Fae Tantallon tae TikTok: a decade o Scots at Schuil

By Jamie Fairbairn

When I look back at the last decade of Scots learning at Banff Academy, it appears to me as a whirlwind of faces, characters, words and history, stories, poems, maps and phrases, partnerships, projects, recordings and writing, jannies, parents, professors and bairns. It has quite simply lifted the lid on language, and as a teacher at Banff Academy – in a strong Doric-speaking area – I can see it has been a massive relief and confidence booster both to Doric speakers and those wanting to learn more about the language of the area and the land.

Many of the pupils at Banff Academy, in Aberdeenshire, are Scots speakers and will speak Doric to family and friends. A familiar greeting and reply of broader speakers might be 'Aye aye, fit like? Foo ye deein?' (Hello, how are you doing?), 'Nae bad ava, jist tyauvin awa' (Not bad at all, just struggling on). They will use words and phrases such as clartit wi dubs (covered in mud), scunnert (mightily fed up), a redd up (an untidy mess), feart (afraid), jeelt (freezing), ower het (too hot) and ben e hoose (through the house). When pupils learn these words and phrases have graced the pages of fine works of literature from the sixteenth century onwards, it surprises them and validates the language they speak.

Doric is the current name for the north-east dialect of the Scots Language, and is spoken, depending on which precise area you are in, by between 40–60% of people in the school's catchment area, according to the 2011 census. Pupils learn that Scots is recognised as a language by the EU, the UK Government and the Scottish Government and was registered as having 1.6 million speakers in the last census. Many Scots speakers have and still do suffer from prejudice about the way they speak. For many pupils Scots is the language they bring into the classroom, and they may feel that they are at an immediate disadvantage when the medium of learning is exclusively English.

Around 2010, as a Geography teacher, I extended the weather unit for third year bairns to include a lesson on Scots weather words, bringing in descriptive words

and expressions such as: Banff baillies; blawin a bleester; dingin it doon; bullet steens; droukit; dreich; chitter; flichter; haar; smirr and thunner plump. It gave an opportunity, too, to introduce poetry by north-east poets of the calibre of Sheena Blackhall.

Winter

The sna's here. It drappit doon
A duvet ower the park.
Let oot a sneeze amang the trees
On ilkie timmer bark
Jack Frost, he's peintit siller
On the fir tree's sark.

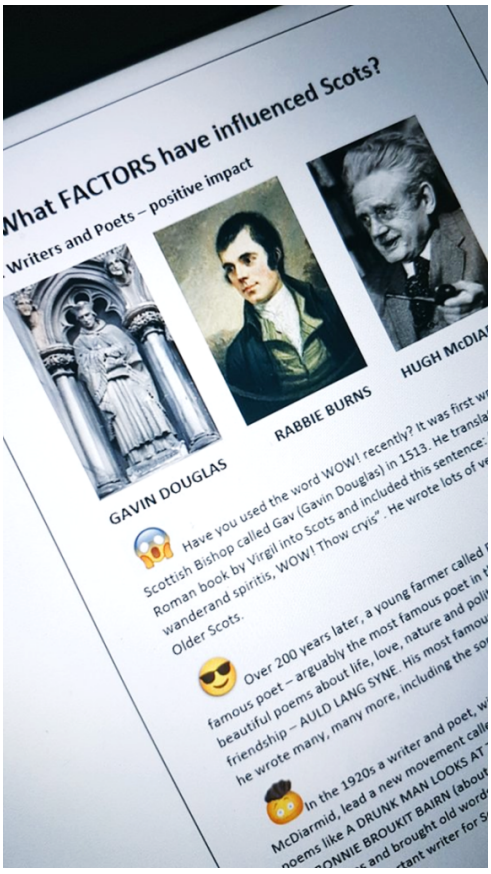
The sna's here. The robin wytes
Fur me tae gie him breid.
His breist is nippit wi the cauld,
It's dirlin sair an reid.
His granny sud hae wuvven him
A toorie fur his heid.

Such poems and words seemed to trigger an outpouring of creativity from the bairns, comfortable with the language of home and pleased they were 'allowed' to use it in class, creating their own work:

Shoors smoor ma front path
Cal an dreich an A'm needin a bath
A'm jist aboot perishin wi the caal
It's nae a guid day ti gan oot wi ma pal
E bullet steens are peltin it doon
Then on comes the ren, aa floodin the toon
Sna'll be neist, richt dingin it doon
An they say that the haar'll be driftin in soon.

