a report on the findings.

In spring 2006, Cathrin Howells and Matthew Fitt met again to discuss the possibility of monitoring and reporting on Scots Language in one Scottish Primary School. A further meeting took place with Dr James McGonigal, Professor of English in Education and Dr Beth Dickson, Senior Lecturer, both of the Department of Curriculum Studies at Glasgow University's Faculty of Education. James and Beth offered to advise on an academic framework for the monitoring and reporting process.

As Cathrin is based in Dundee and Matthew in Lanarkshire, it was decided for logistical reasons to approach a school in Central Scotland. In June 2006, Cathrin and Matthew contacted Valerie Brodie, Head Teacher of Letham Primary School in Livingston to ask if she would be interested in hosting a Scots Language monitoring project. Valerie set up a meeting between Cathrin, Matthew, Laura Tyrell, West Lothian Council's Creative Links Officer, Mandy Allsopp, Learning and Teaching Curriculum Support Officer, and two class teachers from her school. The teachers were Muriel Angus and Angela Mackie.

The decision was made that Matthew would work with Muriel's and Angela's P7 classes to deliver Scots Language lessons. Cathrin would visit the school to discover attitudes towards Scots and to monitor the impact on pupils and staff as a result of increased use of Scots in class. James and Beth were to visit the school during teaching and monitoring sessions to assess progress. A report was to be produced in the autumn of 2007.

1.1 Project Rationale

There have been very few investigations into the impact of the Scots Language in Scottish schools. However, there is a growing number of teachers who have experience of the effect of Scots in their teaching practice. No study has yet been undertaken to record this experience. The purpose of **Cuddy Brae: Language at Letham** was to record, monitor and report on the response made by teachers and pupils to Scots in the modern Scottish classroom.



1.2 Cuddy Brae

The phrase *cuddy brae* is a term borrowed from the Scots mining industry. A *cuddy* was a heavy cart used to counterbalance coal carts as they were brought to the surface up the *brae* or steep roadway from the mine interior.

The aim of the **Cuddy Brae: Language at Letham** project was to monitor the responses of pupils and teachers as largely hidden or unused Scots words were brought for the first time into the life of the school.

In addition, *cuddy* (horse or donkey) and *brae* (hill) are distinctively Scots words but both still commonly used and understood. The project title was chosen to reflect the accessible and inclusive ethos of this year of active Scots learning at Letham Primary in Livingston, while celebrating West Lothian's mining and linguistic heritage.

2. MONITORING AUGUST 2006

Cathrin Howells visited Letham Primary School on 5 occasions from June 2006 to May 2007. In advance of her first monitoring visit, she distributed two questionnaires (one for pupils, the other for staff) which asked about their attitudes towards Scots. You can download these questionnaires from the Literature in Language website by following these links:

Download: [Initial Questionnaire for Pupils](#) (Word doc)

Download: [Initial Questionnaire for Teachers](#) (Word doc)

2.1 Summary of Pupils' Responses from Initial Questionnaire

From a list of 17 common Scots words, the majority of pupils replied that they knew MOST of the words, slightly fewer replied that they knew SOME of the words and four replied that they knew ALL of the words while one pupil replied they knew NONE of the words.

When asked how often the pupils used words, the majority replied they used them MOST of the time, slightly fewer replied that they SOMETIMES used them and three replied NOT VERY OFTEN while one pupil replied NEVER.

When asked how many people in the pupils' family's use these words, the overwhelming majority replied that ONLY SOME PEOPLE used them while three replied that EVERYBODY used them and two replied that NOBODY used them.

2.2 Teachers' Responses from August Discussion

On her first visit, Cathrin met with the whole staff of Letham Primary School. This session took place in August 2006 prior to the Scots Language input from writer and Itchy Coe Education Officer, Matthew Fitt. Cathrin chaired a discussion about the role of Scots Language and the 5 – 14 Guidelines.

The responses made by staff during this session are published below:

- genuine feeling of shock and concern when staff honestly recognised that they were not respecting Scots in the way they did other home languages (*cf p21 of this Report*)
- Almost no CPD in Scots language or Scottish culture (one or two have had sessions with Jim Allen or with Matthew).
- The younger/less experienced teachers seem to have more doubts about the value of incorporating Scots.
- Concerns about the tension between Standard English requirements for national tests and Scots spelling and grammar.
- Concerns about parental perceptions.
- Almost universal plea for age-relevant modern, inspiring and engaging texts.
- A call for digital content also – talking books, web/computer activities, video, CDs.
- Lack of teacher confidence to use Scots in classroom – feel self-conscious.
- Almost universal recognition that it will boost confidence and build sense of identity for the children.
- All projects done to date mentioned in very positive light – and a lot of interesting things have been done, although the comment is made that these always seem like separate, discrete projects, without the permeation factor.

