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Becoming a Teacher of Irish: The Evolution of Beliefs, Attitudes and Role Perceptions

PhD in Applied Linguistics

2015

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Declarations

I hereby declare that this thesis, submitted in candidature for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Trinity College, Dublin, has not previously been submitted for a degree at this or any other university.

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Summary

The aim of the present study is to explore the process of becoming a primary level teacher of Irish, the official yet minority language in Ireland. Since all primary level teachers must teach Irish, becoming a primary teacher in Ireland is bound up in complex ways with the process of becoming a teacher of a minority language and with personal attitudes to, and views on, the language itself. The study represents the first substantial attempt to analyse these complexities from the point of view of the student teacher. It focuses particularly on the beginning pre-service teacher's beliefs about teaching Irish, attitudes to the Irish language and to teaching Irish, and role perceptions. In addition, it explores whether, and to what extent, beliefs, attitudes and perceptions change at different stages of the initial teacher education programme and during the period of early in-service practice. Finally, we examine two key obligatory placements that students undertake during their initial teacher education programme: school placement and placement in the target Irish-language community (*An Ghaeltacht*). This examination involves looking at both pre-service teachers' early anticipations, and their later actual experience, of the placements; and the impact of the placements, if any, on beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions.

Chapter 1 presents a brief overview of the study defining and delineating each of the three areas of beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions. It also gives a preliminary indication of the research methods employed and the participants involved.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature on three research traditions that inform this thesis and provide the general background to the study. First, the nature, origin and significance of beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions are examined, examining too whether they belong to the cognitive or affective dimension. Second we examine the sociolinguistic context of the teaching of minority languages, particularly Irish, and the impact of this context on the process of becoming a teacher. Finally the transition to teaching, and the move from being a learner to a teacher is scrutinised, with particular reference to specific features of initial teacher education for teachers of Irish.

Chapter 3 provides the rationale for combining cross-sectional and longitudinal methods in this diachronic study. The research instruments designed, namely a questionnaire and an interview schedule, were used with between 75-91 student teachers at the beginning and end of their initial teacher education programme. As far as was appropriate, the questionnaire items and interview questions were similar across pre-service teacher groups beginning (Group 1) and completing (Group 2) their programme to allow cross-sectional comparisons.

Chapter 4 deals with early beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions, reporting beginning student teachers' responses to closed, and supplementary open-ended, questionnaire items covering these three domains. Questionnaire-based anticipations of school and *Gaeltacht* placements by Group 1 are also analysed. Also reported are quantitative data which is compared and contrasted with qualitative data derived from interviews with a subgroup of teachers soon after the completion of the first school and *Gaeltacht* placements. The goal here is to identify any early emerging changes in views or attitudes.

Chapter 5 presents questionnaire-based data on later beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions of student teachers in their final year of initial teacher education (Group 2). Cross-sectional comparisons with Group 1 questionnaire data to explore the evolution of student

teacher views in these three domains are reported. Data from the two groups reflecting consistency or lack of consistency between early anticipations, first experiences and later terminal reflections on the two obligatory placements are also analysed. Finally, interview-based information from a subgroup of Group 2 teachers is examined for evidence of further change in beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions during early professional practice.

Chapter 6 discusses the findings reported in Chapters 4 and 5. Results show that beginning pre-service teachers of Irish have a characteristic profile in relation to levels of proficiency in Irish and attitude to learning Irish compared to the general public and other student groups. Results also indicate that, for the most part, initial beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions remain stable over time, though there are some changes with the potential to substantially influence the way the student teacher engages with her role as primary school teacher and teacher of Irish. Teachers' reports of the process of becoming a teacher also point to some unique features of this process for teachers of Irish generally and for those teachers with high oral proficiency.

Chapter 7 summarises the thesis and the main findings. It outlines the implications for initial teacher education, classroom practice and for the Irish language revitalisation enterprise. Recommendations are made for future research, and for changes in teaching approaches and the supports available to teachers.

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List of Abbreviations

In the course of the thesis, certain abbreviations are used consistently. These are outlined below:

EAL = English as an additional language

SEN = special education needs

CLIL = content and language integrate learning

L1 = first/ home language

SL = second language

FL = foreign language

CLT = Communicative Language Teaching

SLA = Second Language Acquisition

The term "teacher" is used to describe individuals/students at different stages along the continuum of teacher education, from early pre-service education to in-service practice. It should also be noted that the teacher's gender in this thesis is female, and the child's gender is male. For economy, the umbrella term "views" is used also to describe the three areas of beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions.

Chapter 1 Introduction

This study explores the pre-service teacher and early practising teacher's experience of becoming a teacher of Irish at primary level, with particular reference to (1) beliefs, (2) attitudes and (3) role perceptions. It also explores the pre-service teacher's experience of two obligatory placements which are key features of initial teacher education: school placement and placement in the target language community (*Gaeltacht*), and the potential influence that these placements have on beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions. Sociolinguistic factors such as the minority language context in which Irish is taught, and the crucial role of primary schools in the revitalisation of Irish, are key aspects of the background to the study. This study looks at individuals' perspectives on becoming a teacher of Irish, including the transition from a being a learner to being a teacher and serving as a representative speaker of the language for learners. This is a "creative longitudinal" study (Dörnyei, 2007) with both cross-sectional and longitudinal dimensions. The study focuses on teachers' beliefs about language learning, attitudes to the target language, and perceptions of their future role as teachers of Irish at four different career points. The cross sectional dimension is represented by comparisons between Study 1 (first year students in initial teacher education) and Study 2 (corresponding final year student teachers entering their first year of professional practice). Within each of these two studies, there is a longitudinal dimension which tracks the participants over the period of an academic year (See further details in 2.5.2 Overview of Study). Also explored in a longitudinal aspect of the study is the extent to which these beliefs, attitudes and perceptions change, or do not change, during initial teacher education and early professional practice, and whether these changes relate to the two obligatory placements. While a solely longitudinal design involving the tracking of one group throughout their entire initial teacher education programme and early in-service practice would be preferable in describing and explaining the types of changes that occur, a longitudinal study was not possible within the time constraints of this research. Specific cohort effects, too, may impact the data collected (see below p.3).

Exploring beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions is important in the case of teaching Irish for a number of reasons. Firstly, while comprehensive data on pre-service teachers' beliefs about language teaching exists for a number of different populations e.g. teachers of English, Horwitz (1985), there is a dearth of comparative data for the teaching of Irish. Secondly, a range in attitudes to Irish is present in the general public in Ireland with primary teachers reporting an above average positive disposition towards to the language (Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin, 1994). Irrespective of the pre-service teacher's own attitude to Irish, upon entering initial teacher education, the teacher is committing herself to teaching and promoting the language as part of

her professional duties. A unique feature of initial teacher education in Ireland is that all teachers are trained to teach Irish, as opposed to representatives of the target language and culture taking responsibility for the promotion of the language in the community e.g. in the case of Arabic in The Netherlands or the Māori language in New Zealand. We do not know whether the more favourable attitudes to Irish reported by primary teachers are formed prior to, or during, initial teacher education and consequently this study also explores two specific experiences during initial teacher education: first school placement and *Gaeltacht* placement that have been shown to affect pre-service teachers' beliefs, attitudes and perceptions (Busch, 2010; Tanaka and Ellis, 2003). Thirdly, teachers are shown to develop a professional identity (Vargehese et al., 2005) and this identity has been shown to be influenced by community and societal expectations (Benton and Benton, 2001; Lastra, 2001). We will explore the role that the teacher of Irish assumes. This has great importance in the case of Irish and other minority languages because, as will be made clear later, teachers take on substantial roles in relation to the language when they enter the profession. Thus, the context of the present study also includes the transition to professional practice.

There are a number of constraints that pertained to the executions of the study and that have to be borne in mind in the interpretation of the results. The first had to do with the possibility that Group 1 and Group 2 compared might differ somewhat in terms of the programme of study they encountered. It should be noted that he Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree programme was in the process of being reconfigured while the doctoral research was being undertaken. The last time that a process of this nature was conducted was in the 1970s. The former B.Ed. model was reconfigured to provide a programme of study for pre-service teachers that will enable them to meet the needs of twenty first century pupils. The incoming first years i.e. Group 1 of the study, are undertaking the reconfigured B.Ed. programme, while the final year students are undertaking the previous version of the B.Ed. programme. The main difference between these two models is that Group 1 is undertaking a 4-year full time degree in order to obtain a Level 8 degree, as per the National Framework of Qualifications. Group 2, however, undertake a 3-year full time programme of study to obtain a Level 7 degree. Then, during the fourth year, and the year over which they are being observed in this study, they engage in a part-time study to obtain a level 8 degree. It is usual practice during this fourth year for students to either work as a substitute teacher or to obtain a full-time position in a school.

The content of the older and reconfigured B.Ed. is broadly similar but the mode of learning is modified in the reconfigured B.Ed. More online learning, and self-directed study is a feature of the delivery of the reconfigured B.Ed. In relation to the Irish teaching methods and Irish

language modules that the first years will undertake, the amount of time allocated to face-to-face lectures is reduced but supplemented with an increase in self-directed study tasks. As part of the process of learning, the pre-service teachers are expected to take more of an ownership of their learning, setting learning goals for themselves and endeavouring to address any gaps that they may have in their own knowledge. This culture of continuous reflection on their progress may have facilitated the process of analysing beliefs, attitudes and perceptions, which is a core part of the study, for Group 1 participants. It is important to note though that this type of formalised continuous reflections was not a part of the former B.Ed.

A further factor that may influence the composition of Group1 and Group 2 is the changing profile of students attending the college in which this study is being conducted. Because of changes in initial education structures, some colleges of education have been amalgamated with larger universities. In the case of two such colleges of education, this has resulted in a physical move to another university or college campus. The new physical locations of other colleges of education could mean that they are a more viable option for certain students, in particular students coming from the West of Ireland, especially *Gaeltacht* areas. Students who traditionally were likely to study in the college where this study is based are not more likely to choose other colleges. This effectively means that the composition of Group 1 and Group 2 may differ in that Group 1 may have lower numbers of native speakers.

Within the constraints of a four-year doctoral study, it was not feasible to wait until both groups experienced the reconfigured B.Ed. but it is important to note that the two key experiences of school and *Gaeltacht* placement are consistent across the two groups. Every effort was made in inviting students to participate in the study to ensure that there was a roughly similar spread of participants in terms of language background, proficiency, gender and age so that both groups could be fairly compared.

A further possibly limiting factor for a study of this kind is that the researcher is also the lecturer involved in the education of the participants. In an ideal world, it would be nice to work with students from another college, and indeed to include students from a number of colleges, however, practical issues, and the timescale under which the study had to be executed, dictated otherwise. Note however measures taken to avoid any potential conflict between the researcher inviting her students to participate in this study, and her role as lecturer in the college of education are dealt with later in section 3.5.

Outline of Study

This thesis has 7 main parts:

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Beliefs, Attitudes and Role Perceptions of Beginning Teachers in a Minority Language Context

Chapter 3: Design of Study

Chapter 4: Early Beliefs, Attitudes and Role Perceptions

Chapter 5: Later Beliefs, Attitudes and Role Perceptions

Chapter 6: The Evolution of Views during Initial Teacher Education and Early In-Service Practice

Chapter 7: Conclusions and Recommendations

In Chapter 2, we explore five areas: language learning beliefs; language attitudes; perceptions of the role of the minority language teacher; minority languages and the sociolinguistic context of Irish; and the transition to teaching: initial teacher education, early professional practice and change. Exploration of these areas defines how each of the concepts of beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions are interpreted in the context of this study, and provides the general background to the study.

In Chapter 3, the design and scope of the current research are given. This section examines five key areas: the importance of examining the process of becoming a teacher of Irish; aims of the study; key experiences during initial teacher education and early in-service practice; recording and measuring growth and development of beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions; and finally the design of the current study. It also defends the choice of combining cross-sectional and longitudinal methods in a diachronic study of this nature.

The presentation of results is divided into two parts. Chapter 4 deals with early beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions. This centres on data from pre-service teachers in their first year of initial teacher education at two particular points: beginning of initial teacher education, and after they have completed first school and *Gaeltacht* placement. It examines two placements' contribution to the evolution of beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions.

Chapter 5 addresses later beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions. This chapter centres on data from pre-service teachers at the end of initial teacher education reflecting on the experience of becoming a teacher of Irish, and later follows their experience of the first year of professional practice. It examines the extent to which beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions evolve between the beginning and end of initial teacher education, looking in particular at the impact of school and *Gaeltacht* placement, and later when the young teacher begins her career.

Chapter 6 provides the discussion for the findings that emerge in chapters 4 and 5. It gives an overview of the characteristic profile of pre-service teachers, tracks the evolution of beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions during initial teacher education and early in-service practice suggesting areas in which stability or change of these may be favoured in the process of becoming a teacher of Irish. It also discusses the perceived catalysts for change.

Chapter 7 deals with Conclusions and Further Recommendations. Areas in which teachers are seen to need further support are identified and effective strategies to address these areas are presented.

Chapter 2 Beliefs, Attitudes and Role Perceptions of Beginning Teachers in a Minority Language Context

2.0 Teachers of Irish and their Views

The three key areas of teachers' views explored in this study are beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions. It is important to distinguish briefly between these three domains of particular interest in this dissertation: beliefs about language learning, attitudes to the specific languages and perceptions of the teacher's role. Working definitions of these three areas are first presented below, followed by factors contributing to the development of beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions, such as nature and origin.

Beliefs about language learning, for the purpose of this study, are operationalised as the cognitive beliefs that pre-service teachers hold concerning strategies most effective in teaching the target language. It also includes views on such issues as the difficulty of language learning, language and communication strategies, the nature of language learning foreign language aptitude, and motivation and expectations in language learning (Horwitz, 1985). The second aspect of the teacher's perspective that concerns us is language attitudes – the personal and professional views that a teacher holds regarding the target language itself e.g. whether she has a favourable or unfavourable attitude to the language. Finally, the pre-service teacher's perception of the teacher's role and what she feels is expected of her in professional and social terms is explored. This includes views on the revitalisation of Irish in society and in primary schools, the demands placed on her in terms of proficiency, the responsibility society places on the primary teacher in the revitalisation and maintenance initiative, her views on acting as a representative of the target language and culture, as well her role in nurturing positive attitudes to the language. Although these three aspects may well be connected and indeed co-influence each other, for the purpose of this research, it is important to distinguish between them as far as possible. Beliefs may be primarily cognitive in nature but professional identity and perceptions of the role of a teacher are seen to be socially constructed (Dewey, 1938). While a teacher may hold certain beliefs about effective ways to teach a language for instance, each interaction in the classroom potentially affects their sense of self and how good they perceive themselves to be (Barcelos, 2003). In addition, beliefs, attitudes and perceptions may not necessarily align in predictable ways. For example, a teacher may be generally positive towards a minority language such as Irish but resent the responsibility placed on her in promoting the language as part of the larger national revitalisation and maintenance initiative (INTO, 1985).

The issues of beliefs, attitudes and perceptions in relation to pre-service teachers are of particular importance in the case of Irish, particularly at primary level. Irish is not only a minority language, but also primary schools have a tradition of bearing the greatest measure of responsibility for reproducing competence in the language in the next generation (Harris, 2006).

2.1 Language Learning Beliefs

This section looks at the first aspect of the teacher's perspective: nature and origins of language learning beliefs. Sections 2.2 and 2.3 look at the remaining two aspects: attitudes and role perceptions. This section will explore origins and nature of language learning beliefs, before turning to specific language learning beliefs that pre-service teachers hold.

2.1.1 Nature and Origins of Language Learning Beliefs

Defining language learning beliefs can be subjective (Pajares, 1992). Beliefs, in this study, refer to cognitive beliefs that pre-service teachers hold concerning effective methods for teaching and learning Irish. Beliefs are said to be essentially cognitive in nature. However, it is usually argued that they still interact with the affective dimension of language learning (Garrett et al. 2003). For example, at times, there may be a dissonance between cognitive and affective components. A person may express a belief in minority language education while harbouring negative feelings about such education (Baker, 1992). It is proposed that beliefs belong to a lower order of thinking and are distinct from their higher order "conceptions" (Benson and Lor, 1999). It is claimed that beliefs are permeable and dynamic structures that act as a filter through which new knowledge and experiences are screened for meaning (Zheng, 2009). Finally, it should be noted that it is not always possible to distinguish absolutely between beliefs about language teaching and beliefs about language learning (Horwitz, 1988). This mirrors the complexity of a study involving pre-service teachers who are at the same time learners and teachers of Irish.

Pre-service teachers often come to initial teacher education with well-developed beliefs about language learning (Horwitz, 1985). Becoming aware of these beliefs, and understanding where they came from, is a key part of initial teacher education (Teaching Council, 2011). A great many of the beliefs about language learning have their roots in the pre-service teacher's own experience of language instruction (Sato and Kleinasser, 1999). This can be seen as micro level language learning beliefs (Nikitina and Furuoka, 2007). There is evidence that in certain circumstances at least, beginning teachers use previous teachers as models to shape their own practices (Veléz-Rendón, 2002). It is also notable that second language (SL), foreign language (FL) and additional language (AL) learners can form their beliefs through the modelling of significant others (Ewald, 2004; Huang, 1997). Many of the beliefs held by pre-service teachers about

language learning originate in problems they had while learning (Bodycott, 1997). In other cases, convictions arise from witnessing a peer engaged in a particular learning strategy or observing what are perceived to be successful language learners (Puchta, 1999). Pre-service teachers' instructional decisions during school placement in particular can be based on their own language learning experiences. They may model the behaviours of a teacher who taught them. They may also draw on resources and activities that they were exposed to and enjoyed while in school (Johnson, 1994; Mangubhai et al,. 2005). The role of the home in constructing language learning beliefs is not as prevalent in studies. It is possible, however, that parents' increasing role in education and children's homework in the past two decades (Irish national Teachers Organisation (INTO), 1997) will give rise in the future to a greater influence of parental approaches to learning strategies on pre-service teachers language learning beliefs.

Language learning beliefs of teachers can also be influenced by cultural and societal factors. In this context they can be seen as macro level beliefs (Nikitina and Furuoka, 2007). Some researchers have found that language learning beliefs tend to be fairly uniform among learners in a given country (Sakui and Gaies, 1999). This is possibly due in part to the value the particular society places on language learning. The similarity in learners' language learning beliefs in a given country may also relate to the fact that they have experienced, by and large, a similar education system. The success of immersion education programmes in Canada for example, has influenced individuals' views that immersion is necessary for successful language learning (Kouritizin et al., 2007). Differences exist in language learning beliefs between learners from different countries (Horwitz, 1988; Siebert, 2003). Beliefs about the ease of learning a language vary from country to country, for instance (Horwitz, 1988). Socio-political factors and socialisation processes in different countries may account for this variance, but the extent to which a society can influence an individual's language learning beliefs is difficult to measure (Kouritzin et al., 2007). Of course, it is not always easy to generalise about whole populations of learners, and it should be noted too that intragroup variance in language beliefs is common owing to individual differences (Horwitz, 1999). While the claim that culture determines language beliefs is contested (Horwitz, 1999), it is still argued that macro factors feature in language belief development (Nikitina and Furuoka, 2007) and therefore culture and society can be seen as influencing, as opposed to determining, language learning beliefs. The extent to which a language is used globally can also influence learners' views on the importance of learning it (Horwitz, 1988). World dominance of a language increases the learners' motivation with the result that Arabic, Chinese, Hindi and Spanish, are popular choices (Kouritzin et al., 2007) as well as learning the language of desirable trading partners such as Japanese (Helliwell, 1999). Differences in the popularity of learning different languages reveals the

relative status of language learning in the various countries and reflect the fact that social, political, and economic forces can also influence learner attitudes (Horwitz, 1999).

