1 + 2 = Free...?

Hilary McColl

Independent Consultant

Abstract: The author suggests that the recently proposed 1+2 strategy for language learning provides an opportunity now to move forward with the long-proposed agenda to strengthen provision for the wide range of 'home' languages used in Scotland. Such a strategy, if resourced and supported, would create a continuum of linguistic skills that reflects the expanding social awareness and communication needs of the growing child. Such a move is in line with the principles of Curriculum for Excellence, and the draft Strategy for Scotland's Languages. It would also provide educational support for national social priorities and would confirm the contribution that Modern Languages can make to everyday life in this country.

Keywords: Scotland, language policy, Curriculum for Excellence

Introduction

… Free, that is, to explore new ways of making provision for language learning in our schools?

In his keynote speech at the SCILT Conference (8 June 2011) Dr Alasdair Allan, then Minister for Learning and Skills for the Scottish Government, spoke of "… our manifest commitment to introduce a new norm for language learning in Scotland based on the European 1 + 2 model – that is, we will create the conditions in which every child will learn two languages in addition to their own mother tongue."[1]

This model, he said

> … includes experience of language learning not just in terms of European languages, but also acknowledges the diversity of languages that we find across modern Scotland. Our task now [would be to develop] a languages plan that encourages cultural and linguistic diversity whilst promoting multilingualism.

Dr Allan also acknowledged that "language teaching has to fight for its place in a busy curriculum." - So how do we ensure that our plans include opportunities for 'each child' to receive tuition in L1 + L2 + L3 when we have recently struggled to ensure that as many as possible received tuition in L2, and when a few never got beyond L1?
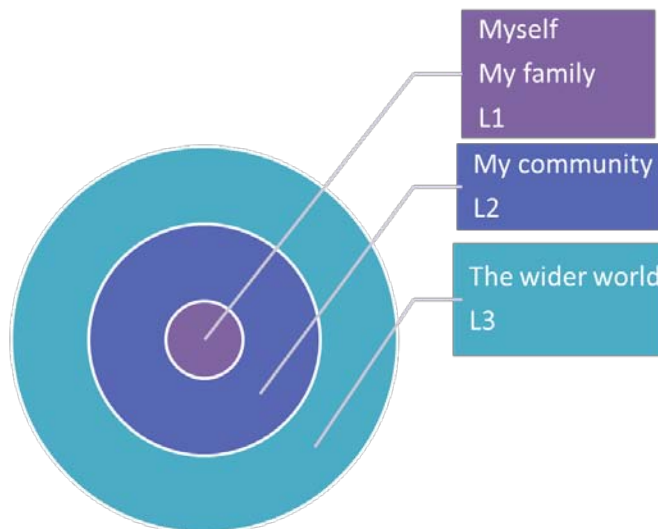
Fortunately, the Curriculum for Excellence policy suggests some possible strategies. It uses words like 'flexibility', 'choice', 'individualisation', 'personal learning skills', 'engagement', 'partnership', 'collaboration', and proposes these as ways of developing

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[1] This was reiterated by First Minister Alex Salmond on 7th September 2011

young people's skills so that they become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.

It might help to think of all this in terms of individual young people, whose personal development reflects gradually widening social experiences, each of which could, in theory, at least, be linked to expanding linguistic competences (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

For each young person, of course, the languages designated as L1, L2 and L3, and the timing and order of their introduction, would be determined by their personal circumstances and the availability of suitable staffing and resources.

Opportunities and challenges

L1 (mother tongue): For the majority of our young people L1 is likely to be English, but for others it may be Gaelic, Scots, British Sign Language (BSL)[2] or other language used at home, perhaps by recent incomers from abroad. The child would first be exposed to the language at home and take the first crucial steps towards the ability to communicate. At school (or perhaps, for some, elsewhere) the child would be entitled to provision that would allow him/her to become articulate and literate in their L1 .[3]

L2 (second language): In theory, L2 would consist of the same range of languages as for L1, but there are likely to be some constraints. For those children whose L1 is not English, English must be considered their main communication need. For those whose L1 is English, selection of L2 would be determined by the languages used by significant

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[2] A BSL Bill is scheduled to go before MSPs in Spring 2012, and SQA is finalising arrangements for National Qualifications in BSL. A BSL Bill is scheduled to go before MSPs in Spring 2012, and SQA is finalising arrangements for National Qualifications in BSL.

