Modern languages and inclusion in the context of Scotland's 1+2 language policy

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Abstract: In 2012, the Scottish Government published a policy document entitled 'Language Learning in Scotland: A 1+2 Approach'. By 2020, conditions should be in place that will allow all children in Scotland to learn an additional language to their mother tongue from the first year of primary school and a second additional language from Primary 5 at the latest. In conjunction with this, the Scottish Government has expressed its commitment to equality of access to all aspects of education for students with Additional Support Needs. This article discusses equality of access to modern languages education for all students and looks at changes in thinking about who should be included in language lessons. The author argues that policies relating to modern languages education in Scotland need to be refined in order to help all teachers to develop good practice and strategies to ensure that language learning is fully inclusive.

Keywords: ASN, modern languages, entitlement, inclusion, Scotland, Corseford School

Introduction

The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO 1994) was one of the seminal developments and stated that education for all is necessary, in all schools, in all societies and countries. In Scotland, the Additional Support for Learning Act (Scottish Parliament, 2004, amended 2009) introduced the term Additional Support Needs (ASN). It defined Additional Support Needs as factors that would impact on a student's ability to benefit from education if they were not supported. Notions of equality and entitlement are further reinforced by key pieces of legislation such as The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act (Scottish Parliament, 2014), The Equality Act (UK Parliament, 2010) and by guidance documents such as GIRFEC (Getting It Right for Every Child; Scottish Government, online). Arguably then, the framework to ensure that students with additional needs are able to access the whole curriculum is in place. However, I am not sure as to whether this is consistently happening. In my own previous experience as ASN teacher, inclusion and mainstream class teacher I have seen students with ASN routinely excluded from lessons deemed unsuitable for them. Commonly cited reasons include behavioural difficulties and 'already struggling enough with English'. In contrast, a report by the European Commission (2005: 37) quoted the following statement by a Scottish HM Inspector of Education:

Pupils with specific learning difficulties or special educational needs can benefit greatly from studying a modern language. There should be no assumption that such pupils will be excluded from learning a second language.

I am aware of good practice happening in some Scottish schools at the moment. However, a move towards a universal understanding of why and how to include students with ASNs in ML lessons is arguably required.

Personal Experience

Corseford School in Renfrewshire is a grant-aided special school run by Capability Scotland that caters for students with complex learning, physical, language and health needs aged 5-18. When I arrived at the school and my role was negotiated it was worked out that teaching of Spanish across the school was to be a significant part of it. Previously I had worked in Spain as a nursery and P2/3 teacher, therefore I could speak some Spanish. Despite being in ASN for 16 years, this was a huge learning curve for me. I wondered how on earth I would teach an additional language to students who use alternative communication forms! Commonly referred to as AAC (Alternative and Augmentative Communication), these systems allow those with communication difficulties to express themselves through alternative methods such as picture symbols, voice output communication aids and even eye-gaze technology. Despite my commitment to equality of access to the curriculum, I started to doubt my own skills. I was about to be amazed by the hard work and determination of our students and the sheer dedication and skill of the staff team that support them here at Corseford! Through getting to know the students as individuals and adapting lessons and materials to meet their needs we developed Spanish as part of everyday school life and have never looked back. However, whether this approach is universal remains to be seen. In a critical review of research and policy relating to disabled children, Stalker & Moscardini (2012) argued that despite Scotland's commitment to inclusion, children with disabilities do not always receive the same opportunities to participate in all areas of the curriculum as their peers. In terms of Modern Languages education, some researchers have argued that students with additional support needs are more likely to be excluded from lessons. Wight (2015) noted that the likelihood of being excluded from ML lessons was higher for students with disabilities. My own belief is that the real picture of what is happening in ML for students with ASN needs to be elucidated, particularly with the advent of 1+2. A report by the European and External Relations Committee (Scottish Parliament, 2013) on language learning in primary schools argued that students with ASN have been insufficiently considered during the planning and implementation of the 1+2 initiative in Scotland. Furthermore it suggested that an assessment of the impact for those students must be considered.