Language learning beliefs exist independently of general epistemological beliefs and also tend to be context and task-specific (Mori, 1999; Yang, 1992; Sakui and Gaies, 1999; Nikitina and Furuoka, 2007). They can also be language-specific. Beliefs about language learning can be insightful and help the learner, or conversely they may be misguided and of little help (Horwitz, 1987; Mantle-Bromley, 1995; Vibulphol, 2004, Tercanlioglu, 2005). Some researchers go so far as to describe the beliefs that pre-service teachers hold as untrue and more akin to a "myth" (Altan, 2006; Horwitz, 1988).

2.1.2 Specific Language Learning Beliefs held by Teachers

Some trends are identified in pre-service teachers' and in-service teachers' language learning beliefs. For instance, they tend to hold a view on the best general approach to language teaching, e.g. a Communicative Approach to Language Teaching (CLT) (Busch, 2010; Horwitz, 1988; Wong, 2010). Pre-service and serving language teachers also see the study of language as distinct from the study of other school subjects and indeed perceive differences between the teaching of different languages (Altan, 2006; Harris, 2006; Horwitz, 1999; Kouritzin et al. 2007; Ó Laoire, 2007). The Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) compiled by Elaine Horwitz in 1985 concerns pre-service teachers' views on five key elements of language teaching: difficulty of language learning, language and communication strategies, the nature of language learning, foreign language aptitude, and motivation and expectations in language learning. This inventory is widely used in the study of language learning beliefs of pre-service teachers and is considered a valid and reliable instrument (Nikitina and Furuoka, 2007). This research will draw largely on Horwitz' study and the model of beliefs about language learning that she provides to identify trends in pre-service teachers' beliefs about language teaching and also matters over which language teachers disagree.

There are some aspects of language learning over which there is no consensus among language teachers. The role of grammar and translation, for instance, which is a key feature of older curricula is still cause for debate among language teachers (Busch, 2010; Horwitz, 1999; INTO, 1985; Liao, 2006; Tercanlioglu, 2005). Use of mother tongue in language teaching is also debated and an area in which language teachers do not always receive clear guidance (Liao, 2006; Harris, 2007; Ó Néill, 2008; Wong, 2010). Teachers have mixed views concerning a belief in a foreign language aptitude (Altan, 2006; Horwitz, 1999; Ellis, 2008; Nikitina and Furuoka, 2007). Part of the remit of the language teacher is also to act as a representative of the target culture for

students. This too is an area over which language teachers have mixed feelings (Byram and Grundy, 2002; Schulz, 2007; Wilbur, 2007; Wong, 2010).

2.2 Language Attitudes

This section offers a definition of attitudes to be used in this study and also explores the nature and origins of language attitudes, in particular the contribution of experiences in the home, in formal education and societal influences.

2.2.1 The Concept of Language Attitudes

The second element of the teacher's perspective to be examined is her attitude to the target language itself. Attitude is considered "the most indispensable concept in social psychology" (Allport, 1935:801). Differences between positive attitudes to a language or to bilingualism in general has been shown to be distinct from beliefs about actually learning that language or language learning generally (CILAR, 1975; Kourtizin et al., 2007) although they may be co-influenced. Several definitions of "attitude" exist. Generally, attitude is seen as an affect for or against a psychological object (Thurstone, 1931), or as a learned disposition to think, feel and behave toward a person (or object) in a particular way (Allport, 1935), or a disposition to react favourably or unfavourably to a class of objects (Sarnoff, 1970). In this study, we are concerned with pre-service teachers' attitudes in relation to the Irish language, and to learning Irish. Several traits are seen as integral to our understanding of attitudes. First, attitudes are deemed to be part of the affective dimension of language learning, along with personality, motivation, the learner's expectation, sociocultural experience or anxiety (Skehan, 1989). Attitudes are taken to be evaluative of objects or people (Baker 1992). They tend to be less affected by situational factors than beliefs, and can also be measured more reliably than language learning beliefs (Garrett, 2010). We now turn to the origins of attitudes towards a language.

2.2.2 Origins of Language Attitudes: The Home

While language learning beliefs are mostly influenced by experiences in education, language attitudes can be influenced by experiences in the home, in education or by societal attitudes. Attitudes shaped by immediate family environment have been examined extensively (Bernat et al. 2009; Gardner, 1985; Orland-Barak and Yinon, 2005). Mothers play a pivotal role in the formation of language attitudes among pre-service teachers Bodycott, 1997). Women also tend to have more favourable attitudes towards different languages, in particular minority languages (Lasagabaster and Huguet, 2007). Parents' language attitudes have a bearing on children's language attitudes, for instance, if a parent is reluctant to praise accomplishments in language learning, then the child may have the impression that language learning does not hold much value

(Harris, 2006). It is not of course as simple as the child adopting all of the parents' attitudes favourable or unfavourable, but it does highlight that the absence of tangible support for Irish may convey an implicit message to the child about the importance of the language, and that the parent does not hold favourable attitudes towards it. The 1999 Curriculum for the Irish language (*Gaeilge*) stresses that conveying a favourable attitude is crucial particularly in cases where a parent does not perceive themselves to be proficient in Irish (An Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta (DES), 1999). This is of particular importance where a language is not acquired by natural immersion. The first language of the home (L1) too, is shown to be significant in developing positive attitudes to minority languages (e.g. Frisian and Catalan, Garrett, 2003). An interesting finding in Wales is that there seems to be a critical period in attitude development: around the age of 11 or 12 when attitudes become less favourable (Baker, 1988). In the case of Welsh, even if Welsh is the L1 of the home, initial positive attitudes to the language cannot always withstand the impact of experiences later in life. A decline in favourable attitudes during the teenage years is usually linked to involvement in popular or majority culture and views that the minority language is old fashioned or uncool.

2.2.3 Origins of Language Attitudes: Education

Teachers have a role in the development of language attitudes (Garrett, 2010). Teachers' attitudes can sometimes be more influential than parents (Lambert and Tucker, 1972). Teacher attitudes in turn impact professional practice (Dooley, 2005; Ellis, 2004; Woods, 1996) and pupils' attitude and performance (Dooley 2005; Lasagabaster and Huguet, 2007). This has been coined the "Pygmalion Effect". A decline in interest in language learning is not uncommon throughout schooling, particularly where the language is taught as a subject only (Chambers, 1999; Koizumi and Matsuo, 1993; Williams, Burden, and Lanyers, 2002). This has led researchers to suggest that attitudes to minority languages need to be nurtured throughout schooling (Lasagabaster and Huguet, 2007). Students in immersion education programmes, however, are consistently found to have more favourable attitudes to the target language than those in regular "subject only" programmes (Lasagabaster and Huguet, 2007).

2.2.4 Origins of Language Attitudes: Culture and Society

Culture, society and their influence on language attitudes is a much debated area (Horwitz, 1999; Nikitina and Furuoka, 2007). It is however argued that there are sets of social conditions that shape learners' attitudes to the value of learning a language (Kouritzin et al., 2007). General societal attitudes to the value of language learning, and attitudes towards learning specific

languages may influence individual learners' own attitudes. Some studies explore the link between public attitudes toward learning foreign/additional languages and individuals' perspectives (e.g. Kouritizin et al., 2007). In Kouritizin's study, it is shown, for example, that language study is not perceived by the Canadian public as important as other subjects in the education system. It is also shown that pre-service teachers may see the advantages of language learning on a national level, mostly in economic terms, which are not perceived as advantages on a personal level. Interestingly, some pre-service teachers express the view that it is more important for people from developing countries to speak more than one language than people from developed countries (Kouritzin et al., 2007). More widely held, and even global, views about the value of specific languages can also be influential. The perceived superiority of English as a language is well documented (Phillipson, 1992; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). Attitudes towards the value of learning other languages e.g. Spanish and Mandarin may be influenced by their perceived value in trade (Kouritzin et al., 2007). Pre-service teachers are therefore, aware of societal views on language learning but their own personal views or perceptions may conflict with these broader views at times. For instance, while they may in general respect bilinguals and bilingualism in society, they do not necessarily hold favourable views towards the actual experience of learning a language (Kouritzin et al., 2007).

Attitudes towards the value of learning a minority language, in particular, can be influenced by the language's perceived usefulness. In the case of Irish, the limited opportunity and need for using Irish outside of the classroom has been reported (Harris, 2006). Wider societal, official and institutional support for a minority language such as Irish, however, can also influence learners' experience of the language within the education system. While some teachers during the 1930s displayed elevated levels of commitment to the promotion of Irish through their work on developing children's literature, it appears that high levels of anxiety in their role has been expressed as early as the 1930s in an INTO study (though this data must be interpreted in the context of a trade union organisation) and again in the 1980s. As Harris (2006) describes, some major problems in the teaching of Irish began to emerge in the late 1980s and 1990s. The most tangible problem in relation to official responsiveness during 1985 – 2002 was the failure to provide in time a new curriculum with suitable resources for teaching Irish. Previously in 1985 both the Irish-language syllabus and conversation course were developed under the auspices of the Department of Education and Science (DES), whereas the current 1999 curriculum was developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. The DES financially supported a project to develop some resources for the introduction of a communicative approach to language teaching (CLT) in the mid-1990s but after this, new Irish courses for English-medium schools were produced by commercial publishers. In the case of Irish-medium schools, Scéim na

nDearthóirí or The Designers' Scheme, was put in place by the Department to develop teaching resources. Major restructuring of the school inspectorate coincided with this time period which resulted in the emphasis switching from day to day administration to the treatment of broader issues such as policy making and evaluation. Responsibility for Irish-medium education became part of the remit of a new statutory body an Chomhairle Um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta, and this group acquired the responsibility for Scéim na nDearthóirí. Harris (2006) raises the question of whether the Irish language in education enjoyed greater protection in the former arrangement when the Department of Education and Science and Inspectorate had a greater hand in the day-to-day teaching of Irish and also in the design of appropriate materials. This role encompassed responsibility for Irish as both as a school subject and as the national language. The obvious issues of declining levels of competence and interest amongst children, as well as factors affecting teacher morale and ability to teach Irish effectively, were not addressed in a prompt, co-ordinated way on a national level because of the "delegated arrangements" (Harris, 2006: 175) and so teachers began to feel isolated in their roles in language education and language maintenance.

These findings point to the fact the some language attitudes reflect broader societal norms while others are unique to the language learner, linked to such factors as home background characteristics and experiences in education. They also show how the individual's language attitudes may be well established by the time the pre-service teacher begins college, and that initial positive attitudes to a minority language does not necessarily guarantee long-term persistence of these favourable views.

2.3 Perceptions of the Role of the Language Teacher

This section examines the perceptions that pre-service teachers develop when anticipating their future role. It is asserted that perceptions of the language teacher's role can be divided into three facets (Garza, 2014): general views on teaching, views on language teaching and finally views on the particular language that will be taught. Each facet is important in the case of teachers of Irish because they are generalist teachers at primary level, teaching 11 subjects, they may also share similarities with other language teachers but the minority status of Irish, and the role of the teacher in promoting Irish, may introduce a unique dimension to the teaching of Irish.

2.3.1 Constructing a Professional Identity as a Teacher

Primary teachers begin to construct a general professional identity during the transition to pre-service education and this identity is further developed during in-service practice (Schulman, 1998; Sutherland et al., 2009). This professional identity is related to, but not synonymous with, their

personal identity (Sutherland et al., 2009). Their professional identity is also distinct from simply a description of their role and functions as a teacher because it is also made up by the way in which the teacher identifies with, and feels about, being a teacher (Leavy et al., 2007). Professional identity is defined as a "personal narrativisation of what consists of his or her (never fully formed or always potentially changing) core identity as a teacher" (Sutherland et al., 2009). Perceptions of their roles are defined as "representations of their understandings of their own professional identity" (Atkinson et al., 1987). Because of the fluid and dynamic nature of identity, this professional identity has the potential to grow and develop during the continuum of teacher education.

Similar to the origin of beliefs about teaching a language, and attitudes towards the target language, pre-service teachers begin to construct a professional identity early on. This professional identity is derived from multiple sources: personal experience of individual teachers, particular experiences of community (Leavy et al., 2007) and of parenting (Bullough and Knowles, 1991), experiences with schooling and instruction (Leavy et al., 2007) and pedagogical knowledge obtained during initial teacher education. These experiences influence how the pre-service teacher views the role of the teacher, and how she feels about her future role as an educator. Teaching is perceived as a profession offering great job satisfaction because of its intrinsic rewards and the choice to become a teacher is often formed very early in life (Ezer et al., 2010). It is valued as an important profession but the inherent difficulties in the work are acknowledged by pre-service teachers (Ezer et al, 2010). While optimism surrounding her future career is by and large maintained during pre-service training and early in-service practice, pre-service teachers have been shown to be more optimistic in their first year of initial teacher education compared to their final year (Tok, 2011). This suggests that perceptions of their future roles are modified during initial teacher education.

Primary teachers in Ireland are also language teachers. Although pre-service teachers are shown to view themselves to an extent as subject matter experts, they also see themselves as pedagogical experts and didactical experts (Beijaard, et al. 2000). The ethical, moral and pastoral role in teaching is significant in a way that has no real parallel in other professions. Nevertheless, some authors suggest that it is their pedagogical role that is perceived by teachers as most important (Beijaard and De Vries, 1997). Almost half of teachers (48.0%) in 1985 agreed that a teacher's competence is often judged on the teaching of Irish (INTO, 1985) but in reflecting on school placement experiences, pre-service teachers are most likely to focus on interpersonal skills and selection of activities rather than theories of second or additional language acquisition for example (Antonek et al., 1997).

Professional identity can be subdivided into two categories: assigned identity and claimed identity (Varghese et al., 2005). Assigned identity stems from societal views on the role of a teacher and can be interpreted in the socio-cultural and socio-political context of teaching. In a minority language context for instance, this assigned role is extended further to include a responsibility for revitalising the minority language. Because assigned identity is imposed on a person by others, it is distinct from their claimed identity: the identity or identities one acknowledges or claims for oneself (Buzzelli and Johnston, 2002). Both of these dimensions of professional identity are at play in the classroom and are important in understanding how a teacher views his or her role as an educator (Varghese et al., 2005).

2.3.2 Constructing a Professional Identity as a Minority Language Teacher

The role of a minority language teacher can be viewed differently in different contexts and hence, the emergent professional identity of minority language teachers develops as interplay between the extent of involvement of home and wider community in language teaching, and the expectations of the language community.

2.3.2.1 The Minority Language Teacher and the Community

It is commonly posited that the role of the minority language teacher is to work in tandem with community efforts to revitalise and maintain the language (Fishman, 2001) but community commitment to language revitalisation and maintenance efforts vary. Examples of a strong community underpinning in minority language education include the revitalisation of Jaru in Australia where the language is a core feature of religious community life and used regularly in liturgy (Lo Bianco and Rhydwen, 2001). Where the locus of responsibility for language revitalisation and maintenance rests largely with the community, it is not unusual for the centres in which the minority language is taught to be situated outside of formal schooling hours in a local church or community centre, for example some minority languages taught in Victoria, Australia (Extra and Yagmur, 2004). In certain instances, it has been reported that the minority language teacher works in relative isolation to the main class teacher in the local primary school (Gogolin and Reich, 2001). Another clear example of the community role in supporting minority language education in the primary school is evident in the tradition in Hebrew-speaking communities for the father to ensure that his son by the age of five commences learning Hebrew (Spolsky and Shohamy, 2001). Even where the father decides to delegate this task to the school, the community assumes responsibility for providing language schools locally to cater for the needs of its young learners. The fact that a minority language is often the language spoken in a child's

home is reflected in the term "home language instruction" used in Sweden and the Netherlands, for example (Gogolin and Reich, 2001).

The impetus for local minority language education therefore, arises from parents and family members who believe that knowledge of the minority language is central to the child's development. As regards Jaru, there is a keen interest among local woman to train as language teachers and to aid with the spread of Jaru through the primary education system (Lo Bianco and Rhydwen, 2001). In the case of Otomí too in Central Mexico, the teaching of the language grew out of local voluntary teachers and the academy with the principal responsibility for teaching Otomí has a wider remit than simply teaching the language a subject only in primary education; teachers also become actively involved in other projects to reverse language shift (Lastra, 2001).

2.3.2.2 The Minority Language Teacher as Language and Cultural Representative

A language teacher in a great number of minority language contexts is primarily an advocate for and representative of the language. It is noted that in the case of Maori, for instance, that locals favour an unqualified teacher from their own tribal group to a qualified "outsider" (Benton and Benton, 2001). In the case of Hawaiian there is a huge connection between the family and minority language education. Indeed the literal translation of the teacher of Hawaiian "*Kupuna*" is grandparent. The original meaning of the word for teacher in Irish *"oide"* or *"boime"* also contains some reference to the pastoral and familial role of the teacher as a mentor, and it is a synonym for foster father or foster mother (Ó Dónaill, 1959:923).The *Kupuna* in Hawaiian culture co-operates with the class teacher but the emphasis is on the *Kupuna*'s knowledge of the spoken language and customs and not necessarily on reading and writing skills. Tensions can emerge where the minority language teacher is not a member of the target language and cultural group. Perceptions of the non-native speaking teacher as the "expert on spelling and grammar" in the local language can lead to a sense of disempowerment amongst locals speaking the native, and often non-standard language. Younger members of the speech community being the most vulnerable in this dichotomy between the local spoken dialect and the variety taught in schools (Lo Bianco and Rhydwen, 2001). In some cases, because a minority language teacher is involved in language revitalisation more widely in the community, she is allocated to several schools as is the case of teachers of Turkish in Germany (Extra and Yagmur, 2004). Along with serving as advocates of the language, teachers also serve as cultural representatives for learners and therefore, one goal of their teaching is to foster an awareness of the target culture and also to nurture intercultural sensitivity (Gogolin and Reich, 2001).

Perceptions of the role of the minority language teacher can therefore be constructed as acting as a representative, and often being a member, of the target language and culture, and

also serving as a language advocate. The role of a minority language teacher is often distinct from the primary educator of the children and sometimes she is not even working physically in the local primary school, and even where she has a direct link with the primary school, she may not be exclusively associated with this school but rather visit several schools in the community. Perceptions of the role of the teacher of Irish in Ireland, however, differ in some respects. First becoming a primary school teacher is synonymous with becoming a teacher of Irish and so the role of the teacher as language and cultural representative and advocate is a subset of the required skill set. In the vast majority of areas outside of Irish-speaking communities, *Gaeltachtaí*, and sometimes within these communities, there is no strong link to the language in the community. Parents also adopt a relatively hands-off approach to their child's progress (Harris, 2006). We can expect, therefore, that perceptions of the role of the teacher of Irish to share some aspects of perceptions of minority language teachers in general, but that these perceptions will also reflect the unique position of primary teachers as *de facto* teachers of Irish.