[3] At the moment, tuition in L1 in is guaranteed only for those whose L1 is English. For children whose L1 is not English, language tuition is patchy or non-existent.

others (family, friends, school) in the child's immediate community. Early provision of L2 would allow each young person to engage more effectively with the local community and lay the groundwork for an appreciation of the social potential of knowing another language. Since the language chosen as L2 would be in use in the local community there would be ample opportunities to practise. Children brought up in bilingual homes may still need additional tuition to become literate in both languages.

Resourcing L2 would be a further constraint. This major new element could not be delivered immediately or with current staffing and resources. Partnerships between the school and the local community, training for potential tutors, enhancement of the role of EAL staff, development of suitable materials and assessment models – all would need time for development. But a start is already being made and the adoption of a formal strategy, together with associated case studies, would help.

L3 (third language): Study of a third, this time most likely 'foreign', language would introduce learners to a wider world and prepare them for adult life in which knowledge of at least two languages would be a distinct personal advantage for work and leisure. The arguments here are well rehearsed. For the first time, though, the language is not represented in the local community, so digital resources that allow communication at a distance become the natural means of engagement. Learning how to learn a language that is not represented in the local community becomes important too, especially for those who may go on to add more world languages to their expanding repertoire. Developing skills for independent language learning becomes a vital component of each student's progress towards personal effectiveness.

This model of L1 + L2 + L3 (+ more) (see Table 1) looks like a neat, logical progression, but in practice the languages will sometimes run concurrently, or overlap, or be introduced in a different order, at different levels or at different times. And of course the same language might be L1 for some children and L2 for others. Some community languages are also world languages. Some children will already be bilingual when they arrive at school. Schools will be able to provide for only a few of the wide range of options this model will create, but those options will be relevant to the context in which they are offered.

Some possible scenarios

John speaks English at home and at school (L1). He learns to read and write English in primary school and grows in competence as he moves through his schooling. Several of his friends are members of a different ethnic group who speak their own mother tongue at home and amongst themselves. John picks up some of their language through social interaction and also has an opportunity to receive some formal tuition in the language (L2). In Primary 6[4], or perhaps earlier, John begins to learn his first foreign language (L3). If he does well he will have an opportunity to add other languages to his repertoire as he moves though secondary school and beyond.

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[4] Year 5/6 in England/Wales or Primary 7 in Northern Ireland

Table 1

L1	L2	L3, L4…
Home language/ Mother tongue	**Community or social language**	**European or other world language(s)**
English

Gàidhlig

British Sign Language

other language | Gaelic

BSL

EAL –> English

other language relevant to local communities | French, German, Spanish, Italian

Russian, Cantonese, Mandarin, Japanese

other world language spoken in the community |
| The primacy of English is recognised

Language learning would normally be progressive and cumulative, though there may be individual exceptions | | |

Mhairi's family speak Gaelic at home (L1) and English outside the home (L2). Mhairi goes into Gaelic Medium Education where she receives formal tuition in both Gaelic and English. In P6 or thereabouts, she begins to learn her first foreign language. By this time she is already bilingual, so she picks up L3 quite easily.

Karen is profoundly deaf but her parents are hearing and so English is the main language spoken at home. Karen's parents receive some tuition in BSL so that they can communicate with their daughter from a very early age, so Karen's L1 is BSL. It takes her a long time to learn English, since she can't hear it spoken, and when she goes to school she finds it very difficult to learn to read and write in the language (L2). Karen goes to a mainstream school where she receives support from a Teacher of the Deaf and an Assistant who can sign for her when she has difficulty following the lessons. Karen's classmates, who are hearing, use English most of the time (L1), but are learning BSL with the Assistant (L2) so that they can communicate effectively with their friend. Later, if they wish, they will be able to gain formal qualifications in BSL, just as in their other languages (L3/L4 etc.)