Things mentioned that would help include:

- working with Scottish authors & musicians, storytellers,
- hearing about the research
- knowing what other schools are doing
- knowledge of available resources
- suitable up-to-date enjoyable relevant engaging texts
- knowledge of the history and etymology of Scots
- support with Scots vocabulary and pronunciation
- ideas for helping Scots language & culture permeate the curriculum & all four modes
- working with experts
- video
- more CPD

Cathrin Howell's comments:

- This is a school where much is already being done, and teachers have also brought good practice from other schools. In some respects it would still seem that Scots is being viewed as a problem rather than a potential source of strength – bilingual benefits are not part of the consideration at this stage and there is a great deal of worry about the tension between Scots and Standard English, with a strong feeling that Standard English will suffer.

3. WRITER'S INPUT: SCOTS LANGUAGE STRATEGIES FOR P7

Matthew Fitt is a writer and teacher with over 5 years' experience in teaching the Scots Language in Scottish schools. He is the Education Officer for the Scottish Arts Council-funded children's imprint, Itchy Coo.

Matthew visited the two P7 classes from September 2006 to February 2007. He made 5 visits in total, spending 45 minutes to 1 hour with each class.

He also ran an in-service session for the whole staff in September.

3.1 Summary of Writer's Visits

Visit 1

MF's first visit to the classes. Muriel Angus (MA) and Angela Mackie (AM) were the class teachers.

MA already had a large banner across one wall which read SCOTS LANGUAGE.

MF used a tried-and-tested priming exercise based on the anatomy with both classes. For example...



Pit baith your airms in the air. Waggle your fingirs. Pit your hauns on your heid. Pit your hauns on your shooders. Touch your taes. Haud up your richt haun. Gie your index fingir a waggle. Point tae your mooth. Point tae your left ee (eye). Point tae your richt ee. Point tae your neb (nose). Point tae your left oxter (*armpit*). Point tae baith oxters.....

MA's class looked at and read out poems in Scots from **King o the Midden** (Itchy Coo, 2003).

Follow-up work

MF left notes on Priming Exercise and notes on how to develop pupils' vocabulary in Scots for animals and birds.

MF's comments

Both classes responded very well to the Scots priming exercise. Before naming the language as Scots, pupils suggested 'slang', 'Gaelic', 'Latin', 'Glaswegian' and 'Scottish'. MA's class suggested some of these names also, in spite of the banner reading SCOTS LANGUAGE which was in place several days before my visit.

I was able to move on to reading a text with MA's, which they enjoyed.

One girl said that her mother insists on her using the English word 'home' while her father insists that she uses the Scots word 'hame'.

One boy told the class that his father speaks Scots with a German accent due to serving with the British Army in Europe.

Visit 2

MF worked with both classes for 45 minutes. Cathrin Howells and Dr Beth Dickson observed the sessions.

With Angela Mackie's class, MF revised priming exercise done on 04/09/06 and pupils identified the language as Scots at only the second attempt. He then led the class through a lesson about Scots animal names – *coo*, *dug*, *bubblyjock* – and asked the class to think up some alliterative pairs using these words, eg, a cool coo, a daft dug, a big bubblyjock. The class was tasked with creating their own alliterative pairs and to provide an illustration to go with them. MF left 5 copies of **A Moose in the Hoose** (Itchy Coo, 2003) which the class used for one hour. MF also gave AM details of Itchy Coo's Halloween competition and asked MA to think about Scots words for clothes.

With Muriel Angus' class, MF again revised the priming exercise and again pupils identified the language as Scots at only the second attempt. MA's class had been working on Scots animal names already and MF read out the finished pieces. These included illustrations and brief descriptions of a *partan*, *papingo*, *puggie*, *tod* and *ettercap* among others. The Scots vocabulary used by the class was at a more advanced level than in most Scottish primary schools but in my view entirely appropriate for the P7 stage. However although individual pupils knew the Scots name of the animal they had learned, the class as a whole did not know the names in Scots of each other's animals. MF started the class off on its work for the Itchy Coo Halloween competition and ask AM to think about Scots words for clothes.

MF's comments

Two very enjoyable sessions. Although MA's class are producing a higher quality of work, AM's class is responding at a deeper level to these lessons in Scots.

AM has produced an exciting new teaching aid for Scots. She has taken individual body parts and asked her pupils to cut out examples of these. The class has on the wall a poster for EEN with lots of pictures of eyes alongside the word. Similarly for MOOTH, HEID and OXTERS. A great example of a teacher taking an idea and making it her own.

MA's class has done something equally innovative by producing a pack of pictures and descriptions for less well-known animals. She also has a corner of the room dedicated to displaying the pupils' ongoing Scots work.