2.4 Minority Languages and the Sociolinguistic Context of Irish

Along with understanding the contribution that beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions make in the process of becoming a language teacher, it is also necessary to consider other contextual factors especially issues involved in minority languages in general, and the specific sociolinguistic context of the Irish language. This context is central to understanding the unique role of teachers' perspectives in the case of Irish and also to understanding the transition which has to be made by pre-service teachers. We firstly look at minority language revitalisation and maintenance and the role of education within this initiative. Then we look and the specific historical and sociolinguistic context of Irish. Finally, we look at differences between the general public and teachers in relation to Irish. This provides the general context for dealing with the issues in section 2.5 relating to the transition to teaching and promoting the language, and the impact of initial teacher education, and early in-service practice has on this.

2.4.1 Minority Language Revitalisation and Maintenance: Languages in Contact

A minority language is usually considered to have two key characteristics: it is traditionally used within a given territory of a State by nationals of that State who form a group numerically smaller than the rest of the State's population; it is different from the official language(s) of that State (ECRML). The extent to which a minority language flourishes, differs in various minority language

context because of the other languages that are in contact with the minority language, its role in education and in the wider community.

The languages that are in contact with the minority language have an influence. If a majority language is spoken widely it can be a threat to a minority language. The hegemonic position of English is arguably more pronounced in Wales and Ireland than in Catalonia, Friesland or the Basque Country and this dominance can make minority language maintenance efforts more difficult in Wales and Ireland. In some cases English hegemony has been termed linguistic genocide (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000), or killer language (Goodman and Graddol, 1996). In cases where the majority language is very strong, the number of learners at any time may significantly outnumber native speakers and it is suggested that pedagogical tasks thus are constrained, given the limited scope for rehearsal of interactions with native speakers (Little, 2003). Another issue when languages are in contact is the typological similarities or differences between them. One difference between the situation of Frisian and Dutch being in contact, and the situation of English and Irish being in contact, is that Frisian and Dutch are typologically similar, a point that has perhaps given rise to the perception that both are "easy" to learn (Ytsma, 2007). Positive attitudes to learning the language can influence beliefs about how easy or difficult it is to learn the language, however. We see sometimes, that where two languages are in contact and are typologically different, learners still consider it relatively easy to learn the minority language e.g. English and Basque, English and Welsh (Lasagabaster and Huguet, 2007; Laugharne, 2007). In the cases of both of these languages, learners have positive attitudes towards learning the language which may compensate for any potential difficulty in learning the minority language.

2.4.2 Minority Language Revitalisation and Maintenance: The Role of Education

Minority languages have been frequently studied in the education domain as it is one context that can influence life opportunities (Garrett et al., 2003), and because education is a key institution in the revitalisation and maintenance of minority languages (Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin, 1994). The role of education in minority language revitalisation and maintenance is of particular interest to this study. A major government initiative for minority languages such as Catalan, Basque and Welsh is to include them in formal education, as is the case in Ireland. Education is also the site where larger political, social, ideological values are transmitted and reflected, the very values which fuel language revival struggle (McCarty, 1998). While it is true that languages can survive without schools, education systems nevertheless have become paramount in the process of reversing language shift in cases of minority or endangered languages (Ó Laoire and Harris, 2006). Language planning for instance is very often centred on the school (Ferguson, 2006). Schools are

for the large part in receipt of state funding and can readily be used as an agency of state language planning. Finally, as a formative institution, schools can help to nurture and develop attitudes and behaviours of members of society (Ó Laoire and Harris, 2006). Of course, it can be argued that as a result, schools sometimes bear the entire burden of language planning implementation (Ferguson, 2006).

Language in education differs from other school subjects. Gardner and Lambert (1972) suggest that language teaching is not a socioculturally neutral field but affected by a range of sociocultural factors such as language attitudes, cultural stereotypes, and even geopolitical considerations; a thought that has been echoed by and Harris (2006) and Pedrosa and Lasagabaster (2011). Presence of a minority language in schooling can have an impact on the number of younger speakers (e.g. in Catalonia). The position of the Basque language in education has also given rise to a younger generation of speakers but the problem of intergenerational transmission is still present (Fishman, 2001). We can see that the absence of a minority language from formal education diminishes possibilities for younger generations to develop favourable attitudes to the language and to use it as a means of communication with peers. Initial teacher education, in Friesland for instance, is conducted in Dutch and no single Frisian-medium primary school exists (Ytsma, 2007). Lack of Frisian-medium education can have a knock on effect in terms of how important society perceives Frisian to be in other domains. Limited use of the minority languages is linked to unfavourable attitudes (Lasagabaster, 2007) and scant use of Frisian made by youngsters in urban areas who have learned the minority language, reveals a view that Frisian is not necessarily suited to this lifestyle. At best, the education system produces second or additional language speakers (Lasagabaster, 2007). Support for social movements and the use of the minority language outside of the classroom walls is therefore vital (Lasagabaster, 2007).

The type of education offered too is significant. Basque-medium education has flourished since the late 1970s as has happened in Ireland. Alternative linguistic models are offered in the Basque country too e.g. dual language instruction. Most education in Catalonia too, is bilingual like in Luxembourg or in francophone Canada (Huguet, 2007) which differs from the Irish models of total immersion schooling. No education model exists in Catalonia now wherein Catalan is a subject only. International research suggests that a linguistic model in which the minority language is taught as a subject only in school does not produce high proficiency in the minority language (Harris, 2006; Lasagabaster, 2007). Concerns in the Basque Country about the infeasibility of producing proficient Basque speakers through the education system have been documented (Lasagabaster, 2007). Harris (2006) has proposed the implementation of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) which is widely practised across Europe (Grenfell, 2002). Providing more partial immersion or dual language programmes is an aspiration of the Twenty-Year Strategy for

Irish too, a government strategy to promote the use of Irish and to redress language shift in Ireland (GOI, 2010). While there is parental support for different models of immersion education in Ireland (INTO, 1985), this interest has not yet manifested itself in the creation of many partial immersion programmes. A marked difference in the profile of students attending minority language-medium schools in Friesland, Catalonia and the Basque Country, compared to Ireland is their L1. In Ireland, the students' L1 is rarely Irish whereas in the other areas, the L1 is usually the minority language which is the medium of instruction in school.

Edwards (2002) provides an interesting view on minority language revival. He suggests that the optimal conditions for revival are where there is self-segregation, the absence of literacy, formal education, modernity and globalisation. Successful language maintenance of Swedish on the Aland Islands of Finland bears this truth. Another factor is the recency of the revitalisation initiative. In terms of self-segregation, the boundary of linguistic identity between "us" and "them" that had been reinforced by Irish cultural nationalists at the end of the nineteenth century, has been weakened since the foundation of the Free State in 1922 (O'Rourke, 2011). Pauiston (1994) suggests that political independence in the Irish context removed the sense of urgency surrounding the Irish language question. In contrast, speakers of Galician, whose recovery began in the 1970s, associate being speakers of Galician with being involved in a power struggle (O' Rourke, 2011). A contradictory picture can emerge, particularly in the early recovery of a language. On one hand there is a strong community or national support to revive the language, usually at grassroots level (Escobar, 2008) but also a post-colonial hang up about the validity of using this language. These contradictory feelings comprise what Mac Gréil and Rhatigan (2009) call "post-colonial attitudinal schizophrenia".

Where the minority language is revitalised or maintained through formal education, it can be erroneously considered a purely "academic language" (McCarty, 2008). There have even been criticisms of the Irish curriculum that it does not have sufficient richness as a first language curriculum (Uí Choistealbha, 2012). Even when the express aim of education is not to reverse language shift, but rather to foster proficiency in the language, Irish language learning may still focus on perfunctory tasks as opposed to actual competence in the language. This is disappointing considering substantial developments on a European level regarding language learning, learning outcomes for languages and the Common European Framework of Reference for language teaching and learning. Where the goal of education is to foster positive attitudes to the target language, the question of compulsory study is raised. On one hand compulsion can foster resentment but on the other hand removing compulsion can irreparably damage the language as proposed Ní Shléibhín, head of an Irish-language organisation Gael-Taca (2011).

These findings suggest that while the presence of minority languages in education is important, systems where the minority language is a subject only are less effective than immersion education models, and also that proficiency in a minority language can be increased by a greater provision in immersion education models. It also points towards the need to nurture positive attitudes to the minority language throughout primary education. Total immersion education models are necessary but insufficient, however, to ensure the language's growth and use (Etxeberria, 2003). Creating or maintaining a bilingual society cannot be delegated to the school; intergenerational transmission needs to be fostered (Fishman, 2001).

2.4.3 Introduction to the Minority Context of Irish

Defining the status of Irish in Ireland today is complex. It is a minority language in the sense that its pool of speakers is a significant minority; but it is the official language of the State and so under the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages (ECRML) it cannot technically be classified as a minority language. For the purposes of this research, the term minority language is used indicative of the minority of speakers of the language. It should be noted that the case of Irish as minority language differs from other minority languages because of four notable characteristics (Harris, 2007):

(1) The weak position of the language in the *Gaeltacht* heartlands at the time when the revitalisation initiative of the state originally began

(2) Despite its minority status in terms of number of speakers, it was installed as the first official language of the new state

(3) The failure in the interim to improve the rate of intergenerational transmission of the language within families and homes – either in the *Gaeltacht* Irish-speaking areas in the West, or in the country more generally

(4) The heavy reliance placed on the education system to compensate for this failure of natural transmission.

Learners of Irish share some characteristics with heritage language learners, defined as someone having an ethnic or cultural background as well as some level of proficiency in speaking and understanding the ethnic language (Chinen and Tucker, 2005; Lawton and Logio, 2009). Although heritage languages are usually seen to be the language of immigrant, refugee, diasporic, and Indigenous groups (Cummins, 2005) and former colonial languages too (Wiley, 2005), for *Gaeltacht* inhabitants, Irish can be seen as a heritage language. Outside of the *Gaeltacht* too, some learners of Irish are motivated to learn Irish to reconnect with the heritage of the Irish-speaking community and to (re)negotiate an Irish-speaking identity (Government of Ireland (GOI), 2010). Irish can be described as an autochthonous language like Welsh in the UK, where the language is

part of intergenerational transmission – L1 of a speech community and the L2 in educational contexts for significant amounts of learners/speakers (Ó Laoire and Harris, 2006). In terms of Irish learners, the Irish language is usually seen as a SL as opposed to a FL because of a few key traits: the tendency to teach Irish largely through Irish use Irish to some extent for real communication in class and school, and to use Irish to teach parts of other subjects in some schools (Harris, 2006; DES, 2007a). (These assumptions will be explored later in Chapter 6 in the context of findings from the present study). Students generally regard learning Irish as being different from learning a third such as French or German (Ó Laoire, 2007).

According to the 2006 census, 1.66 million people speak Irish which gives it a seemingly important position in Irish society. An increase in self-reported speakers of Irish is revealed in the 2012 census with 1.77 million speakers, although this is reflective largely of second or additional language speakers as opposed to first, and heavily concentrated with over 98.0% speaking Irish within the education system. In 2009, 15.4% of respondents to the Mac Gréil and Rhatigan study, reported proficiency in Irish. The long-term continuing growth in the percentage of the population reporting some ability in Irish in the census has been noted (Ó Riagáin, 2001) and in 2012 was a 7.1% increase in the number of reported speakers. More women also consistently identify themselves as Irish speakers compared to men and there is a predominance of females in the teaching profession at primary level.

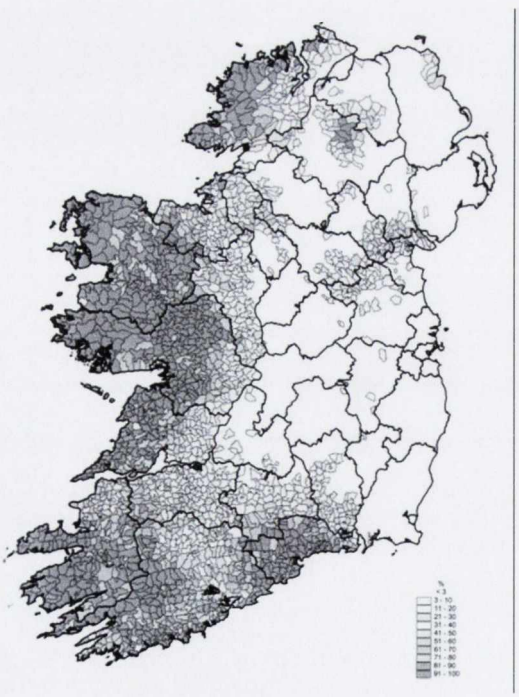
2.4.4 The Revitalisation of Irish and the Education System

The broader historical context of the Irish language in Ireland will be given in order to situate the experience of learning and teaching Irish in Ireland today. Irish was once the first language spoken by the people of Ireland but the use of the Irish language as a mother tongue is reported to have been in decline since the 17th century which is attributed to historical events during struggles with the colonial power, Britain, such as the defeat of Ulster chiefs at the battle of Kinsale in 1603 and the subsequent Flight of the Earls (1607) in which many of the old Gaelic aristocracy emigrated en masse to mainland Europe. Cromwellian Plantations and the Penal Laws, a series of punitive laws, further served to increase the power of the British ruling class now in Ireland, and to suppress the Irish people and their language in the centuries to come. The Fitzgerald study (2003) examined data from the 1911 census data for people born before 1851 and still alive in 1911, and hence was able to map out the dramatic decline of Irish as is clear in the two maps below. Concentration of speakers is indicated by the shading on the map. The darker the shading, the greater the density of Irish speakers in the area.

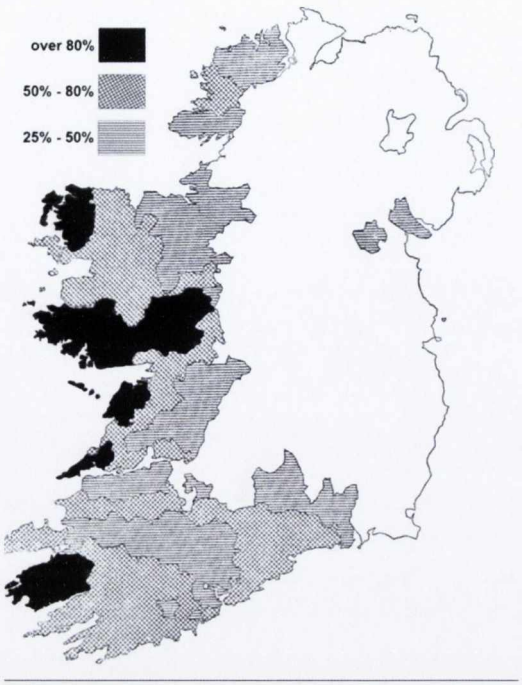
Decline of the Irish language was exacerbated by number of factors including British educational and governmental policies to curtail and eradicate the use of spoken Irish, the Great

Famine and mass emigration of Irish speakers. The British implemented a national education system in Ireland in 1831. Prior to this, education had taken place in hedge schools, a form of education that took place outdoors, usually near a hedgerow and in which local educated men in the community taught younger members. Ireland was a test-case for the implementation of the British education system in Africa and America. A key feature of this education system was the emphasis on promoting the English language and British value system while concomitantly, seeking to undermine and remove the use of Irish. Severe physical and psychological methods to suppress the use of the language characterise this era. Irish children famously recited during their school day "I thank the goodness and the grace, Which on my birth has smiled, And made me in these English days, A happy English child". Any report of speaking Irish was dealt with punitively and via physical punishment. The "bata scoir", or tally stick on which incidences of speaking Irish were recorded, was also the instrument used to physically punish children with for this use of Irish. Shame now began to be associated with use of Irish and the impacts of this shame are reported frequently in later years e.g. Douglas Hyde's famous speech "The Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland" (1892), revealing the long-term impact of these negative and traumatic experiences on the Irish psyche.

Pre-Famine Irish-speaking population based on 1911 census data



Post-Famine Irish-speaking population based on 1911 census data



Fitzgerald, G. (2005) *Map of Irish language*. Available at: http://www.politics.ie/forum/history/211779-ancient-genocide-ireland-10.html

As well as the British goal of targeting children specifically to diminish the use of Irish, other societal factors contributed to the decline. The failure of the potato crop, the staple food of the Irish people, in 1845 presented Ireland with an emergency situation whereby the inhabitants of the island were no longer able to access nourishing food, because of a reliance on the potato, and also the exportation of domestically produced goods to England, in keeping with British law. In order to overcome the destitute and starvation, other employment possibilities were available to English speakers which served as a further disincentive to continue speaking Irish. Along with the casualties of this Famine, which reduced the population by almost half, over half a million Irish speakers are estimated to have emigrated to America (Doyle, 2006: 221). Unlike other emigrants at this time, the profile of up to half of these people leaving were often young, unmarried women who rarely returned to Ireland (Dolan 2008: 37; Doyle 2006: 216). The permanent movement of such a large number of women from Irish-speaking regions deprived these areas of young blood and reduced the amount of children born into Irish-speaking households in Ireland, and thus the tradition of intergenerational transmission was severed. Patterns of continued decline in later decades are clearly illustrated in the maps below which highlight the distribution of Irish-speaking

communities (*Gaeltachtaí*) at different junctures, as well as the obvious shrinking of these same communities over time.

An Ghaeltacht 1926 *An Ghaeltacht* 1956 *An Ghaeltacht* 2007

Ní Bhrádaigh et al. (2007) *An Ghaeltacht*. Available at: http://www.irish-society.org/home/hedgemaster-archives-2/places-artifacts/gaeltacht

Although the education system was initially founded in 1831, the inclusion of Irish in the primary school curriculum did not occur until 1878 and at this point it was included as an additional subject for academically able students. Up until this time, despite the dwindling number of native speakers of Irish, there was no provision for Irish even in Irish-speaking areas. The establishment of The Gaelic Union in 1880 and the Gaelic Athletic Association in 1884 were key efforts in promoting Irish language and culture at a time where the language was being suppressed. In 1883 teachers and inspectors were granted permission by the commissioners to use Irish with Irish-speaking children in their class. In practice, however, most teachers and managers were not aware of this allowance with the result that classroom interactions were conducted in the most part solely through English (Ó hÉallaithe, 2008).

With the founding of *Conradh na Gaeilge* or The Gaelic League in 1893 a more concerted effort was made ot encourage people to use Irish in their everyday lives Under the Revised Programme of 1900, the Irish language was retained as an optional subject during ordinary school hours. The 1883 decision to allow teachers and inspectors to use Irish as a means of communication with Irish-speaking children in Irish-speaking regions was formalised in 1904 under the Bilingual Programme. Irish language organisations such as *Conradh na Gaeilge* were

instrumental in bringing about this concession. Another significant contribution of *Conradh na Gaeilge* was the establishment in 1918 of the Education Committee of *Conradh na Gaeilge* and its subsequent publication of a Comprehensive Programme for Irish at all three levels of education. Under this programme, Irish was no longer relegated to the status of an optional subject but rather formed a core component of the primary school curriculum with all subjects to be taught through Irish in *An Ghaeltacht*, a bilingual programme to be established in *breac-Ghaeltachtaí* (partial Irish-speaking areas) and Irish was to be taught for at least an hour a day in English-speaking areas.

Bourdieu (1991) describes how a valorisation process of a language can impact on language attitudes. The most significant period in the teaching of Irish was after the foundation of the Free State in 1922 when the new Irish state's expressed aim was to restore the Irish language as the daily spoken language of the Irish people. With the foundation of the Free State in 1922, a coordinated effort was made to restore and maintain the Irish language. As Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin (1994) point out though, Irish language policies since the beginning of the Free State have not always acknowledged the uneven distribution of Irish speakers. A language policy organised on territorial lines, as opposed to a universal policy, may have been more effective, as was done in other countries (e.g. Belgium, Switzerland, and Spain).

