A COMPARISON OF SCOTTISH GAELIC EDUCATION

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This paper contrasts the government of Ontario's continuing neglect of Canada's traditional heritage languages, and as a case study, its neglect of Scottish Gaelic, by comparing educational regulations, guidelines, memorandums, and circulars directing Scottish Gaelic education in Ontario, to educational policies currently directing the instruction of this language in Nova Scotia and Scotland.

Scottish Gaelic has often been associated with part of the Canadian establishment; hence, its inclusion in the multicultural curriculum, like other valuable third languages, is historically justified. Every discussion of "Heritage Language" education, especially one involving something as uncommon as Scottish Gaelic, is incomplete without a public evaluation of why the Gaelic language should be a worthwhile cause to pursue in the public educational system.

Cet article montre la négligence continue du gouvernement de l'Ontario envers les langues de patrimoine traditionnelles du Canada, et comme un cas particulier, sa négligence du Gaélique, en comparant les arrêtés ministériels, les directives, les mémorandums et les circulaires administratifs réglant l'étude du Gaélique écossais en Ontario, aux principes gouvernant l'instruction de cette langue en Écosse et en Nouvelle-Écosse.

Le Gaélique écossais fait toujours partie dans la création du Canada; son inclusion au curriculum multiculturel, comme celle de toutes les autres langues tertiaires, est justifiée par l'histoire. Toute discussion sur l'enseignement des "Langues de patrimoine", surtout quand il s'agit d'une langue peu commune comme le Gaélique écossais, sera incomplète sans une évaluation du public reconnaissant les raisons qui justifient l'inclusion de l'enseignement d'une telle langue au système d'éducation.

The Justification for Scottish Gaelic Education in Canada

Language "is the backbone of our culture", and "being able to speak the language is, in itself, a source of personal enrichment for a child - through language [each child] has a better understanding of their cultural values and themselves" (Sursai, 1993). The study of a heritage language allows Canadians to

nourish their roots, and nurture their children, by allowing them to discover who they are, and what they have to offer to Canada. The culture of Scottish Gaelic, in particular, served as the root and basis of many parts of English Canada. Founding politicians, geographical explorers and traders and musical bards have claimed a Highland heritage. Highland Scots were prominent pioneers for much of the land and government which is called "Canada".

John A. Macdonald, William Lyon MacKenzie, and Alexander MacKenzie all contributed to the Upper Canadian legislative assembly, and the federal and provincial governments of Canada. Women legislators claiming a Gaelic heritage, such as Nellie McClung and Adelaide Hoodless, acted as catalysts for women's rights and their equal recognition within Canada. While some of these leaders may not have spoken Gaelic, all were raised in this cultural environment. It is this particular environment whose values we still protect today. For instance, long before North American, and British, women were allowed to vote, Gaelic Scots recognised the woman's contribution to society. Scottish highland women could inherit and hold property, enlist in wars and battles, remain single and raise a family alone if their spouse(s) died, and make local laws, and they were not socially condemned for taking lovers. Hence, these men and women contributed some of the basic utilitarian principles of the Gaelic culture to Canada: gender equity, and an established social justice.

Other Gaelic Scots contributing to Canada's founding were fur-traders and explorers such as Simon Fraser, Simon MacTavish, William MacGillivray and Sir Alexander MacKenzie, who opened up and settled Western Canada through increased trade and commerce with the Hudson's Bay and North West companies. This executive highland trade is the reason why many Canadians today live where they do. Lord Strathcona (one of the organisers of the Canadian Pacific Railway), also a Gael, expanded Canada through railway ties from the East to the West. And Scots such as Dr. Thomas McCulloch, precursor of responsible government in Nova Scotia, and Sir James Douglas, governor of the colony of British Columbia from 1858-1864, organized a working judicial system in the East and the West to protect the inhabitants, and, hence, formed the cornerstone of Eastern and Western Canada. It was Highland rather than English immigrants who originally settled these parts of Canada. This is one reason why Scottish Gaelic is justified as a course of study.

