

Learning

Gaelic Before

The Child Is Born

Why This Is So Important

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Ideally we would very much like to see a situation in Scotland where it is nothing out of the ordinary to find children with Gaelic as their first language, or if not, at least on the road of learning Gaelic as early as possible from their parents and in the home environment.

Moreover, if we can achieve some measure of success in this endeavour, it will certainly go a long way in securing the Gaelic language in Scotland for many generations to come.

The big picture objective is to see a significant increase in the number of children in Scotland, fluent in Gaelic before they reach three years of age and by way of an explanation we offer the following.

- 1) Those considering parenthood, prospective parents, expectant parents, as well as those already parents, acquiring Gaelic, not only for their own satisfaction, but also as a precursor to their children becoming a fluent Gaelic speaker.
- 2) If parents etc. manage the above, then the next step of creating the all important Gaelic home environment will prove to be much easier.
- 3) In an ideal world those who envisage being in a Gaelic speaking family, would want to start the process some four years in advance.
- 4) With number one and two in the bag, the scene is now set for any child entering this scenario, to find Gaelic as the norm in their life and home. “Normalisation” means that in a child’s eyes Gaelic is the everyday language, which in our experience is the ideal situation, if we really want Gaelic to be present throughout their life and to ensure intergenerational transmission occurs.
- 5) For those of us albeit parents, grandparents, family, as well as workers in all spheres of Gaelic, we must realise that for the language to thrive, it has to begin before a child goes to a parent & child group, playgroup, nursery or primary school. And while school is absolutely the right place for a child to move onto the next stage of learning Gaelic, it is not the place to begin the process, the home is.
- 6) Consider that almost everything a baby learns begins in the home with parents, and in this respect, why would Gaelic be any different?

What Needs To Be Done

Having Gaelic around for the next generation or even tomorrow, for that matter, will require a varied, imaginative, innovative approach and commitment from not only those considering parenthood, prospective parents, expectant parents, those already parents, grandparents, other family members, but also from all those people working in a wide range of Gaelic centred fields. Only when we have all the essential elements brought together, can we make real and lasting progress.

To this end Taic/CNSA within their own field of operation have a unique and substantial range of Gaelic acquisition courses for parents, other adults and children, which with positive and specific language input, resources, and set within a conducive environment, can bring anyone, albeit adult or child, to a Gaelic conversational fluency in a remarkably short period. And in ways that minimise stressful learning situations and by way of user-friendly strategies that are immediate and accessible to all age groups.

Here again we seek to highlight a number of important tasks in regard to what can be done and by whom.

- 1) When it comes to babies, parents will certainly want to take up one of the language specific **Altram Courses** that cover any number of topics associated with very young children, plus a wide range of words and phrases, known as **“The Language Of Endearment”**. One can imagine how satisfying it is for parents, having at their fingertips a wide and highly expressive flow of appropriate language to use with their baby.
- 2) While learning Gaelic, one should seek out other Gaelic speakers and ask for their help using the language with you. Of course all learners will struggle with Gaelic and understanding the fluent speaker, especially in the early learning stages. No matter, using what little Gaelic one has, is the important thing to remember. Notwithstanding, some fluent speakers may be reticent to use their Gaelic with you, for a variety of reasons; not wishing to appear superior to you the learner; not confident in their own use of Gaelic; not wanting to see you struggling. Again, no matter, coax them into helping, as it will prove invaluable and in time, it will give one enormous satisfaction in being able to converse with others in Gaelic.

- 3) In the best of all possible worlds, both parents will strive to become fluent in Gaelic well before their child is born. If this is not possible then certainly, one parent, at least, should endeavour to become fluent and as soon as possible after the child is born. This said, even in a home where neither parent speaks Gaelic and they already have a child, then it is still possible to bring a child up as a fluent speaker. Of course, in these circumstances, it will require a good solid Gaelic home environment, coupled together with a highly motivated commitment from all concerned and the enrolment in a full time **Pre-3 Family Gaelic Centre**.

One parent speaks Gaelic one doesn't; for a variety of reasons, a great many families are only equipped with one fluent Gaelic speaker. As an improvement to this situation, a good first step, would be for the non Gaelic speaker to acquire Gaelic as quickly as they can. This will not only lighten the load for the Gaelic speaking parent, it will also add much in language credibility in their child's eyes, not forgetting the support it offers and the doubling up of Gaelic around the home environment.

To reinforce the Gaelic language presence in the home, wherever possible, call on Gaelic speaking grandparents, neighbours, relatives, friends etc., to help as their input is an invaluable resource not to be ignored.

- 4) Very early on in any Gaelic speaking "whole family unit" initiative, will be the need to create and maintain a Gaelic friendly home. And as one would expect, there are many steps parents need to take to achieve this objective. There are also a number of highly relevant questions parents need answers to. Then again, there are the numerous pitfalls parents will certainly want to avoid.