Revitalisation of Irish was largely centred on the education system. Coolahan (1981: 40) goes so far as to say that the spread of the Irish language was the most important function of the school programme (Ó Néill, 2008). The emphasis placed on Irish in society after the foundation of the Free State has been described as the condition of a "state born out of a struggle for independence, the ideological basis for which was dependent to a large extent on asserting a separate national identity based on language" (Ó hÉallaithe, 2008). Some criticise the language revival movement as having concentrated more on English-speaking areas rather than on Irish-speaking and thus creating a pool of second or additional language speakers in the education system rather than promoting intergenerational transmission of Irish (Mac Murchaidh, 2004). Reliance on education to revive the Irish language has been described as follows: "the official mind was blinkered by the view that just as the schools had allegedly killed the language in the nineteenth century, so they could revive it in the twentieth", (Lee, 1989; McCarty, 1998) drawing attention to the experience of children in the previous century who endured physical and psychological punishment if they spoke Irish during the school day, but who now through their learning of Irish during the school day were to be major agents of change in reversing language shift . The Revival movement, however, was accused of being more interested in gaining support among the urban middle class, "rather than depending on the illiterate raggle-taggle of uncouth native Irish-speakers" (Ó hÉallaithe, 2008).

A general support for the revitalisation was not confined to the education sector. Support was shown in the Civil Service (1928) and in other state organisations like *An Garda Síochána* (1937) wherein proficiency in Irish was a requirement for employment. *An Gúm*, a major publishing house for Irish language literature, was established to provide the general population with Irish language literature. The radio station 2RN was also set up to promote Irish-language media. *An Coiste Téarmaíochta*, was founded in 1926 to support schools in the teaching of Irish. While support for the promotion of the Irish language was prevalent in society in general, there were some objections by certain academics. The Language Freedom Movement was one such movement spearheaded by O'Meara and O'Doherty. The learning of Irish by primary school children was regarded as a cause of concern in how it impacted on their overall academic performance (Mac Namara Report, 1966). In 1963, as a response to the growing concern of academics relating to the teaching of Irish in primary schools, The Commission in the Revival of the Irish Language called for more research on the topic. Fr. Colmán Ó hUallacháin directed this research and his findings led to the creation of *Buntús Cainte* a programme of work for primary schools and also to the creation of Irish language programmes on radio and television. Audiovisual courses were subsequently introduced into schools as result of behaviourist views of learning. Behaviourist views of language learning dominated school curriculum at this time and concerns were later expressed that progress made by students was less than anticipated. Factors attributed to this lack of sufficient progress were outlined by the INTO in 1941 and later in a White Paper in 1980 which identified the lack of support for Irish outside the school, inadequate use of Irish as a teaching medium of other subjects, and the level of competence of many teachers as playing key roles. The 1985 report by Harris, on behalf of *Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann*, outlined earlier signalled a change from behaviourist methods of teaching to more communicatively oriented language teaching. A communicative approach to language teaching was then introduced in the Revised 1999 Curriculum. Other changes have occurred in terms of the status of Irish include the Official Languages Act (2003) and the recognition of Irish as a working language of the European Union (2005).

It is hoped that framing teachers' experience of the Irish language in terms of the history of Irish language, and particularly the central role of the education system in the revitalisation and maintenance efforts, that we will be able to understand better the unique process of becoming a teacher of Irish.

2.4.5 Public and Teachers' Attitudes to Irish

Teacher attitudes to Irish can be situated within the research on the general public's attitude to Irish. Some attitude surveys have been administered to the population at large in order to identify

certain trends in public attitudes to the Irish language e.g. CILAR (1975), Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin on behalf of Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann (1984; 1994). In each of these national surveys, the general public expressed an interest in the Irish language as an ethnic symbol. They also reported a belief that the government has a crucial role to play in relation to the promotion of Irish and the majority of respondents were keen that Irish should remain a core subject in state education. The public is also favourable to revitalising the Irish language outside of *Gaeltacht* areas (Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin, 1994). Attitudes of serving primary teachers specifically have also been explored too in several studies to provide comprehensive data on teachers' attitudes to Irish and to the position of Irish in primary education (INTO, 1941; 1985). Early reports conducted by the INTO in 1936 into the use of Irish as a means of instruction in the case of children whose home language was English were prompted by fears that the language revival project was not achieving success. The results of this study, published in 1941, revealed that a majority of teachers perceived that teaching through the medium of Irish was 'intellectually inhibitive' and 'educationally unsound' (INTO, 1985). In a similar vein, the Mac Namara report on Bilingualism and Primary Education: A Study of the Irish Experience, reported that the amount of time and effort allocated to the teaching of Irish had been to the detriment of Irish pupils in terms of their scholastic attainment. Mac Namara attributed the lag in Irish children's attainment in English and Arithmetic compared to British school children's results to the focus on the Irish language and the proportion of time given to its teaching in the Irish education system. He posited that the emphasis on Irish had disadvantaged school children in their engagement with and attainment in other areas of the curriculum, namely English and Arithmetic. Serving primary teachers were specifically targeted in these studies because of the importance of their views in the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish more generally. There is also a clear difference between teachers' views and the general public's views. On a positive note, teachers are more favourable to Irish than the general public. There is an overall tendency for the teacher sample to be more supportive of Irish, more proficient in the language and more likely to use Irish than the general population.

This data now informs general literature on language revitalisation and maintenance, and language shift (Fishman 2001; Spolsky 2004). Much of this research has used social stratification theories to explain attitudes to Irish in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland i.e. positive attitudes to Irish in the Republic are correlated with gender and social class, whereas positive attitudes to Irish in the North are correlated with gender, cultural and ethno-religious factors (Harris, 2007). Studies of primary teachers show that along with gender and social class, the identity as a teacher of Irish may also play a role in favourable attitudes. It should be mentioned though that the profile of primary teachers in Ireland fits with the general predictions

regarding positive attitudes i.e. that they are associated with females from upper or middle class backgrounds.

Several themes have emerged in language attitudes research in Ireland and public attitudes to Irish do not appear to be clear cut. First, a disparity exists between an interest in the language and a commitment to using the language regularly (CILAR, 1975; Murtagh, 2007). The Irish language is seen as a cultural marker of identity but the public is more in favour of a bilingual policy as opposed to restoring Irish as the first language of the state (CILAR, 1975). Positive attitudes to Irish were broadly maintained from 1975 - 1985 (Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin, 1984; INTO, 1985). It should be noted though that by the 1980s, respondents were not as extreme in their responses i.e. they did not tend to select strongly agree or strongly disagree on scales when responding to the survey which suggests a waning interest in the language question. A disparity exists between the favourable attitudes to the Irish language in general and negative attitudes concerning the experience of learning Irish (CILAR, 1975). A subsequent finding was that pupils' disposition to the general idea of learning a SL or FL is more positive than their attitude to learning Irish (Harris, 1984).

Second, the general public have views and expectations concerning the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish. The general public expresses favourable attitudes to Irish, for example most people are in favour of investment in the teaching of Irish and in the development of *Gaeltacht* areas, and most people wish for Irish to be present in the education system (CILAR, 1975; INTO, 1985). The general public is in favour also of other models of partial immersion education or CLIL. This was at a time when Irish-medium schools were beginning to grow in Ireland (Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin, 1984). The general public has assigned a role to primary teachers in the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish through the strong agreement that Irish should be an obligatory subject in schools. Teachers implicitly identify their central role of schools in the language revival programme. The majority of teachers in 1985 (73.0%) were not in favour of the promotion and maintenance of Irish being left wholly to voluntary organisations. Views concerning the position of the *Gaeltacht* in teachers' and pupils' engagement were mixed with half of the respondents believing that if the *Gaeltacht* died out so too would the Irish language (CILAR, 1975; INTO, 1985). In line with the public's and teachers' wishes for Irish to be included in the education system, Irish is regarded as a core subject in primary and secondary school as evidenced by the number of teaching hours allocated to it and pupils typically experience 1600 hours of instruction during their entire primary and secondary schooling (Ó Laoire, 2007). Teachers, too, perceive Irish as a core subject at primary level (Murchan et al., 2009). Pupils have the opportunity to learn Irish in English-medium schools and in Irish-medium schools (All-Irish schools and *Gaeltacht* schools).

The main conclusions to be drawn from these findings are that despite support for the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish in education, and support for its promotion in terms of ethnic identity, cultural value, and *An Ghaeltacht*, negative attitudes to the experience of learning Irish in school still prevail (CILAR, 1975; Devine 2003), and a limited use of Irish outside of formal education exists (Murtagh, 2007). While it is claimed that positive attitudes and aspirations for Irish have been maintained at very high levels (Mac Gréil, 2009), it is important to note that the most tangible support on a day-to-day basis for the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish resides with primary school teachers. The survival and promotion of Irish, rests on the "attitudes, efforts, and commitment of individual schools and teachers in a way that other subjects do not" (Harris, 2006: 170). Teachers can therefore, feel relatively isolated in their role in revitalisation and maintenance of Irish.

2.5 The Transition to Teaching

Pre-service teachers undergo an important transition from a citizen to a key player in the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish during initial teacher education. This section explores the transition that pre-service teachers make from learner to teacher with a focus on the potential of experiences, during initial teacher education and early in-service practice, to modify views. To understand more fully what is involved in making this significant transition, we also examine key features of minority language teacher education generally and any further issues for pre-service teachers of Irish, particularly in terms of developing proficiency, constructing an identity as a language and cultural representative, and deconstructing post-colonial mind sets. Finally, we look at the future role that the language teacher will undertake during early professional practice particularly expectations of teacher proficiency in Irish, and nurturing positive attitudes to Irish language and culture.

2.5.1 Initial Teacher Education and its Potential to Modify Views

A high level of stability is consistently reported in beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions of pre-service teachers (Peacock, 2001). Nikitina and Furuoka (2007) suggest that this stability occurs where views are formed by the macro context i.e. societal and cultural norms, and are a core component of one's identity. Therefore, the probability of change is low. Some authors suggest that views may be quite central and well entrenched and so to a degree inflexible (Rokeach 1968; Wenden, 1987). Cognitive dissonance describes the situation were someone holds two or more contradictory views at the same time (Festinger, 1957). A pre-service teacher might believe, in principle, that target language should be learned in the target language community, but their actual experience of this may contradict this belief because they had limited opportunities to

practise the language with locals, because of poor quality teaching, or excessive language anxiety while visiting the target language community. The pre-service teacher now holds two competing beliefs and according to this theory, she will strive to reduce this "dissonance" and either accept the new evidence, readjusting her original belief, or cling more strongly to the original belief. The somewhat curious tendency for someone to cling to a particular belief, attitude or role perception, even when faced with evidence that demonstrates the opposite, was researched by Festinger (1957). In cases where a lack of change in belief system was reported, this was where a person was heavily committed to the original belief system (his famous experiment concerned people in a cult who were living in a remote location and whose lives centred on participation in the group). Other studies reveal that some new changes can be short lived. Kerekes (2001) for instance found that five months after an SLA class for in-service teachers, two of the six teachers had reverted to their previous pre-course beliefs.

A quick note should be given on terminology. Early studies on change use terms like "attitude" and "beliefs" in a different way than is understood in the context of this thesis. First, early studies on "beliefs" as examined by Festinger (1957) dealt with "beliefs" relating to the affective dimension and which were linked to a core identity of a person. This concept is more akin to "role perceptions" used in this thesis. Under the theory of Language Attitude Change, which will also be explored in this section, the scope of this theory extends to cover what is understood as "beliefs" and "role perceptions" in the context of this study.

The great stability that has been reported in the areas of beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions may be because the pre-service or early professional teacher has not been confronted with contradictory evidence and so their views have not yet been challenged. Several authors call for the inclusion of more reflective tasks during initial teacher education to address this (Pennington, 1996; Angelova, 2005; Attardo and Brown, 2005; Bartels, 2005). Schulz (2001) also proposes that there may be a conflict at times between beliefs and situational constraints which may prevent them from actually implementing a particular belief. The tendency to cling to a previously held view in the face of opposing evidence as described in Festinger's research (1957) is perhaps more unlikely in this study as most of the areas that are addressed concern basic aspects of teaching Irish and not highly emotive issues.

So do beliefs, attitudes and perceptions concerning language and language teaching change during initial teacher education and early in-service practice? The influence of third level education is contentious (Woods, 1996; Borg, 1999; Peacock, 2001). Some researchers suggest that this period does hold potential for the modification of beliefs and attitudes because of the pre-service teacher's new pedagogical knowledge and school placement (Almarza, 1996; Borg, 2003; Nikitina and Furuoka, 2007; Johnson, 1994; Horwitz, 1985; Kern, 1995; Richards and

Lockhart, 1996; Riley, 2009; Zheng, 2009). Others disagree however, and claim that teacher education plays only a minor role in modifying pre-existing beliefs, attitudes and perceptions (Peacock, 2001; Vibulphol, 2004). Some triggers for change in language learning beliefs include age (Tercanlioglu, 2005), and stage of career (Bailey, 1992; Hinton, 1999; Murchan et al., 2009; Zheng, 2009) so the natural maturation that occurs during initial teacher education can lead to changes in views. Differences in beliefs about language learning between beginner and advanced learners, for instance, have been reported (Kuntz, 1999; Mori, 1999; Nikitina and Furuoka, 2007; Peacock, 2001; Wong, 2010). This has been shown too between novice and expert teachers (Mori and Sato, 2007; Zhu, 2004). Changes in language beliefs of learners can occur due to increased proficiency (Tanaka and Ellis, 2003) which can occur as the pre-service teacher engages with the programme of study.

Most international studies that deal with change in views of pre-service or in-service teachers' views relate to language learning beliefs. Although beliefs are reported to be relatively stable, changes have been reported in area of Learning and Communication Strategies (Busch, 2010; Kuntz, 1999; Tanaka and Ellis, 2003). Learners tend to change from agreeing with the following statements to disagreeing with them: *'Learning a language is mostly a matter of learning grammar rules'*, *'Learning a language is mostly a matter of learning new vocabulary'*, *'You shouldn't say anything in a language until you can say it correctly'*. As participants in these studies engage more in their own learning of the language or begin teaching the language to someone else, their beliefs about language teaching became more aligned with communicative approaches. In another study, pre-service teachers developed new beliefs about how to teach a language skill, beliefs that were not contained in the original research instrument (Farrell, 1999). Belief in Foreign Language Aptitude has been shown to change as they engage in learning the language (Nikitina and Furuoka, 2007). Participants change from disagreeing to agreeing with the following statements: *'It is easier for children than adults to learn a language'*, and *'Some people are born with a special ability to learn a language'*.

Language attitudes too, have the potential to undergo change during initial teacher education. Some arguments have been made against the malleability of language attitudes. While language attitudes endure longer than some other attitudes (Garrett, 2010) they are not necessarily immutable. Language attitude change is complex. Some theories to explain attitude theory are proposed by Baker (1992) and Fullan (1991). These two theories centre on key moments that cause the person to reflect on her thinking and in some cases modify the existing thinking. Another useful framework for understanding why and how some change occurs is that of Attitude Change Theory (Katz, 1960). Under this theory some catalysts for change exist and are strong enough to cause someone to re-evaluate her attitude. Peak learning experiences (Maslow,

1959) and critical incidents (Matsumoto, 2007) too, may trigger this change e.g. being understood in conversation with a native speaker for the first time. Studies that deal with language attitudes, particularly attitudes to the Irish language reveal great stability in learners over a number of years, and also in the population at large (Murtagh, 2007; Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin, 1994). Studies conducted immediately after the learner spends time in the target language community, on the other hand, can often reveal more positive attitudes to the language and to the people who speak it (Tanaka and Ellis, 2003). Studies conducted immediately after a pre-service teacher has engaged on school placement have also suggested that a change in attitude has occurred (Busch, 2010).

Changes in role perceptions amongst teachers can be provoked by changes in the teaching context (Bailey, 1992; Murchan et al., 2009) or professional development experiences (Ó Néilll, 2008; Murchan et al., 2009) so the experience of undertaking school placement in different schools and settings may modify views. Beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions can become more rigid after a certain point though (Kern, 1995). In studies of role perceptions, an increase in experience in the classroom is linked to a move in focus from the teacher's needs to the pupils' needs. Teachers with more experience are more likely to speak about engaging children in teaching e.g. making the class enjoyable and fun (Farrell, 1999). Initial teacher education offers pre-service teachers a valuable opportunity to begin to develop a professional identity. As part of the transition process from student to teacher, they create and recreate an image of themselves as members of the teaching community (Wenger, 1998) which entails reflecting on their perceptions of the role of the teacher. The most rapid development of professional identity occurs during early in-service practice (Flores and Day, 2006), but there is an emergent professional identity that is formed during pre-service education (Walkington, 2005). Initially, this emergent identity is formed by the pre-service teacher's images of other teachers, their initial beliefs and concepts of what constitutes a good teacher and their implicit theories of teaching (Sutherland et al., 2009). During initial teacher education, perceptions of their future roles are reinforced or altered by school placement, cooperating teachers during this practice, as well as the teacher education institution and teacher educators (Sutherland et al., 2009). In forming this emergent professional identity, pre-service teachers are not seen as wholly passive or wholly active (Morgan, 2010) but rather that they interact with their environment and thereby construct an identity (Bronfenbrenner, 1995).

2.5.2 Minority Language Initial Teacher Education

Although minority languages can fall into different categories (O'Riagáin, 2006), the experience of initial teacher education in the minority language in each case can have certain commonalities and face similar challenges. Some necessary features of initial teacher education for minority

language teachers include facilitating linguistic development of pre-service teachers, and enabling them to teach the target language effectively. Some challenges facing pre-service teachers centre on becoming language and cultural representatives or advocates for the language, and the deconstruction of post-colonial attitudes. Each of these areas will now be discussed.

2.5.2.1 Preparing to Teach a Minority Language as Subject Only or in an Immersion Setting

In situations, where the minority language is taught in formal education e.g. Welsh, Basque, and Irish, as opposed to a local community environment e.g. Hawaiian, pre-service teachers will generally undertake initial teacher education to become a primary or secondary school teacher with an emphasis on teaching a minority language as a subject only or in a minority language-medium school. Both settings have implications for the type initial teacher education needed. For teachers who will teach the minority language as a subject only, proficiency is required to teach the language, to use it informally during the day, and to potentially use it in a CLIL lesson. To prepare for this setting, pre-service teachers usually undertake modules in language competence and in language teaching methodologies. They will also be required to teach the target language during school placement. Inadequacies have been frequently reported in initial teacher education in the Māori context (Kamwangalmalu, 2010), the Irish context (Máirtín, 2006) and Welsh context (General Teaching Council, 2011). Most foreign language programmes emphasise the importance of study abroad components (Tanaka and Ellis, 2003). The requirement to spend time in the target language community is not present, in the case of a minority language however, where the college of education is situated in the target language community e.g. Wales. This is a feature of initial teacher education in Ireland.

The second context for teaching the minority language is in an immersion setting, ranging from total immersion.(e.g. German in Belgium, Czech in Austria, Swedish in Finland) to partial immersion (e.g. Breton in France) to virtually no provision for promoting bilingual education or for improving pre-service teachers' language competence (e.g. Danish in Germany, Basque in France, Frisian in The Netherlands). Even within one country e.g. France, there can be a range of practices in relation to different minority languages. For future teachers in immersion settings, the proficiency needed is greater as they will teach every subject through Irish. The need for specialised training for immersion contexts is noted by several authors (Baker, 2011). It is posited that one key factor in the success of bilingual education is that the teachers have native or near native proficiency in both languages of the school and that the teacher is able to speak competently and confidently in the target language (Baker, 2011). Pre-service teachers in these contexts need not only to be very proficient in teaching the target language, but they also need subject specific vocabulary in other curricular areas in order to be able to teach them effectively.