In 2014 the Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA) brought in the Scots Language Award and I Iowped at the chance to offer it to seniors as an elective course run in the Faculty of Humanities. Seven gallus souls took the plunge, and numbers

have since built up to around 135 pupils choosing Scots throughout the different stages of school. The award consists of two units: (1) History and Development of Scots – including the factors influencing Scots from early days to present, reasons for links with other languages, linguistic features, and contemporary use; (2) Understanding and Communicating – reading and interpreting Scots texts and creating written and oral communications in Scots. One of the appeals of the Award is its flexibility, as it can be tailored to pupil interests and can explore the dialects of Scots used in the community, whether the school is in the north-east of Scotland, where Doric is spoken, in Shetland and Orkney with their own distinct dialects, the south-east where Borders Scots is spoken, Galloway, Ayrshire, Fife, Lothian, Angus and many others.



As far as texts go, literary works, poetry, journalism, graphic novels and non-fiction can be explored. The range of materials in Scots is growing by the day, including works by renowned writers from across the centuries – from John Barbour in the fourteenth century to William Dunbar and Gavin Douglas in the sixteenth; from Robert Fergusson, Robert Burns and Robert Louis Stevenson through to twentieth-century works by Hugh MacDiarmid, Edwin Muir, Norman MacCaig, Alasdair Gray, Liz Lochhead, Tom Leonard, James Kelman, Rona Munro and Anne Donovon. There are also contemporary publishing companies such as

Itchy Coo, which offers both original works and translations of children's books into Scots. Examples include Roald Dahl books such as *The Eejits*, *Chairlie an the Chocolate Wirks*, *Geordie's Mingin Medicine* and *Sleekit Mr Tod*, as well as J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stane* and Jeff Kinney's *Diary of a Wimpy Wean*.

For an anthology of Scots works, Matthew Fitt and James Robertson's *The Smoky Smirr o Rain*[1] covers a huge range of thematically arranged Scots poetry and prose, from medieval poems in older and mid Scots to works from the modern day. Bairns love having a go at decoding Middle Scots and have attempted to translate verses from Barbour's *The Bruce* among others. Alan Riach's *Scottish Literature: An Introduction*[2] provides a definitive guide to the literature of the land, with just the right amount of information for discovery and further learning on authors and works through the sweep of history. The Association for Scottish Literature also has an excellent series of Teaching Notes, guiding folk through a myriad of Scottish texts. Film clips, graphic novels and contemporary plays are available from the Scots Hoose website.

The understanding and communicating unit of the SQA Award requires an analysis of the purpose and audience of texts, their main ideas and supporting details, and applied knowledge and understanding of Scots to explain meaning and effect of the text. For the creative part, pupils have to produce a detailed communication in Scots for a specific purpose and audience and are required to apply detailed knowledge and understanding of Scots to communicate the meaning. Examples at different outcome levels include: to investigate the rich panoply of weather words to create and present a detailed weather forecast in Scots; to write a letter to someone explaining something challenging that happened to you; to compose an apocalyptic film script using as a stimulus Robert Louis Stevenson's poem 'The Maker to Posterity'.

> *'What tongue does your auld bookie speak?*
> *He'll spier; an' I, his mou to steik:*
> *'No bein' fit to write in Greek,*
> *I wrote in Lallan,*
> *Dear to my heart as the peat reek,*
> *Auld as Tantallon.*

‘Few spak it then, an’ noo there’s nane.
My puir auld sangs lie a’ their lane,
Their sense, that aince was braw an’ plain,
Tint a’thegether,
Like runes upon a standin’ stane
Amang the heather.

You would hope that RLS would be heartened that Scots – dear to his heart as the peat reek and Auld as Tantallon – rather than being tint a’thegether, is, over a century later, being broadcast globally on TikTok through the Scots poetry of Len Pennie and her contemporaries.