Fortuitously, Taic/CNSA have a range of informative and easy to follow **Family Language Plan** manuals that will help parents through everything mentioned above and more, apropos the setting up and personalising of the said plan. Moreover and irrespective of whether both parents, one parent or even in a household where neither parent has any Gaelic, they can still be empowered to create the all important Gaelic home environment, provided they have their own **Family Language Plan** deeply embedded in their daily life.

- 5) Parents will also come to realise that a TIP hands on practical language acquisition course such as an **Altram Course** and a **Gaelic In The Home Course**, is a must. Both these courses will immediately provide an array and diversity of social and intimate language, they will most certainly need, in order to talk with their child confidently and with flair.

With regard to the above, if one is fortunate enough to have Gaelic speaking grandparents around, then they should be enthusiastically persuaded to help with the learning process. In our experience older Gaelic speakers very often have the best spoken Gaelic; rich, diverse and satisfyingly idiomatic.

- 6) If one is considering parenthood; prospective parents; expectant parents and want to acquire Gaelic for your child and perhaps, ultimately the family as a whole and with this idea very much in mind we are in the midst of developing **“Whole Family Courses”** for use in a full time **Pre-3 Family Gaelic Centre**.
- 7) The above would then require parents etc. to commit to acquiring Gaelic through a variety of strategies and this is best done by joining a **Gaelic In The Home Course**, whereupon they can acquire a comprehensive range of social language apropos cooking, home management, shopping, dining, in fact most aspects found within the home, both internally and externally.

Giving It Your Best Shot

True, there are no guarantees in the saving of Gaelic for all the coming generations, but as parents, those considering parenthood, prospective parents, expectant parents, as well as those already parents, we can however, give it our best shot by taking the following steps.

- * Parents etc. learning Gaelic before or soon after their child is born
- * Build a strong and vibrant Gaelic centred family home environment before or soon after a child is born
- * Set up and follow rigorously a Family Language Plan
- * From the day a child is born celebrate and speak the Gaelic language
- * Join a Gaelic pre-school outlet and send children to a Gaelic medium school
- * Parents must realise that children need to see Gaelic in a good light, has value and can have a meaningful role throughout their life.

The Good That Comes From Doing This

With parents learning Gaelic and bringing it into their home, as a central theme of their family life, they are not only giving the whole family a strong and lifelong bond, they are also helping to retain one of Scotland's most unique features.

In addition, below are some of the special elements that parents who make such a meaningful commitment should be conscious of.

- 1) Parents who embark on learning Gaelic either before their child is born or as soon after as possible, will have ready and waiting all the necessary specific language they will need to engage with a very young child. Moreover, if they have planned well, they will have joined one of the very useful **Pre-3 Family Gaelic Centres** that will be springing up all round Scotland in ever increasing numbers.
- 2) The joining of a **Pre-3 Family Gaelic Centre** has other advantages for parents. For example, parents making the Gaelic family commitment will need to mix with other parents, making the same journey, for all sorts of reasons such as, sharing experiences, avoiding mistakes, diminishing isolation, especially felt when things are not going so well, learned shortcuts, highs and lows, information and support and of course, just socialising to lighten the load etc.
- 3) On offer in a 5 day per week **Pre-3 Family Gaelic Centre** will be a range of TIP **Altram** and **Gaelic In The Home Courses**. Also available in a number of locations will be parent & child 0-3 groups and playgroups for 2 year olds, meeting between 1- 5 times a week.
- 4) Parents in creating a vibrant Gaelic home environment; largely made possible by way of their own **Family Language Plan** and by starting the whole process as early as possible, will be able to present their child with a Gaelic world that is completely normal in their eyes and as we all know that anything considered the "norm" has enormous strength and staying power.
- 5) Confidence and developing language ability come quickly and naturally, where a child has the great good fortune of having Gaelic as their first language. In short, nothing sets up a child's Gaelic language journey better than to have begun with Gaelic in the first place. Thus establishing the cornerstone for a vibrant and ongoing intergenerational transmission to take place.

Who Are We Talking To The Client Groups

Those Who Have Been Through The Gaelic Medium Education System

Gaelic speakers who have learnt Gaelic through the Gaelic medium education system but find that on reaching adulthood and possibly as future parents, their language range is limited, especially in regard to babies, toddlers, pre-school children and the language of the home.

The answer here is to join a full time **Pre-3 Family Gaelic Centre** and taking up one of our TIP **Altram** and **Gaelic In The Home Courses** and acquiring a copy of Taic/CNSA Language Of Endearment manual, all of which should be well in hand long before their child is born. In addition, the implementation of a **Family Language Plan** is an absolute must, if any kind of success is to be achieved.