Much of the English-Canadian aesthetic culture is owed to Scottish Gaelic as well. A majority of the hymns sung in Presbyterian churches are Gaelic melodies, stemming from the lilting language. Much of the Canadian folk music stems from the Gaelic bardic tradition (Thomson, 1989) - Scottish Gaelic naturally lends itself to such harmonic tales, and if Italian is the language of opera, then Scottish Gaelic, through groups such as The Rankin Family and the Barra MacNeils, is a language of Canadian folk music.

Canadian-English linguistics and diction owe much of their content to Scottish Gaelic too, since cultural words like: bannock, bard, bog, clan, crag, crofter, glen, plaid, reel, slogan, and whisky have all been infused into English language by Gaelic language. (Oxford English Dictionary) Also, expressions of speech such as "cock- eye", "he sat on the fence when he should go the whole hog", "she has an axe to grind", and the familiar "Smashing!" (the Gaelic " 'S math sin", often mistaken to be of British origin) were derived from the Gaelic culture. Also part of this culture were familiar Canadian names such as "MacDonald", and "MacKenzie" ("son of" Kenzie). These words and phrases have all added a dash of colour to our national language of English.

The importance of maintaining a culture [and its values] which has added historical leaders, pioneers, and bards to Canada should be obvious; however, the Scottish Gaelic influence on the development of the country is perhaps so well known that it is often taken for granted, and overlooked. Mistakenly, Scottish Gaels are often grouped into a more general category called, "British". In this multicultural society, however, the British [the "English"] are considered to be among the "oppressors" of minority cultures, rather than one of the "oppressed" (whatever their numbers). Yet farming highlanders have suffered centuries of such class and language discrimination from the "English" [such as the highland clearances which drove many highlanders to Canada in the first place.] In this respect, Scottish Highland settlers have occupied a place in both the upper governing class structure of Canada's founders, and in the lower farming class structure which maintained and developed the land for its future use in Canada. This is a unique position for a culture - to simultaneously represent both a majority influence and a minority interest in Canadian affairs. Thus, Scottish Gaelic should not receive any less claim to the Heritage Language Program simply because it is mistakenly but generally associated with only the dominating group in Canada.

If the minority language of Scottish Gaelic had an influence on making Canada, then Scottish Gaelic, and the culture and ideals which are contained within it, will be needed for the continuing survival and re-structuring of multicultural Canada. After all, if you do not understand the basis behind that which you belong to, then where do you have left to go? The Scottish Gaelic language does have a legitimate claim to Canada's Heritage Language Program, particularly in Ontario and Nova Scotia which is reflected in Gaelic being one of over eighty Heritage Languages in Canada.

Curricular Policy in Ontario

Scottish Gaelic may have a claim to Ontario's Heritage Language program, but the Heritage language policy in Ontario is vital to the survival of the Gaelic culture. Neglect and suppression tends to result in the eventual

disappearance of rights which were once enjoyed by Scottish Gaelic and other very treasured languages. The change in educational language policy and bureaucratic obstacles may make access to Scottish Gaelic more difficult. The Ontario Ministry of Education, parental groups, and the dispersion of cultural groups in Ontario have created more obstacles to pass before a student can access an Ontario Heritage Language program.

Under the Ontario Legislative Assembly Bill 80 (1986), only twenty students were originally required to form a Heritage Language class [277 e.(2)] at the local level. Today, under the Ontario Ministry of Education Regulation 285 5.(1), which is clarified in the Ontario Ministry of Education's Memorandum No. 7 [dated June 29, 1990, 3], twenty-five students are now required to form a Heritage Language class. Also, while Bill 80 [277 e.(3)] did not specify that the "twenty" "qualified" persons requesting a Heritage Language class needed to live in the school district in question (they simply had to be "assembled" for the purpose of the class), Regulation 285, Part 4., and Memorandum No. 7, do require that twenty-five "qualified" persons be living in the school district, and give written notice of their desire for a Heritage Language class to be offered.

