



Supporting Diverse Learners: Inclusion, Engagement & Access in Scottish Schools

Wednesday 20th May | 4:00–5:30pm | Online Event

Organiser: SERA Inclusive Education Network

Ross McWhinnie

Gamifying the Odyssey: An Inclusive Approach to National 2 Talking and Listening for ASN Learners

Abstract: This practitioner inquiry examined an alternative approach to delivering National 2 Talking and Listening for a group of eight ASN learners during the 2023-2024 academic session. The learners experienced a diverse range of barriers to learning and were based across more than one location. Rather than adopting a conventional book study model, in which pupils listen and respond to a text, the project sought to develop a more active, engaging, and intellectually ambitious approach. The class selected Homer’s *Odyssey* as shared text, a work not typically associated with this level of study. Drawing on principles of gamification, key events from the epic were adapted into a Dungeons and Dragons style tabletop adventure in which pupils made decisions on behalf of Odysseus and responded to the narrative in interactive and imaginative ways. The teacher guided the sessions in alignment with the original story while also using pupils’ creative responses and misunderstandings as productive opportunities for discussion and learning. Differentiated question stems were prepared for each lesson to enable all learners to demonstrate knowledge, opinion, and interpretive understanding at an appropriate level. Progress was monitored through verbal retrieval practice, participation and retention records, staff and personal observations, quiz performance, parental feedback, and assessment outcomes. Findings suggest that this approach increased engagement, supported recall and retelling, and enabled learners to participate meaningfully in a challenging literary study. The positive pupil response further indicates the potential value of gamified approaches in ASN contexts.



Ross McWhinnie has been an ASN teacher within a specialist provision for the last nine years, working with learners who experience significant and complex barriers to learning. Prior to this, he taught history in a number of secondary schools in and around Glasgow. He has an Honours degree in Classical Civilisation, and Post-Graduate Certificate in Education, both from the University of Glasgow. In 2024, Ross received GTCS Professional Recognition.

Vicky Lyon

Practitioner Perspectives on Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance: A Participatory Inquiry within a Scottish Local Authority Outreach Service

Abstract: This study examined Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA) within a Scottish local authority outreach service. The original intention was to undertake a Participatory Action Research (PAR) project with children and young people (CYP) whose school attendance was between 0% and 20%. However, ethical approval for direct work with CYP could not be secured due to the absence of institutional ethical sponsorship. The project therefore shifted to exploring the perspectives of practitioners who support CYP experiencing significant non-attendance. The study was informed by a social constructivist and interpretivist paradigm and retained participatory elements by involving practitioners as active contributors to the research process. An adapted version of the “talking tree” tool (Gillett-Swan et al., 2023) was used to facilitate structured and creative reflection on school culture, relationships, and barriers to engagement. Data were analysed using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-phase framework for thematic analysis. Participants identified a range of individual, family, school-level, and system-level factors that shape non-attendance. They also highlighted practical forms of support that may help CYP re-engage, including predictable relationships, flexible learning arrangements such as adapted timetables and outreach provision, and the reduction of environmental stressors. The findings point to the need for clearer multi-agency processes and more consistent, early intervention for CYP experiencing long-term school avoidance. The study offers practitioner-informed insights that may contribute to local authority attendance policy and strategy. It also reflects on the challenges faced by teachers undertaking research in professional settings without access to institutional ethical structures.

Vicky Lyon began teaching in 1999, at the point when the McCrone Agreement was being implemented, so professional learning has always been central to her work. She became one of the first accredited EIS Learning Representatives, supporting colleagues to access meaningful development opportunities. She completed her Ed.D. in 2014, focusing on how online communities can support teacher communication and collaboration. More recently, she conducted an EIS Action Research project on Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance, an issue that is deeply connected to her practice as an Outreach Teacher. However, she encountered several barriers that limited the scope of this project. These experiences have directly informed the focus of her current Master’s thesis, which examines the barriers and enablers teachers face when trying to engage with research.



Clare Young

Assessing the Literacy Barriers Experienced by Bilingual Learners in a Scottish Primary School

Abstract: This study examined the assessment of literacy barriers among bilingual learners at Gilmerton Primary School in Scotland, where rising numbers of pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL) reflect a wider national trend. In Scottish schools, approximately 40,000 children are identified as EAL learners and are entitled to targeted support, including in-class and withdrawal provision alongside monitoring of English language proficiency. Against this backdrop, the project investigated which assessment tools most effectively identify literacy difficulties in bilingual learners. The study focused on 37 bilingual pupils in Primary 4 to Primary 7 who were recorded on school EAL trackers as either developing competence or competent in English. These pupils were assessed using both the Single Word Reading Test (SWRT), which primarily measures decoding and sight-reading skills, and the York Assessment of Reading Comprehension (YARC), which evaluates reading rate, reading accuracy, and reading comprehension. The project was motivated by concern that the school's existing reliance on the SWRT may overlook important aspects of literacy development in bilingual learners. Analysis of the assessment data indicated that the majority of pupils achieved average scores in both decoding and comprehension. However, the YARC revealed areas of difficulty not fully captured by the SWRT alone. The findings suggest that assessment approaches for bilingual learners should extend beyond single-word reading measures to include comprehension, enabling more precise identification of literacy needs and informing targeted interventions to support fuller participation and higher attainment.



Clare Young came into teaching in Scottish schools later in life having previously taught English as a foreign language in both Peru and Copenhagen, latterly to Bosnian Refugees in The Danish Refugee Council. Her 20-year teaching career started in the Scottish Borders followed by a move to Edinburgh City Council. Her role has always been in support for learning. Clare has had a strong interest in action research since she came into teaching. Her first research, which was published by the GTCS in 2007, focused on the creation and evaluation of a primary-secondary transition project for vulnerable pupils. This was also submitted to gain Chartered Teacher Status. In 2024, she conducted a comparison between the process of dyslexia identification in Denmark and Scotland. Clare enjoys the opportunity of evaluating her practice and finds the EIS Action Research Grants an ideal mechanism for this.

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