![Education Scotland logo - Foghlam Alba]

Improving Practice in Gaelic Education

Effective interventions to raise attainment

This paper presents a summary of a presentation delivered by Dr Fiona Lyon which focused on the use of effective strategies to support children and young people in their learning in Gaelic Medium Education (GME).

Education Scotland has included some challenge questions, including those used in inspections, for practitioners' consideration in evaluating how practice can be improved. The paper supports raising the attainment of all and closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged.

Transforming lives through learning

Gaelic Medium Education (GME): Effective interventions to raise attainment

1. Introduction

The **National Improvement Framework** has increased the focus within schools on improving attainment, particularly in literacy and numeracy. In so doing, schools are encouraged to have clear evidence on children's and young people's progress and to make resultant interventions so that all learners attain as highly as possible. A suite of resources are available on the **National Improvement Hub** to support practitioners in making a professional judgement about the achievement of levels in numeracy and literacy. This includes specific advice on **Gaelic Medium Education**. Practitioners will also find it useful to refer to the **Assessing progress and achievement framework for literacy and Gàidhlig**, with a related presentation on **Glow**. Central to improving attainment in Gaelic Medium Education is high-quality, purposeful and engaging learning which is set within the principles of immersion. For more information on how to achieve this, please refer to **Education Scotland's Advice on Gaelic Education**. The Gaelic version of this Advice is available **here**.

2. Context and background

Intervention aims to raise standards of literacy and numeracy. Early prevention and intervention programmes are drawn up to target and support children who might be at risk of doing less well as they progress through stages. It is important to identify how we may support children as early as possible. This in turn reduces the likelihood of children developing low self-esteem and adopting inappropriate behaviour. Early assessment can provide valuable information on each child's development in early literacy. The extent to which children are identified depends greatly on the type of assessment or screening used, and the intervention or targets for improvement put in place. Action from an initial assessment may lead to further assessments of literacy and phonological awareness. This is known as early intervention. In many cases, teachers carry out individual baseline screening assessments with children at the beginning of P1. In Gaelic Medium Education, many of the early intervention approaches used in English medium schools are not suitable for use with immersion. The advice, *Building the Curriculum 5* states that 'staff should use assessment information from a wide range of sources to monitor learners' progress and plan next steps in learning'[1]. The purpose of this paper is to present strategies that may be used with children learning through the medium of Gaelic.

3. Why is phonological awareness important in developing literacy acquisition?

Vital information can be gained from screening at an early age, in particular a child's knowledge of sounds, alliteration and rhyme. These are important elements of phonological awareness which may need to be taught explicitly. If a child has difficulty breaking words into syllables, repeating multi-syllabic words, identifying and giving rhyming words and is slow to learn individual letter sounds, then there can be a delay in learning to read. According to Muter (2003), phonological awareness refers to the appreciation of, and ability to process and manipulate the speech sound segments of words. A child must understand that a spoken word can be broken down into smaller parts

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[1] Scottish Government, 2010, p. 20

in order to connect it with its written representation. There is a reciprocal relationship between phonological awareness and reading; children with a higher level of phonological awareness learn to read more easily and good reading skills develop further phonological awareness skills (Muter, 1996). Direct training in phonological awareness skills will support reading development. The implications for assessing phonological awareness in Gaelic needs to be planned to take cognisance that English is the first language for many children in Gaelic Medium Education. However, Goswami (2010) argues that the progression in phonological awareness is universal across all languages and research carried out by Lyon (2011) found that the development of phonological skills of those in Gaelic Medium Education were comparable to their counterparts who were learning through the medium of English. Both Everatt et al. (2000) and Frederickson and Frith (1998) concluded that the assessment of phonological processing skills is useful in identifying dyslexia in children and young people who are bilingual.