Proficiency is also needed in communicating with members of the school community e.g. parents, other teachers, the principal and board of management. In some countries provision is made in initial teacher education programmes for the minority language e.g. Scots Gaelic, and the course is conducted through the target language. It is suggested that strong minority language communities can sustain dedicated courses for immersion programmes, for example, Catalonia, Wales and the Basque Country (Roberston, 2006).

The most favourable conditions in making provisions for initial teacher education in the minority language are that the minority language is used in all course administration, minority language speakers direct and manage training, assessment conducted wholly in minority language, and that there is sufficient language development opportunities for teachers as well as an award to show they have been trained in the minority language (Roberston, 2006). The cost involved in making these provisions can be prohibitive, however (Roberston, 2006). The emphasis too, is placed on minority language speakers being involved in the entire process, something that can be untenable given the small pool of speakers. In other cases, there is no specific training for the minority immersion context nor is there continuing education programmes for the immersion teacher e.g. Finland (Baker, 2011).

2.5.2.2 Preparing to teach Irish as Subject Only or in an Immersion Setting

Irish is a core requirement of pre-service education in Ireland. Up until the 1960s pre-service education was conducted through Irish but at present it is largely conducted through English, with the exception of some all-Irish streams within colleges of education. Along with entry point requirements to colleges of education, pre-service teachers must also have a C3 in honours Irish (equivalent to a B2 under the Common European Framework), while students need a C3 in ordinary level English or a D3 in higher level English, and a D3 in ordinary level mathematics. In terms of the position of Irish in colleges of education, it is considered a competency subject along with English and mathematics and so is allocated a commensurate amount of credits (7.5 for competency, 5 for teaching methods) under the European Credits Transfer System. This differs from other subjects such as religion or Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) where competency in the subject, as well as competency in the teaching of the subject, are dealt with in one lecture. Traditionally, in colleges of education, particularly in the college of education in which this research is being conducted, commitment to Irish language and culture has been explicit in the college's guiding principles (President's Report, 2012).

In Ireland, one issue identified with initial teacher education are that regardless of the type of school a teacher wishes to work in e.g. teaching Irish as subject only in an English-medium school or teaching Irish in a total immersion setting, pre-service teachers experience by and large

the same type of programme in Irish. The lack of a required qualification in Irish to teach in Irish-medium schools means that every teacher is in theory qualified to teach in an Irish-medium school. In the case of recruiting teachers for Irish-medium schools, locating teachers are proficient in Irish can be a challenge (Máirtín, 2006). Also later during in-service practice, where teachers are redistributed to schools because of being on a local panel, it poses great difficulties for the school and teacher where the teacher does not have the required proficiency to teach through Irish. Another issue for immersion schooling is that there is as of yet no designated college of education for Irish-medium education in the Republic of Ireland and therefore, students from the *Gaeltacht*, Irish-medium education, or teachers with a high interest in Irish, are distributed across the various colleges (Máirtín, 2006). It should be noted though that the emphasis in the Máirtín (2006) study is on providing high calibre teachers for Irish-medium settings, and the scope does not extend to the recruitment needs of English-medium schools, where the majority of pupils learn Irish.

There are some similarities between the experiences of teachers in both of these settings. In terms of school placement, teachers in both settings often perceive a lack of suitable resources for teaching the minority language in each context (McCarty, 2008). In some instances the standardisation of language in school textbooks may not accurately represent local idioms and dialects (INTO, 2004). At other times, new words that are considered to be heavily influenced by the colonial language (English) are not well received by teachers (INTO, 2004). Old fashioned resources too are not considered favourably by teachers (INTO, 2004). For teachers in immersion settings, they may feel that there is also a dearth of resources for teaching other subjects through the minority language. Minority language teachers in professional practice share some common issues at an international level and the discussion of some key areas in various contexts e.g. communicative competence, learner autonomy and CLIL continue among supra national European bodies.

2.5.2.3 Issues of Varying Levels of Proficiency in the Minority Language

A goal of initial teacher education, regardless of the setting in which a teacher will find themselves, is to ensure teachers are proficient in the target language. There are two approaches to this: (1) language competence is an entry requirement with a focus on improving this standard throughout initial teacher education, and (2) a terminal exam for pre-service teachers to gain a qualification in teaching through the minority languages e.g. Welsh. In Ireland the minimum entry requirement is a C3 in honours level Irish (equivalent to a B2 under the Common European Framework) to gain a place on a B.Ed. programme. Pre-service teachers can have varying levels of proficiency from considering themselves a weak second or additional language speaker, to being a native speaker. Facilitating teachers of minority languages in their language development is a

challenge faced in many different contexts. It is often reported that teachers have low competence in the minority language e.g. Samí (Huss, 2008), and Māori (May and Hill, 2008). For the most part, teachers are often themselves second or additional language speakers of the minority language e.g. Irish or Māori but this can vary from country to country e.g. the incidence of reported native Welsh speakers among teachers is high in Wales at 35.9%. Murtagh (2007) indicates that reported speakers of Irish may only reveal token phrases or the odd Irish word in a primarily English-language syntax. The vast majority of primary teachers are second or additional language speakers of Irish. The teaching of Irish outside of Irish-speaking regions is also the norm and not the exception. Second or additional language speakers are often teachers of minority languages e.g. Basque teachers (Lasagabaster and Sierra, 2002; Lasagabaster, 2008) or some majority languages e.g. English where 80.0% are non-native speaker teachers (Canagarajah, 1999) and other suggest that this will continue to be the norm (Lasagabaster and Sierra 2002). Having second or additional speakers as teachers is not necessarily a disadvantage as they may be better able to understand the situation of their learners (Phillipson, 1992; Lasagabaster and Sierra 2002). Indeed in many minority language learning contexts, second or additional language speakers dominate among learners too e.g. Samí, Māori, Irish, Welsh. One advantage of this is that they are linguistically homogenous starting school because they do not know the immersion language e.g. in Finland and Canada (Baker, 2011).

Suggestions to improve teacher proficiency during initial teacher education include the teaching of some other subjects at pre-service through Irish and a Diploma in Irish Language Education (Primary Teaching) (GOI 2010). Increasing exposure to the minority language through CLIL has frequently been suggested by researchers e.g. Harris (2006). Arguably, this should be a key component then in minority language education. The Teaching Council in Ireland recently recommended that a module on teaching through Irish be introduced as compulsory training for students in at least one of the colleges of education (Teaching Council, 2011). This mirrors developments in other countries e.g. in 1994 in Alsace, a training course has been organised for bilingual French and German teaching (Grenfell, 2002). Some consideration has to be given to the language in which the CLIL subject is taught. If mathematics, science and technology for instance are taught through English will this convey a message that English is more valued in these domains? (Baker, 2011). In Ireland, PE is the subject most likely to be taught through Irish (Uí Choistealbha, 2012). If the minority language is used for physical education (PE) or the arts will the learner perceive the minority language to only be useful in these human aesthetic pursuits? (Baker, 2011).

One significant feature of initial teacher education in Ireland is that the weight of pre-service teachers' professional development in Irish occurs during pre-service education as

opposed to in-service practice, as is the case of Basque teachers for instance under the IRALE programme (Irakasleen Alfabetatze Euskalduntzea) whereby whole or partial release from teaching duties is sanctioned so that teachers become full-time students of Basque for a period of up to three years. Teachers in this situation receive their full salary (Cenoz, 2000). While continuous professional development is encouraged in the ECRML, linguistic proficiency of beginning teachers is a major topic of concern in teaching (Wilbur, 2007). It is attributed to instructional practices they have been exposed to, and an inflated view of their own competency sometimes (Wilbur, 2007). A lack of language ability is one of supervising teachers' primary criticisms of student teachers internationally and also in Ireland (Cooper, 2004; Wilbur 2007; DES, 2007b). In the case of Welsh, the majority of teachers report that their initial teacher education was 'very good' or 'good' at preparing them to teach Welsh as a second or additional language. In the comments made by participants though, a distinction between the needs of native and non-native speakers was frequently noted. In most cases, there was a perceived need for more language support to ensure proficiency. The need for language proficiency is also noted among native speakers of certain languages e.g. Scots Gaelic (Roberston, 2006). Teachers may also have limited experience of an Irish-medium schooling system (Máirtín, 2006) which makes the need for suitable training during initial teacher education and in-service practice all the more urgent. Principals in Ireland also report dissatisfaction in the provisions made for teachers during initial teacher education (Máirtín, 2006). They also report concern over the proficiency of teachers in Irish and it has been expressed by principals that their preference is for a fully qualified substitute teacher with limited Irish, rather than an unqualified teacher who has Irish (Máirtín, 2006) though this finding contradicts current Teaching Council regulations.

2.5.2.4 Becoming a Cultural Advocate for the Minority Language

Other elements of becoming a minority language teacher may happen on a subconscious level, for example, developing an identity as a cultural representative and also deconstructing a post-colonial mentality. Weak versions of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, a theory originally devised by Benjamin Whorf in the early twentieth century, posits that different languages give us different windows on the world. In Bourdieu's terms too, the linguistic habitus of a speaker comprises a set of dispositions and ways of viewing the world (O'Rourke 2011). Although this theory has been challenged by some authors (Mc Whorter, 2014) exploring the unique cultural view that the target language offers, is often seen as important in learning the language. In the cases of many minority language revitalisation and maintenance, there is often a strong focus on the inculcation of cultural values associated with that language and a focus on the history and tradition of the people who speak it. The cultural dimension to language teaching in general is important (Royal

Irish Academy (RIA), 2011) but this is paramount in the case of minority languages and the teaching of languages like Kalmyk and Ulster Scots could be seen to be quite didactically oriented in this regard (Avery and Gilbert, 2006). Language teaching is therefore supplemented with exploration of literature and art forms unique to the language, to validate the target language culture (Romero-Little and McCarty, 2006). Hawaii and Alaska, for example have Native Cultural Standards which advise teachers on how to promote the respective culture in their teaching. The cultural transmission of speakers of a language may be prioritised over general school achievement e.g. Hawaiian-medium education (McCarty, 2008). For a language like Samí, speaking Samí is linked to certain occupations and there is a concern that while the language is being taught in schools, Samí culture may not be supported by the teacher (Huss, 2008). It is clear then that the role the language teacher plays in cultural transmission, differs in contexts where the community members are heavily involved in language revitalisation and maintenance and where language teaching is central to cultural transmission, compared to contexts where the emphasis in language teaching is placed mostly on the language only.

A goal of minority language initial teacher education is often to strengthen the teacher's identity as a cultural representative (e.g. Hawaiian) but what are the issues involved where the pre-service teacher does not closely associate with the target language group or come from this community? It has been suggested that second or additional language speakers belong to an imagined community (Pavlenko, 2003) and that membership to this community is not predicated on physical proximity to the group. Identity it is claimed, is constantly in flux (Phan, 2007) but we do not always know how second or additional language speakers will react to the new cultural identities presented to them both within and outside the classroom (Lantolf and Johnson 2007). One central aim of the Irish syllabus in use at third level is that pre-service teachers will explore perceptions of Irish speakers within and outside of the *Gaeltacht* and also to investigate characteristic features of an Irish speaker's identity (An Mheitheal um theagasc na Gaeilge ar an Tríú Leibhéal, 2011). A significant feature of initial teacher education in Ireland then is that the pre-service teacher must spend time in the target community, become exposed to the culture and to facilitate her acting as a cultural representative in her future career.

The integrative orientation in language learning has been studied by several researchers and the difficulty of interpreting an integrative orientation to language learning has been outlined (Baker, 2011; Dörnyei, 2005). At times, a learner may not express a desire to integrate with the specific target culture or speakers but their integrative orientation can be explained using the concept of the "ideal language self", a view of the language proficiency and disposition that the learner would ultimately like to have e.g. a desire to become a very proficient second or additional language speaker, or a desire to gain enough proficiency to teach Irish very well. So we

can understand the importance of the *Gaeltacht* placement not solely as an expectation that the pre-service teacher will ultimately integrate with the target culture community but that an identity may emerge in belonging to the imagined community of second or additional language speakers of Irish, which will bolster her ability to act as a language and cultural advocate in her future role.

Another issue in becoming a cultural representative or advocate for a minority language occurs when the culture of two speech communities are very similar. This similarity makes it difficult to have a distinctive cultural component in the school programme e.g. in the case of French immersion in Canada (Baker, 2011) or in Ireland. Despite the cultural similarities of English and Irish-speaking people in Ireland, the public still a belief that 'Ireland wouldn't really be Ireland without Irish-speaking people' (Mac Gréil and Rhatigan, 2009; O' Riagáin, 2007). The public also holds Irish speakers in relatively high esteem and many consider that Irish should be preserved for its cultural value (Mac Gréil and Rhatigan, 2009). Irish is sometimes seen as part of the national psyche which "reflects some of the deeper aspirations, conflicts and contradictions of Irish society and experience" (INTO, 2004). Differences in the culture between Irish-speaking communities and English-speaking communities are therefore described in abstract terms relating to a way of thinking or being as opposed to the two communities having very distinct value systems, social norms or art forms. This complexity makes the role of the primary teacher in being a promoting Irish Gaelic culture somewhat more difficult in the case of Irish than in other minority languages.

2.5.2.5 Deconstructing Post-colonial Attitudes

Another area that a pre-service minority language teacher may need to explore is that of post-colonial attitudes. These can relate to an inferiority status of the minority language, a reluctance in the community to promote it and feelings of embarrassment or shame when speaking the language. Many of these insecurities may exist tacitly in the learner. Deconstructing a post-colonial mentality may not be explicitly addressed during initial teacher education butt is however, an important milestone as teachers of minority languages begin to construct a new identity as representative of the target language.

Many minority languages share a colonial past and language loss by its people. The type of colonialism associated with the minority language is significant. It is suggested that 'exploitation colonies' like in African countries face a greater challenge in the revival or maintenance of their languages than do 'settlement colonies' e.g. in Latin America (Kamwangalmalu, 2008). Attempts to revive the language via the education system have hence been more successful in Latin America than in African countries. There is a tension though amongst communities in Latin America over whether it is appropriate or desirable to teacher

Indigenous languages in the "alien environment of the school, or to instruct non-tribal members in tribal languages" (McCarty, 2008: 172). Using the "instrument of defeat", namely the education system that once decimated local language and culture, as the "method of defence" for language revival and maintenance, can also pose some difficulties (Spolsky, 2004). Where the goal of education is to revitalise the minority language that had once been suppressed, this attempt has largely been unsuccessful with the notable exception of Hebrew (Ó Laoire, 1999).

Learners of these minority languages can share certain experiences. First, the association of shame with speaking the language is reported by speakers of Ulster Scots (Avery and Gilbert, 2006), and Irish (Mac Gréil and Rhatigan, 2009). As a result, speakers can have mixed feelings about the use of the heritage language in a post-colonial era ranging from strong views that the language should be revived (Whitehead, 1995) to thinking that use of the heritage language is in fact an impediment to success and advancement (Kamwangalmalu, 2008). Support for the revitalisation of the minority language may not necessarily be strongest among mother tongues speakers e.g. Galician (O'Rourke, 2011). Language teachers therefore, have to deal with residual and inherited negative associations that they themselves as well as learners can have with the language, though they may not be fully conscious of this.

Another common legacy of colonialism, is that pejorative connotations are made with speakers of the minority language e.g. the view of Galician as being 'barbaric' (O'Rourke, 2011) or using negative adjectives such as rough or lacking in culture to describe speakers of Galician (O'Rourke, 2003; 2005). Negative images have in the past been linked to Irish speakers e.g. being perceived as smaller, uglier, weaker, less healthy, more old-fashioned, less educated, poorer, less confident, less interesting, less likeable and lazier than speakers of English, and more likely to be involved in farm labour (CILAR, 1975: 300). Teachers of minority languages can find themselves acting as advocates for the language, something that may not be reinforced in the community in which they are teaching. In Ghana, for example, it is reported that the attitudes of community members are generally negative to the mother tongue (Mfum-Mensah, 2005; Kamwangalmalu, 2008). Younger speakers in other contexts can be reluctant to speak the heritage language e.g. Aboriginal languages in Taiwan (Li, 2003). For some parents, oral fluency in the minority language e.g. Māori is desirable amongst children but not necessarily formal education through the minority language (May and Hill, 2008). A similar finding is reported for Tamil parents in Malaysia and Singapore. Teachers of Samí in Finland report the challenge of overcoming prejudices amongst parents and the school community with parents frequently opting to move their children from Samí-medium schools (Huss, 2008). It may also be the case that it is the teacher who harbours negative feelings towards the teaching of the mother tongue in schooling e.g. in Nigeria (Kamwangalmalu, 2008). The stigma attached to speaking a minority language, even if on a

subconscious level, can mean that the required energy and enthusiasm to revive and teach the language is greater. An interesting phenomenon is where the once suppressed language later becomes a language associated with linguistic elitism. Allegations of this nature have been made in the case of Irish where support for the Irish language is found more frequently among the educated, middle class sectors of Irish society (Mac Gréil and Rhatigan, 2009). It has been shown, in the case of Irish, however, that this inferiority complex concerning the speaking of Irish faded with time (O'Riagáin, 1997) but exploring other manifestations of a post-colonial mind set in the present day has been absent from more recent studies of language attitudes to Irish.

These areas of (a) appropriate initial teacher education (b) developing proficiency in the minority language, (c) developing the pre-service teacher as a representative of the minority language and culture, and (d) deconstructing post-colonial mentalities are significant elements of initial teacher education for many minority language teachers. As of yet, recommended initiatives to increase proficiency of pre-service teachers of Irish, have not been fully developed or implemented. Provision of initial teacher education is almost entirely the responsibility of individual nation states. The fact that similarities are experienced by teachers of minority languages in different contexts, however, points to the need for a more co-ordinated structure at an international level.

2.5.3 Expectations in Teaching Irish

An overview will be given below of expectations regarding the teaching of Irish during professional practice, in particular the implementation of the Irish-language (*Gaeilge*) curriculum and some issues arising, and the day-to-work of the teacher in terms of proficiency and nurturing positive attitudes to Irish language and culture.

2.5.3.1 Implementing the Irish Curriculum in Primary Schools

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is the main approach to teaching Irish in Ireland. CLT comprises a set of principles that are associated with a communicative view of language, and one that reflects a more humanistic approach to teaching, one in which the interactive processes of communication received priority (Ó Néill, 2008). The aim of the curriculum is to enable children to develop communicative competence in Irish in an enjoyable way. Because the curriculum is child-centred as opposed to language-centred, it is the teacher's responsibility to prepare lessons linked to the child's interest and in which the emphasis is on him being active in using *Gaeilge,* and in developing the four language skills: oral, listening, reading and writing. Teachers are expected to draw on a number of strategies to develop the child's communicative competence including role-play, language games, tasks and problems, drills, drama, video, story, and poetry. Implementing a

communicative approach to language teaching (CLT) is a key task of the primary school teacher so that students have opportunities to use Irish in meaningful contexts and to see it as a living language. A challenge for some pre-service teachers in this study is that may have experienced the audiolingual or grammar-translation method of language teaching for aspects of their primary schooling, and therefore it requires a major paradigm shift to move to a CLT approach (Wilbur, 2007). It is possible that they will draw on their own experiences of learning to inform their planning in the classroom in the future.