Gaelic Speaking Grandparents, Neighbours, Friends Etc.

It is most important that we attract fluent Gaelic speaking grandparents, neighbours, friends etc. onto our courses and into full time **Pre-3 Family Gaelic Centres** as well as onto a variety of our TIP **Altram** and **Gaelic In The Home Courses** as helpers, where they can bring a much desired Gaelic conversational fluency to parents and those who aspire to be tutors or staff for pre-3 groups. In this task, those mentioned above, are absolutely essential and what is more, they will be highly influential in regard to the success of each centre.

Secondly, apropos grandparents, having been parents themselves, they will be experienced with regard to babies and the appropriate Gaelic language one uses at such times.

Also worth repeating, is the fact that in a great many instances, older Gaelic speakers have the best spoken Gaelic and therefore any exchange with them, will naturally enhance the quality of the language involved. Lastly, we want fluent Gaelic speaking grandparents etc. to be another visible source of Gaelic being used in the wider community.

Gaelic Learner Grandparents, Neighbours & Friends Etc.

We want to draw into our network non Gaelic speaking grandparents etc. so that they can learn Gaelic and then become another source of fluent speakers, for example.

- 1) As grandparents, bring another avenue of Gaelic to their family, working together with the parents in bringing their grandchildren to a Gaelic fluency before they reach the age of three years. Very often, in families, grandparents have a rather special affinity with their grandchildren, which offers yet another important area for language acquisition.
- 2) What would also really be good in these circumstances, is for parents, grandparents etc., to bring neighbours and friends, who are keen to learn Gaelic, along to a **Pre-3 Family Gaelic Centre** and even better, joining a TIP **Altram** and **Gaelic In The Home Course**. In time and after gaining the desired fluency, they will also help greatly, both in the centre and in swelling the fluent Gaelic speaking throng that grows daily all round Scotland.

Gaelic & Non Gaelic Speaking Couples Considering Parenthood

The non Gaelic speaking couples have somewhat further to go in acquiring Gaelic, apart from which, their path to a full and rich Gaelic fluency, firmly set with in their proposed family home, is much the same as the fluent speakers. Notwithstanding, if both groups can gather around them Gaelic speaking grandparents, neighbours and friends, to add their input to this enterprise, so much the better.

More help on the horizon will see a new language course called **“The Pre Pregnancy Course”** coming out sometime in the near future which provides a useful range of Gaelic language to be used in the run up time to a child’s birth.

Added to which, both Gaelic speaker and learner then have a number of steps to put in practice. For example, going to a **Pre-3 Family Gaelic Centre** will be absolutely essential for a host of reasons as outlined in number 2 of **“The Good That Comes From Doing This”** section.

Also necessary will be the joining of a TIP **Altram** and **Gaelic In The Home Course**, whereupon couples will acquire all the necessary, if not more, of the Gaelic language they will come to need. They will also come across the many and varied confident boosting strategies so necessary in these early critical stages.

Another excellent source of Gaelic language, particularly apropos babies, can be found in the Taic/CNSA “**Language Of Endearment**” manual. Of course, we expect to develop many new courses, centres etc. as time goes on, however, what is on offer here, will in the meantime, serve these people very well. Alongside all this activity and offering an ideal and immensely strong foundation, is the implementation of a personalised **Family Language Plan**.

Gaelic Speakers & Learner Expectant Parents

The fluent speaker in this category, obviously have an advantage, insomuch as they are that much further along the Gaelic acquisition road. However, there are a number of tasks apropos specific language that both groups will have to undertake in order to create and maintain a truly comprehensive Gaelic centred home.

Apropos learner expectant parents, it is most important, especially in regard to creating a Gaelic speaking family, that the learner parents work towards gaining a Gaelic fluency in their own right, before their child is born.

Put all this together with their newly acquired Gaelic fluency and they could not be better prepared for the coming baby. At this point it is worth stating again that, a child born into a well settled Gaelic home environment, has the best chance ever, of being, in the first instance a fast learner, leading to a long term fluent speaker and the ideal ambassador for carrying the language forward to the next generation.

Notwithstanding, both fluent and learner parents will also need to align themselves to a full time **Pre-3 Family Gaelic Centre**, in order to take up one of the TIP **Altram** and **Gaelic In The Home Courses** and embrace a **Family Language Plan**, all of which will certainly cement the whole enterprise.

Gaelic Speakers & Learner Parents Of A 0-9 Month Child

After many years of working in this field, we have come to the conclusion, that if intergenerational transmission is to work and become the norm in a family, that family must have begun the Gaelic acquisition process with their child, from the day they were born.

And to this end they could do no better than working towards gaining a Gaelic fluency in their own right; starting the work before their child is actually born, is a particularly good move and will pay high dividends as the family continues through the bedding down process of the Gaelic home environment.