Research on Modern Languages and ASN

Previous researchers have given credence to this and argued that there is not enough research on the relationship between ASN and ML education. Abrams (2008) highlighted the 'extremely limited' research on this subject. In Scotland, following on from McColl's work (e.g. McColl 2005), the current, up to date picture in light of political developments such as the 1+2 approach needs to be considered. While the benefits of learning additional languages have been spelt out in the Modern Languages Excellence Report

(SCILT, 2011), little appears to be known about whether all students undertaking their broad general education in Scotland are enjoying language learning. In Scotland, all children are entitled to learn a modern language during their broad general education. Questions now need to be asked to how this entitlement translates into practice and in cases where exemption has occurred, why is this? Is the decision an individual one? Up to now, these questions have been difficult to address due to lack of available data on the matter. It is difficult to find statements about equality of entitlement for students with ASN within policy and guidance relating to the 1+2 approach. For example, in the Ministerial Working Party's report on 1+2 to the Scottish Government report (Scottish Government 2012) the section on equality only pertains to areas of social deprivation. Whilst social deprivation and poverty are contributing factors, they do not accurately reflect all additional support needs in Scotland. Children with disabilities are not mentioned. Riddell & Weedon (2014) refer to Scottish social policy discourse in relation to children with ASN. They define Additional Support Needs as resulting from ' a range of factors including social, sensory, physical or cognitive difficulties ' (Riddell & Weedon, 2014, p.364) Arguably failure to specifically mention students with ASN and how they fit into the picture risk omissions in practice and misunderstandings.

The intention by the authors of the 2005 European Commission report was that all young people, regardless of disability should have equality of access to ML education. Their findings indicated that only between 50 and 70% of children with special needs were receiving this, setting dependant. Therefore the authors wanted to offer advice and guidance on making ML education accessible to more learners with special needs. Unfortunately, there seems to be a lack of current research that examines whether this has been achieved in Scotland. The Ministerial Working Party's 1+2 report (Scottish Government 2012: 20) stated that 'language learning [needs to] be recognised as an entitlement for all young people through to the end of their broad general education (S1-S3)

However, actual practice on the ground still needs to be addressed in light of these recommendations. Arguably, once data has been gained on the current picture, some guidance is required to help teachers to include all students in ML lessons. As yet, this does not appear to have happened. Teachers are presented with a wide range of needs and circumstances daily. Building the Curriculum 3 (Scottish Government, 2008) states that the learning experience should be personalised and suited to the needs of every child. However, as Hamill and Clark (2005) argued previously, planning and delivering a curriculum that includes meaningful learning experiences for all children takes a great deal of skill. This implies that policy implementation needs to be thought through in relation to actual practice a little more carefully, including what teachers' understanding of inclusion really is and how best to include students with ASN in ML lessons. As part of the implementation process of 1+2, in mainstream primary schools in particular, teachers are having to contend with learning and teaching new languages, which can seem daunting to those with little experience in the subject. In addition to this they are managing increasingly inclusive classrooms (Doran 2012). These two developments mean that significant changes need to be made to practice and arguably guidance is

needed to reflect this. Any school may theoretically be able to argue that ASN students are included in lessons, however, being included is so much more than being present in a classroom during a lesson. The distinction needs to be clear- taking part and having resources that allow you to participate effectively accessible to you (SCILT, 2015) means that you are fully included. This may be a new way of working for some teachers in Scotland. In my view, staff development must be considered to ensure that all teachers feel comfortable in creating inclusive environments for all students in all lessons.

Edgin et al (2011) argued that the social benefits of learning an additional language outweighed any effort required for students with Down Syndrome during a ML project. Indeed, the bulk of research appears to give credence to this notion (SCILT, 2011). Wight (2015) cites Sparks and Javorsky (2002) who argue that students with learning disabilities do not necessarily have any more difficulties in learning languages than their peers. This is especially true if resources and methodologies are adapted to meet the needs of different learners. Historically, ML education has been seen as more suited to students who are academically able (SCILT, 2011) perhaps due to the perceived language demands of the subject. Skinner & Smith (2011) argue that these notions are 'antiquated'. In addition, according to Wight (2015), much research reports on the arguable misconception that ML learning may be too difficult for those with ASN.

Examples of good practice at Corseford School and elsewhere

In my own experience I have been amazed at the ability of our students not only to participate in lessons but retain language learnt and use it functionally.