Scots learning lends itself to interdisciplinarity. As a Geography teacher, I have focused blocks of the Scots language work on landscape, weather, planets, farming, fishing and language. Scots words abound on maps of the local area and their etymologies (often Gaelic, older Scots or Old Norse in origin) reveal meanings which bring familiar placenames alive. Words such as glen, knock, brae, ben, knowe, ness, carse, mire, haugh, heugh and shank describe landscape features and their meanings can be explored. Places allow pupils to discover meaning and to imagine how people in the past were thinking – for example Bloodymire, which refers to the boggy site of battles between the Scots and Danes; the street-name Gowden Knowes, which relates to wheat fields on the hillocks and fields down to the shore; the village Shank of Barry, which refers to a ridge of land. Pupils then become map detectives. Building on the new knowledge, they create a large display that includes an imaginary island littered with newly crafted names made up of descriptive Scots words, a full description of their island in Doric, and road signs using the local, rather than official, names of places (e.g. the village of Aberchirder is known locally as Foggie, the village of Gardenstown is known locally as Gamrie, Fraserburgh is called The Broch and Peterhead is The Bloo Toon.) Who wouldn’t want to visit this youngster’s island, ably described in this extract of her tour guide:

Ye will be far fae disappyntit fan you visit ess wee island. A wee boatie will drap ye aff at the herbour. Feel free tae bring yer dookers an ging for a sweem wi the locals. Mind yersel though, it’ll be fair baltic. Gin ye heed up tae Bowies Beach da be feart o the bourachie o selkies. The wee beasties will jist be sunbathin in o the birslin sun. Nae far fae ess, aifter a wander, ye’ll fin yersel

> *inaboot the 'Broon Bens'. If yer feeling up til it, pit on a wooly toorie, watterproof jaicket, an mak yer way richt up tae i tap. It'll be blaan a right bleester, so be prepared. Doon fae ess is a shimmerin blae lochan ye can dip yer taes in o. A short dander east will tak ye tae 'Wee Broon Toon'. In o ess toon er's a café. Tak yer pick fae onything fae a saasage bap, a rowie or the hale jing bang. The toonsers will yap tae ye aa day – you'll ging deef wi'it. The Toon Hall is a puckle distance awa. Ess is far meetings are held, pairties ging aheed an fowk hae fun. Conveniently a shoppie is close, tae dae yer errins. They tak baith siller an bunk caird. Watergaw Village, is a skyrie wee place, nae muckle fowk there though. Some would say a visit nae worth a docken. Noo, fit iver you do, dinna ging near the 'Dire Mire' or you'll get stuck or even worse faa on o yer erse.*

One of the keys to success, it seems to me, is to engage in partnerships and projects not just in school but in the local and national community. One example was our partnership with Aberdeen University's Elphinstone Institute, which specialises in folklore, culture, and language of the north-east of Scotland. We collaborated on a year-long research project in which PhD student Claire Needler spent a year accompanying the Scots Language class, exploring the bairns' attitudes to Scots. The findings then fed into the learning in a symbiotic way. One of the major outputs was a week-long school-wide Scots language awareness project, in collaboration with a community arts company called Caged Beastie. Using a collaborative learning approach, pupils created three main outputs: a travelling exhibition of favourite and meaningful Scots words and photos; a booklet in Scots on how to do ethnographic research; and a catalogue of teachers' favourite Scots words, their meanings, what they meant to the teacher, and their etymologies.[3] Each teacher put up a large poster of their word outside their classroom for a week, prompting questions from all pupils going in and out of their rooms throughout the week and creating a buzz around the language. The picture boards made a permanent home in the school's conference room, and signs in Doric around the school remained, for example 'Jannies' Neuk', and 'Come awa ben' as a welcome to the library. An official report was also produced for the British Education Research Association,[4] as well as a book chapter looking at transformative pedagogy with home language.[5] Partnerships are an excellent

way to promote Scots, and we have also worked with organisations such as Education Scotland, Scots Radio, the Scots Language Centre, the Scottish Qualification Authority and Historic Environment Scotland, notably recently with youngsters as Scots voice actors for an upcoming audio tour of Linlithgow Palace.

But what are the benefits to doing Scots at school? Having provided pupils with an opportunity to engage with Scots at Banff Academy, it has become clear that there are significant benefits for self-esteem, literacy, inclusion, and cultural knowledge. Code-switching between Scots and English is a significant ability, bilingualism in fact, and when pupils are made aware of their linguistic skills, they can take more control and make conscious decisions about which they want to speak and write in different situations. The main message is that being bilingual is good not bad and should be celebrated and given opportunities to flex its muscles. Self-esteem is particularly important, and we have found that pupils for whom Scots is their first language can blossom when given permission to create pieces in Doric. I have seen the glee on pupils faces as they declare 'I can dee this!' perhaps for the first time at school. Over lockdown some pupils wrote up to six pages of text in Doric as a retelling of a story on an audio clip, glad of the opportunity to express themselves in their mother tongue, and perhaps writing more than they would in English. One pupil, unprompted, wrote the History and Development of Scots essay in Doric. When asked why she did that, she replied 'it was in ma heid'. I discovered that another pupil had a gift at writing stories in Scots. A very quiet pupil, he continued to supply me with stories unprompted, much to my delight, and when we got a particularly spooky and gruesome tale in broad Doric printed in Aberdeen University's newspaper, his beaming smile said it all. I have found that engaging with Scots enables inclusion for many pupils, a space where they can thrive.