One thing which has come up several times in each session is the need for appropriate dictionaries. MA and AM are using dictionaries intended for adult reference. They have expressed concern at the lack of Scots dictionaries suited to the learning needs of 10 and 11 year old children.

Visit 3

Professor James McGonigal observed both sessions.

In MA's class, MF led pupils through a writing exercise to describe a ghost or a bogle. MA passed MF pieces of writing written by her pupils in Scots about a class visit to Edinburgh.

In AM's class, MF revised animal names and discussed the Scots words for clothes. The class then read through and sang **The Dundee Ghost** by Matt McGinn.

MF's comments

The response of AM's pupils to the Scots work is worth noting. One pupil has commented that learning about Scots is 'not like work'. Her pupils are showing markedly higher levels of enthusiasm for these lessons now than at the beginning.

MA's class is equally interesting. Pupils are very keen to write in Scots. Their writing in English is of a high standard and there is a desire to write at that same advanced level in Scots. But their ambition is not matched by their Scots vocabulary. Most of the pupils in this class begin their stories confidently in Scots but as the story progresses, the writer tends to revert to English as they 'run out' of Scots words. What's required obviously is more strategies to build the pupils' Scots vocabulary, ideally before reaching P7.

Visit 4

MF asked pupils to describe themselves in Scots. The classes sang 'The Twelve Days o Yule tide' which proved very popular. MF discussed 'Oor Toun' with MA and AM, a larger scale project for development over the following term.

MF's comment

Absolutely delighted with the way Muriel and Angela are developing these Scots exercises in their own ways. My role is to offer them ideas and suggestions but as soon as they saw the impact of Scots on their classes they were taking the teaching of Scots to new levels.

Visit 5

MF looked at poetry and song by Robert Burns.

MF's comment

At this stage, the pupils all refer to the language as Scots. They have hardly any difficulty understanding Burns' language. If they do encounter any unusual vocabulary, they do not panic. It is simply a matter of finding out what it means, by asking the teacher or by consulting a glossary or dictionary.



3.2 Staff Training Session

MF led an in-service session with the whole staff, lasting two hours. His theme was strategies and resources for teaching Scots in the primary classroom. He suggested a framework for a programme of study from P1 – P7.

MF's comments

A very interesting session. Groups were discussing the meanings of Scots words throughout. Animated conversation during exercises I had set them and while looking at Itchy Coo resources.

One staff member was very nervous about teaching Scots in the classroom. She felt that she didn't have enough Scots in her background to teach it confidently.

Another staff member stated that she had recently been 'corrected' by her Teacher Training Institute and told by a tutor at her TTI that she had a 'horrible West Lothian accent'.

The Head Teacher commented that she had not thought of a whole-school approach to Scots prior to the session.

3.3 Web Link to gallery of pupils' Scots work

To see photographs of the pupils' work, visit the Cuddy Brae gallery on the Literature in Learning website:

www.literatureinlearning.org.uk/projects/lethamgallery.htm

4. MONITORING NOVEMBER 2006

Cathrin Howells returned to the school in November to interview a number of pupils from both P7 classes about their experiences of working with the Scots Language at school.

4.1 Pupil Responses

Sense of Identity

The children all expressed a strong sense of entitlement and identity associated with working in Scots:

E: When we're speaking Scots we are speaking properly. We are Scots, we are Scottish, so we should speak Scots . . . Some people may think that speaking Scots is like slang, but it's not, it's like our language.

R: Sometimes in school we used to be told to speak English, but now that we can speak our own language, I like it.

J: I think it's really good, it's a good thing to learn about where you come from and how people still speak here.

Language Awareness

The children are becoming aware of variations within Scots:

R: Our teacher doesn't come from the same place that we do, she comes from down in the Borders . . . and she sometimes says things differently.

And variations between Scots and English:

J: Well, when Matthew first came in, it isn't always about the language, it's about the accent, too, of words, cause some of the words are nearly the same, except the accent changes them a bit.

They are also aware of when it is appropriate to change between Scots and Standard English, though sometimes it is difficult to stop!

J: I was writing up everything else in Scots, so it can get you carried away a bit.

The children were also aware that writing in Scots is more difficult than writing in English:

I: What about writing in Scots?

G: Aye, that was a bit difficult

L: Because you didnae know how to spell most of the words

D: When you're speaking it just comes normally, but when you see it you become very confused.

C: That's what I can actually write in, in English instead of Scots.

But then another child observed:

J: We've done it [writing in English] since Nursery, really.

So it is not surprising that to suddenly have to write in their own, unpractised, language is a much greater challenge.

Parental Responses

The children recorded the reactions of their parents:

E (of her mum): She said she wished she'd had the opportunity when she was at school to really learn Scots.

R: My Dad says he'd rather me write in my own language, like the way I speak.

Resource Implications



The children relied heavily on their teachers and one another for support, and found existing Scots dictionaries difficult to use. There is a need for suitable support materials for use in primary schools.