At Corseford we do not want our students to simply be able to reel off a string of vocabulary in Spanish or in Gaelic, which is our L3. We want much more for them than that. The learning of an additional language is first and foremost embedded in culture and we always begin with this to ensure that our students become 'responsible, global citizens who value diversity and who demonstrate tolerance, respect and understanding of other countries and cultures' (SCILT, 2011: 6). Indeed, for some of our students learning Spanish may purely involve a sensory experience with Spanish-related objects and sounds of the language. For others though, we are working at age-appropriate level and beyond. Something even I doubted was possible in the beginning. My own misconceptions have been well and truly driven away.

Last year Corseford was honoured to receive the 2015 Education Scotland Award for Languages. At Corseford I teach Spanish as our L2 and use a range of adapted methodologies to make ML accessible to all students. In addition to this, we have recently introduced Scottish Gaelic as our L3. The school featured as a recent case study (SCILT, 2015), which highlighted that inclusive pedagogies are being used to help young people to access Spanish and in some cases achieve recognised qualifications at National 1 and 2 levels. Corseford has integrated Spanish into the daily life and culture of the school. Whole school events are held such as a Spanish café and a sensory theatre trip to Spain in which all students are included. Technology such as interactive screens,

communication devices and a digital sensory theatre are used to bring learning to life for the students.

At Corseford we make resources accessible to children with complex needs by utilising technology and reducing the environmental barriers to learning that can be an issue for those with disabilities. Methodology has been adapted to include multi-sensory experiences. These are cited by researchers as a way of ensuring that students with ASN can access learning in ML lessons (Wilson, 2011). These types of activities make sure that students are able to actively engage with lessons, so that no student should feel excluded because activities do not meet their needs. Key to this is planning in advance in order to allow our highly skilled staff team to programme vocabulary into communication aids for the upcoming term. Learning is also reinforced with Boardmaker symbols, puppets and practical activities.

Increased publicity through organisations such as Education Scotland and SCILT has seen an increase in examples of existing practice highlighted on websites and in publications. Most of these are related to practice with mainstream students, but one or two have also highlighted inclusive methodologies, such as the case study of St Roch's Secondary School in Glasgow (SCILT, 2011). This project involved students with low motivation and who were deemed to have limited resilience. During the project these students undertook a skills-based interdisciplinary learning project in French based on food, music, cafes and currency. The project involved confidence building and utilised external business partners to develop skills and the confidence to use them in the ML. Through this approach to learning a ML the students appeared more motivated and developed skills in a contextualised, relevant, interdisciplinary environment. As previously mentioned, language learning is so much more than learning lists of vocabulary. It is intertwined with culture, citizenship and tolerance.

Characteristics of inclusive practice

Common to both of these cases, as well as being inclusive of ASN, is the fact that learning a language is achieved through innovative methodologies. Wilson (2011) lists important points to consider when making ML lessons accessible to all learners. These include 'multisensory approaches, structured and explicit content, over- learning of key points and praise and reward' (Wilson, 2011). Skinner & Smith (2011: page ref) make similar suggestions. They argue that the following accommodations can increase motivation and positivity amongst ML learners with learning disabilities:

- Highly structured instruction

- Multi-sensory approaches

- Frequent review and repetition

- Familiar instructor

- Positive class climate

Wight (2015) highlights ML education as an opportunity to become more aware of one's own language and culture and compare it with that of other countries. Wight argues that learners will have increased opportunities to critically consider the world that we live in and become more accepting of others. For students with disabilities these developments could potentially be life enhancing. In light of this, I would argue that there is rarely a valid reason for exclusion or exemption from ML lessons. There are benefits to be had for every student. However, there may be the occasional exception to this statement which should be decided on a case-by-case basis. It is pleasing to note that one or two examples of good practice relating to ASN and inclusion are beginning to appear. It is hoped that these will forge the way for ML for all to become the norm. However, including students of differing abilities in ML lessons is one thing, but providing a meaningful learning experience that meets all of their needs is quite another. By including them in a class where they cannot participate to the best of their ability, we are arguably excluding them. This is why it is important to again reinforce the idea that teacher knowledge about a range of needs and methodologies is fundamental, along with the funding to allow for professional development as necessary.

Concluding Thoughts

What should success in ML education look like? In my view, it should not be measured by the amount of vocabulary one can recite, but by participation, enjoyment, knowledge of the culture of the language, amongst other things. I believe that it is critical that specialist and mainstream teachers have the opportunity to work together in order to facilitate ML learning for students with ASN and provide opportunities for both to learn from each other. Arguably, policy, strategy and funding to allow for this would be highly beneficial.

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