But what of the future? How can we improve the place of Scots language and literature in our schools? In a busy curriculum it is hard to establish new subjects and there is still some way to go before studying Scots is universally seen as a worthwhile thing to do by teachers and leaders across Scotland. But that is frankly no excuse for denying pupils their rights to engage with their mither tongue and the opportunity to engage with the literature and linguistic history of their own land. Mak the curriculum busy wi Scots! The flexibility of the Scots Language Award means that there are opportunities to complete it in different

departments of a school. The understanding and communication unit sits comfortably within the current English curriculum, the History and Development unit can be taught in the Humanities (Geography, History, Modern Studies and RMPS) and some schools bed it in the Languages Department. Banff Academy is moving increasingly towards teaching through Project Based Learning, and Scots lends itself to this kind of interdisciplinary approach, with a driving question, an immersion event (such as a visit, film or trip), a period of research to establish the knowledge needed, and the production in terms of a product which has relevance to the local community or outside partners. Imagine an eight-week project answering the driving question 'How can young people promote Scots poetry and stories in the local community?' Pupils could investigate historical and contemporary literature and local authors and create an exhibition, or a presentation of their own creative work inspired by what they found. The school is also basing learning around key skills and attributes such as confidence, resilience, communication, creativity, problem solving, emotional intelligence, digital literacy, and teamwork. Without exception these all feed into Scots language learning. For problem solving, what about asking bairns how we address the question of standardisation of Scots language? They may have some good answers!

In Humanities we continue with the senior Scots Language class of twenty-five to thirty bairns, and, in an innovative move, third year secondary pupils, who are required to study a modern language, can choose Scots in the mix. In the first year we offered it, two out of seven classes opted for Scots, the second year three out of seven, and this year four out of seven – numbers-wise, this means 110 pupils want to do Scots. This will provide the progression for Scots language that has hitherto not been available in secondary school, laying foundations for a pathway of study from early years to tertiary and beyond.

More classes studying Scots has created the demand for Scots teachers. I'm delighted that, following some years being a lone voice, I now have a group of eight teachers confident enough to take on S3 Scots classes, as youngsters continue to vote with their feet and take Scots. I set up a collaborative group on Scots in the school, meeting weekly. We were then asked to pilot a brand-new Open University Professional Learning Scots course for teachers, with tutors Sylvia Warnecke (OU) and Bruce Eunson (Education Scotland). This course is a serious sixty-hour Scots Language and Culture course, with seven units covering

Scots in the school context, the educational benefits, Scots in primary and the junior school, Scots and social studies at secondary, literature and creative writing, creativity and the expressive arts, and Scots as a language learning option in schools. My personal favourite, which I found inspiring, was a unit on expressive arts written by Gerda Stevenson, based around her poetry work *Quines*, and a tapestry project by artists inspired by the poems, written in Scots, English and Gaelic, from the point of view and in the voice of significant but oft neglected women in Scotland's history. One of the best aspects of the course is the electronic forum where teachers share ideas and compare what they have tried out with classes. Each unit has an application task to try with youngsters, which is shared on the forum, and a professional recognition task, which is assessed by the tutors. Regular tutorials further enable the discussion. We all felt a real sense of achievement when we completed the course, which took an academic year, and it gave all the participating teachers a real confidence boost and a green light for their Scots teaching. Given the prejudice which we have to accept has dogged Scots learning in schools, this is a big step forward. When the course becomes available to teachers after the summer holidays in 2023, I would thoroughly recommend that teachers do it, whether they be working in primary, early years, secondary or any subject in school. Successful completion gives teachers official professional recognition by the General Teaching Council of Scotland. You have no idea how brilliant it is to be an officially recognised Scots teacher – of course, big badges were made and are worn with pride! We can move forward confidently from here. It's been quite a decade, and the most important thing is that it has been fun: fun for the bairns, and fun for the rest of us. A'm fair tricket!