The methods they were exposed to as learners may conflict with aspects of CLT. The challenge teachers face in implementing a CLT approach is evidenced by the fact that there is an inconsistency in its application in Irish primary schools (Ó Néill, 2008). Students with positive experiences in communicative classes can have a greater propensity to develop a communication-orientation belief system (Peng and Woodrow 2010). Difficulties in implementing CLT have been noted too by the Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO, 2004). One issue is that while teachers may subscribe in theory to CLT, in reality they may practise more traditional form of language teaching (Karavas-Doukas, 1996; Mangubhai et al., 2007). Ten examples of this have been compiled including teachers paying most attention to language form but believing there's more to good writing than accuracy, and teachers marking errors comprehensively although selective marking is preferred (Lee, 2009). In other situations, teachers' views on SLA may deviate completely from principles of CLT (Mangubhai et al. 2007). Others suggest that there are confusions as to what the concept actually means (Mangubhai et al 2007). Teachers can hold misconceptions about CLT and take it to mean that grammar is not part of this approach (Li, 2003). One strain of thought is that beginning teachers have not been adequately prepared to implement CLT effectively (Mangubhai et al 2007). In a review of the teaching of Irish in the primary schools, weaknesses were evident in whole school planning in Irish in most schools (DES, 2007a). Insufficient consideration had been given to use of differentiated teaching methodologies, and to the breadth of teaching approaches that might be used to assist teachers in delivering the curriculum (DES, 2007a).

In Ireland, pre-service teachers receive input into CLT approaches during initial teacher education. Practising teachers received some support in implementing CLT too. The School Development Planning Support (SDPS) advisers (formerly the Primary Curriculum Support Programme) assisted schools in the whole school planning process. Templates for planning that could be used in the school and in the classroom were available on the PCSP archive and on the SDPS websites (DES, 2007a). *Cuiditheoirí* or facilitators visited schools and advised teachers on the implementation of the *Gaeilge* curriculum and provided useful sources of information in relation to resources and teaching materials. These support services (PCSP and SDPS) were intended to

provide clarification, reinforcement and reiteration of many of the key messages delivered on the in-service days (DES, 2007a). The extent to which this support simply created a culture of dependency though has been raised (Murchan et al., 2009).

2.5.3.2 Day-to-day Work of the Teacher of Irish

Now that we have an understanding of the expected curriculum, we can examine specific facets of the teacher's role during in-service practice, and the opportunities and challenges within these. As mentioned previously, in Ireland, every primary school teacher is a teacher of Irish (Harris, 2006). It is in their day-to-day teaching of Irish that they are most embedded in the revitalisation and maintenance initiative. We will now look at some aspects of their day-to-day work in order to explore what will be expected of teachers in their professional practice. Two areas will be discussed:

- Teacher Proficiency in Irish
- Nurturing Positive Attitudes to Irish Language and Culture

In terms of proficiency, three characteristics of teaching Irish have been previously highlighted: the tendency to teach the lesson mostly through Irish, the tendency to use Irish for real communication outside of the Irish lesson, and the tendency to teach other subjects through Irish from time to time (Harris, 2008). These three demands on teacher proficiency will be explored.

2.5.3.2.1 Teacher Proficiency: Teaching Primarily through Irish

Relatively speaking, a lot is asked of primary school teachers in their teaching of Irish. Not only does this relate to teaching Irish as a subject, but potentially using Irish a medium of communication with members of the school community, and in accessing publications relevant to the profession e.g. the curriculum documents, circulars, articles in the teacher-centred magazine InTouch. The fact that curriculum documents are published in Irish only and not bilingually could be considered a barrier to understanding and interpretation for those teachers whose Irish language proficiency is not particularly high (INTO, 2004; Ó Néill, 2008; Uí Choistealbha, 2012).

Teacher proficiency plays a role in implementing a Communicative Approach to Language Teaching (CLT) in that Irish is usually taught primarily through Irish, although this is not overtly stated in the curriculum (Ó Néill, 2008). In ensuring that the lesson is conducted primarily through Irish, group work can sometimes pose difficulties because pupils mightn't necessarily automatically speak in the target language (Grenfell, 2002). Teachers may wish to be in control of the linguistic progression, they fear that the pupil will go off-task, and they worry that they will be exposed to deviant forms of the language (Ó Neill, 2008). Issues of noise and discipline have also

been highlighted (Carless, 2004). A tendency of pre-service teachers to give instructions and to explain new words through English during an Irish lesson has been criticised (DES, 2007a). Some authors internationally suggest a judicious use of L1 in the language lesson, however, (Orland-Barak and Yinon, 2005). L1 of students is sometimes used in these contexts for clarification purposes, for communication purposes, and for managerial purposes (Orland-Barak and Yinon, 2005). Teachers in Irish-medium schools sometimes report insecurity with their Irish language proficiency (Council of Europe in Ó Laoire et al. 2009) and so in order to teach lessons primarily through Irish, some teachers resort to more traditional teacher-centred approaches to teaching (Ó Laoire et al., 2009). Reported declines in motivation, and boredom in pupils may be a product of this reverting to traditional methods (Ó Laoire et al. 2009).

2.5.3.2.2 Teacher Proficiency: Creating an Irish-Speaking Environment

Primary teachers play a key role in promoting the use of Irish as a live communicative language and also in providing corrective feedback. For the vast majority of pupils, the classroom is the main, and sometimes only, place in which they will have opportunities to practise and use the Irish (inter)language (Harris, 2006). Because most schools are English-medium and located outside of the *Gaeltacht*, Irish is not spoken widely outside school environment. It then lies with the teacher to create situations and contexts within the classroom and school community in which the child can use his Irish. It also means that Irish may be perceived by pupils as merely a subject and not a living language (Ó Laoire, 2007) and that there is no immediate goal in learning Irish (Harris, 2006).

Limited opportunities for the child to use Irish outside of school place an onerous task on the teacher to devise situations where the child sees a meaningful need to communicate in Irish (Harris, 2006; Ó Murchú, 2008). Where a child does attend an Irish-language event outside of school, most of the support from the community in promoting Irish tends to focus on aspects of Irish culture rather than the language (DES, 2007a). The *Gaeilge* curriculum recommends that the teacher uses Irish informally throughout the day to increase children's exposure to Irish and to encourage them also to communicate in Irish. Teachers therefore need not only subject specific vocabulary but also the ability to use Irish casually and in other professional situations e.g. communicating with other staff. Another factor in creating an Irish-speaking environment is the ability to encourage an atmosphere where children use their Irish and are not afraid of making mistakes. Pupils often have no experience of using Irish outside of the classroom and hence do not have an evaluative yardstick to gauge their progress (Ó Laoire, 2007). Corrective feedback is, the majority of time, given by the teacher and not reinforced by dialogue with Irish speakers outside the school (Harris and Ó Duibhir, 2011). Teachers' reactions to learner mistakes and errors are all the more significant in this context.

2.5.3.2.3 Teacher Proficiency: Implementing CLIL

Teaching of other lessons through Irish in the form of CLIL or Extended Core Programmes has been suggested frequently in the past (e.g. *Conradh na Gaeilge*, 1918). While CLIL has been implemented on a small scale in Ireland, its potential has not yet been fully harnessed (Harris, 2008). CLIL can help pupils to sometimes to explore concepts in different language ultimately helping comprehension (Grenfell, 2002). CLIL has been implemented in several other contexts e.g. in France for the teaching of Japanese, Portuguese, Russian and Arabic Grenfell (2002), or in a minority language context e.g. The Basque Country. CLIL has been championed as a very effective approach to language teaching and it is noted that merely increasing a pupils' instruction in a language does not always lead to a proportional increase in learning (Lasagabaster, 2008). In order to implement CLIL, demands are placed on the teacher in terms of subject specific vocabulary. It also behoves the teacher to find appropriate ways to explain new concepts in a different language to children. It requires that the teacher preserves the integrity of the subject being taught, and that appropriate content is being covered, while at the same time ensuring that children are becoming familiar with the language needed to describe new concepts and ideas in the target language. Small scale initiatives to teach the visual arts and science have occurred in the past (Harris and Mac Giollabhuí, 1988a/b) and indeed increasing opportunities for partial immersion in Ireland is an objective of the Irish government (GOI, 2010).

2.5.3.3 Nurturing Positive Attitudes to Irish Language and Culture

Another consideration in the teaching of Irish is nurturing positive attitudes to the Irish language and culture. This belongs to the affective dimension of teaching. Children's declining interest in and use of, Irish has been well documented and so we examine the demands placed on a teacher to encourage a positive attitude to the Irish language in this context. We also look at views of Irish Gaelic culture and the feasibility of instilling an interest amongst children in this culture.

2.5.3.3.1 Attitudes to the Irish Language

A distinction has been made in other research between attitudes to a language, and attitudes to the experience of actually learning that language. This distinction is significant in understanding pupils' experience of Irish. Although children consider Irish to be one of the top three subjects to learn together with English and mathematics (Uí Choistealbha, 2012), they often rate Irish as their least favourite subject (Devine, 2003; Uí Choistealbha, 2012) and over a third (34%) express dissatisfaction in the learning of Irish as shown in the Growing Up in Ireland Study (2009). This is frequently linked to an attitude that they are not good at learning Irish. Where the minority

language is taught as subject only, there are hardly ever reports of satisfactory competence achieved in the language e.g. Basque (Lasagabaster, 2005). In Ireland despite an increase in the amount of people studying Irish because of the introduction of free schooling, there has still been a decline in performance in Irish as an examination subject (Ó Riagáin, 1997). Limited competency in Irish is often lamented despite pupils spending fourteen or fifteen years learning Irish in formal education (Ó Duibhir, 2009). The former Irish Language Commissioner, *An Coimisinéir Teanga*, expressed alarm about the teaching of Irish in English-medium schools in Ireland (Ó Cuirreáin, 2006). This has been labelled a "crisis in the schools" by some (Ó Raghallaigh, 2005). A similar finding occurs in other FL contexts where there is little exposure to the target language e.g. English learners in Japan (Martin, 2004). Where children already bring less than favourable attitudes to the teaching of Irish, this places increased demands on the teacher.

2.5.3.3.2 Attitudes to Irish Gaelic Culture

An express aim of many minority language curricula is that cultural elements are explored in language teaching e.g. Welsh (General Teaching Council, 2011). Another issue is in selecting cultural elements to expose children to in the teaching of Irish. Although cultural awareness is a feature of the primary school curriculum, exploring Irish culture with pupils is relatively underdeveloped and concrete examples in whole school and individual planning are lacking (DES, 2007a). As we have seen in Section 2.5.2.4, there is often an ambiguity around what constitutes Irish culture and whether or not it is synonymous with Irish Gaelic culture. A lack of clarity in this area may be one of the reasons that cultural awareness is reported to be underdeveloped in the teaching of Irish. Although the preservation and promotion of Irish Gaelic culture is enshrined in the Education Act 1998 item 9, the tangible references to this in school planning seem to centre on standalone activities during *Seachtain na Gaeilge* or Irish-language Week as opposed to specific reference to the exploration and discussion of particular art forms etc. (DES, 2007a). Another reason for the lack of development, is the child's limited exposure to Irish Gaelic culture outside of school. As the curriculum acknowledges, the best case scenario is where a collaborative effort is made on the part of teachers, parents, principals and the wider school community in the promotion of Irish, including the child's attendance at local and national Irish language events. It is recommended that the child speak some Irish with his parent and even observe the teacher and parent conversing in Irish from time to time (DES, 1999). It is noteworthy that emphasis is not explicitly placed on the child's communication with peers outside of school through Irish (DES, 1999).

A secondary aim of the *Gaeilge* curriculum is to enhance the cultural identity of the child through (inter)cultural awareness activities (DES, 1999). Students often choose to study a subject

because of their interest in the culture (traditional and popular) associated with the language (Kouritizin et al., 2007). It is considered much more important that the bilingual education teacher be a good model of the minority language as opposed to the majority language (Roswell et al., 2007). This cultural dimension of the teacher's role involves making pupils "understand why the speakers of two different languages act and react the way they do" (Skutnabb-Kangas (2000: 631) but not catapulting the teacher into a position where she is "speaking for" or representing the entire culture. In a sense, language teachers act as a language/cultural expert (Larzen-Ostermark 2008). As we have already seen in Section 2.3.2.2, however teachers may have mixed views over whether they belong to the Irish-speaking community and how authentic they therefore are as a cultural representative.

In relation to promoting positive attitudes to Irish culture, it seems that along with overcoming some negative attitudes that children might have, teachers also have a lack of clarity surrounding which cultural elements they should explore and they also have limited support from others in achieving this. All this points to the increased demands on primary teachers to be proficient in Irish, and to cultivate an environment that nurtures positive attitudes to Irish language and culture, sometimes with little external support. It is not clear, however, how pre-service teachers feel about these demands that will be placed on them in their future careers.

In conclusion, developing and refining beliefs about language learning, attitudes to a language, and perceptions of the role of the language teacher are three related but distinct aspects of becoming a language teacher. The particular sociolinguistic context of the language impacts this process too, particularly in the case of a minority language where the language teacher plays a vital role in language revitalisation and maintenance. Initial teacher education comprises some key experiences to help them negotiate a professional identity and this study aims to pinpoint key experiences and factors that influence the process of becoming a teacher of Irish.

Chapter 3 Design of Study

3.0 Introduction

This chapter gives an overview of the study's aims, the research methodology used, the research instruments designed, and the participants involved. The research methodology section explores theoretical and methodological underpinnings and the aims of the research instruments used as part of the study, the justification for combining longitudinal and cross-sectional approaches in the research design in order to maximise the ability to track the impact of key experiences during initial teacher education and early in-service practice, and finally the rationale for employing a questionnaire and interview in data collection. The research instruments section deals with the instruments' purpose, their content, the construction of each part of the questionnaire and interview, and briefly the limitations of the study. The participant section describes the pilot phase of the study and the issues arising, as well as outlining the steps taken to invite participants to be involved in this study.

3.1 Aims of the Study

The dependent variables in this study are teachers' beliefs regarding the teaching of Irish, attitudes they have regarding the Irish language, and their perceptions of becoming a teacher of Irish. The study explores how these dependent variables, beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions, are influenced by the independent variable: their experiences during initial teacher education and early in-service practice. Broadly, the aims of this study are to investigate the following questions:

(a) What are the characteristics of pre-service teachers and how do these compare to the (inter)national profile? What beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions do teachers enter initial teacher education with? How do teachers anticipate the key experiences of school and *Gaeltacht* placement?

(b) What changes, if any, happen to these beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions during initial teacher education and are these changes linked to school and *Gaeltacht* placement?

(c) Do any of these beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions continue to evolve during in-service practice?

(d) Do teachers with reported higher proficiency in Irish experience the same growth and development of beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions?

Change is interpreted as statistically significant differences in percentages selecting 'agree', 'neither agree nor disagree', or 'disagree' for each item on the questionnaire, administered between the beginning and end of initial teacher education, or in the themes mentioned in open-ended responses on the questionnaire, as identified via Chi Square tests. Attention will also be drawn to trends at the top end of the scale i.e. changes in the percentages agreeing with particular items. Change is also interpreted as significant differences in mean scale scores on the questionnaire administered between the beginning and end of initial teacher education, as evidenced in independent samples t-tests. Change is further interpreted as the qualitative self-reflective descriptions that teachers provide in the interviews concerning their own journey to becoming a teacher of Irish.

3.2 Key Experiences in Initial Teacher Education and Early Professional Practice

Now we look at a more detailed explanation of certain experiences teachers have during initial teacher education, and then in early in-service practice. We look at the specific contribution of these experiences to beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions.

It is claimed that initial teacher education provides key experiences and can be the arena in which language beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions are most susceptible to change (Dooley, 2005). Characteristic features of initial teacher education are that pre-service teachers study Irish as an academic obligatory subject, they study teaching methods for Irish, they undertake a school placement in which they teach Irish, and they spend some a period in an Irish-speaking region or *Gaeltacht*. Characteristic features of the day-to-day work of a teacher of Irish are that she generally teaches Irish through the medium of Irish, uses Irish informally throughout the day, and in some cases teaches other aspects of the primary school curriculum through Irish. Each of these features may be significant and they may have the potential to modify existing beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions.

Four key stages during initial teacher education and early professional practice have been chosen. Below is a description of each of the four stages identified. In section 2.3: Design of the Current Study, the longitudinal and cross-sectional nature of the study will be clarified and the reason for using two groups will be explained.

Study 1: First Year Students in Initial Teacher Education

Longitudinal Stage 1: Beginning of initial teacher education

Longitudinal Stage 2: First school placement and *Gaeltacht* experience

Study 2: Final Year Students in Initial Teacher Education

Longitudinal Stage 3: End of initial teacher education

Longitudinal Stage 4: Early professional practice

Study 1

Longitudinal Stage 1: Beginning of initial teacher education

Upon entry to initial teacher education pre-service teachers begin to think about the profession of teaching in a more focused manner. As acknowledged by several authors, teachers begin their career following an "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, 1975) whereby they have spent up to fourteen years, in the case of Ireland, as students in primary and secondary education. This kind of apprenticeship is not a feature of other professions. Consequently, teachers may come to colleges of education with deep-seated beliefs about what effective and ineffective teaching entails, and it can be particularly difficult for them to adopt and adapt to new teaching methods. Participants in this study were in primary school during the transition period from the 1971 behaviourist language teaching to the 1999 Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach so for some, they have no direct experience of CLT, while for others they have only partial experience. It is important for them to acknowledge that the way they teach Irish during their career will differ from the way in which they were taught. For those instructed in CLT, they need an opportunity to explore the rationale for this approach and the issues involved. A key feature of the teacher education programme in first year is unpacking pre-service teachers' own experience of primary and secondary education before engaging with the Revised Primary School Curriculum (PSC). Identifying and analysing beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions at this point, allows a baseline measurement.

Longitudinal Stage 2: First school placement and *Gaeltacht* experience

School placement, in which pre-service teachers gain experience of teaching the curriculum, is a cornerstone of initial teacher education. It is the first experience that they have of formally teaching and provides an invaluable insight into their future profession. School placement is a crucial experience as it is the first chance for the pre-service teacher to move from an Irish learner to a teacher of Irish. It affords them the opportunity to try out different instructional practices

and to reflect on their appropriateness and effectiveness. Pre-service teachers on school placement can often experience difficulty in teaching Irish, particularly in teaching through Irish (DES, 2006). These new experiences on school placement can provoke pre-service teachers reflect on their beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions (Vibulphol, 2004). Pre-service teachers can often modify beliefs, attitudes and perceptions of language teaching as a result (Busch, 2010).

Study abroad programmes have been shown to have a bearing on pre-service teachers' language attitudes (Tanaka and Ellis, 2003). In certain cases, they have an impact on proficiency too (Tanaka and Ellis, 2003). A recommendation of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) is that pre-service teachers spend a substantial period of time in a region in which the target language is spoken. A potential is present during the pre-service teachers' time in the *Gaeltacht* as they experience Irish in a naturalistic setting. It is envisioned that this experience will provide interesting insights to them in relation to the use and importance of Irish as a live communicative language (Module specification, Teaching Council, 2011; Gaeltacht Working Group, 2012). It is potentially transformative in nature in that pre-service teachers have the opportunity to conduct many day-to-day tasks through Irish and to interact with local native speakers; an opportunity very seldom afforded outside of the *Gaeltacht*. Visiting the *Gaeltacht*, for some, may be a pivotal point in terms of seeing Irish in its broader sociocultural context and comparing it to the micro-level experience in the classroom or in college.

