

Ensuring high quality learning opportunities in Gaelic-medium preschool: challenges and opportunities

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Three Studies

- 2008-9: *Review of Gaelic Medium Early Education and Childcare* (Scottish Government & Bòrd na Gàidhlig)
- 2010-11: *Young Children Learning in Gaelic* (British Academy)
- 2012: *Ar Stòiridh* (Scottish Funding Council & Stòrlann)

Research Team:

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Aims

Review

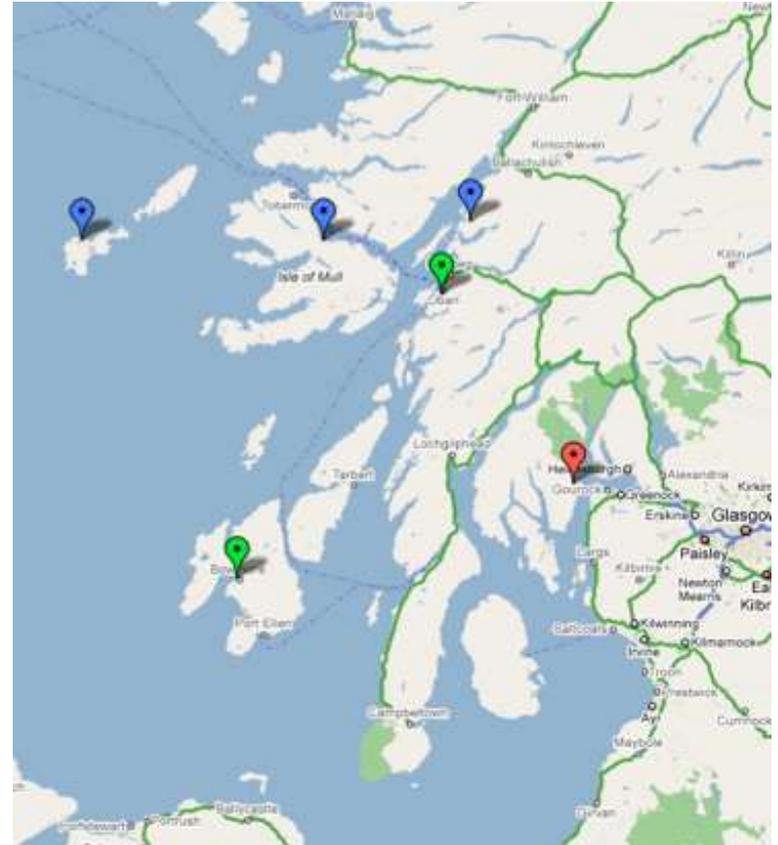
- To map the current extent of GM provision for early years education and childcare

Young Children

- To investigate the everyday experiences of children attending GM preschool settings

Ar Stòiridh

- To explore the potential of an iPad app to increase preschool children's opportunities to develop spoken Gaelic and early literacy



Key Questions

- How effective is Gaelic-medium pre-school provision at
 - meeting needs and stimulating demand
 - providing children with high quality preschool education, meeting all the expectations of *Curriculum for Excellence*?
 - ensuring that children are developing competence in the spoken language and early stages of literacy, enabling them to progress to GM primary education?
- How might current provision be enhanced?

Review Findings (1)

- 127 providers of preschool education & childcare (2009)
- More educational provision than childcare
- Provision clustered in particular areas
- Most children come from English speaking homes

Review findings (2)

- Use of Gaelic varies considerably between settings
- Recruiting staff is difficult
- Gaelic-medium preschool resources limited
- No initial & continuing professional education in Gaelic for early years or preschool immersion provision
- If demand for Gaelic-medium provision is to be increased need national promotion strategy

Young Children Findings (1)

- *Language children hear*
 - Gaelic in just over half of observations
- *Language children use*

English	No speech	Gaelic
65%	15%	19%
62%	30%	8%
52%	37%	13%

Use of Gaelic in the playroom

- Singing and story time most common engagement with Gaelic
- Child to child talk – English
- Common requests, polite phrases and language for routines understood in Gaelic and sometimes embedded in English
- Limited productive vocabulary
- Little evidence of metalinguistic awareness

Young Children Findings (2)

Learning experiences in Gaelic-medium playrooms

- Some areas of learning seldom observed
- Problem solving, exploring, questioning difficult for children learning Gaelic in the playroom
- Engagement varies with type of activity and language use
- When adults lead activities in Gaelic children often passive and easily distracted
- Talk is the dominant response mode in Gaelic-medium
- Planning driven by language targets as well as children's interests

Ar Stòiridh Findings

- The iPad can be a useful and highly flexible tool in Gaelic-medium playrooms
- Children enjoyed using it
- The app has potential to support the development of children's Gaelic language and early literacy skills
- Practitioners would benefit from professional development opportunities both to develop technical skills and devise ways of using the app effectively

Enhancing current provision

- Challenges
 - Language learning and teaching in preschool
 - Early Years pedagogy in Gaelic medium
- Strategies for blending language learning and early years pedagogies

Language education challenges

- What models of language learning and teaching are suitable for early years Gaelic-medium settings?
- How can we best support early literacy in Gaelic?
- What does it mean to be becoming bilingual at the age of 3 or 4 and how can practitioners support this?
- What cultural and identity issues are raised in the process of becoming a Gaelic speaker and how can these be explored in the playroom?
- What impact do – or should - language revitalisation policy goals have on pre-school practice?

Pedagogical challenges

How can we

- balance child-initiated and adult-initiated activities?
- provide opportunities to explore, problem solve, negotiate and reflect with responsive adults and peers in Gaelic-medium provision?
- create a playroom environment where language learning is authentic, responds to children's interests and their preferred ways of responding or interacting?

Blending pedagogies for Gaelic-medium preschool

- Tailor curriculum to reflect Gaelic culture and immersion learning experiences
- Use projects to capitalise on motivation and curiosity
- Find ways of ensuring more time is spent with adults and small groups of children
- Reflect with children about language learning and differences between languages
- Use technologies familiar to the children to extend the amount of Gaelic heard and vary response modes

Ensuring high quality in Gaelic-medium preschool

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