

Scotland, People and Language Forum

“Working with Language Diversity in Scotland” Briefing Paper

Background

The “Scotland, People and Language Forum” took place on 20 February 2015 in Glasgow. The event was co-organised by Education Scotland, Bilingualism Matters (University of Edinburgh) and Gathered Together (Bemis Scotland). The aim of the forum was to discuss Scotland’s linguistic diversity, current Scottish language policy and to share information, experiences and good practice.

The event was attended by 59 participants, representing a total of 31 institutions and organizations including the Scottish Government, 12 local authorities, NGOs, universities and colleges. Half of the participants were EAL or ESOL teachers.

This briefing aims to capture the experiences of the participants in working with diverse languages in Scotland, the challenges that were highlighted and good practice that was shared.

Language diversity in Scotland

The forum named a total of 80 languages that they came into contact in their own work experience. This includes languages of Europe, Asia, South America and Pacific Islands. EAL teachers reported some schools where almost all pupils are bilingual. In Glasgow 147 languages are said to be spoken by school-children.

The challenges

- **Communication and information provision** Teachers emphasized the need to ensure that parents have the right information about choices and courses available (including post 16 options). Information needs to be presented in simple English (both information prepared by both schools and the local authority). Both schools and families would benefit from wider availability of interpreters.
- **Promotion of use of the mother tongue** There needs to be greater promotion of bilingualism, home languages and language learning among children, parents and schools. If schools value bilingualism, children will value their own heritage.

- **Access to resources and services** Barriers to accessing resources were mentioned by several contributors- many of the barriers were structural including poor transport options in rural areas and lack of child care provision for people wanting to access ESOL.
- **Role of school and teachers** Concern was raised around the quality of support for EAL/ ESOL learners, with some teachers not regarding EAL as their responsibility and not appreciating the role of home language in the education process.

Good practice and Solutions

- **Valuing the home language** EAL teachers highlighted that this was an important element in teaching practice; children feel confident in chatting in their home language without feeling the need to translate for adults. Teachers should recognize that having a firm grasp of grammar in their first language enables further development of language skills and language learning.
- **Promoting parental involvement** Participants widely recognized the importance of schools working with parents, particularly at primary school, to help support the parents so they can help their children with homework and learning.
- **Teachers and teaching practice** In any educational setting, confident and passionate teachers are key to success. Several participants highlighted the need for class teachers to have additional training on simplified English and general guidelines for working with EAL children.
- **Using the skills and experience of pupils and parents** More attention should be paid to the experiences of the pupils coming into school. For example, using native speakers' skills in encouraging language use and language learning (both with parents and for children to use their first language in class).

Learning Together group

Golfhill Primary, Glasgow, wanted to support the families of EAL pupils to help their children with their learning. They started a club for parents and their children in the school- families could take home dual language books to read together. The club also provided parents the opportunity to see how their children were being taught and ideas for how to support their learning with fun activities including games, writing letters in sand and songs.

To hear EAL teacher Marilyn Gordon talking about the group go to <http://tiny.cc/h52d0x>

Resources

A 1+2 Approach to modern languages Education Scotland's overview of the 1+ 2 Approach including resources <http://tiny.cc/pz0j2x>

Able Kids Press Ablekids is an independent bookseller based in Scotland, specialising in bilingual and language resources for children <http://www.ablekids.co.uk/>

Bilingualism Matters Bilingualism Matters is a Centre at the University of Edinburgh, BM study bilingualism and language learning, and have a variety of leaflets for families and teachers around bilingualism and how to support learners <http://www.bilingualism-matters.ppls.ed.ac.uk/>

Edinburgh EAL Service This website provides detailed information on supporting bilingual learners in class, translated materials and useful resources and publications <http://tiny.cc/o60j2x>

European Day of Language celebrates linguistic diversity in Europe and promotes language learning. Website has activities, fun facts and materials for teachers

<http://edl.ecml.at/Home/tabid/1455/language/en-GB/Default.aspx>

Gathered Together Supporting parents from ethnic minorities become more involved in their children's learning and school communities. Ideas for promoting parental involvement in schools including good practice guides, videos and blogs <http://gatheredtogether.bemis.org.uk/>

Mantra Lingua Dual language books, including "sound-enabled" stickers for learners to hear words aloud. It provides books in 65 different languages <http://uk.mantralingua.com/>

National Centre for Languages CILT works to convince people of all ages, at all stages of learning and in all walks of life, of the benefits of learning and using more than one language. Includes reports, research and statistics on the value of language learning

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20101227105751/cilt.org.uk/home.aspx>

SCILT Scotland's National Centre for Languages The first port of call for information about language learning in Scotland, including links, resources and further information about 1+ 2

<http://www.scilt.org.uk/Home/tabid/1069/Default.aspx>