Thus, in less than a decade, the following changes in Heritage Language policy have restricted the teaching of minority languages such as Scottish Gaelic in Ontario schools:

1. Required, mandatory student class size increased to twenty-five from twenty.
2. Students must live in the school district, as opposed to simply being "assembled".
3. Requests must be in writing, from the parents (regardless of whether they are literate or not.)
4. Classes may not begin for three months from the time the requests are made.
5. Students are now restricted to 2.5 hours of instruction in any Heritage Language per week, and not more than 2.5 hours per day during summer school classes. [Before, the hours of instruction were unlimited.]
6. Instruction appears to be limited to the elementary school level only, since secondary school credits are not addressed, or mentioned in the Ministry course listing under "international languages".

Hence, it appears that the definition of "qualified persons" has changed, as well as the number of persons necessary to establish a Heritage Language course. The Heritage Language programs have become mandatory (when requested by twenty- five families), rather than permissive when requested by only twenty qualified persons. In this way, the decision to offer a Heritage Language class has moved from local control to provincial control. Also, classes must begin the next commencement date, or within 90 days, whichever is first; and a credit may be assigned by the principal [who determines whether the instructor is satisfactory as well].

Some contradictions in this policy appear in Ministry circulars. For instance, "Ontario's Heritage Languages' Program" states, "The Ministry of Education believes that such opportunities will ... prove valuable for credit courses at the high school level." Does this mean that it might be possible to obtain a credit in Scottish Gaelic at the secondary school level? The acts, regulations, and memorandum do not broach the subject of secondary school credits, only elementary school classes. Also, in the Circular, "Education for a multicultural society", "it is each person's [own] responsibility to protect the quality and dignity of its members." This suggests that support and funding are the individual's responsibility, as opposed to the Ministry's obligation. Minister Gerry Phillips, in an October 22, 1988 News release circular to citizens said, "the Ministry will provide 'incentive funds' to encourage the training of Heritage Languages instructors," yet what provisions must be met before an instructor may be given a grant for training in a Heritage Language? And which institutions offer training in uncommon Heritage Languages such as Scottish Gaelic? The answers to these questions are never explained. Such countering literature on the policy only confuses the taxpayers about their options with regard to Heritage Language learning.

Parental groups hold some responsibility as well for ensuring that their students are receiving the quality of education necessary to learn a Heritage Language without straining the system. After school or Saturday programs, often provide teachers who, although they have an Ontario Teacher's Certificate, are not qualified language instructors for the program. Hence, being compelled by second language parents to stay after school, prompts both the students and the teachers forced to do so, to resent the program. Parents and administrators could work together to develop incentives - with qualified language teachers [not necessarily with an Ontario Teaching Certificate] and willing families of students.

Wide geographical dispersion of cultural groups is also a problem when attempting to gain access to a Gaelic language program. For instance, the Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry County Board of Education, in a brief reply to a request for information on their secondary school credit in Scottish Gaelic, was not aware that a school within the board [Glengarry District High School] was running an accredited course in Scottish Gaelic: "No such courses are offered..I am not aware of any current or recent 'activity'." (Lusigna, 1993) The "Scottish Culture and Language" course which was, and has been, offered at Glengarry District High School, was maintained under the joint effort of the school's integrated history and geography departments, and was fully supported by the board as a prerequisite course for OAC Social Science: "We believe this course will be an excellent program asset for a school that exists within a community that is so visibly proud of their Scottish roots." (James W. Dilamarter, Director, Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry Board of Education, November 14, 1990.)

Ontario offers Heritage Language instruction on request for over seventy-five languages and thousands of students. Gaelic, unfortunately, is not very widely requested, since this cultural group is very geographically dispersed - usually across several boards. Currently, there is an opportunity; to combine boards to get the necessary number of twenty-five students for a third-language class; however, many officials do not recognize this option as a possibility, even when the classes have already been organized. Saturday language schools, such as one in Scarborough run by *Mod Ontario*, survive solely through the marketing efforts of its community members (Dunbar, 1993), but never receive Ministry funding because the class number of students, within the Scarborough board, is just under twenty-five. If the board were to combine this class with another, in the North York Board region, for instance, the numbers would meet the number necessary to receive funding for a Heritage Language class under the ministry requirements. Small parental groups, such as the Scarborough Gaelic Group and the Glengarry County High School group, are the reason the language has survived to this point. The more problematic the implementation of a Heritage Language course becomes, however, the more endangered its language and culture.

