

Learning Community Languages What's happening in Scotland?

Surveying provision for community languages in Scotland

The University of Stirling's Scottish Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research (Scottish CILT) is conducting a survey of provision for learning community languages across Scotland. The survey focuses on provision aimed at children of school age, whether this is offered in school time or after school hours, with the support of local authorities or on a voluntary basis. The survey is funded by the Scottish Executive and takes place during the academic year 2004-5.

What are community languages?

Community languages are defined as languages other than the dominant language in any society, which are in regular use among its members. People may use community languages:

- to talk to their immediate family;
- to communicate with others who speak these languages in the neighbourhood;
- to maintain family contacts with countries in which these languages are spoken;
- for cultural (including religious) purposes;

and/ or

- at work and for business purposes.

Current estimates suggest that over 150 community languages are spoken by children at school in Scotland. These range from the languages of well-established communities, such as Panjabi, Urdu and Chinese, to the languages of more recently arrived groups, including refugees and asylum seekers, such as Dari, Somali and Albanian. The modern languages usually taught in Scottish schools - French, German, Spanish, Italian, Urdu and Gaelic ('second language') - are community languages for some children, if they make use of these languages outwith the classroom, in any of the ways listed above. Gaelic, Scots and sign languages can also be considered community languages.

"A wide range of languages other than English, Scots and Gaelic is spoken in Scotland, representing the culturally diverse nature of the population and recent patterns of settlement. It is important that there are opportunities for all Scots to celebrate their language and traditions and to participate fully in the cultural life of their own community and of Scotland."

Scottish Executive (2000). *Creating our future ... minding our past.*
Scotland's National Cultural Strategy.

Learning community languages

People learn community languages in many different ways.

- ★ Some children grow up in families where the language is spoken on a daily basis. They may acquire their community language in early childhood as their first language or they may learn it at the same time as English.
- ★ Some may have been born overseas or have spent a substantial period of time in another country where their community language is the dominant language or in widespread use.
- ★ Some communities organise language learning classes for children, with the aim of enabling children to develop the ability to read and write their community languages and to learn more about the cultural traditions associated with the language.
- ★ In some cases, children are able to study their community language at school, either as a modern language (French, German, Spanish, Italian, Urdu and Gaelic 'second language') or as a medium of instruction, in Gaelic medium schools and schools which use British Sign Language as a medium of instruction.

Why are community languages important?

Helping children to maintain and develop their community languages is important for individuals, for their communities, and for wider Scottish society, for a variety of reasons:

- ✓ families have the right to pass on their cultural and linguistic heritage to their children;
- ✓ children who have the opportunity to grow up bilingual have obvious linguistic advantages;
- ✓ research has also shown that bilingual children have cognitive advantages deriving from the more sophisticated brain development which learning two languages from an early age promotes;
- ✓ having access to a range of languages is an important economic, cultural and intellectual resource for any society.

Community languages as a resource for Scotland

Many recent reports have pointed to the increasing importance of multilingualism in a world in which international communications, labour force mobility and the impact of globalisation on business and on culture are key factors in economic and political change. Investing in community languages, in addition to modern languages in schools, will ensure greater diversity in the range of languages for Scotland to draw on in business, cultural, political and social contexts. It will also capitalise on existing language skills and expertise.

The Survey

In order to identify the best ways of supporting community language learning, we need more information about existing provision. The Scottish CILT survey will seek answers to the following questions:

1. How many community languages are taught in Scotland?
2. How many children take part in community language classes?
3. How many years of study do they complete?
4. What kinds of teaching materials are in use or are needed?
5. What kind of training have community language teachers had/do they need?
6. What do learners achieve at the end of the study period and what kind of certification do they - or could they - receive?

Phase 1: Building the database (September - December 2004)




Scottish CILT will contact representatives of all local authorities in Scotland to investigate the extent of information held locally about provision for community languages. This information will be collated with the aim of mapping the range of languages for which provision is made and the different types of provision available. This will be supplemented with information from national and voluntary bodies concerned with community language learning.

Phase 2: Survey of providers (January - March 2005)

Drawing on the information collected in phase 1, questionnaires will be sent to a wide range of providers, seeking information about the numbers of students catered for and the numbers of teachers engaged in teaching community languages. The survey will also investigate the aims and outcomes of provision, the kinds of support which providers already receive, and what additional support might be beneficial. The survey aims to provide a more detailed picture of provision, to supplement the database, and to help to identify the most effective ways of promoting community language learning in future.

Phase 3: Dissemination (April - June 2005)

The findings of the survey will be disseminated in Scotland in these ways:

-  on the Scottish CILT website (www.scilt.stir.ac.uk);
-  via the Scottish CILT newsletter which is distributed free to all Scottish schools and to any other individuals or organisations who subscribe (to do so, please contact Scottish CILT);
-  in a report to the Scottish Executive.

“The continuing vitality of ... community languages is important not only for the communities who speak these languages. It also enriches our entire society and makes it more socially inclusive.”

Scottish Executive (2000). *Citizens of a Multilingual World*.

The Bigger Picture

The findings from the Scottish survey will be combined with similar surveys for England and Wales, to provide a picture of provision for community language learning across Britain and to inform future decisions about the best way of supporting this. For the same reasons, a Europe-wide survey of provision for community language learning funded by the Council of Europe will take place between 2005 and 2007, and the findings from the Scottish survey will be included in this.

Please support this project!

If we contact you for help with this project, please provide whatever information you can. If you know of other people we should get in touch with, please let us know.

If you would like to know more about the project, or would like to subscribe to our newsletter, please get in touch with us at Scottish CILT:

Project Director:

Joanna McPake

Tel: 01786 466295

Email: j.m.mcpake@stir.ac.uk

Scottish CILT Information Officer:

Sheila McLachlan

Tel: 01786 466298

Email: s.e.mclachlan@stir.ac.uk

Scottish CILT, Institute of Education,
University of Stirling, STIRLING, FK9 4LA
Office telephone: 01786 466290 Office fax: 01786 466291
Website: www.scilt.stir.ac.uk

QuickTime™ and a
GIF decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

"In many countries of recent immigration, the gift of languages and cultural knowledge is donated to the host society by its new citizens. Scotland is no exception. ... The cultivation of this language resource would represent a major achievement for the Scottish nation, and would return to the society significant long-term benefits."

Joseph Lo Bianco (2001). *Language and Literacy Policy in Scotland*