Sharif's family came to Scotland quite recently and they speak their own language at home (L1). Although Sharif is picking up 'social' English (L2) quite quickly from his class mates, he needs some specialised help for a while (EAL) to improve his ability to follow the lessons and learn. When he is ready he follows English classes like the rest of his classmates. Since he didn't go to school before coming to Scotland, Sharif needs some help with reading and writing in his first language too. For this, he goes to lessons on a Saturday at the Community Centre and practises at home with his uncle. Later, if he does well, and if he wishes, he will be able to gain SQA qualifications in his first language as well as in those subsequently acquired.

So what are the advantages? There are, of course many advantages to language learning and the arguments in favour have been well rehearsed. In this context it may be worth revisiting three of them: skills development, social cohesion, and employment.

Skills development – For both pupils and teachers

Pupils will need to take more responsibility for their language learning, making use of resources in the family, community and online. They will need opportunities to learn how to learn a language, how to work co-operatively with fellow learners and adults outwith the school community, and to use digital media to communicate with speakers of other languages. They will become aware, perhaps earlier than at present, of the diversity within our own communities and become comfortable and competent in their relationships with other members of the community who have different linguistic priorities. This should have a beneficial effect on their language learning generally, preparing them to make rapid progress in their L3 and any subsequent languages. Teachers will become more involved in professional partnerships, in co-operative teaching and in supporting independent learners.

Multilingualism and social cohesion

In 2000, the Ministerial Action Group on Languages, in a discussion on why languages are important, included social inclusion, citizenship and democracy amongst the benefits, considering that:

> …education in languages at school has an essential role to play in preparing all students for citizenship of the wider society. If it helps them to become sensitive to the languages and cultures of others and develops in them sufficient confidence and competence to be able to use their languages, however modestly, in their interactions with other citizens, then we believe they are more likely to understand others and to be respected by them. In this way the wider society becomes more open, democratic and inclusive." (SEED, 2000:13)

Using the 1+ 2 model, we have the freedom and the flexibility, if we wish, to introduce a local, social element into language learning, so that language learning becomes not just something 'out there' that our students may one day need in their work (or not), but can be seen as a continuum, equipping them with the ability to communicate effectively here and now, in our home communities. Languages can contribute to good citizenship in Scotland as well as abroad. Multilingualism and multiculturalism can become the accepted norm.

Employability

In 2002 Scottish CILT undertook a literature review for the then Scottish Executive, the purpose of which was to look at research, policy and practice relating to translating, interpreting and communication support services across the public sector in Scotland. One of their key findings was that although social inclusion has been placed at the

centre of policy making in Scotland, little thought had been given to the implications for staffing translation, interpreting and communication support (McPake et.al., 2002):

> We see a need for the employment of many more bilingual workers than exist currently in Scotland…. Most people brought up in bilingual families in Scotland will be fluent in another language in terms of informal social conversation skills… [but] few will have developed the specialised vocabulary relating to their professional field. (ibid: 57)

> If communities are to be empowered to contribute to the pool of qualified translators, interpreters and communicators, or service providers capable of communicating with clients from minority communities, action required would include making changes in educational policy that will allow potentially useful skills to be nurtured by the educational system. (ibid: 25)

> In considering the way in which translation, interpretation and communication support services are to be developed, an essential component of policy development must surely be the formulation of a 'cradle-to-grave' language and communication policy which is robust enough to support national objectives. (ibid: 26)

Free to make progress?

The idea that home languages might be considered worthy of further study is not new (see, for example SEED, 2000; Lo Bianco, 2001; McPake, 2006). Dr Allan, in his speech, mentioned the success of Gaelic Medium Education (GME). He could also have mentioned Dingwall Academy where hearing pupils are set to gain qualifications in BSL No doubt there are other schools doing innovative things with community languages too. But tuition in home languages is not yet widespread. The recently announced focus on language learning in the Australian curriculum may provide inspiration:

> The curriculum will provide, where appropriate, different learning pathways for students: second language learners, for students studying a second language in addition to their native language; background language learners, for students who have a background or family heritage in the language studied; and first language learners, for students who are native speakers of the language studied. (Garrett, 2011)

Perhaps now, with the current levels of support and encouragement, we too have the freedom and the opportunity to begin to make progress. Perhaps now is the time to demonstrate that the benefits modern languages teaching can provide are relevant and important for every child, here and now, in their present as well as in their future lives.

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