Policy Regarding Curriculum in Nova Scotia

Comparatively, the curricular policy in Nova Scotia and Scotland has overcome a great number of obstacles to ensure the survival of Scottish Gaelic. In contrast to Ontario's policy on Heritage Languages in the classroom, Nova Scotia actually lists Scottish Gaelic as a credit course available in Grades 3-12 in the Ministry's Public School Programs 1991-1993, because of taxpayer demand.

Listing Scottish Gaelic as a course option, even though the course (unlike French) is only optional, provides the opportunity for students to nurture their heritage language without the restrictions or barriers which are present in the Ontario Ministry's "Heritage Language" courses. The Nova Scotia Education Act and School Boards Act provides the Governor in Council with the powers to "prescribe the school program of education to be provided and administered by school boards established by this Act." (4(a)(ix)) Also, subsequent Regulations Under the Education Act as amended up to February 2, 1993 require school boards to provide subjects for all students resident in the area under their jurisdiction "the courses prescribed by the Minister." (Sec. 5-6(c)(d)) Hence, having Scottish Gaelic listed in the Minister's Public School Programs 1991-1993 increases the chances that this heritage language and culture will be maintained within the province of Nova Scotia.

Section 5 of the Education Act, paragraph 7(1) insists that "the Bureau of Education shall provide the school boards with textbooks and other teaching-learning materials prescribed by the Minister for use in Grades Primary to 12 programs." In Ontario, simply acquiring materials since Heritage Language

texts are not listed in Circular 14, is another major barrier to third language education. Here, Nova Scotia actively pursues the teaching of Scottish Gaelic by providing a course listing, teachers, and materials for the language. It does not, however, make the course compulsory (as it is in parts of Scotland), which would indicate that there is not full support for the culture. It also appears to be moving away from formerly fully funded programs such as their "Gaelic play groups" - seven of which were fully funded from 1973-1983 (Beaton, 1993), and Adult Education, where the greatest interest in Scottish Gaelic would probably lie, due to tracing of family lines. Adult Education is not listed as a course program, and often has to rely on corporate sponsors, and self-generated funds from the publication of texts, such as the St. Anne's Gaelic College's text, *Gaidhlig Troimh Chomhradh*. (Parsons, 1989) This adult-centered learning text utilises poetry and songs from local native speakers and hence, empowers them with the value of the language - culturally, and economically.

It should also be mentioned here that Nova Scotia contains the largest concentration of Gaelic-speaking Scots in Canada, and therefore a large concentration of taxpaying parents who want Gaelic in their children's curriculum. As a result, they carry a great deal of political clout which insures that Scottish Gaelic remains listed in the curriculum even if it is not used. Many Nova Scotians came as immigrants from the highland clearances, and subsequently set up farms, and fisheries, in Nova Scotia [the new Scotland] upon their arrival. Their bardic tradition, which has kept the Gaelic language alive across the world (Thomson, 12), and their strong sense of community, has allowed the language to enjoy favourable success to this day. In fact, people in agriculture and forestry trades have been proven to sustain third-languages beyond any other trade group in Canada. (Walker, 44) Also, Premier Angus L. Macdonald (1933-1945), a Gaelic speaker and scholar, had much to do with the successful preservation of the Gaelic language in Nova Scotia. It is no wonder Scottish Gaelic Education has received more support in Nova Scotia than in Ontario. Regardless of the increasing financial constraints, the curricular policy allows easy access to the language. The language of Scottish Gaelic is obviously important and valued in the province of Nova Scotia.

Scottish Gaelic Education in Scotland

In comparison to the work being done in Scotland, Ontario and Nova Scotia's third-language programs in Gaelic sadly pale in comparison.

