

THE ITCHY COO SCOTS LANGUAGE PROJECT 2002 - 2011



REVIEW SUMMARY

ITCHY COO - AT A GLANCE

- 📖 37 new Scots language books for children and young people
- 📖 250,000+ books sold
- 📖 1000+ Scots language school and library visits
- 📖 500+ Scots language teacher training sessions
- 📖 3 websites and Facebook page
- 📖 worked with 50,000+ children
- 📖 average annual funding: £50,000 (equivalent to one penny per year for each inhabitant of Scotland)

THE ITCHY COO PROJECT



Itchy Coo is the name of a publishing imprint which produces books in Scots, mainly but not exclusively for children and young readers. It was created by writers Matthew Fitt and James Robertson in partnership with Black & White Publishing Ltd, with the financial support of the Scottish Arts Council/Creative Scotland. Its first books appeared in August 2002 and by March 2011 it had published 37 titles. All but two of these titles remain in print, many have been reprinted several times, and the Itchy Coo list as a whole continues to flourish.

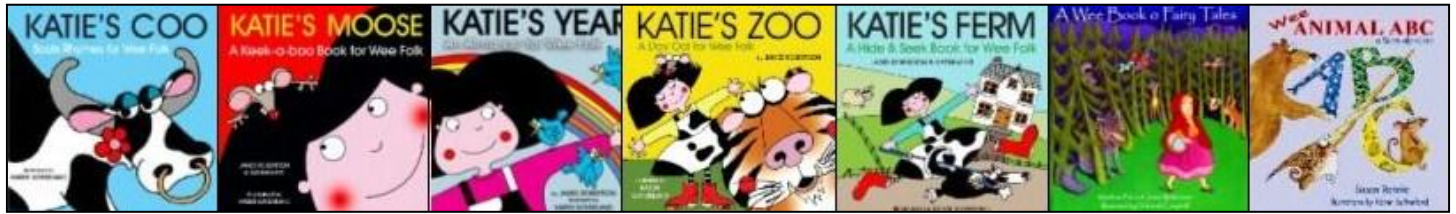
Concurrent with the creation and development of the imprint and as an integral part of the overall Itchy Coo project, Fitt and Robertson operated an extensive programme of educational and community outreach to ensure that the books produced had the widest possible readership and usefulness, particularly within primary and secondary schools. This programme ran from 2002 to 2011.

In addition Fitt and Robertson actively engaged in the development of strategic policy for the Scots language, placing particular emphasis upon its educational value: this involved the lobbying of and liaison with national and local government, educational institutions and literature organisations, and engagement with international bodies.

The education, outreach and strategic liaison elements of the Itchy Coo project were brought to an end in March 2011.

A full report on the project, *The Story of Itchy Coo*, can be accessed at www.itchy-coo.com.

ITCHY COO'S JOURNEY - MILESTANES



Aug	2002	Launch of Itchy Coo imprint at Edinburgh International Book Festival
Mar	2003	<i>Animal ABC</i> awarded Times Educational Supplement Scotland/Saltire Society Prize for Educational Publications
Aug	2003	Itchy Coo publishes <i>The Braille Coo</i> , first ever Braille book in Scots
June	2004	<i>King o the Midden</i> shortlisted for Scottish Arts Council Book Awards
Sept	2006	Launch of <i>The Eejits</i> , Scots translation of Roald Dahl's <i>The Twits</i>
May	2006	Itchy Coo represents Scots at Endangered Languages conference at United Nations, New York
Jan	2007	Publication of <i>Kidnappit</i> , first graphic novel in Scots
Jan	2007	ASDA Itchy Coo promotion in all Scottish stores
May	2007	Itchy Coo joins Literature Forum for Scotland
Nov	2007	<i>Katie's Moose</i> wins Early Years category of Royal Mail Scottish Children's Book awards
Dec	2007	Itchy Coo secures presence of Scots language in <i>Curriculum for Excellence</i>
2008 - 2009		Itchy Coo participates in Audit of Scots Language provision
Spring	2008	Citizens Theatre <i>Wee Fairy Tales in Scots</i> tour of Scotland
Aug	2008	Publication of <i>Winnie-the-Pooh in Scots</i>
2009 - 2010		James Robertson and Matthew Fitt appointed to Ministerial Working Group on Scots Language
Apr	2009	Formation of Education Sub-Committee, chaired by Matthew Fitt, of Scottish Parliament's Cross-Party Group on Scots Language,
Feb	2010	Publication of <i>Precious and the Puggies</i> by Alexander McCall Smith, his first Precious Ramotswa story for children, available only in Scots
Feb	2011	Twelve teachers receive first ever Awards for Professional Recognition for Teaching Scots Language



