23 Months, 4 Coordinators, 1 Aim: a discussion on attempts to develop the place of Scots Language in education across Scotland

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From April 2014 to March 2016 Education Scotland employed four Scots Language Coordinators (SLCs). During their time in post the SLC team developed the place of Scots language in education, as advised by the Scottish Government Ministerial Working Group on the Scots Language (2010: 6). Their task involved creating specific Scots language activities for learners, engaging with practitioners to provide training and build confidence, as well as working to raise the status of Scots – both within and outwith education. This paper will discuss the coordinators' work and the language issues they have explored, such as: what is it like introducing a language in the classroom when there is no standard or accepted definition? And: what is practitioner/learners response to this, particularly in terms of assessment?

Each project or initiative the SLC team undertook was slightly different, perhaps targeting a different demographic, or geographical area, but with the common link throughout all: to promote more spoken Scots, create more opportunities for learners to hear Scots, to have more Scots written and for more Scots to be read.

No initiative helped pursue this more than the 'Scots Language Ambassadors' scheme which paired 'good' Scots speakers from the community with schools in their area. The aim of this project was to pair a respected figure from outside the school environment with a class of learners. The 'ambassador' would be recognised as having a 'good' Scots voice, and be someone who was keen to get Scots into the minds of learners, as well as parents. An example of what one ambassador was engaged in with a school is Sheena Wellington, who was paired with Blackness Primary School in Dundee, the school she attended in her youth. Sheena visited to sing Scots songs, read poems and stories in Scots, play games and tell the classes about what Blackness was like in her day. She judged Scots poetry for the Dundee School Arts Festival and at the end of the year ceremony was given a bouquet of flowers and invited back next term.

A particular issue for Scots language in modern education is often the lack of attractive resources. One project the SLC team created was a series of events

in cultural venues across the country, taking the animated film version of Julia Donaldson's *The Gruffalo* together with James Robertson's Scots translation of the text. Starting in the Glasgow Film Theatre, learners were invited to attend a screening of the animation as well as a reading of the Scots version. This format was then taken across the country with new translations of the book being produced in Shetlandic, Orcadian, Ayrshire Scots and Doric. On each occasion, a different local writer explored the accent and vocabulary unique to their region. Scots language publisher *Itchy Coo* went on to publish new versions of both *The Gruffalo* and *The Gruffalo's Child* in Doric, Glaswegian, Dundonian, Shetlandic and Orcadian.

The SLC team has done a great deal of partnership work with the various organisations across the country whose remit touches on Scots language and education. An emphasis on 'good' spoken Scots was again a key push behind a project done in partnership between Education Scotland and Historic Scotland where learners from Glaitness Primary School in Orkney became junior guides at Bishop's and Earl's Palaces. Primary 6 learners trained for a few months to provide guided tours for visiting learners from all over Scotland as part of Historic Scotland's Junior Tour Guide scheme. Dressed in historical costume as characters from the building's past, they brought the history of the building to life for their peers, specifically using words and phrases in Scots to tell the story.

The Scottish Government's policy, *Language Learning in Scotland: A 1+2 Approach*, is aimed at ensuring that every child has the opportunity to learn a modern language from P1 onwards. Additionally, each child is entitled to learn a second modern language from P5 onwards. The policy will be fully implemented across the country by 2020. One of the SLC priorities has been to ensure that practitioners are aware that Scots can be included as a second additional language in primary school. In primary schools, projects about other countries can involve aspects of language, geography, history, environmental studies and the expressive arts, together with health and wellbeing. The other country can become a focus for learning across the school. Similarly, a focus on Scotland can be a pathway to Scots.

A project titled 'Keen tae Ken yir Kin' has been developed to pair schools from different dialect areas of the country so they can exchange Scots language writing as well as sound and film clips. 'Keen tae Ken yir Kin' was devised to put Scots at the centre of the learning experience – not on the periphery, or only done for a day, as is so often the case. The project is an opportunity to explore some of the more difficult questions relating to Scots – in particular the similarities and differences between dialects and to see

what happens when learners not only swap written texts in a language without a standard, but actively pursue creating texts that are distinct from the commonly published versions of the language and speaking in a way that is as natural to them as possible.