Due to the formation of *Comhairle nan Eilean* [The Western Isles Islands Council] in 1975, the initiative of "bilingual education" [Gaelic and English] began to be funded by the Scottish Education Department. Highland schools began to receive instruction, in all subjects, in both Gaelic and English, and August 1985 saw new ground broken in Gaelic primary education in Inverness and Glasgow,

two crucially important centres of urbanized "Gaeldom" (Gillies, 1989). This development came about as a result of sustained, very vocal, campaigning by parental associations. Hence, parents were once again the instrument "to get the ball rolling" --like the public funding of French immersion in Ontario (Korbee). The bilingual project continues to this day in the highlands, and enjoys immeasurable success. The British Broadcasting Company now produces programming in Gaelic for all ages (soap operas, children's shows, sitcoms, documentaries, and so forth), and Gaelic play groups provide day care in Gaelic immersion for children of working parents. Much like French-activists in Canada, there is a growing concern among Scottish Gaelic speakers, about the threat posed to the language by the ever-increasing exposure to English; hence, this heightened consciousness has found expression in a wide variety of ways: campaigns for bilingual road signs, public demonstrations, presentations of Parliamentary Bills designed to improve the status of and the provision for the language; and the establishment of *Comunn na Gaidhlig*, a semi-statutory agency created in 1985 to promote the Gaelic language and coordinate the efforts of existing bodies (Gillies, 1989 & Grant, 1992). Gaelic has also received notable distinction by being represented in Celtic departments of every university in Scotland, and at colleges such as *Sabhal Mor Ostaig*, which conducts its Business Studies (Accountancy, Computer studies...) and Broadcasting programmes entirely in Gaelic. This provides young Gaelic speakers with education in the Gaelic language on every level.

Gaelic immersion, as mentioned above, parallels many of the characteristics of French immersion in Canada. Skills and objectives outlined in Gaelic 5-14 (Scottish Office Education Department, 1991), are as follows:

Children's earliest language is acquired in the home, and schools will build on that foundation. This language will be varied, and sometimes may not be Gaelic, but it will mirror the diversity of the community the school serves and will contribute to learning in the classroom.

Schools will attach a high priority to helping children from homes where Gaelic is not spoken to transfer their language skills into Gaelic at as early a stage as possible. In order to achieve this, Gaelic will be the only language medium used for the first two years. Thereafter, although English may be used, Gaelic will continue to be the predominant medium. There are 4 broad aims. In order to achieve these aims, teachers will:

- make pupils aware of the importance of Gaelic.
- provide experiences for developing pupils' capacities to communicate, think, feel, and make through Gaelic.
- through these experiences extend pupils' understanding of the nature, structures, and conventions of Gaelic.

- help pupils to develop confidence and pleasure in their own use of Gaelic.
- take full advantage of Gaelic dialects in teaching knowledge about language.
- take advantage of the rich contexts for Gaelic development provided by the mass media, computers and drama.

Given that Gaelic is still the first language spoken in many parts of the highlands, it is not surprising that educational scholars approach it today with a determined effort to preserve it, like the French language in Canada, as a "native" language:

If we are to foster an awareness of the indigenous cultures and if our children's lives are to be enriched by that awareness, then as money is provided to conserve and develop other natural resources, including rare plants and animals, so too must financial support be forthcoming for Gaelic language and culture. (Gillies, Scottish Resources in Schools' group, 54)

Hence, Gaelic Education in Scotland has surmounted enormous hurdles in the past 19 years, and its clear objectives, curriculum guidelines, public and private support, all represent the epitome of how a founding language should be directed: through access and freedom of choice and interest. The one problem which remains for the Gaelic language in Scotland is that it is not recognized as a national language of the United Kingdom. Although its priority, maintained by various pressure groups, receives more attention than the Scots language¹, it has been present in Scotland since the arrival of the Norse (Grant and Docherty, 1992) and has never been officially represented as one of Britain's national languages.

Conclusion

In comparison to the work in Gaelic language education being done in Scotland, the Scottish descendents in Nova Scotia and Ontario have a political battle ahead of them if they desire the same quality of Scottish Gaelic instruction in their classrooms.