4. Phonological awareness screening tool
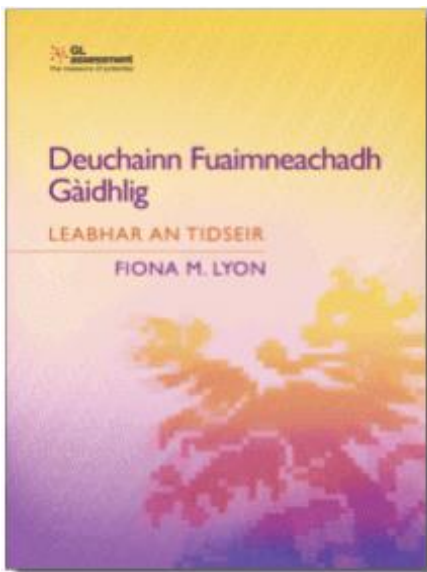
In GME, Gaelic is the language used for learning and teaching with all related activities and resources also in Gaelic. HM Inspectors refer to this as Gaelic being based on the principles of immersion which begins with a period of total immersion (2015)[2]. As a result, an assessment through the medium of English, or of the English language, is not appropriate for use until children have been formally introduced to reading and writing English as part of the curriculum. This is suggested to be at the end of P3, or P4. The exact timing is part of teachers' judgements in monitoring progress in developing fluency in Gaelic. The use of an assessment through the medium of English, or of the English language, would be used in a planned and progressive way which is cognisant of learners' developmental stages from P4 onwards. GL Assessment's *Deuchainn Fuaimneachadh Gàidhlig* is a test devised for assessing phonological awareness in Gaelic. It can identify which children are behind same-age peers in phonological awareness and provide information about specific skills. The following subtests are included in the screening tool: rhyme detection, rhyme production, syllable blending, phoneme blending, initial phoneme deletion, final phoneme deletion, polysyllabic repetition and letter knowledge. As has been noted, children learn language through immersion so it is reasonable for a practitioner to plan an assessment of phonological awareness in Gaelic when children have sufficient vocabulary and fluency in Gaelic. While the exact timing of this is subject to practitioners' monitoring and tracking of children's progress and achievement, it is likely to be in P2/P3. Prior to this, for example P1, it will be possible for a practitioner to determine whether a child can recognise single sounds, be aware of alliteration, and recognise rhyme in Gaelic. Generally, children who show good oral competence in Gaelic can be assessed accurately using the screening tool.

5. Suggested activities for rhyming

The research by Lyon (2011) highlighted that rhyming in Gaelic does not behave in the same way as in English. Rhyming in Gaelic is somewhat different from English in that the

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[2] Education Scotland Advice on Gaelic Education, February 2015

focus is usually on the vowel sounds with no reference to the consonants at the end of the rhyme syllable. The stress falls on the first syllable in Gaelic words. Therefore, the rhyme vowel is often found in the penultimate syllable rather than the end syllable. The role of rhyme is nevertheless important to all young learners of Gaelic and practitioners must create opportunities for regular practice. Resources like the online BBC '*Fàilte gu Fuaimean',* uses mainly rhyme in its stories. This may be useful for young learners of the language who do not have a wide vocabulary. Ideally, exposure to rhyme takes place in early learning and childcare settings, with further opportunities for recognition and production of rhyming words at the primary stages. Suggested resources specifically involving rhyme are: *Spòrs agus Seinn, Muir agus Tìr, Caoran ann an Cliabh, Trobhadaibh a-steach, Aibidil nan Rannan Gòrach, Am Bodach Beag Annasach, Aithris is Oideas, Cuairt chun na Gealaich agus rannan eile, Damhan-allaidh san Oisean agus rannan is rosg eile, Èist is Seinn, Rannan Chloinne rin Seinn, Seinneamaid Còmhla, Sùilean Dubha, Tickettyboo.*

6. **Addressing Dyslexia Toolkit – Fuaimean Feumail, Fuaimean Còmhla**

In the online resource, **Addressing Dyslexia Toolkit**, which forms part of the National Framework for Inclusion (2009), Gaelic Medium Education is highlighted under 'Other factors to consider' when identifying dyslexia. This acknowledges that the child is learning to operate in two different phonological and written language systems which 'could be a complicating factor, and close investigation should be done before reaching conclusions. This may require focused attention to phonology in both languages'. Under the Resources Downloads section, a Gaelic version of Sylvia Russell's '*Phonic Code Cracker'* can be found at
http://www.addressingdyslexia.org/pages/index.php?category=14&sub=3&point=7
entitled 'Fuaimean Feumail' by Mairead Monk, Peggy Ann Campbell and R. MacInnes. Also, *'Fuaimean Còmhla'* by Peggy Ann Campbell and R. MacInnes, which offers support in phonic sounds for older learners who are needing additional help with their learning. Many of the other sections in the online toolkit describe support strategies for children and young people who need assistance with literacy. There are also suggestions for practitioners for their use in the classroom. In the career-long professional learning (CLPL) section, there are many opportunities for teachers of Gaelic Medium to increase their knowledge of language acquisition. **Education Scotland's website** details a variety of strategies which can be used to support those with dyslexia at the primary and secondary stages.

7. Ceitidh: Scottish Gaelic computer

Voice-assisted technology, Ceitidh is now available from CALL, Scotland's **Scottish voice** website alongside 'Heather' and 'Stuart'. This is licenced for the use of all schools. The Gaelic voice works on Windows and Macintosh computers and can be used to:
- read Gaelic web sites, eBooks, textbooks, SQA exam papers and other curriculum resources
- check writing, emails, and social media posts. Proof-reading, by listening, can improve spelling and grammar.