Further Suggestions

One child asked for more story books in Scots and another wanted books about the history and geography of Scotland:

C: More stories, like in Scottish.

J: And more Scots history maybe . . . I don't know a lot about Scotland. I know a lot about like Edinburgh, but I don't know anything really about Glasgow. Or anywhere else in Scotland really.

Another child was keen to learn to count and do her tables in Scots:

D: See how we got One, Two, Three – would there be like words in Scots?

F: Yeh – Yin, Twa, something like that

D: I would like to learn that.

Motivation

One child left us with an abiding sound-bite and a powerful endorsement for the project:

R: Well, like, Ah'm no fan o writin, but Ah like writin in Scots.

Another child agreed:

G: I dinnae like daein that much writing, but in Scots I like doing words and all that.

A common response when the children were asked what they had enjoyed was: *Everything!* and *All of it, all of it!*

4.2 Teachers' Responses

Cathrin Howells interviewed class teachers Muriel Angus and Angela Mackie. (Matthew Fitt was also present.)

Impact on the Children

Identity

Issues of identity and motivation came through strongly in the interviews with the children, and these were confirmed in discussions with the teachers. Muriel felt strongly that it was an opportunity to enrich their experience and understanding of their Scottish heritage:

Muriel: *Scotland has got a lot to offer, it's got language, it's got music, it's got culture, and what with the stories and things, you know, I think it's given them more of an identity.*

Confidence, Motivation and Enjoyment

Angela: *Children who maybe wouldn't have spoken quite so much, are giving a wee bit more when we're doing the Scots language, or they're writing a wee bit more writing, or they're just trying that little bit harder.*

Muriel (when asked what the children had enjoyed): *All the different aspects of it, the novels, the books that have been bought by the school as part of it. As I said to you earlier, we've read together as a class novel, *The Trauchles of Hercules*, and some of them, they were just spellbound.*

Knowledge About Language

A particular concern is always raised when children are working in Scots - will it have an adverse effect on their English? But the teachers at Letham are adamant that the experience is proving, to the contrary, extremely beneficial for their knowledge about language:

Interviewer: *Do you feel the children's English language is compromised by what they've done so far?*

Angela: *No. I think the children have a clear distinction between Scots and standardised English, and they know the difference.*

The children have become curious about language, and their teachers have embraced the uncertainties that have arisen as a result of entering this new territory:

Interviewer: *The children were very interested that you have different vocabulary from them, and that they'd been asking you about that, that their words for certain objects were different from yours.*

Muriel: *Yes and I have to ask them for things. But I think that's great, because I think that's making things even richer.*

Learning about their World

Angela: *We were in Edinburgh last Monday, and we walked from the parliament buildings up to Mary King's Close, and they were pointing at things, going, "Oh, that's Such-and-such Wynd, that means this, or there's a Close, that means that," so they're listening and they're learning about these things, and they can take them out into the wider world, and see for themselves that these things do exist.*

Impact on the Adults

Issues of identity, ownership, motivation and confidence are often talked about in the context of children's learning, but they should not be overlooked or underestimated when considering how teachers take on new initiatives and become in some sense learners again themselves.



Language and Identity

Like the children, the teachers have found that the project has strengthened their sense of identity:

Muriel: *From my point of view, and I've even got it written here in my notes, it's taken me back to my childhood, because, again I just said to them this afternoon, I find in class I'm speaking more Scots than I've ever spoken since I was a child, because I've said to you constantly, I always had it drummed into me, "You must speak in proper English, you must write in proper English,"*

Angela: *I feel it's OK now to speak in Scots. Whereas before it was almost a, not taboo, but you know, you just didn't, you didn't at all.*

This issue of permission and correctness flows deep, and had been mentioned in the responses to the original staff questionnaire before the project started, as well as coming up during the interview with Angela and Muriel. Teachers often feel they must step back from their strong Scottish identity because the use of Scots will lead to an "incorrect" use of English.

Muriel: *I always had it drummed into me, "You must speak in proper English, you must write in proper English."*

We should talk about "standard" English rather than "correct" or "proper" English, and help the children to identify appropriate uses of languages in a range of forms and situations.