Like Scottish Gaelic, similar struggles to maintain a heritage language are well documented. The Catalans, for instance, retain a linguistic and cultural heritage that has been persecuted since Spanish was imposed as the official language in 1718.² Also, Fryslan (Frisian), a widely used heritage language in the Netherlands, has suffered the same obstacles to education due to the political emphasis placed on Dutch.³ Finally, regional languages in France (such as Breton) have suffered years of oppression due to stringent language policies for High French.⁴ The growing cultural diversity in countries is becoming an enigmatic

problem. How do you feasibly maintain and nurture every language? Which languages deserve attention, and who is qualified to make these decisions for the future of our multicultural nations? It's a question for which many lesser-known groups desire an answer.

As we have already seen, in Ontario, there is not enough awareness about the opportunities that exist for heritage language learning in the classroom, and between school boards. This barrier to the formation of a Heritage Language class makes it difficult for cultural groups in diverse geographical regions to organize and receive educational recognition. Since parental groups are required to organize anyway before a Heritage Language course can be implemented, and since groups such as these are usually involved in Saturday morning language programs already, it would be desirable for the group of twenty-five concerned parents not only to submit their signatures, but also to meet with school administrators and teachers to help them in the planning and effective implementation of their children's curriculum, materials' acquisition, and procurement of qualified language instructors. This type of cooperation can only serve to eliminate fears, discredit discrimination, and build a tie to multicultural Canada. Those children who are not part of a Heritage Language program, should be given the choice, freedom, and awareness that they may choose from one [or even several] of the existing programs in which they may have an interest.

Also, it may be possible that parental groups are not the answer to the survival of a heritage language. Television and the media have had an enormous effect on the increase of English-speaking peoples in the world. Scotland's B.B.C. programs in Gaelic, such as "Dodaman" (the Scottish equivalent of "Raffi"), have had an outstanding impact on children in Scotland and Ireland. It may just be possible that, for Gaelic anyway, the media hold the language's "bardic" future in Nova Scotia and Ontario as well as Scotland.

Canada's national languages, including Scottish Gaelic, are the soul and heart of our country; without them, we are only a corpse of our former living beings. If we continue to undermine our cultural heritages by creating barriers to their access, then we have effectively eliminated a nation. That is cultural genocide.

Notes

1. The language of Scots does not receive instruction in immersion, or any programming on national airways.
2. Grant, Nigel and F.J. Docherty (1992). "Language Policy and Education: some Scottish-Catalan comparisons. *Comparative Education*. Vol.28, No.2. 145-166.

- Tarrow, Norma (1990). "Language, Culture and Early Childhood Education in Catalonia and the Basque region of Spain." *International Journal of Early Childhood*. Vol.22, No.2 (December 1990) 49-58.
3. Jong, Sikko-de and Alex Riemersma (1992). "Bilingual Education in Fryslan: Levels of Language Proficiency in both Dutch and Frisian at the end of Primary School." *International Conference on Maintenance and Loss of Minority Languages*, Noordwijkerhout, The Netherlands, September 1-4, 1992.
 4. Stone, G. Tod (1989). "Language Revival in France: The Regional Idioms." *Language Problems and Language Planning*. Vol.13, No.3, 225-240.
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The Home-Language Reform in Sweden*

The three principles - equality, autonomy, cooperation - were stated for educational policy in the so-called Home-Language Reform, *Hemspråksreformen*. This reform refers to children who at home speak a language other than Swedish. This reform became law on July 1, 1977, and brought about a new definition of "immigrant children". According to the reform law, pupils are no longer listed in educational statistics by their citizenship but, since autumn 1978, by the language spoken at home, *hemspråk*.

The official definition of an "immigrant child" is now: A pupil with home (= parental) language other than Swedish. One advantage of this definition is the fact that it refers to a problem that is highly relevant for schools, namely, the linguistic proficiency of pupils, while citizenship bears upon schools only indirectly. An additional advantage of this definition is its applicability to Sweden's own minorities, to the Lapps, the Tornedal-Finns and the Romanies (gypsies).

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* In *Compare*, Vol. 4, No 2, 1984, p. 207.