School placement and *Gaeltacht* occur in a back to back manner and so one point of data collection can allow teachers to reflect on both placements that they have recently engaged in. Data collection at this point also coincides with the end of first year in initial teacher education. According to the module specification for the first year of initial teacher education, it is expected that by the end of first year pre-service teachers will have developed a positive attitude to the Irish language and will be introduced to effective strategies for teaching Irish. Some research highlights the fact that increased proficiency can cause attitudes to change (Nikitina and Furuoka, 2007). Other research has highlighted that teaching methods courses can cause changes in beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions (Busch, 2010).

Certainly, the experience of becoming a primary school teacher differs from the experience of studying a language in other more general degrees because the learning of Irish is with a view to teaching it. The programme of study is concentrated on the type of language that is needed of a primary school teacher in her day-to-day teaching, in communicating with parents, principal and the wider education community, and also in reading materials relevant to the profession e.g. Department of Education and Skills (DES) circulars, articles and publications about the teaching of Irish written in Irish. Pre-service teachers learning Irish differs from the situation of studying of a foreign or modern language in other degrees where there can be a stronger

emphasis on literature. To some extent, the programme of study in a college of education can be seen to be more utilitarian and practical in orientation to meet the needs of primary school teachers teaching Irish. The end of their first year in initial teacher education is an opportunity to explore how this particular type of study of Irish has impacted on beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions.

Study 2

Longitudinal Stage 3: End of initial teacher education

This will be the first point of measurement for Group 2, pre-service teachers in their final year of initial teacher education. The programme of study in its entirety – courses in competency and methodology, School placement, *Gaeltacht* placement, the general passage of time, and other key moments – provides a very rich experience of the Irish language to the pre-service teacher. A group of exiting pre-service teachers will be asked to reflect on their experience and on their current beliefs about and attitudes to the Irish language, as well as their perceptions of their future role. This allows pre-service teachers to identify other key experiences that the researcher is unaware of but that nevertheless caused beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions to change and develop. Beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions of the two groups: first year pre-service teachers and final year pre-service teachers, can be compared and differences in their views can then be analysed.

Longitudinal Stage 4: Early professional practice

While some of their views may have been modified in initial teacher education, it is likely that the change from pre-service to in-service may be significant enough to warrant further change or modification of previous beliefs and attitudes. Location of school, school size, school type, class level being taught and school ethos may all be contributing factors to the formation and modification of beliefs and attitudes (Bailey, 1992; Murchan et al., 2009). Also it is a time when teaching skills are not subject to the same level and regularity of evaluation by supervisors and potentially this is a time when attitudes and behaviours are more aligned as suggested by Festinger's Theory of Cognitive Dissonance (1957). Having spent some time in the profession, teachers will be able to reflect on any attitude change that has occurred (Baker, 1992). General passage of time may carry an influence also.

In sum, Longitudinal stages 1 and 3 are characterised by quantitative data collection namely questionnaires. The three areas examined in each of these longitudinal stages are consistent: beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions, but each longitudinal stage targets a different

stage of the teacher of Irish's career and so some differences are present in wording to consider items in retrospect e.g. final year students' reflecting on school placement or *Gaeltacht* experience.

Longitudinal stages 2 and 4 are characterised by qualitative data collection namely semi-structured interviews. The choice to include qualitative data collection methods arose from an observation that studies in which no change in language learning beliefs was reported tended to rely on solely quantitative methods e.g. Mori (1999) whereas studies which included qualitative dimensions had a greater tendency to pinpoint changes e.g. Riley (2009). Indeed, in certain cases where the research methods comprised both quantitative and qualitative research methods, it was generally in the qualitative research methods that changes in beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions were most evident e.g. the journal entries in Busch's (2010) study.

Exploring the beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions of teachers at each of these four stages, and looking in particular at the specific contribution of school placement, *Gaeltacht* experience, and first year in in-service practice will give us an insight into the dynamic process of becoming a teacher of Irish.

3.3 Key Considerations in the Research Design

As outlined in the previous chapter, pre-service teachers bring to initial teacher education several beliefs about how a language should be taught, attitudes to the language itself, and perceptions of their future role. Several studies exist in Ireland revealing the kinds of beliefs and attitudes that the general public as well as practising teachers have (CILAR, 1975; Harris, 2006; Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin, 1984; Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin, 1994). Corresponding data is not available for pre-service teachers. In addition to this, data regarding how teachers feel about taking on their future role as teachers of Irish is lacking. This study aims to address this gap. In the absence of any existing instrument suitable for administration to pre-service teachers and teachers in early professional practice, to examine together the three areas beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions, the questionnaires and interview schedules used in the present study were developed.

3.3.1 Aims of Research Instruments

A key aim of this study is to develop and administer research instruments that can record and measure the evolution of beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions of teachers during initial teacher education and early in-service practice.

In order to achieve this aim some key considerations were made in the design of the research instruments:

(1) To combine a longitudinal and cross-sectional approach

(2) To employ questionnaires and interviews in data collection

The reasons behind these decisions will now be given.

3.3.1.1 Combining Longitudinal and Cross-sectional Approaches

This research concerns initial teacher education and some parts of early in-service practice. Its aim is to provide a systematic account of how beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions develop, as called for by several researchers (Ó Riagáin, 2008; Wilbur, 2007). In the field of applied linguistics, longitudinal studies remain in the minority because of their time intensity and the potential for the research question to be outmoded by the time all data is collected (Dörnyei, 2007). "Creative longitudinal design" however, can be used, a design that combines longitudinal and cross-sectional designs (Dörnyei, 2007). By combining cross-sectional with longitudinal approaches, multiple groups can be examined longitudinally but in a shorter period of time (Collins, 2006). Some different models of this combination exist e.g. split panels, accelerated longitudinal design (Collins, 2006), time-sequential, cohort-sequential, and cross-sequential (Schaie, 1965). Combining cross-sectional and longitudinal approaches emerged as a research design in developmental psychology when it was observed that longitudinal and cross-sectional approaches in isolation, failed to capture the richness of the process of change (Woolf, 1998). Researchers such as Baltes (1968) and Schaie (1965) agree in principle that the two research methods can be combined to maximise the ability to track changes in the growth and development of key variables. They differ, however, in their proposed designs with Schaie advising a more complex multivariate (age/stage, group and time of measurement) design to explain why and how change happens. Whereas Baltes (1968) and Schaie (1965) were seeking to explore the variable of age, this research will be exploring beliefs, attitudes and perceptions of pre-service teachers (in Woolf, 1998). Research concerning language attitudes has up to now been centred on a bivariate model e.g. language attitudes and age (Baker, 1992). Schaie's (1965) model has been chosen over Baltes (1965) model because of the advantages of this model in describing a better range of factors that can impact on the dependent variable of beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions. The nature of this study is exploratory and seeks to identify the complex range of factors that can influence beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions. It is also considered superior in explaining changes in these areas (Schaie and Baltes, 1975).

A creative longitudinal design can be seen as "the best of both worlds" as it combines cross-sectional and longitudinal approaches in a single study (Sigelman and Rider, 2008). It allows

for the observation of two or more groups on multiple occasions. Creative longitudinal designs have some advantages. They allow for the study of the growth and development of beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions over a relatively long interval of time (four years) but with a smaller number of measurements of each group. Gaps exist in previous research instruments in relation to the measurement of change in beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions over time. Within the chronosystem of education, time is considered to be a critical factor (Bronfenbrenner, 1995). This can be interpreted as sociohistorical time, as in what are the beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions of pre-service teachers in 21st century Ireland compared to beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions held by teachers when the language revitalisation project initially began. It can also be taken to describe changes in beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions that occur in real time e.g. from the start of college to early in-service practice. Because two or more groups are used, differences between the groups can be measured revealing differences in beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions in pre-service teachers at significant points in their career: first year and final year of initial teacher education, and later their first year of teaching. An aspect of the longitudinal approach will be retained for both groups. Group 1 will be monitored at two points during their first year: beginning of initial teacher education, and following first school placement and *Gaeltacht* placements (these two placements happen in a back to back fashion). This is to first explore beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions of beginning pre-service teachers, and to track any change that might occur in these relating to either of the placements or other experiences during their programme. Group 2 will be monitored at two key points also: end of initial teacher education and first year in the classroom. At the end of initial teacher education, teachers can reflect in a comprehensive way on any other beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions that evolved and whether these changes were related to the school or *Gaeltacht* placements or other experiences. It provides a measure of the beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions with which they leave initial teacher education which can be compared to any changes that occur in these upon entering professional practice.

A cross-sectional approach is implemented to complement this longitudinal element and the beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions are explored of two groups: one group of incoming pre-service teachers as described above, and one group of pre-service teachers on completing their programme and during early in-service practice. This allows us to obtain two snapshot views of pre-service teachers: those who have just begun initial teacher education with those who have just completed it, thus allowing us to compare the two perspectives and analyse the impact that initial teacher education, and later early in-service practice, potentially has on beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions. Cross-sectional approaches to the study of language beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions have been implemented by various researchers (e.g. Nikitina and Furuoka, 2007;

Lasagabaster and Sierra, 2002; Kern, 1995). A cross-sectional approach, looking at two different populations e.g. beginner and advanced learner, novice and expert teachers, first year students and final year students, helps us to understand the belief systems at different stages of the process. It allows us to make comparisons between the two groups and to reflect on changes in views that have occurred between them. Hence, the cross-sectional aspect of this study allows us to compare views at two important points in the process of becoming a teacher of Irish. The longitudinal element allows us to chart how beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions evolve and the specific contribution of school and *Gaeltacht* placement. Using a creative longitudinal approach provides us with a deep and rich exploration of the process of becoming a teacher of Irish, and helps us to understand how key experiences may contribute to the evolution of beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions, over time.

3.3.1.2 Use of Questionnaire and Interview

A questionnaire is used in this study to draw comparisons between the views of teachers in this study and teachers in studies conducted in other contexts. This is largely achieved by utilising common questionnaire items from other well established research instruments e.g. the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI), the Attitudes and Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) and some items from the Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann (1993) studies. (Appendix B on the accompanying cd provides a copy of the questionnaire used and all items that were sourced from previously used research instruments are highlighted). Questionnaires are seen to be easy to administer and are not time intensive (Dörnyei, 2007). Where the researcher wants to deliberately delineate beliefs, attitudes and perceptions first before examining how they might co-influence each other, a questionnaire is very useful because each of these three areas can be addressed in separate sections in the questionnaire. A qualitative element is included in the data collection, however, in the form of open-ended supplementary questions in the questionnaire to allow teachers to expand on or further clarify responses they gave to particular items. As well as this, semi-structured interviews are conducted with two subgroups complement the questionnaire and allow a smaller group to provide a richer and in-depth description of the specific experience of school placement and *Gaeltacht* experience, and later early in-service practice. This provides an opportunity for teachers to look at the questionnaire that they completed previously and to consciously reflect on whether any change has occurred since they undertook school and *Gaeltacht* placement, or began professional practice. The interview also allows teachers to discuss other catalysts for change in beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions that may not have been covered in the initial questionnaire. Further, the interviews allow them to talk

about areas where their beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions were not aligned or where they co-influenced each other.

3.3.1.3 Major Studies Influencing this Research

Several relevant studies influenced the scope and design of the current research, and are referred to throughout the thesis. A brief summary of each of the following studies is now given.

(a) Committee of Irish Language Attitudes Research (1975)

(b) Attitude and Motivation Test Battery (Gardner and Lambert, 1985)

(c) Irish National Teachers' Organisation (1985) Survey of Teachers' Attitudes

(d) Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (Horwitz, 1985)

(e) Irish in the Primary School: Long-Term Achievements and National Trends (Harris , 2006)

(a) Committee of Irish Language Attitudes Research (1975)

This was the first major study accessing the public as well as teachers' view on the Irish language. It examined specifically the following areas:

Theme 1: Biographical details	Theme 2: Use of Irish at home	Theme 3: Irish and the *Gaeltacht*	Theme 4: Irish and the Government	Theme 5: Irish and Identity

The main findings relevant to the current study were that abilities in speaking Irish were generally high among teachers, much higher than among the general population. Teachers involved to a greater degree in social and cultural activities where Irish was spoken than the general public.

(b) Attitude and Motivation Test Battery (1985)

This instrument was devised by Gardner and Lambert (1985) to explore attitudes of pupils in immersion education settings in Canada. The instrument examined the following areas:

Theme 1: Integrativeness	Theme 2: Motivation	Theme 3: Attitudes to the Learning Situation	Theme 4: Attitude/ Motivation Index

The main findings relevant to the current study are that attitudes to the learning situations can exist independently of general attitudes to the language, and also that motivation to learn a language can be linked to a desire to get to know speakers of the language or for more instrumental reasons.

(c) Survey of Teachers' Attitudes to the Irish Language 1985

This study was conducted by the trade union organisation representing primary teachers. This sought to provide comprehensive information on teachers' attitudes to Irish and to the positions of Irish in national schools in 1984. The 1984 INTO survey was the first major study of teachers' views on the teaching of the Irish language in national schools to be undertaken since the previous 1936 INTO study. The study examined the following areas:

Theme 1: Description of Teacher	Theme 2: Description of School	Theme 3: The Teacher and Irish	Theme 4: The Teaching of Irish	Theme 5: Irish in the Curriculum	Theme 5: Reading materials

The main findings relevant to the current study are that school contexts can have a bearing on teachers' attitudes to teaching Irish, and also that teachers' views on the curriculum, what and how they are expected to teach, can also influence the experience of teaching Irish. The identity of the teacher as a speaker of Irish outside of school can be indicated by her willingness to engage in Irish-language activities. The 1985 report highlighted the diminishing number of teachers in the system who were of *Gaeltacht* origin (linked to the mode of recruitment, the decline of Irish-speaking *Gaeltacht* population and the increase in the number of national teachers required and the increase in the national population which occurred during the late 50s, 60s and beginning of the 70s). Teachers of longer service, among which there was a higher incidence of native speakers and teachers who attended preparatory colleges, had more favourable attitudes to Irish, generally taught Irish for a longer length of time each week, described their oral ability as 'fluent', were more enthusiastic about teaching Irish, and were more likely to listen to Irish programmes on the radio outside of schools.

(d) Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory 1986

This was the first systematic account of language teacher beliefs using a Likert scale, which also included guidelines for administration. The following five themes were explored:

Theme 1: Foreign Language Aptitude	Theme 2: Difficulty of Language Learning	Theme 3: Nature of Language Learning	Theme 4: Appropriate Language Learning Strategies	Theme 5: Motivation and Expectation (added to FL BALLI, 1988)

The main findings relevant to the current study are that language teachers have more sophisticated views of language learning compared to the general public, and that they generally think the language they will teach is relatively easy.

(e) Irish in the Primary School: Long-Term Achievements and National Trends Harris (2006)

This study examines the views of teachers, pupils and parents in relation to Irish, exploring the following areas:

Theme 1: Teachers' attitudes to Irish and proficiency in Irish	Theme 2: Teachers' classroom practice and view of the role of Irish in primary schools	Theme 3: Parents' attitude to Irish and proficiency in Irish	Theme 4: Parents' view of the role of Irish in primary schools	Theme 5: Scéim Labhairt na Gaeilge

Main findings relevant to the current study were that satisfaction derived from teaching Irish is not necessarily linked to the ease of teaching the language, that content and language integrated learning (CLIL i.e. use of Irish to teach another subject in the curriculum) is a proposed method to increase children's exposure to Irish outside of the formal language lesson, and that teachers have noted a decline in children's proficiency in Irish. Data from this study also point to a decline in teachers' favourable attitudes to teaching Irish

3.3.2 Approaches to Investigating Beliefs, Attitudes and Role Perceptions

A discussion of research methods that have previously been used in recording and measuring beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions will now be given. Then the shortcomings of some of these approaches and the benefit of incorporating both questionnaires and interviews in this creative longitudinal study will be outlined. Finally an overview of the current study will be given.

Barcelos (2003) distinguished between three broad methods of investigating beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions. The first of these is the normative approach which has largely involved the implementation of variations of Horwitz' BALLI (1985). While this instrument is useful in gleaning statistical information concerning common beliefs across learner populations, studies that have adopted such an approach have not yielded many results relating to changes in beliefs over time e.g. Mori (1999); Peacock (2001). Some theorists have, therefore, concluded that no changes in beliefs have occurred. This may unfortunately be a myopic view of what is a very multifaceted and dynamic language learning process. The second approach is a metacognitive one which examines 'theories in action' (Wenden, 1999). This is done mainly by content analysis of learner self-reports in semi-structured interviews. Again, some limitations are associated with this type of data collection. Learners may not always, for instance, report their beliefs accurately in such a format (Ellis, 2008). Self-report methods also assume that learners are aware of the beliefs they hold and are able to verbalize them. Finally, some beliefs may lie below the threshold of consciousness or cannot be easily and directly expressed. A third competing approach is the contextual one which views learner beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions as varying according to context as has been evidenced in the results of replicating the BALLI with different types of learners in different countries (Altan, 2006; Nikitina and Furuoka, 2007). It involves collecting a variety of data types and diverse means of data analysis. It has been argued that this approach is superior because rather than viewing beliefs, attitudes or perceptions as a 'mental trait' i.e. a characteristic or innate construct, it incorporates the influence that experience can have on same (Barcelos, 2003:26). Aspects of all three approaches are present in the current study with the use of common questionnaire items representing a normative approach, an opportunity for teachers to reflect on their own practice, representing metacognitive approach. Finally the specific sociolinguistic context of Irish is taken into consideration, representing a contextual approach.

3.3.2.1 Questionnaires, Concept Maps, Metaphor Analysis and Interviews

A variety of methods have been employed in previous studies to investigate beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions. These have been concentrated mostly on quantitative methods with a small number also adding in qualitative elements. These research methods will now be described.

3.3.2.1.1 Questionnaires

Quantitative data collection has been used in a number of studies e.g. Horwitz (1985), Mori (1999), Nikitina and Furuoka (2007), Sakui and Gaies (1999). Mainly this involves the administration of questionnaires to the participants. Where a normative approach to data collection is used, such as questionnaires, the BALLI has been a popular choice by researchers.

Certain merits are linked to the use of the BALLI: its long record of use, comparability to other studies, and the ease of administration and comparison across studies and over time (Nikitina and Furuoka, 2007). Some weaknesses are associated with the use of questionnaires, however. Borg (2008) suggests that they constrain responses, use wording that may be problematic, and provide no insights as to why the beliefs are held. For example, in the AMTB, participants can articulate whether they enjoy learning a language but not why they enjoy it. Equally in items used in other studies can point to a commitment to language revitalisation and maintenance but not to the reasons why the respondent feels this way (Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin, 1994).