Motivation and Ownership

Angela: *I think it's great, I do, I really enjoy doing it with the children.*

Muriel: *I've really enjoyed it as well. I think the kids certainly have.*

Angela: *I'm enthused as well, and I think because I have enthusiasm for it, the children have enthusiasm as well.*

The teachers developed a strong sense of ownership over the weeks, too:

Angela: *I feel that this is mine, this is what I want to do with the class.*

Confidence

Matthew felt he had grown in confidence through the project, seeing something he strongly believes in starting to come to life and having a positive impact on all involved:

Matthew: *I've gained confidence that if it's done in a certain way, this can work.*

Matthew also recognised that the teachers had grown greatly in confidence, and were not simply reliant on his input:

Matthew: *I think you've built up quite a lot of expertise with this now. I think it's something that you should be very confident of.*

Muriel: *I like the way we started with basic things, like the parts of the body, because I think, not only did that give the kids the confidence, but it gave me the confidence as well, and that allowed us to move them quite quickly to the other things that (Matthew) introduced.*

Knowledge About Language

The project has raised awareness of the benefits of multilingualism for Muriel, who has experience of teaching children for whom English is only one of several languages:

Muriel: *I find it particularly interesting because I'm switching between languages all the time, because at home I'm switching between Albanian and English, and in school now I'm switching between English and more Scots, and then if I'm on the phone to any of my family, it's Scots and English again.*

Future Possibilities

Scots Across the Curriculum

The teachers could see a range of cross-curricular possibilities where Scots would comfortably sit, for example in the context of their work on World War II:

Muriel: *In the past, we had an afternoon when we invited residents from the old folks' home and where we sang songs and they talked about their memories and things, and I would hope that we could do something along similar lines, but bring in the Scots a bit more, and perhaps use a bit more Scots because we've got a few more resources as well.*

Muriel: *This is a great project, and I think we could do so much more with it, I really, really do, both in terms of language, maths even, and enterprise. Now that we're into the project, I*

would hope, rather than just do the things in English, I would have a go at doing a bit more in Scots.

The teachers felt they would like to see Scots embedded in the primary curriculum from about P4, so that by the time children reached P7 they would be quite proficient, allowing more sophisticated tasks to be undertaken, spanning enterprise and history as well as language work. Angela drew parallels with her teaching of German through the school - it would be too demanding to try and begin it in P7 and expect the children to be proficient in a year.

Insights and Observations

The Value of Support



All those participating were strongly aware of that the success of this project has been in no small part to the commitment of the headteacher Valeri Brodie, and the interest shown by a national initiative able to offer guidance and support, including the involvement of academics from a leading teaching university. For any venture in a school to have a widespread and lasting impact, the support of the head and senior management team is vital. In this instance, the headteacher's request for the scripting of a Scots nativity was viewed as the ultimate stamp of approval!

Advice for those setting out

Interviewer: *If other teachers were thinking of going down this route, what advice would you give them?*

Matthew *(in response to a comment from Muriel about his input): So that encouragement was useful, that advice, to get you started was good.*

Angela: *Yes*

Interviewer: *If a school wasn't sure whether to do it or not, whether they knew enough about it, you would say . . . ?*

Angela: *Try it, try it.*

Both teachers and children found it helpful to start with simple familiar language - parts of the body, animals, names for places and features of landscape - and build from there.

Resource Issues

Both staff and children were very aware that there was a lack of reference resources suitable for primary children learning Scots, as well as a need for more stories and other texts in Scots. For projects like this to become fully established and sustained, the gap in resourcing will need to be addressed.

Learning Together

Staff have embraced the learning process alongside their children, and both parties seem the richer as curiosity about language drives discoveries and motivates a sharing process.

A Revolution?

Matthew: *We haven't done anything here that on the face of it is revolutionary. [But] it is revolutionary, because we're using a language that's not been used, that's not been allowed in the classroom.*

5. PROJECT OUTCOMES

Cathrin Howells returned to the school in May to ask for the pupils' and teachers' views and opinions on their year working with the Scots Language.

5.1 Pupils' Viewpoint

Pupils' Podcast

[West Lothian Young Scot](#) worked with P7s in Letham Primary School, Livingston, to create a podcast on the Scots language. Listen to what the children have to say about working in Scots:

[Letham podcast](#) -download the file to your hard drive then use your media player to listen.

5.2 Teachers' Viewpoint

Muriel Angus

Muriel Angus reports that observing Matthew's work with the children was one of the highlights of the project. Equally rewarding was the buddying scheme set up between her P7 pupils and pupils from P3/4. She also mentions positively the increased use of Scots throughout the life of the school and the excitement generated by the whole-school involvement in the St. Andrew's Day assembly.

She notes the wider impact of Scots on the school not only through assemblies but P5/6's enjoyment of the activities and games in **Eck the Bee** (Itchy Coo, 2002), reading of Scots stories in P1 and a higher degree of interest in Scots among staff.

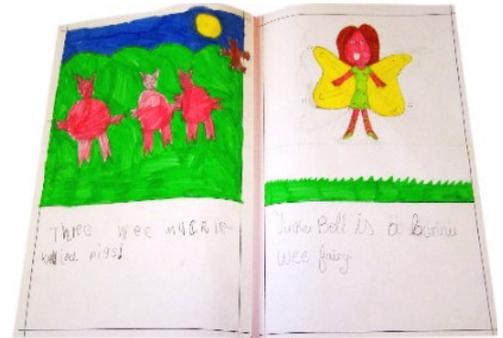
Muriel is planning to create Smartboard activities for Scots colours and numbers. Mentioning that the Scots project had no detrimental effect on her pupils' writing tests, she makes the point that in future she will slow down the writing process in Scots, starting with the basics before progressing on to more challenging writing tasks.

