

TOWARDS A BILINGUAL SCOTS-ENGLISH LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

A partnership project between a primary school and a publisher of teaching material

Scots, until recently excluded from the primary classroom, is once again making itself heard within Scottish education. For two hundred years, pupils were corrected or punished for speaking Scots. Only once a year were children encouraged to use the language as they recited the poems of Robert Burns to celebrate the national poet's birth. The rest of the time the only language allowed in class was English.

In 1991, the Scottish Education Department included the sentence '*the language children bring to school should be fostered and encouraged*' in a review of the curriculum. The review did not mention Scots by name but on the strength of this, a number of teachers during the 1990s began to create their own Scots Language courses. The last fifteen years we have seen a marked increase in the numbers of teachers using Scots in their teaching practice. However, Scotland does not as yet have any dedicated Scots Language medium schools.

In January 2005 a partnership was created between Kirkhill PS, a Scots Primary School and Itchy Coo, a publisher that produces Scots language books for children. The aim of the project is to explore ways of introducing Scots throughout the year on a graded scale from P1 up to P7. At the end of eighteen months, it is hoped that a model Scots Language curriculum for all primary level education in Scotland will be developed, giving other schools the opportunity of working towards a bilingual Scots-English learning environment themselves. As part of this development, Kirkhill PS will, in co-operation with Itchy Coo, join the Mercator Network of Schools in the near future.

Currently, the only official language of education at Kirkhill PS is English but staff agree that the Scots Language is already an integral (but unrecognised) part of the school's life. The Head Teacher, Mrs Anne Moir, feels that there would be significant benefits for the educational development of her pupils if the Scots Language was given a formal place in the classroom. Itchy Coo will work at a whole-school level to train and advise teachers on long-term Scots Language delivery. Matthew Fitt, the representative of Itchy Coo, will visit Kirkhill PS on a weekly basis during this project, giving support, advice and in-service training on the Scots language to the teaching staff.



jaguar wi jaggy jaws



penguins in peenies pentin picturs

So far, teacher Christine Pope has been rhyming, singing and using fluffy animals as visual aids to introduce her P2 class to simple Scots vocabulary such as coo, dug and moose. Christine has found the Scots has fitted neatly into a project on farms she was already running with her class.

At P4 level, teacher Jennifer McEwen has used a tattiebogle (scarecrow) as the focus for introducing anatomical vocabulary like heid, mooth, airms and oxters. Noting the positive response of her pupils to hearing Scots in the class, Jennifer has gone on to lead her class to a show-stopping performance of the 'The Three Wee Pigs' in Scots for a school assembly.

And Cheryl Reekie who teaches P7 has had her class playing hide and seek with breeks, bunnets, jaikets and semmits in a priming exercise called 'The Claes Game'. With this and a great deal more vocabulary at their disposal, Cheryl's class has now created its own fictional Scots town where Greetin Wynd runs across the Bubblyjock Brig at the foot of Kirk Brae. This 'Scotsopolis' will soon be populated by imaginary characters whose lives and personalities may become the starting point for narrative storytelling and extended creative writing.

Mercator-Education's Network of Schools is extremely interested in the outcome of this project and hopes that these kinds of partnerships can be inspirational to other minority language communities. Naturally we will keep our member schools up to date with regards to the outcome of this project!