When I look back at the last decade of Scots learning at Banff Academy, it

appears to me as a whirlwind of faces, characters, words and history, stories, poems, maps and phrases, partnerships, projects, recordings and writing, jannies, parents, professors and bairns. It has quite simply lifted the lid on language, and as a teacher at Banff Academy – in a strong Doric-speaking area – I can see it has been a massive relief and confidence booster both to Doric speakers and those wanting to learn more about the language of the area and the land.

Many of the pupils at Banff Academy, in Aberdeenshire, are Scots speakers and will speak Doric to family and friends. A familiar greeting and reply of broader speakers might be 'Aye aye, fit like? Foo ye deein?' (Hello, how are you doing?), 'Nae bad ava, jist tyauvin awa' (Not bad at all, just struggling on). They will use words and phrases such as clartit wi dubs (covered in mud), scunnert (mightily fed up), a redd up (an untidy mess), feart (afraid), jeelt (freezing), ower het (too hot) and ben e hoose (through the house). When pupils learn these words and phrases have graced the pages of fine works of literature from the sixteenth century onwards, it surprises them and validates the language they speak.

Doric is the current name for the north-east dialect of the Scots Language, and is spoken, depending on which precise area you are in, by between 40–60% of people in the school's catchment area, according to the 2011 census. Pupils learn that Scots is recognised as a language by the EU, the UK Government and the Scottish Government and was registered as having 1.6 million speakers in the last census. Many Scots speakers have and still do suffer from prejudice about the way they speak. For many pupils Scots is the language they bring into the classroom, and they may feel that they are at an immediate disadvantage when the medium of learning is exclusively English.

Around 2010, as a Geography teacher, I extended the weather unit for third year bairns to include a lesson on Scots weather words, bringing in descriptive words and expressions such as: Banff baillies; blawin a bleester; dingin it doon; bullet steens; droukit; dreich; chitter; flichter; haar; smirr and thunner plump. It gave an opportunity, too, to introduce poetry by north-east poets of the calibre of Sheena Blackhall.

> *Winter*
>
> *The sna's here. It drappit doon*
> *A duvet ower the park.*

Let oot a sneeze amang the trees
On ilkie timmer bark
Jack Frost, he's peintit siller
On the fir tree's sark.

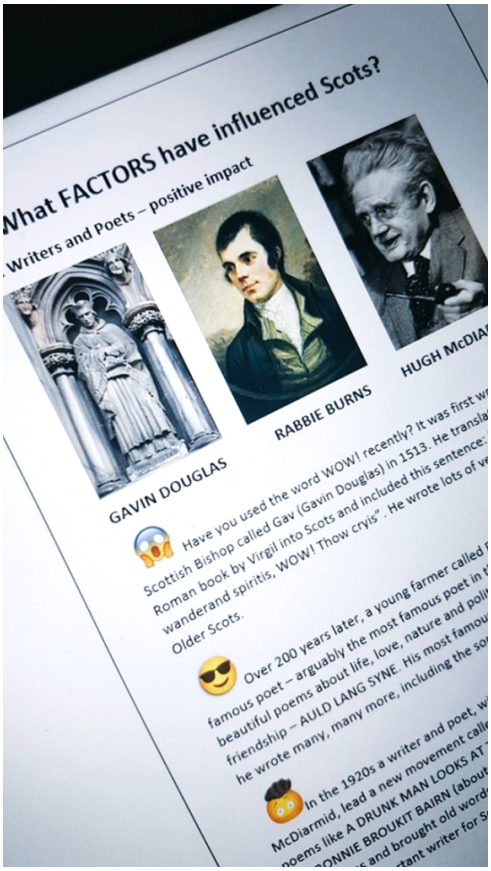
The sna's here. The robin wytes
Fur me tae gie him breid.
His breist is nippit wi the cauld,
It's dirlin sair an reid.
His granny sud hae wuvven him
A toorie fur his heid.

Such poems and words seemed to trigger an outpouring of creativity from the bairns, comfortable with the language of home and pleased they were 'allowed' to use it in class, creating their own work:

Shoors smoor ma front path
Cal an dreich an A'm needin a bath
A'm jist aboot perishin wi the caal
It's nae a guid day ti gan oot wi ma pal
E bullet steens are peltin it doon
Then on comes the ren, aa floodin the toon
Sna'll be neist, richt dingin it doon
An they say that the haar'll be driftin in soon.