The resources Muriel found most useful are:

Matthew's writing pack (provided to staff during project)
Hercules Bampots and Heroes (Matthew Fitt, Itchy Coo, 2005)
www.scuilwab.org.uk
My Mum's a Punk, Grammar Broonie

Angela Mackie

Angela Mackie states that the Scots Language visits were wonderful. She mentions the songs and dances as memorable parts of the project. The practical applications were especially valuable from the work done with Enterprise and in creating a fictional Scots town. But it was the children's enthusiasm for the Scots work which Angela flags up as being vital in P7 which shone out the most.



As a result of the project, the children were more confident and developed a greater sense of belonging. The Cross-curricular opportunities that led out of the Scots study included Scottish music, the Parliament, Enterprise and Counting in Scots. Angela is of the opinion that she is now more appreciative of her own culture as an adult.

Angela concludes that she has learned to approach Scots lessons with more of a sense of fun. She plans to develop more reading and writing of plays in Scots, perhaps using *The Broons* and Itchy Coo's *Wee Book o Fairy Tales in Scots* within her teaching practice. In addition she will give more time to Scots during the school year.

The resources Angela found most useful are:

Itchy Coo's story-starts CD
Eck the Bee, Itchy Coo
A Book of Fairy Tales, Itchy Coo
Blethertoun Braes, Itchy Coo
Mingin' Rhymes, Itchy Coo
Hercules Bampots and Heroes, Itchy Coo
A Mantle of Verses
www.scuilwab.org.uk

5.3 Professor (English in Education) James McGonigal's Viewpoint

A wholehearted approach: *"The children responded very well to Matthew's good teaching, nicely paced, the relaxed involvement, the song and dance approach, Matthew as self-deprecating troubadour [the man who took the dour oot o' troubadour]. And the teachers, too, had clearly taken on the project through wall displays and writing."* Jim also commented on the the community involvement of St Andrew's Day and Nativity celebrations, with a really good commitment of the school to involve parents. The school clearly embraced this project wholeheartedly and it influenced many classrooms and activities over the year, creating a community where Scots language was becoming a normal part of the working day, not just something to be kept for the playground.

The issue of writing: Jim went on to raise the following question: *"To what extent should/could the work in Scots be more consciously embedded into some of the more extended written work that the children might be doing, either on genres of writing or on*

environmental topics in history and geography [eg the topic on Edinburgh Old Town] where the teacher/children had already begun to move into some Scots responses?" Literature in Learning reflects that this would be a long-term objective for this project, but writing in Scots proved to be much more difficult than talking and reading and as a result ambitions for writing had to be scaled down. The P7 children reflected very maturely on this - they have been writing in Standard English since Nursery, but have never had the chance to write in Scots till now.

Managing visits and planning: Jim also wondered about *"the nature of the balance to be struck between the 'flying visit' approach [deliberately chosen as a strategy here to enable class teachers to explore and extend ideas independently] and the possible lack of continuity and ideas for development that can come from lack of planning time with the teacher, before or after."* This is often an issue for writers working in schools. In actual fact, there had been enough additional CPD and Angela and Muriel were engaged and enthused enough to ensure that they made very good use of the ideas raised each time. But for all projects, the need for quality planning time for all involved, that is properly funded, should be recognised by funding providers and senior managers.

Spelling: Scots spelling can cause some concerns for teachers and pupils: *"Within Scots teaching, one of the things that is problematic is orthography, of spelling patterns that are flexible but not likely to cause confusion by their inconsistency, whether in relation to Scots or English. The word I noticed on Monday was 'army' which I would have spelled as 'airmy' [probably on the analogy of 'arm'] but Matthew wrote up as 'ermy'. Just above it on the b/board was 'bonnie' which looks more Scots than 'bonny', but kids might wonder about the rule-- why not 'ermie'."* One of the things that has emerged from this project is the need for more resources to support spelling and vocabulary in Scots. The discussion of language, its variations and its appropriateness, is always of value, and raises awareness. Scots is largely a spoken language, for historic/political reasons, and so its orthography is essentially in its infancy, complicated by regional variations. If we look back to the times of Chaucer, and even Shakespeare, we see the English language going through its own many variations in spelling before the body of written text became extensive enough for standard forms to become settled upon. Maybe, in time, with more projects like Cuddy Brae, a similar day will dawn for Scotland. For now, children and their teachers need greater access to resources that readily support their attempts to write in Scots, and the encouragement to feel free to discuss the curiosities and anomalies to which all languages give rise.