There is simply no other way, and if parents, especially fluent speakers, do not “start as they mean to go on”, then quite honestly, they may as well not bother starting at all. If Gaelic is not the first language for the child, then it has virtually no chance whatsoever especially in the coming onslaught of English.

Having said all this, and where parents have begun with English, it is not the end of the world. What they have to do is set about immediately creating the Gaelic environment and taking all the suggested steps such as joining a full time **Pre-3 Family Gaelic Centre** and embracing a TIP **Altram** and **Gaelic In The Home Course**. But above all else, they must keep strictly to the various tasks as have been laid down. It is also crucial that the Gaelic language bonding mechanism between parent and child is put in place quickly. Of course, all that has been said before, equally applies to learner parents, perhaps, even more vigorously.

Another crucial step couples must consider taking, is the planning and then implementation of a personalised **Family Language Plan** as is described in number 2 of the “**What Needs To Be Done**” section. Both groups will gain an awful lot of benefits and support during the learning period, from the involvement of fluent Gaelic speaking grandparents, neighbours, relatives, friends etc. As will the child, for it will demonstrate very clearly in the child’s eyes that Gaelic is out there in the community among the people.

The actions suggested here will certainly go a long way in relieving the isolation and loneliness, often felt by parents found in these categories.

Learner & Gaelic Speaking Parents Of A 9 Months-3 Year Old Child

Unfortunately for both sets of parents of a 9 months-3 year old child, it will be highly unlikely that this child, will have the advantage of “Gaelic as a first language” asset. Bearing in mind what has been written previously apropos the lateness of starting such a venture, it is still however possible for parents of a 9-18 month old child to reach a Gaelic fluency before their third birthday. Naturally the job will be even harder, given that Gaelic was not introduced to the child when it was born.

In which case it is imperative that these parents enrol at a full time **Pre-3 Family Gaelic Centre** as fast as they can.

If their luck is out and they have no such facility nearby, they may well consider getting together with others and set one up of their own. It is not impossible and there is help and advice to be had from Taic/CNSA.

Sorry to be so negative here, but it is right to point out, that by this stage, time is fast running out for a child to acquire a Gaelic fluency by their third birthday. It is also fair to say that the lateness will not serve intergenerational transmission process very well either.

However, if parents are truly determined, all is not lost, but they will have to move swiftly and take decisive steps immediately. This will mean joining a full time **Pre-3 Family Gaelic Centre** taking up one of our TIP **Altram** and **Gaelic In The Home Courses** and acquiring a copy of Taic/CNSA **Language Of Endearment** manual.

Embarking on a **Family Language Plan** wholeheartedly and to the letter of the text; no shortcuts, will also be an absolute requirement. Of course, there are no guarantees but doing as much as one can, is all one can do; it can work, though it depends hugely on parental commitment.

Parents in this situation, having access to fluent Gaelic speaking grandparents, neighbours, relatives, friends etc. should energetically persuade, cajole and encourage them to pitch in and help with the child’s language acquisition, it will help immeasurably, if they add their weight to the undertaking.

The lateness of children learning Gaelic also raises other issues, whereby all too many well meaning Gaelic speaking parents believe that they have little or no role in their children learning Gaelic. At the same time they erroneously believe, school will get the language learning job done all on its own. And to quote an earlier passage “school is absolutely the right place for a child to continue to learn Gaelic, it is not the place to begin the process, the home is”

In truth, parents do have an enormously important role in passing on Gaelic to their child; intergenerational transmission activity, at this crucial time in the home, when what they do impart to their child, will provide a strong and lasting foundation for that child’s Gaelic journey.

One must also be fair to schools with regard to learning Gaelic, for in fact they do a superb job. However, the language they use is set within an academic spectrum, which is absolutely fitting. It is after all a place of academic learning and accordingly the language reflects this world. Whereas the home offers parents and their child a much more intimate vocabulary, reflecting relationships, the home, emotional interaction and so on. One would not expect schools, nor would one want them to enter these realms.

To support the above and throughout this document reasons and explanations have been given as to the overwhelming importance for Gaelic to be the first language in a child’s life, beginning at day one, leading to an effective fluency before the child reaches the age of 3 years. Such a course of action is essential, if it is to have any lasting impact on the child and have a meaningful place throughout their life.

Having said all this, it is as well to remind parents, that when considering another child or siblings, they need to start the language acquisition process, well before this child is born.

In Conclusion

Think about helping in any of the aforementioned ways; so much fun, so rewarding; such a good thing for your family and Scotland and remember.

- * **Big commitment with lots of skills and time; join us.**
- * **Not a lot of time, not multi-skilled, but willing to help, join us.**

Finlay M. Macleoid