In 2014 the Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA) brought in the Scots Language Award and I Iowped at the chance to offer it to seniors as an elective course run in the Faculty of Humanities. Seven gallus souls took the plunge, and numbers have since built up to around 135 pupils choosing Scots throughout the different stages of school. The award consists of two units: (1) History and Development of Scots – including the factors influencing Scots from early days to present, reasons for links with other languages, linguistic features, and contemporary use; (2) Understanding and Communicating – reading and interpreting Scots texts and creating written and oral communications in Scots. One of the appeals of the Award is its flexibility, as it can be tailored to pupil interests and can explore the dialects of Scots used in the community, whether the school is in the north-east of Scotland, where Doric is spoken, in Shetland and Orkney with their own distinct

dialects, the south-east where Borders Scots is spoken, Galloway, Ayrshire, Fife, Lothian, Angus and many others.



As far as texts go, literary works, poetry, journalism, graphic novels and non-fiction can be explored. The range of materials in Scots is growing by the day, including works by renowned writers from across the centuries – from John Barbour in the fourteenth century to William Dunbar and Gavin Douglas in the sixteenth; from Robert Fergusson, Robert Burns and Robert Louis Stevenson through to twentieth-century works by Hugh MacDiarmid, Edwin Muir, Norman MacCaig, Alasdair Gray, Liz Lochhead, Tom Leonard, James Kelman, Rona Munro and Anne Donovon. There are also contemporary publishing companies such as Itchy Coo, which offers both original works and translations of children's books into Scots. Examples include Roald Dahl books such as *The Eejits*, *Chairlie an the Chocolate Wirks*, *Geordie's Mingin Medicine* and *Sleekit Mr Tod*, as well as J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stane* and Jeff Kinney's *Diary of a Wimpy Wean*.

For an anthology of Scots works, Matthew Fitt and James Robertson's *The Smoky Smirr o Rain*[6] covers a huge range of thematically arranged Scots poetry and

prose, from medieval poems in older and mid Scots to works from the modern day. Bairns love having a go at decoding Middle Scots and have attempted to translate verses from Barbour's *The Bruce* among others. Alan Riach's *Scottish Literature: An Introduction*[7] provides a definitive guide to the literature of the land, with just the right amount of information for discovery and further learning on authors and works through the sweep of history. The Association for Scottish Literature also has an excellent series of Teaching Notes, guiding folk through a myriad of Scottish texts. Film clips, graphic novels and contemporary plays are available from the Scots Hoose website.

The understanding and communicating unit of the SQA Award requires an analysis of the purpose and audience of texts, their main ideas and supporting details, and applied knowledge and understanding of Scots to explain meaning and effect of the text. For the creative part, pupils have to produce a detailed communication in Scots for a specific purpose and audience and are required to apply detailed knowledge and understanding of Scots to communicate the meaning. Examples at different outcome levels include: to investigate the rich panoply of weather words to create and present a detailed weather forecast in Scots; to write a letter to someone explaining something challenging that happened to you; to compose an apocalyptic film script using as a stimulus Robert Louis Stevenson's poem 'The Maker to Posterity'.

> *'What tongue does your auld bookie speak?*
> *He'll spier; an' I, his mou to steik:*
> *'No bein' fit to write in Greek,*
> *I wrote in Lallan,*
> *Dear to my heart as the peat reek,*
> *Auld as Tantallon.*
>
> *'Few spak it then, an' noo there's nane.*
> *My puir auld sangs lie a' their lane,*
> *Their sense, that aince was braw an' plain,*
> *Tint a'thegether,*
> *Like runes upon a standin' stane*
> *Amang the heather.*

You would hope that RLS would be heartened that Scots – dear to his heart as the

peat reek and Auld as Tantallon – rather than being tint a'thegether, is, over a century later, being broadcast globally on TikTok through the Scots poetry of Len Pennie and her contemporaries.