Dialect versus slang: Jim went on to add weight to these very observations: *"Another issue which Matthew and I discussed in the school playground is the intersection of slang and dialect, which are layered in interesting and dynamic sociological ways in young people. I think teachers need more knowledge about that, and time to talk it through, so that the 'language awareness' approach to Scots in relation to other language experiences which children have can be more confidently dealt with, with a combination of flexibility and sense of the directions of language change. The European language in one of the P7 classes was German, so there is overlap on both word patterns and pronunciation. The place of Scots in the Languages element of the Curriculum for Excellence also needs continuing thought: the crucial issue is the extent to which languages are taught in such a way as to inform each other-- and Scots is a really good way of holding a mirror up to English, so that both become more visible."*

Personalisation and relevance: Jim went on to consider the importance of making links to the children's own landscape and culture, often the key to success with school projects: *"There was a positive focus on raising Scots to consciousness by the use of the local environment, especially place names [and a surprising lack of awareness among children of the meanings of words like brae, glen, kirk etc.]. This again makes me think of 'citizenship' issues, and the extent to which the next generation of Scots can be active and aware citizens when they lack such basic knowledge of the words that are all around them."* The children enjoyed discovering more about their local and language heritage, and on a trip to Edinburgh were overheard spontaneously commenting on the names of streets and locations and commenting on their meaning, much to the teachers' delight. It is important that all children in Scotland become familiar with the way the Scots language is interwoven with the landscape, the culture, the built environment, playing a part in their everyday lives. Letham PS has made a good start; more could be done to make this a secure part of the wider school curriculum in Scotland.

5.4 Senior Lecturer in Education Dr Beth Dickson's Viewpoint

Summary of main points arising from the observation of two lessons in the LiL project in Letham

There are 3 main areas of educational gain from teaching Scots in the classroom:

- Motivation for learning
- Increased cognitive awareness of how languages work; increased knowledge of how to talk about languages; increased understanding of the educational and social issues which surround using a non-standard language variety (metalanguage)
- Increased knowledge of Scottish culture and history which enabled pupils to make greater sense of their own physical and social environment

It is generally recognised that it is the symbiotic nature of language and culture which develops literacy, rather than the stress on decontextualised 'language exercises'. Additionally, in a globalising society where large numbers of people are moving into areas where language new to them are spoken, knowledge about how language works is of great importance (New London Group 1996).

Teaching Approaches

The teaching was conducted by Matthew Fitt doing a number of sessions but these were developed in the intervals between sessions by the classroom teachers. Matthew is a very gifted teacher and is very relaxed and competent in the classroom. He uses a magazine format which reviews previous learning before introducing new material. The pace is appropriately fast. Pupils can keep up but there's no time to be bored. He has developed a series of languages games and songs which form the basis of his own repertoire of teaching content but could easily be used by other teachers. These methods address a variety of learners: visual, verbal and kinaesthetic. This is a key part of the appeal –

language learning which is not just focussed on words. Although Matthew is a gifted practitioner, teachers who continue with the work in between his visits report that their own motivation and that of the pupils is sustained in the interim because of the inherent appeal of the content.

5.5 Writer Matthew Fitt's Viewpoint

Cuddy Brae: Language at Letham was for me the most rewarding project I have worked on in recent years.

Collaborating with Cathrin Howells of LiL was one of the highlights of the project and discussing the issues related to use Scots in the classroom with Dr Dickson and Professor McGonigal was very inspiring. The enthusiasm and support shown by Valerie Brodie, Head Teacher of the school, was also most encouraging.

Contact with the two groups of P7 pupils was of course a central part of my work at Letham Primary. The two groups worked extremely hard during the year and responded well to all the challenges that were set but the best outcome of this project was the contribution of the two class teachers, Muriel Angus and Angela Mackie.

Muriel and Angela had both considered using Scots before in their teaching practice. The notion was not completely new to them. But they had not realised their full potential to teach through the medium of Scots.

My contribution to their development as teachers of Scots was concentrated into a few visits from September to February. I led classes which they observed and suggested activities which they followed up on. But after only the first few sessions, both Muriel and Angela had taken Scots on board and had made it their own within their teaching practice. All I did was offer support from which their confidence with teaching this subject was able to grow. The project shows that staff who may be reluctant or unwilling for whatever reason to teach Scots can do so and do so extremely well with very few resources. The real resources are in fact the teachers themselves.

Letham Primary School has adopted a more effective and substantial policy with regard to language, resulting in enhanced good practice by teachers and a richer learning experience for future year groups at the school.

During the project, Marion Low and Pauline Millar of Inveralmond Community High School's English Department visited Letham, one of the school's cluster-primaries. Full of praise for the primary teachers' work, they mentioned that the High School is producing its own programme of Scots study. This is very encouraging as it is crucial that the Scots skills learned by pupils in primary are sustained and developed at secondary level.