The voice will be particularly helpful for speakers of Gaelic with dyslexia, reading difficulties and visual impairment. It may also be useful for anyone learning or working in Gaelic. Crucially, computer readers enable learners to be more independent so that they do not have to rely on human readers in assessments and examinations. This should

help them to be more confident as individuals. Computer readers are vital for people with blindness or severe sight loss, and the Ceitidh voice will, for the first time, provide visually impaired speakers of Gaelic with a method of reading Gaelic web sites, online newspapers and eBooks.

8. Clicker 6/7

There are several ways that children and young people can be supported in their reading and writing using **Clicker 6/7**. This is a talking word processor which confirms what has been written. Using a word predictor can encourage wider vocabulary. Practitioners can customise the word banks to meet the needs of each individual by importing word lists and recording each word.
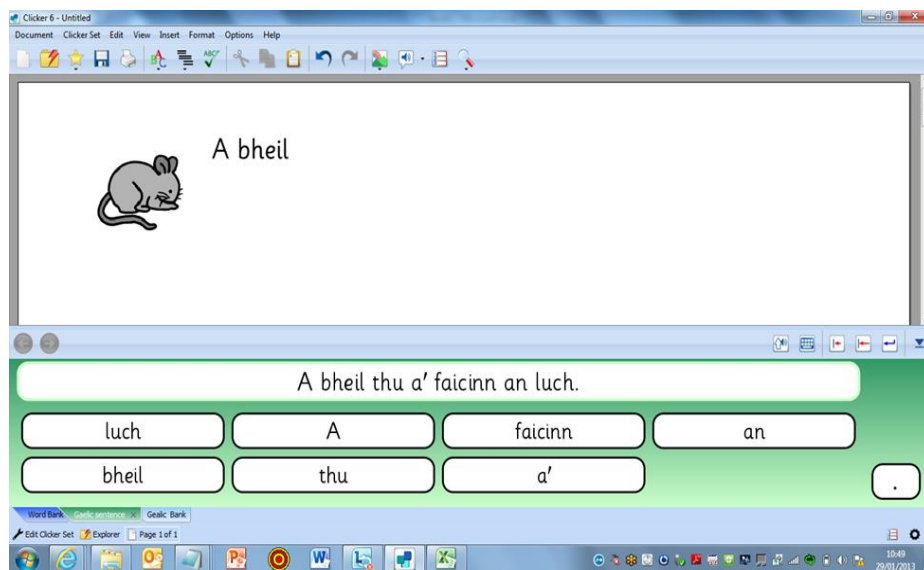
This is an example of sentence building activity using Clicker 6.

9. Penfriend

Penfriend XL word predictor software suggests words as you type text into a word document. The software has been adapted to use a Gaelic lexicon, with a choice of 500, 2000, 5000 or 10 000 words. Penfriend guesses the word being typed and will go on to predict the next complete word. It recognises the correct grammatical word required. For example, a pronoun following a verb. Every time a new word is started, a selection of words appears at the side of the page. A word can be selected by clicking on that word or pressing the Function button attributed to the word.
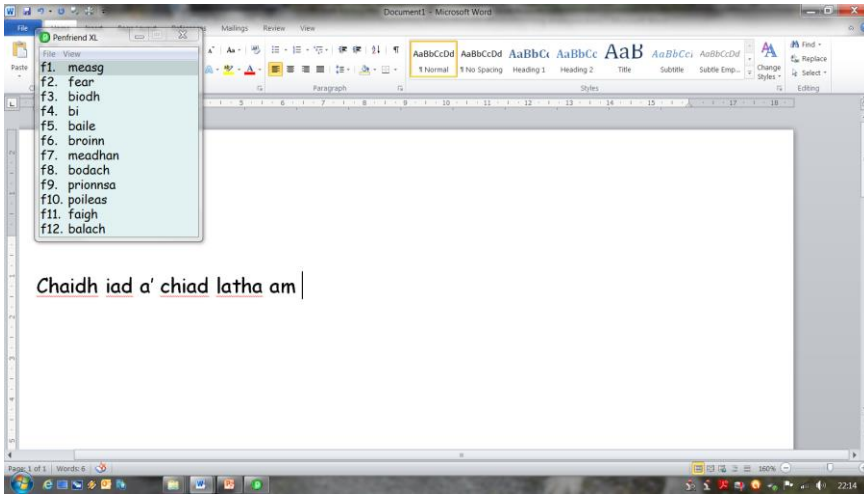
This is an example of Penfriend's predictive text using 10000 word lexicon.