The scheme aims to allow learners, and practitioners, to explore regional variations of Scots, learning about the vocabulary and grammatical structure, common threads and distinctive features of each. The learners from either school begin the project by emailing a *handsel* on themselves and where they are from to their partner school. Schools in Edinburgh and Aberdeenshire were paired to pilot the scheme. The two schools had Secondary 5 Higher English students - who were sitting the SQA Scots Language Award - exploring 'Keen tae Ken yir Kin' across 8 weeks. Here is what a Banff learner sent to introduce herself in her handsel:

> Fit like! I'm fae Banff Academy an am 16 year aul. I'm currently takin scots language, geography, photography, health an food tech an English. Banff isna the biggest toon aroon but it its hame, heaps o folk spik scots aroon here an it kin be a affa caul place. I bide wi ma mither, ma faither, ma breather an ma sister, och a nearly forgot aboot ma 3 cats ana. I fair like ma music an art, I'm affa guid at em so ma mither and practitioners tell ma, I dinna mind gan ti skiel as a kin mak a fair few freens there. Far I'm fae there's a fair few sights tae see, duff hoose, the castle, the beach an plenty parks fir the bairns tae play in, fitba n golf, och an a guid few ither things tae dee. Some o oor traditions er sma things like pittin a penny in a new purse, nae pickin up yer glove if ye drap it (signifies bad luck if ye pick it up) and pittin a silver penny in a pram o a new born baby. Fin first fitting at new year ye tak a lump o coal n gee it to the hame owner for guid luck n ye hope a dark haired person comes first chappin at yir door.

Perhaps the workstream furthest away from the classroom that the SLC team undertook was that of writing a Scots language policy. Some organisations, such as Creative Scotland, now have Scots language policies in place. Across the country some schools have had such policies in place also. The coordinators have been involved in taking these smaller-scale policies used by particular schools then assisting in policy writing up to a national level. The Scottish Government launched its Scots Language Policy in September 2015 in partnership with Education Scotland. The SLC team felt this was very important for raising the status of Scots across the country, particularly in the

minds of parents. As it would be practitioners who the coordinators interacted with most, and were appointed to support directly, the team spent some time surveying the various questions surrounding Scots language in a modern learning environment. With three of the four coordinators being seconded practitioners, the team sought to provide appropriate information responding to the more difficult issues practitioners face. One question that arose frequently was that of standardisation. James Costa's paper (2015) on what it means to introduce non-standard speech in schools while also claiming the 'language' label was of great assistance in the writing of our answers to those questions.

To the questions of: 'What about Standardisation? Do we not need one form of Scots for official purposes?', the SLC team replies: 'Standardisation of Scots is not part of the coordinators' remit. While many views on standardisation exist, this is an area for academics and linguists: it is undeniable though that promoting Scots language within education will help to keep it alive. The aim of the SLC team is to create an atmosphere in schools which will encourage Scots, in all its varieties, to flourish.'

The coordinators acknowledge that it would be preferable to be introducing a language with an agreed standard, but without one, why not embrace the fact that the language is in a state of flux and the opportunities that having no standard offers, particularly to reluctant learners? Doing so gave learners the opportunity to codify their own Scots, thus embracing dialect diversity as well as developing an understanding of phonics and differences between spelling and grammar in an English text as opposed to a Scots text. A point the coordinators were keen to emphasize is that by putting Scots in a more prominent place, the questions can be addressed, and that by raising the status of the language, even if only among school-age learners, we create opportunities to influence the future of Scots (and its chances for full codification) positively.

The SLC team also sought to address assessment of Scots, and the question of: 'How is Scots to be assessed in the classroom if there is no standard to refer to?' offering an answer of: 'Practitioners should be encouraged to work collegiately, possibly with support from the Scots Language Coordinators, to establish a consistent approach to Scots that reflects the characteristics of their locality. Combined with a careful study and application of Experiences and Outcomes across the curriculum, practitioners will be able to create a useful progression of skills. Over time, a bank of evidence material can be built up to inform assessment, the moderation process and best practice.' This has been something we have now

seen in practice. On 'Glow', Scotland's national intranet for schools, the SLC team created a page for practitioners to share Scots-related questions and answers. One question posted on the site was in reference to the SQA Scots Language Award:

> I'd be interested to hear how folk are assessing the History and Development unit at level 4 and level 5. I'm thinking of assessing in the form of a conversation as I've done this in assessment for other languages, but wondered how others have approached it.

As the SLC team hoped, a question asked by one practitioner was answered by another, who posted a reply of:

> I'm running the History & Development unit at level 4. I assessed in a range of ways: learner research and then developing a powerpoint; learners annotated a map with details of significant events; learners engaged in a group discussion with older members of the local community about their experience of using Scots and reflected upon the changes (?) in attitudes. The examples given by the SQA are written essays. The main thing about conversations, I think, would be in evidencing that the outcomes are fully met.