5.6 Literature in Learning's Viewpoint

This was a powerful and enriching project which energised both the pupils and the teachers involved. Various aspects are of particular interest to note if projects like this are to develop across the country:

Teacher perceptions of Scots: The initial CPD with teachers at Letham suggested that many were not comfortable working with Scots. We looked together at these extracts from the 5-14 English language guidelines:

“Teachers should therefore build on the diversity of culture and language in their schools by:

- *fostering respect for and interest in each pupil’s mother tongue and its literature, whether English, Scots, Urdu, Punjabi, Cantonese or any other;*

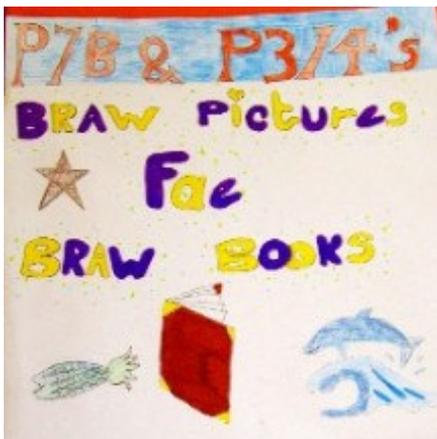
“It should be a central aim of Scottish schools to help their pupils understand that the common experiences, activities, history and artefacts of the people of Scotland constitute an identifiable and distinctive culture, worthy of transmission and study.

“Scottish writing and writing about Scotland should permeate the curriculum and be introduced from an early stage, taking its place beside English literature . . . Scottish texts should be actively sought and used in classrooms: poetry, drama and fiction, historical and contemporary.” (English 5-14)

There was a genuine feeling of shock and concern when they very honestly recognised that they were not respecting Scots in the way that they did other home languages, and an acknowledgement that Scottish texts did not permeate the curriculum, as recommended in English 5 - 14. Many felt Scots was something they had been told not to use, and that they should only use "correct" English in school when working with the children.

Letham PS is in a school already committed to trying to raise the profile of Scots, so how much more prevalent must these feelings be in the wider teaching community? These extracts from 5-14 make a good starting point for staff discussion about attitudes and practice, and until further guidance is available, 5-14 has much to offer in terms of establishing Scots in the curriculum.

Developing knowledge about language for all: The open attitude to discussing the



peculiarities of language, and the willingness of the teachers to show they were learning alongside their pupils, created an atmosphere of curiosity and mature reflection on how language works, as well as where, when and why it works. The children developed a strong sense of how to use language appropriately, and could stand back from their language behaviour and look at it objectively, quite an achievement for relatively young pupils, again a credit to the quality of the work done by the teachers and writer. They enjoyed comparing and contrasting and were endlessly curious about the differences between Muriel's Borders Scots and their own Livingston variety! The children's understanding and use of Standard English was

not compromised by the greater inclusion of Scots during the year, indeed there is evidence to show it was actually enriched, allaying any possible fears that there would be a detrimental effect.

Resources for Scots language: It was apparent that the resourcing for such a project was problematic, particularly in terms of resources for spelling and vocabulary development. This is an area that will need to be addressed by publishers, in consultation with specialist

organisations. It will also be important to ensure that schools are fully aware of what is currently available, perhaps by the development of a web page that collates details of existing resources and their providers.

Staff development: Matthew made a very valuable contribution to this project, but it will not be possible for him to visit every school wishing to extend their work in Scots! Consideration must be given to the best way to help teachers move forward in this area, including downloadable and interactive resources, as well as liaison with initial teacher education departments and providers of continuing professional development.

5.7 Language at Letham and A Curriculum for Excellence

It is not clear at the time of writing where Scots language sits in terms of A Curriculum for Excellence and its guidance. We are also awaiting the outcomes of the consultation on a strategy for languages in Scotland, so until we have further information from both these sources, it will not be possible to say how the Cuddy Brae project sits with the latest thinking about learning Scots in particular.

However, as a project which embodies the wider purposes of A Curriculum for Excellence, the approach at Letham PS has certainly embraced some key principles and has successfully provided challenge, enjoyment, breadth, progression, depth, personalisation, choice, coherence and relevance, as advocated in the ACfEx guidance.

The project has made a very good start at establishing Scots as a natural part of the primary curriculum, and has laid firm foundations for continuing to build and develop the role of Scots in the school in years to come.

Many thanks to all involved in the Cuddy Brae: Language at Letham project particularly Muriel Angus, Angela Mackie, Valerie Brodie, James McGonigal, Beth Dickson, the Scottish Arts Council, West Lothian Council, the staff of Letham Primary and the school's braw P7 pupils.