10. Wordshark

Wordshark is a multi-sensory computer programme produced by White Space Ltd. It aims to help learners improve their skills in reading and spelling by playing a variety of games. Although the purchased programme contains English word lists, practitioners can create banks of Gaelic words. These may be used to teach new vocabulary or to support learners by creating individual lists of words for spelling and reading practice. An on-screen keyboard can be created with the specific characters required for Gaelic. Principally, this would be the 18 letters of the Gaelic alphabet and the stressed vowels sounds. Once the word lists have been saved, the words can be recorded with the use of a microphone. Advice on how to do this is available in a manual. Reading and spelling assessments are built into the programme. These can be accessed once several games have been played. Options such as a wordsearch, containing the list of words selected, can be printed. A record of games played, and any errors made in each game, is automatically saved. Word lists may be printed. This record can be accessed any time.

This is an example of Wordshark with a multi-sensory wordlist in Gaelic.

11. Highlight tape

When children with reading difficulties are faced with a comprehension passage with questions to answer, it can be challenging for them to find the answers or key points in the passage. If a worksheet is being used, children and young people should be encouraged to use a highlighter pen to mark the question, and with the same colour, mark the answer in the passage. An alternative to this, especially where textbooks are used, can be the use of highlight tape.
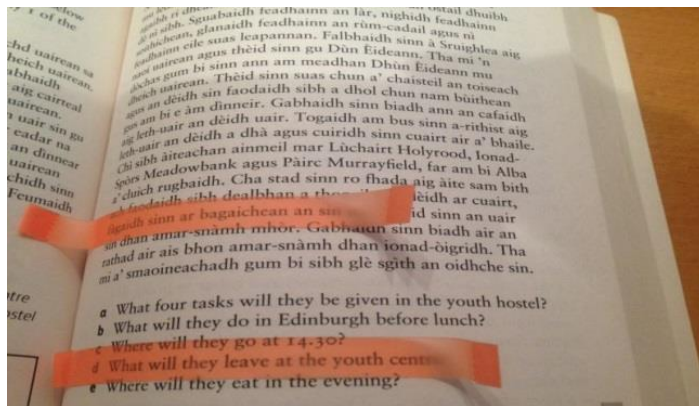
Highlight tape is a reusable, non-permanent coloured strip of tape available in different colours. Strips can be applied directly to text, and then moved, once the task has been completed. Alternatively, two strips of coloured tape can be stuck onto a small laminated card and used to cover a question and its corresponding answer. This lessens the burden on short term memory and helps to increase the work pace.

12. Multisensory Games

Magnetic letters are useful at every stage of learning. They are commonly used in P1 when early phonic sounds are being taught. Many children require a multisensory approach to learning to read and spell words. This teaching approach enables children to understand and process information through words

being presented in different ways – auditory, visual, tactile and kinaesthetic. The Gaelic Magnetic Phonics pack, *Fuaimean Fonaig* is ideal for this use. Its regular use should be encouraged as an alternative to a spelling 'test' for a child who lacks motivation, or has challenges with handwriting. Whole words can be made, segmented into syllables and blended again. By saying the sounds as they are used, a child will begin to memorise letter patterns. A whole word can be written below the magnetic one to complete the multisensory approach. Children will be motivated to try to read and spell by introducing some fun into their learning and gain regular practise.

13. Smart Chute

Smart Chute is a multisensory game. Children post cards into a card flipper to reveal the correct answer. It can be used to increase vocabulary, teach phonics, check spelling, reinforce memory skills or practise syllable and phoneme segmentation and blending. Children can use it individually, or it can be used as a group. Practitioners will have to create cards specific to Gaelic.

14. Some further approaches

Various reading and spelling games can help to motivate children who require support with literacy. Board games, such as snakes and ladders, or a race track with dice and counters, can be used with a set of word cards. These may have rules for reading or for spelling. For example, when landing on an even number, children must turn over a card

and read it correctly, or return to previous square. Chain games or follow-on games are also fun to play and support children with their learning in an enjoyable and challenging way.

15. The framework for self-evaluation and self-improvement

This paper may be used with the documents illustrated below to enable practitioners to explore their practice as part of self-evaluation leading to self-improvement. A few challenge questions are provided to facilitate this enquiry.

16. Challenge questions

- How well are a range of approaches being used to meet the needs of children and young people? How do we know?
- How can the strategies in this paper be used to make timely interventions to support children?
- How effective is the evidencing of progress for children and young people in literacy and Gàidhlig?
- How well is the curriculum for GME improving attainment?
- How well does the information that is gathered from assessment inform our planning and adjustments to the curriculum?
- What is the impact of monitoring and tracking of progress and what interventions are being put in place to support children and young people?
- How effectively is account taken of ensuring equity, including poverty-related issues, in raising attainment for children in GME?
- How well are you evidencing that children in GME by P7 are achieving as well, or better as their counterparts in English medium education?
- How effective are the school's arrangements for moderation? How do you know?
- How are partnerships with the local community, parents and carers, Gaelic groups and business organisations used to improve children and young people's fluency in Gaelic?

17. References

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