Scots learning lends itself to interdisciplinarity. As a Geography teacher, I have focused blocks of the Scots language work on landscape, weather, planets, farming, fishing and language. Scots words abound on maps of the local area and their etymologies (often Gaelic, older Scots or Old Norse in origin) reveal meanings which bring familiar placenames alive. Words such as glen, knock, brae, ben, knowe, ness, carse, mire, haugh, heugh and shank describe landscape features and their meanings can be explored. Places allow pupils to discover meaning and to imagine how people in the past were thinking – for example Bloodymire, which refers to the boggy site of battles between the Scots and Danes; the street-name Gowden Knowes, which relates to wheat fields on the hillocks and fields down to the shore; the village Shank of Barry, which refers to a ridge of land. Pupils then become map detectives. Building on the new knowledge, they create a large display that includes an imaginary island littered with newly crafted names made up of descriptive Scots words, a full description of their island in Doric, and road signs using the local, rather than official, names of places (e.g. the village of Aberchirder is known locally as Foggie, the village of Gardenstown is known locally as Gamrie, Fraserburgh is called The Broch and Peterhead is The Bloo Toon.) Who wouldn't want to visit this youngster's island, ably described in this extract of her tour guide:

> *Ye will be far fae disappyntit fan you visit ess wee island. A wee boatie will drap ye aff at the herbour. Feel free tae bring yer dookers an ging for a sweem wi the locals. Mind yersel though, it'll be fair baltic. Gin ye heed up tae Bowies Beach da be feart o the bourachie o selkies. The wee beasties will jist be sunbathin in o the birslin sun. Nae far fae ess, aifter a wander, ye'll fin yersel inaboot the 'Broon Bens'. If yer feeling up til it, pit on a wooly toorie, watterproof jaicket, an mak yer way richt up tae i tap. It'll be blaan a right bleester, so be prepared. Doon fae ess is a shimmerin blae lochan ye can dip yer taes in o. A short dander east will tak ye tae 'Wee Broon Toon'. In o ess toon er's a café. Tak yer pick fae onything fae a saasage bap, a rowie or the hale jing bang. The toonsers will yap tae ye aa day – you'll ging deef wi'it. The Toon Hall is a puckle distance awa. Ess is far meetings are held, pairties ging aheed an fowk hae fun. Conveniently a shoppie is close, tae dae yer errins. They tak baith*

> *siller an bunk caird. Watergaw Village, is a skyrie wee place, nae muckle fowk there though. Some would say a visit nae worth a docken. Noo, fit iver you do, dinna ging near the 'Dire Mire' or you'll get stuck or even worse faa on o yer erse.*

One of the keys to success, it seems to me, is to engage in partnerships and projects not just in school but in the local and national community. One example was our partnership with Aberdeen University's Elphinstone Institute, which specialises in folklore, culture, and language of the north-east of Scotland. We collaborated on a year-long research project in which PhD student Claire Needler spent a year accompanying the Scots Language class, exploring the bairns' attitudes to Scots. The findings then fed into the learning in a symbiotic way. One of the major outputs was a week-long school-wide Scots language awareness project, in collaboration with a community arts company called Caged Beastie. Using a collaborative learning approach, pupils created three main outputs: a travelling exhibition of favourite and meaningful Scots words and photos; a booklet in Scots on how to do ethnographic research; and a catalogue of teachers' favourite Scots words, their meanings, what they meant to the teacher, and their etymologies.[8] Each teacher put up a large poster of their word outside their classroom for a week, prompting questions from all pupils going in and out of their rooms throughout the week and creating a buzz around the language. The picture boards made a permanent home in the school's conference room, and signs in Doric around the school remained, for example 'Jannies' Neuk', and 'Come awa ben' as a welcome to the library. An official report was also produced for the British Education Research Association,[9] as well as a book chapter looking at transformative pedagogy with home language.[10] Partnerships are an excellent way to promote Scots, and we have also worked with organisations such as Education Scotland, Scots Radio, the Scots Language Centre, the Scottish Qualification Authority and Historic Environment Scotland, notably recently with youngsters as Scots voice actors for an upcoming audio tour of Linlithgow Palace.

But what are the benefits to doing Scots at school? Having provided pupils with an opportunity to engage with Scots at Banff Academy, it has become clear that

there are significant benefits for self-esteem, literacy, inclusion, and cultural knowledge. Code-switching between Scots and English is a significant ability, bilingualism in fact, and when pupils are made aware of their linguistic skills, they can take more control and make conscious decisions about which they want to speak and write in different situations. The main message is that being bilingual is good not bad and should be celebrated and given opportunities to flex its muscles. Self-esteem is particularly important, and we have found that pupils for whom Scots is their first language can blossom when given permission to create pieces in Doric. I have seen the glee on pupils faces as they declare 'I can dee this!' perhaps for the first time at school. Over lockdown some pupils wrote up to six pages of text in Doric as a retelling of a story on an audio clip, glad of the opportunity to express themselves in their mother tongue, and perhaps writing more than they would in English. One pupil, unprompted, wrote the History and Development of Scots essay in Doric. When asked why she did that, she replied 'it was in ma heid'. I discovered that another pupil had a gift at writing stories in Scots. A very quiet pupil, he continued to supply me with stories unprompted, much to my delight, and when we got a particularly spooky and gruesome tale in broad Doric printed in Aberdeen University's newspaper, his beaming smile said it all. I have found that engaging with Scots enables inclusion for many pupils, a space where they can thrive.