Practitioner, learner and parent response to our work so far has been generally positive, though not without doubters and opposition. Continuing issues remain. One the team has identified as being particularly important to future work is that of practitioner confidence and Career Long Professional Learning for all school staff. As the project progressed, the SLC team found time and time again statements from practitioners such as, 'What is formal Glaswegian etc? not quite sure how you could allow an oral talk to be assessed in formal Glaswegian? ie I don't know the difference between Scots and slang.' The honesty of this answer is incredibly helpful in diagnosing the state of Scots. Whether a practitioner or a learner, there is a difficulty for all in feeling confident to distinguish between what is Scots and what is English, between encouraging 'good' Scots, without allowing slang to flourish. Whilst in the academic world there may be accepted definitions of Scots, English, dialect, language, slang etc, amongst learners and practitioners in schools across Scotland there are grey areas that make promoting the use of Scots problematic. As discussed above, the SLC always took the approach of not attempting to create answers that Scots does not currently have, and instead

pursued projects that promoted as much use of Scots as possible, in as natural and simple way as learners and practitioners felt capable of.

Another issue (no doubt for a long time yet) is that of respect for Scots and the benefits it affords to a developing and shared idea of Scottish identity. In 2010 Scottish Government Social Research published 'Public Attitudes Towards the Scots Language' which had asked the question 'Why do you not speak Scots/speak Scots more?' By far the most common reason given for not speaking Scots (amongst the 280 adults who claimed that they never spoke it) was 'I am not Scottish' (2010: Figure 3.3). To the question of 'Why do you say that it's not important that Scots is used in Scotland today?' The most noteworthy finding from these results is the relatively large percentage (19%) who commented on the lack of relevance of Scots; it's pointless (2010: Figure 3.16). The opinion pendulum then swings to also show there is a high level of agreement with the statement, 'Learning the Scots language can contribute to a sense of national cultural identity' where almost three quarters agree with this and approximately well over a third of the total sample agree strongly (2010: Figure 3.23).

There is still a substantial dearth of age appropriate texts for use in schools, particularly non-fiction texts. This issue of course relates to Scotland's writers, arts-funders, academics and social commentators, and the choices they make when presenting their work, as well as the audience they wish to address or attract. Creating a text specifically for use in school is certainly not the most attractive offer you can put to an artist, but the age appropriateness of texts is only part of the problem. Places such as the Scottish Documentary Institute (whom we have contacted, and developed an excellent new relationship with) previously held no record of which of their films or texts featured Scots language. The SLC team has received similar replies from many institutions whom they have contacted.

The lack of awareness and the status afforded Scots language is not limited to average public perception – the same is found across a multitude of national organisations. When looking for material suitable for use in schools there are these two huge hurdles; the first being, finding texts – navigating through organisations and catalogues with no map directing you to what might feature Scots language; then the hurdle of whether it is suitable in terms of quality and content. Without financial support, using Scots language will continue to be a personal choice which may cause artists to weigh up the pros and cons of exploring. Present Edinburgh Makar, and great advocate and asset to Scots, Christine De Luca, wrote a good summary of a leading poet's experience of this in her essay 'Language and my poetry'. De Luca has been

very successful in taking her Shetlandic poetry across the world, but is certainly an exception to the rule.

An inspirational quote discussing what is available to writers who explore a regional or minority language in their art can be found in Paja Faudree's book *Singing for the Dead: The politics of indigenous revival in Mexico*, where she quotes Montemayor and Frischmann:

> The resurgence of Indigenous intellectuals and of writing in Indigenous languages represents one of the most profoundly important cultural events in Mexico at the end of the twentieth century […]. These [new] writers may be said to represent a dual process: a national one, corresponding to ethnic development and empowerment; and a personal one, consisting of their commitment to their bloody histories of oppression, to their individual cultures, and to their own languages that describe our territory in a fresher and more natural way [...]. During the last five hundred years, non-Indigenous national and foreign researchers have defined Indigenous groups and explained what they think, how they behave, and in what they believe. With these new writers we have the possibility for the first time of discovering, through the Indigenous groups' own representatives, the natural, intimate, and profound face of a Mexico that is still unknown to us.
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> (Montemayor 2004: 4)

The notion that the learners in Scotland today could be on such a journey is an incredibly inspirational thought, especially for those of us who get to participate with them on a daily basis.

To conclude, even if deciding to give only a one-sided, enthusiastic review of the place of Scots language in Scottish education, it would be hard not to say that the good work done is dependent upon enthusiastic individuals and most engaged with by those already convinced of the benefits of Scots. This is common from Nursery settings to the highest level of assessment in secondary and further education. It has been written in many essays and papers that to survive, minority languages such as Scots need a place within the education environment of that nation. Education Scotland's team of coordinators are pleased to say that has begun, but are well aware that success is not something achieved simply within education. This paper stands as a summary of their 23 month contribution.

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