

qualified teacher arrives -- a solution that leaves open the possibility that student interest will wither in the intervening time, which could be years. Our only choice until we have reached the ideal state, I believe, is to continue to stoke interest in Celtic languages by whatever means we have at our disposal. Even substandard instruction is preferable to allowing interested people to go wanting for Celtic language knowledge. Granted, this view may not be shared by all.

Some enthusiasts would prefer that a language not be spoken at all rather than be spoken badly. The problem with this view in terms of adult school learners is that they do not intend to become so accomplished in a language that they can move into a native-fluency setting. They would like to learn a little more about their heritage, they want to know the (approximate) pronunciation and meaning of the occasional word they see in an English text, or, in some cases, they just want to hear again some of the phrases they remember hearing their grandparents or parents speaking. In fact, my class has unanimously adopted the maxim "Is fearr Gaeilge bhriste ná Béarla cliste" -- (Broken Irish is better than clever English.) With these factors in mind, I see no choice but to continue offering lessons to the students who are interested in them, even if the level of instruction falls short of the ideal. Surely this approach can hardly do any more damage to a language than something like internecine squabbling among the cognoscenti about which is the "true" dialect.

REFERENCES

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TAKING THE 'ACHING' OUT OF 'TEACHING': FUN AND GAMES IN THE CLASSROOM

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When teaching languages it is important to remember the role of play in language acquisition. As adults, we often marvel at the ease with which children are able to learn things that cost us such effort and pain. Indeed, they learn without even being aware of what they are doing, if the 'real work' is couched in games or entertaining programs of one kind or another. The element of 'distraction' can be of great benefit. I resolved to bear this in mind when teaching Gaelic to adults on Sabhal Mòr Ostaig's summer short courses.

Having taught students of all ages (from pre-school to post-retirement), I have found that any and all (with the possible exception of 14-year-olds!) are willing to experiment with game-playing and role-playing in the classroom. Thus, I produced week-long courses which were based almost entirely on 'distraction' methods. Many of the games were drawn from language courses I had attended, read about or heard about, while a few were entirely my own work. The examples below are chosen at random from my collection, but they illustrate the diversity in the types of games that can be employed as well as the range of uses they can be put to.

The exercise I used as an 'ice-breaker' was one which involved all of the students getting out of their chairs and moving around the room. After a short preparatory session, I went around the class placing stickers on the backs of the students. The stickers had the names of animals (or, in another version of the game I used, famous people), and the purpose of the game was for the students to find out which animal 'they were' by asking questions of their colleagues. The format is no doubt fairly familiar, but the effect on the

atmosphere in the class, each time I used the game, was profound.

Useful for building vocabulary at the early stages, and then for revision somewhat later, is the 'bingo', 'house' or 'lotto' format. A number of versions are described in numerous communication courses, and the teacher's own imagination can soon give rise to others. One use I found for the format in Sabhal Mòr was 'opposites bingo'. Each student receives a bingo card with some adjectives written into the boxes (the cards are all slightly different, of course). The teacher then draws adjectives out of a 'hat' and calls them out. The students cover the *opposite* of the word the teacher has called: so, if the word that comes out of the hat is *mòr*, students cover *beag*. The winner is the first to have all their adjectives covered. While this game requires a good deal of preparation in the first instance, the time spent is a worthwhile investment, as the cards can be used in later classes and adapted for other purposes.

Board games can help to lighten the atmosphere in an intensive course, at the same time as encouraging students to use language naturally and innovatively. It is surprising how many familiar board games can be adapted for language-learning purposes, from the simple 'Snakes and Ladders' format (well-used in the Wlpan courses) to something as complex as *Monopoly*. When considering a game for adaptation, the important thing is to have a firm idea of the *purpose* it will serve in students' learning.

With an intermediate class, I used a version of the game *Guess Who?*, in which the two teams can each see about 20 cartoon pictures of people's faces. The same pictures are printed on small cards. Each team draws one card from the pile at the start of play. By asking each other questions about the facial features of the depicted characters, the teams try to guess the identity of the 'person' on the opposing side's card, e.g. 'A bheil falt bàn oirre?' ('Does she have blonde hair?') This was an effective way of allowing the students to review the work we had done on descriptions, and so it articulated well with the 'opposites bingo', which I had used earlier in the course to revise the

appropriate vocabulary. Although it is similar in concept to the oral-class favourite *20 Questions*, the presence of the board and the colourful cartoons seems to enhance the element of play and to help relax the students to a greater degree than I have observed when using that other game.

With Michelle Macleod, of NUI Galway's Irish Department, I am presently putting together a collection of games and other materials for the promotion of fluency in Scottish Gaelic. The package is provisionally (if prosaically) entitled *Pasgan de dh'Adhbharan do Luchd-Teagasg na Gàidhlig* and includes a variety of strategies which employ the 'distraction' techniques I am advocating here. We hope that the finished package will not only be of use to teachers of Gaelic, but that it will also be translatable into Welsh, Irish and other LCTLs.