But what of the future? How can we improve the place of Scots language and literature in our schools? In a busy curriculum it is hard to establish new subjects and there is still some way to go before studying Scots is universally seen as a worthwhile thing to do by teachers and leaders across Scotland. But that is frankly no excuse for denying pupils their rights to engage with their mither tongue and the opportunity to engage with the literature and linguistic history of their own land. Mak the curriculum busy wi Scots! The flexibility of the Scots Language Award means that there are opportunities to complete it in different departments of a school. The understanding and communication unit sits comfortably within the current English curriculum, the History and Development unit can be taught in the Humanities (Geography, History, Modern Studies and RMPS) and some schools bed it in the Languages Department. Banff Academy is moving increasingly towards teaching through Project Based Learning, and Scots lends itself to this kind of interdisciplinary approach, with a driving question, an immersion event (such as a visit, film or trip), a period of research to establish the knowledge needed, and the production in terms of a product which has relevance

to the local community or outside partners. Imagine an eight-week project answering the driving question ‘How can young people promote Scots poetry and stories in the local community?’ Pupils could investigate historical and contemporary literature and local authors and create an exhibition, or a presentation of their own creative work inspired by what they found. The school is also basing learning around key skills and attributes such as confidence, resilience, communication, creativity, problem solving, emotional intelligence, digital literacy, and teamwork. Without exception these all feed into Scots language learning. For problem solving, what about asking bairns how we address the question of standardisation of Scots language? They may have some good answers!

In Humanities we continue with the senior Scots Language class of twenty-five to thirty bairns, and, in an innovative move, third year secondary pupils, who are required to study a modern language, can choose Scots in the mix. In the first year we offered it, two out of seven classes opted for Scots, the second year three out of seven, and this year four out of seven – numbers-wise, this means 110 pupils want to do Scots. This will provide the progression for Scots language that has hitherto not been available in secondary school, laying foundations for a pathway of study from early years to tertiary and beyond.

More classes studying Scots has created the demand for Scots teachers. I’m delighted that, following some years being a lone voice, I now have a group of eight teachers confident enough to take on S3 Scots classes, as youngsters continue to vote with their feet and take Scots. I set up a collaborative group on Scots in the school, meeting weekly. We were then asked to pilot a brand-new Open University Professional Learning Scots course for teachers, with tutors Sylvia Warnecke (OU) and Bruce Eunson (Education Scotland). This course is a serious sixty-hour Scots Language and Culture course, with seven units covering Scots in the school context, the educational benefits, Scots in primary and the junior school, Scots and social studies at secondary, literature and creative writing, creativity and the expressive arts, and Scots as a language learning option in schools. My personal favourite, which I found inspiring, was a unit on expressive arts written by Gerda Stevenson, based around her poetry work *Quines*, and a tapestry project by artists inspired by the poems, written in Scots, English and Gaelic, from the point of view and in the voice of significant but oft neglected women in Scotland’s history. One of the best aspects of the course is

the electronic forum where teachers share ideas and compare what they have tried out with classes. Each unit has an application task to try with youngsters, which is shared on the forum, and a professional recognition task, which is assessed by the tutors. Regular tutorials further enable the discussion. We all felt a real sense of achievement when we completed the course, which took an academic year, and it gave all the participating teachers a real confidence boost and a green light for their Scots teaching. Given the prejudice which we have to accept has dogged Scots learning in schools, this is a big step forward. When the course becomes available to teachers after the summer holidays in 2023, I would thoroughly recommend that teachers do it, whether they be working in primary, early years, secondary or any subject in school. Successful completion gives teachers official professional recognition by the General Teaching Council of Scotland. You have no idea how brilliant it is to be an officially recognised Scots teacher – of course, big badges were made and are worn with pride! We can move forward confidently from here. It's been quite a decade, and the most important thing is that it has been fun: fun for the bairns, and fun for the rest of us. A'm fair tricket!

(c) The Bottle Imp