FEEDBACK ON THE ITCHY COO PROJECT

In autumn 2010, a cross-section of those who had professional involvement with Itchy Coo, including teachers, librarians, education officers, writers, arts administrators and facilitators, were interviewed and their views and opinions on the project evaluated. This survey, together with a history of the project, is contained in the report, **The Story of Itchy Coo**, which can be accessed at www.itchy-coo.com. The following is a sample of comments received.

'Would hold Itchy Coo up as a model of best practice.'

'It surpassed all expectations - particularly given the limited Itchy Coo resources available.'

'The books have always been of the highest quality.'

'The standards - writing, illustration and design - all excellent.'

'Itchy Coo has made me aware of just how much a small organisation can change attitudes and practice in schools and communities.'

'Has brought about systemic change by getting in at the roots.'

'Hugely popular and influential work in schools - impact on both teachers and pupils.'

'The revolution in the inclusion of Scots in the Curriculum for Excellence would not have happened without Itchy Coo.'

'Itchy Coo changed the attitudes of many teachers who realised that Scots learning was beneficial rather than detrimental to children's linguistic development.'

'Their advocacy for Scots, undertaken with energy and passion and completely central to the achievement of their aims and objectives, was one of the biggest things they achieved.'

'At a strategic level there will be immediate, direct gaps in the provision and enabling of continuing development of Scots.'

'The first and instant issue is a gap in the educational side and how the loss of the work Matthew Fitt has been doing will be filled.'

'There will no longer be a central point of reference for advice and support.'

'Thank you for all your good work in the Itchy Coo project. It can be very easy to take such a good initiative for granted and forget just how low the profile of Scots was before Itchy Coo was established.'

'It would be a wise government that set about ensuring such provision was built into the curriculum as an entitlement.'

'There should be long term investment in greatly enhanced support structures for Scots; without this there will be a real risk of serious decline in the status of the Scots language.'

'A HUGE THANK YOU TO JAMES AND MATTHEW.'

WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED, AND WHAT IS STILL TO DO

Without the work of Itchy Coo some of the following outcomes would not have happened, and arguably none of them would have happened in the same way or to the same extent:

The publication and continued availability of a wide range of high quality books in Scots, suitable for children and young people from pre-school years through to secondary school level;

Recognition and acknowledgment of Scots in *Curriculum for Excellence*;

The creation of a variety of web-based resources, information and support for teachers working with Scots language;

A *general*, widespread recognition of the intrinsic value of Scots language in education across Scotland;

Specific recognition of the value of Scots language in education, as shown, for example, through the experience of Falkirk Council, and the General Teaching Council of Scotland's Professional Recognition Awards;

Development of new Scots language teaching resources in different local authority areas;

Greatly increased recognition of and engagement with Scots language by literature, arts, cultural and other organisations;

Increased recognition of and engagement with Scots language by national and local government, politicians and civil servants.

It is difficult to gauge accurately or fully the impact the Itchy Coo project has had on these different areas of Scottish life and work, and almost impossible to estimate the longer-term impact. Without Itchy Coo's ongoing educational outreach and strategic liaison activities it is possible that much of the progress outlined above may falter, decline or even go into reverse. It is Matthew Fitt and James Robertson's view that the change in attitudes to and engagement with Scots are profound enough to prevent this happening, and in any case they do not believe that the healthy sustainability of the language can, should or does depend on the activities of one small organisation. Nevertheless, despite the increased enthusiasm and engagement of many in education, libraries, the arts and political spheres, they are disappointed that in some quarters, at both national and local government levels, commitment to the support and development of Scots appears to remain only lukewarm. In the current economic climate this means that substantial financial input into Scots language provision is unlikely to be forthcoming unless specific changes in policy occur.

Fitt and Robertson believe that the Itchy Coo project has amply demonstrated over this ten year period what can be done with very few resources and the positive outcomes which can be achieved. They are of the opinion that it would be a derogation of responsibility if the opportunity to consolidate these and to secure further positive educational and cultural outcomes was not seized.

They hope that other agencies and organisations, including national and local government, will grasp this nettle, and look forward to seeing what policies are developed, what new resources are made available and what results these policies and resources achieve.