Another criticism is that questionnaires consisting of closed items allow respondents only to state their beliefs – and then only the beliefs which are included in the questionnaire (Sakui and Gaies, 1999). Use of superlatives can be seen to be constrictive and also provocative. In the case of the BALLI, there is a strong audio-visual emphasis, for example, mirroring the views on best practice in language learning and teaching present at the time the questionnaire was devised. This is obviously one area that needs to be amended before the instrument is used with a contemporary audience. Some researchers have adapted the BALLI to suit the needs of the group under study as is advised by Horwitz (personal communication, 2012) e.g. Nikitina and Furuoka (2007). One noticeable omission in the Nikitina and Furuoka study was the statements that deal with learner's motivation. It was done because motivation is seen by the researchers as a psychological construct that involves incentives – extrinsic or intrinsic – to learn and, as such, is not based on the premise that something is right/true or wrong/false, which is an inseparable part of the concept of beliefs. One addition was the new parameter to examine the learners' beliefs about the importance of learning a foreign language. The sections of the questionnaire explored both micro-context (beliefs which shaped by the learners' previous and present learning experiences) and macro-context of learning (learner's opinions about additional language learning and multilingualism generally). Some other researchers have adapted the way in which they analyse the data from the BALLI e.g. Busch (2010) who highlights the importance of considering each item as a discrete entity as opposed to tracking statistical changes across the group.

3.3.2.1.2 Concept Maps

Another option for gathering data on pre-service teachers' beliefs is through the use of concept maps as has been used by Gupta and Saravanan (1995) and Farrell (2006). Rationale for the use of concept maps has come from their use in cognitive psychology where they have been used to provide frameworks for understanding how people store and use the knowledge they have to carry out various tasks. Concept mapping is defined as 'a research technique for capturing and graphically representing concepts and their hierarchical interrelationships' (Meijer, Verloop and

Beijaard, 1999: 62). This technique has also been used successfully to trace conceptual change of pre-service teachers in the teaching of English reading (Mergendoller and Sacks, 1994; Meijer, Verloop and Beijaard, 1999). Concept mapping provides a static representation of beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions. It does not allow participants to comment on why they hold certain views, however.

3.3.2.1.3 Metaphor Analysis

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) suggest that the use of metaphor is quite commonplace and it is a conceptual phenomenon as well as a linguistic one. They argue that metaphors are used to both construct and constrain thought. It is now an accepted tool in educational and applied linguistic enquiry (Cameron and Low, 1999). Some theorists have included a section on metaphor analysis as part of the questionnaire to allow teachers to articulate their perceptions of a teacher's role e.g. Bodycott (1997); Kramsch (2004). Results of metaphor analysis do not accord very closely with the beliefs measured by belief questionnaires e.g. BALLI (Ellis, 2003). It is, therefore, argued that metaphor analysis may be a better method to access the affective dimension of language learning and teaching. A criticism of this approach, however, is that participants are not asked explicitly to state beliefs but rather they are gleaned circuitously by analysis of their written and verbalised comments e.g. in Ellis (2004).

3.3.2.1.4 Interviews

Interviews have also been used in some studies to allow participants to reflect on the experience of learning a language e.g. Riley (2009). Interviews may involve individual learners or teachers as in the aforementioned study or in Bodycott (1997), or indeed a small group like in Riley (2009). Participants can contribute to the discussion and direct the conversation in a way that is not always possible in questionnaires. Participants may also be more comfortable expressing themselves verbally rather that in written form. Interviews can be more time intensive and the transcription of each can be also be labour intensive. There is also the danger that participants will only give socially desirable responses and that the Halo Effect will be at play (Gass and Mackey, 2002).

Although the benefits of each type of the research methods individually have been outlined above in respective studies, there is a tendency to combine research methods in order to provide a richer picture of beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions. As will be seen below, a combination of research methods is particularly popular in studies that examine changes in beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions.

3.3.2.2 Combining Research Methods to Measure Change in Beliefs, Attitudes and Role Perceptions

This section presents some research methods employed that combine two different but complementary approaches to data collection.

3.3.2.2.1 Concept Maps and Interviews

In some cases, the use of concept mapping is combined with interviews (Farrell, 2006). In this study students are asked to compose two concept maps: one at the start of their engagement with a reading methods module as part of their postgraduate diploma in education, and then another on completion of the module. Students are then afforded opportunities to describe the changes that occurred between the composition of the first concept map and the subsequent concept map. Personal reasons for the changes between both concept maps are also invited. Some of the limitations acknowledged previously relating to the normative approach in the administration of questionnaires apply to the use of concept maps also. Farrell (2006), therefore, decided to conduct and record a group interview (a type of focus group interview) following the composition of the first concept map. Similarly, final group interviews were conducted for triangulation after the second concept map was devised. As others have suggested e.g. Barcelos (2003), a quantitative approach may not yield accurate results concerning changes in beliefs.

3.3.2.2.2 Questionnaires and Journaling

In other cases, questionnaires have been combined with journaling (Busch, 2010; Tanaka, 2004). The first study adopted a mixed methods approach to data collection in order to surpass some of the difficulties associated with a solely quantitative approach. A qualitative analysis of the participants' open-ended explanations is included. Three questions are examined: what beliefs they held at the beginning of the course, whether those beliefs had changed by the end of the course and, if so, what contributed to the change. The more revealing nature of qualitative analysis is stressed in the findings. More information on the depth of knowledge associated with those changes as a result of the SLA course is depicted using this method. In the second study (Tanaka and Ellis, 2003) journal entries again prove more revealing. Despite no statistically significant changes being evident in the questionnaire responses after 12 weeks, interview and diary data report change, showing that the absence of evidence to highlight changes in beliefs, attitudes and perceptions may be a product of inappropriate data collection methods rather than a mere absence of such changes. Researchers therefore, call for more interviews, learning diaries and open-ended questionnaire to supplement research findings (Sakui and Gaies, 1999). The

superiority of qualitative methods in pinpointing change gave rise to the researcher's decision to include semi-structured interviews in the current study.

3.3.2.3 Self Reflection on Changes in Beliefs, Attitudes and Role Perceptions

In the past indirect methods have been employed to examine participants' attitudes to language, for example, in the matched guise tests (Gardner and Lambert, 1972). Metaphor analysis and concept mapping too, can place the responsibility on the researcher to identify whether a change has occurred in beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions. Having examined several studies that involved mixed methods, it is clear that studies which ask participants to consciously reflect on change in beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions, and to make the tacit explicit, are more successful in identifying change than those in which the researcher infers the change. This is achieved in several different ways. In one study, teachers compare pre and post tests and locate four items on which their answers differed the most, and then wrote a short paragraph about why their beliefs changed (Busch, 2010). If they can find no great differences, they choose items about which they were uncertain on the first survey but were able to answer on the second survey, or to write why their beliefs did not change. In another study, interviews are held after the administering of the questionnaire at two points in time and participants are given the opportunity to discuss the changes in their beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions (Riley, 2009).

3.3.2.4 Value of Mixed Methods Approach to Investigate the Evolution of Views

The inclusion of questionnaires and interviews, while asking teachers explicitly to reflect on change is seen as an effective method to investigate beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions. This has been shown to be particularly effective in tracking their evolution over time and also to pinpoint changes that can occur. Another concern in the design of the research instruments is to take into account the affective dimension of language teaching that has previously been neglected in other research on language beliefs (mostly focussing on the cognitive dimension of language learning). The researcher feels that it is very important to give a peopled account of the process of becoming a teacher of Irish from individual viewpoints, highlighting the meaning individuals attach to various steps in this process. Inclusion of qualitative research methods to capture the richness of the process is deemed paramount and is present in the form of semi-structured interviews in this study. The advantages and issues in each of these types of data collection are presented in Table 3.3.2.2.

Table 3.3.2.2
Benefits and Weaknesses of Different Approaches

Research Method	Examples	Advantages	Disadvantages
Questionnaire	Mori and Sato (2007); Richards (2001) Use of BALLI: Altan, (2006), Horwitz, (1985); Kern, (1995); Mori, (1999); Nikitina and Furuoka, (2007) Use of AMTB: (Gardner and Lambert 1972; Harris, 2006)	Ease of administration Comparability to other studies	Constraint of thought Not much opportunity for participants to discuss beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions not present in questionnaire
Concept Mapping	Farrell (2006)	Affords participants the opportunity to represent graphically the beliefs, attitudes and perceptions that they hold	Not much opportunity for participants to state why they hold certain discuss beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions
Metaphor Analysis	Kramsch (2004); Farrell (2006)	Can access affective dimension	Participant not explicitly asked about beliefs, attitudes and perceptions but rather it is inferred by the researcher
Interview	Phan (2007); Sugiyama (2003);	Can access affective dimension Affords an opportunity to express self verbally rather than in written form	Time and labour intensive May feel pressure to give socially desirable responses
Journaling	Busch (2010); Pavlenko (2003); Ellis (2002)	Can access affective dimension	Analysis is time and labour intensive Time commitment of participants is great
Self-reflection	Farrell (1999)	Participant explicitly asked about beliefs, attitudes and perceptions. Not solely inferred by researcher.	May feel pressure to give socially desirable responses

3.3.2.5 Overview of Study 1 and Study 2

In brief, as shown in Table 3.3.2.3, there are two studies. In Study 1, we look at the experience of first year students during their first year in initial teacher education. In Study 2, we will look at the experience of final year students at the end of initial teacher education and in the early stages of their teaching career. In Study 1, data is derived from questionnaires administered to pre-service teachers in first year (n = 75) who are willing to participate in the beginning longitudinal stage (Stage 1), and from interviews with a subgroup of pre-service teachers in first year (n = 26) who are willing to explore the specific contribution of school and *Gaeltacht* placement to the evolution of beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions (Stage 2). A similar approach is used in Study 2 with data derived from questionnaires administered to final year students (n = 91) who are willing to participate in Stage 3 and a subgroup (n = 30) will partake in semi-structured interview for Stage 4.

Table 3.3.2.3
Overview of Study 1 and Study

	Group	Period(s) to be Explored	Rationale	Instrument	Date
Stage 1	Group 1 First Years, 75 pre-service teachers	Beginning of initial teacher education	Provide a baseline of pre-service teachers' beliefs, attitudes and perceptions.	3-part questionnaire	Sep/ Oct 2013
Stage 2	Subset of Group 1 First Years, 26 pre-service teachers	First school placement *Gaeltacht* placement	Explore any influence of school and *Gaeltacht* placement on beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions. Examine anticipation, and actual experience of placements.	Semi-structured interview	April 2014
Stage 3	Group 2 91 Final Year Students	End of initial teacher education	Reflect on key experiences in initial teacher education and their influence on beliefs, attitudes and perceptions	3-part questionnaire	April/ May 2013
Stage 4	Subset of Group 2 30 Early In-service Teachers	Early In-service practice	Explore early experiences of teaching Irish and any influence on beliefs, attitudes and perceptions.	Semi-structured interview	March 2014

3.4 The Research Instruments

The main purpose of the research instruments is to provide a measure and description of the dependent variable of teachers' language beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions, and later to track and investigate how the independent variables (academic, professional and personal experience or knowledge during initial teacher education and early in-service practice) modify these. As previously argued, gaps exist in previous research instruments in relation to the measurement of change in beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions over time, and in capturing the affective dimension of this process.

3.4.1 Purpose and Content of the Research Instruments

In designing a suitable instrument, some research instruments that explore language beliefs were consulted e.g. Horwitz (1985; 1988) and Ó Néill, (2008). Similarly, research instruments that look at attitudes to minority languages in general (e.g. Lasagabaster and Huguet, 2007) and to the Irish language in particular were consulted (e.g. CILAR, 1975; INTO, 1985; Gardner, 1985; Harris, 2006; Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin, 1984; 1994) to provide a starting point for identifying suitable questions to capture the growth and development of beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions. A review of pertinent research in the area of minority languages in education also highlights some areas of interest that could complement the aforementioned research instruments (e.g. role of mother tongue in language teaching, views on CLIL, role of teacher as cultural advocate in language teaching). Some of these additional elements are specific to the context of teaching Irish, while others constitute models of effective language teaching and allow for teachers to give their views on the feasibility and issues involved in implementing such strategies.

Three sections are contained in each of the research instruments: Beliefs about Teaching Irish, Attitudes to the Irish Language, Role Perceptions of the Teacher of Irish. Consistency in the themes addressed at each stage of data collection allows for comparisons to be made between beliefs, attitudes and perceptions at different key stages when becoming a teacher of Irish. Each of these three areas will now be outlined.

3.4.1.1 Beliefs about Teaching Irish

It is important to find out what beliefs teachers have relating to teaching and learning Irish for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is through the education system that the vast majority of Irish people are exposed to the Irish language and culture. Teacher language beliefs influence the nation's experience of learning Irish and have a crucial role in the language maintenance initiative. Secondly, the finding that learners may be favourable in general to the promotion of a minority

language like Irish but then dislike learning it is of concern to researchers because it is through the education system that most Irish people have contact with the Irish language, and through people learning Irish as opposed to acquiring it naturally that the language revitalisation initiative has mainly been centred (Harris, 2008). Also, the fact that language beliefs are context-specific (Mori, 1999) place a huge importance on the creation of stimulating Irish language classrooms. Finally, some erroneous language beliefs that pre-service teachers may hold may impede effective language teaching (Horwitz, 1985).

By establishing the general language learning beliefs that Irish teachers have, we can compare their views to the views of other teachers in different language situations, underscoring the particular context in which Irish is taught (Barcelos, 2003). Given the critical role of the education system in the maintenance of Irish (Harris, 2006), it is necessary to explore in an in-depth manner the situational factors that influence the teaching of Irish. Participants in Study 1 are pre-service teachers, engaged in a short period of school placement, and therefore will not have the experience of teaching all aspects of the *Gaeilge* curriculum. Hence the questions will be limited to key features of pre-service teachers' lesson planning and delivery that are expected in their first year of initial teacher education. Participants in Study 2 though will have more experience of teaching the *Gaeilge* curriculum in school and may potentially have more experience of implementing certain approaches such as CLIL.

3.4.1.2 Attitudes to Irish

Attitudes are important in any minority language context as they provide a measure of the health of the language (Baker, 1992). While some studies regarding attitudes to the Irish language have been carried out in Ireland, a contemporary view of teaching and learning Irish would add greatly to this discussion (Harris, 2007). Teachers' attitudes to Irish have been consistently found to be distinct from attitudes of the general public (INTO, 1985). While we know that they tend to have more positive attitudes to Irish, we do not know, for instance, whether a group of people who are very interested in Irish self-select to go into the profession of primary teaching and subsequently broadly maintain these positive views, or whether experiences in initial teacher education and early in-service practice modify existing attitudes. Because research has revealed a decline in teachers' favourable attitudes to Irish and the possible perception of working in isolation when promoting the Irish language (Harris, 2006), identifying contemporary teacher attitudes to Irish gives us an insight into teacher morale and the issues associated with the locus of revitalisation lying within the education system. This section also examines the impact of *Gaeltacht* experience, school placement and later in-service practice on attitudes to Irish.

3.4.1.3 Perceptions of Becoming a Teacher of Irish

The unique role that teachers hold as representatives of the Irish language and culture, their awareness of this role, and their perceptions of it as a privilege or potential burden is significant in the process of becoming a teacher of Irish. Teachers are asked about their views on the language revitalisation and maintenance initiative in general, particularly their views on Irish as an ethnic symbol and the obligatory nature of Irish in primary education, and then about the role of the primary teacher in the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish. Some key elements of the role of the Irish teacher at primary level, and their perceptions of these elements will be examined: Teacher proficiency in Irish, nurturing positive attitudes to Irish language and culture. Because they are constructing their professional identity as a teacher of Irish and possibly as an Irish speaker, this section aims to explore how they feel about this future role.

3.4.1.4 Key Experiences

Teachers are also asked to anticipate, and later reflect on the key experiences of school and *Gaeltacht* placement and analyse whether these experiences contribute to their beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions. Because the study is essentially exploratory in nature, they are given a chance also to speak about other key experiences that may influence their evolving views.

In short, we know that the effective teaching of Irish depends largely on the attitudes of schools in a way that other subjects do not (Harris, 2006). It is crucial that the research instrument captures this very important and unique role of primary teachers. Longitudinal Stage 1 and 3 involve a three-part questionnaire completed by 75- 91 participants. This addresses initial beliefs about teaching Irish, attitudes to the Irish language and perceptions of the role perceptions of the teacher of Irish. Longitudinal Stages 2 and 4 involve a semi-structured interview with 26 -30 participants. During the interview stage of data collection, teachers have access to the questionnaires that they completed previously. They have an opportunity to look back at the responses they gave at the previous stage of data collection and to comment on any items over which they have now changed their mind. They also have the opportunity to speak about other beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions that they may have. The three elements - Beliefs about teaching Irish, Attitudes to the Irish language, and Perceptions of the Role of the Teacher of Irish – feature in each phase of the study, both in the quantitative and qualitative research instruments allowing for a comprehensive presentation of how these critical elements develop and change over time when becoming a teacher of Irish. Of course, given that beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions are open to change, they can therefore change multiple times as explained by the theory of oscillation (Baker, 1992). This research looks at attitude and belief development and

change within initial teacher education and early in-service practice but will be unable to make any claims about how resilient these attitudes and beliefs then are. Content of the research instruments at each stage of data collection is presented in Table 3.4.1.4. (Refer to Appendix B for a copy of the questionnaire in which items from previously used research instruments are highlighted).

Table 3.4.1.4
Content of Research Instruments (Questionnaires and Interview Schedules)

Section 1 Beliefs About Teaching Irish	Section 2 Attitudes to the Irish Language and Irish Speakers	Section 3 Perceptions of Becoming a Teacher of Irish
General cognitive beliefs about language teaching as identified in BALLI	Attitude to Learning Irish (AMTB) Integrativeness scale attitude to Irish speakers (AMTB) Anticipation of *Gaeltacht* placement (original items)	Perceptions of revitalisation and maintenance initiative in general (Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin, 1994) Perceptions of obligatory nature of Irish (Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin, 1994) Anticipation of school placement (original items) Perceptions of key features of role of teacher of Irish: teacher proficiency, nurturing positive attitudes to Irish language and culture (original items) Perceptions of role of primary teacher in Revitalisation and maintenance initiative (original items)

3.4.2 Construction of Questionnaire and Interview

Participants are asked for certain biographical details at the beginning that have been shown to be linked to beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions i.e. gender, home language, language of schooling. As Clément, Gardner and Smythe (1977, 1980) show, the presence of a positive self-rated proficiency for instance in the second or additional language (SAL) is positively linked to motivation and so information on general competence, as well as oral proficiency, was sought at the beginning of the questionnaire. These biographical details help to explain if the experience of becoming a teacher of Irish is different for different profiles of learners. Oral proficiency is specifically investigated because of the focus on developing oral proficiency of teachers in initial teacher education and expectations on the teacher in terms of proficiency e.g. to teach usually

through Irish, to use Irish informally throughout the day, and sometimes to teach other aspects of the curriculum through Irish. The construction of each part of the questionnaire is now discussed.

3.4.2.1 Beliefs: Building on the BALLI

The items concerning beliefs about language learning are largely based on an adaptation of the widely used *Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory* (BALLI) (Horwitz, 1985; 1988). Several researchers used the BALLI as a basis for questionnaire design but tailored it to suit the particular language and context of learning that language e.g. Mori (1999). Because it has been advised by Horwitz, the original designer of the BALLI, to amend the BALLI in studies on language learners' beliefs, some necessary modifications will be made to it in order to investigate more thoroughly the particular case of Irish (Horwitz, 2012 personal communication).

3.4.2.1.1 Amendments to BALLI

Five general themes make up the BALLI: Difficulty of Language Learning, Foreign Language Aptitude, Language and Communication Strategies, Nature of Language Learning, Motivation and Expectation. Even where researchers amended parts of the BALLI in their own study, these broad themes have remained intact and so for this study too, these five themes are used. Some amendments are necessary, however. One hour is allocated for the administration of the questionnaire. Unlike the original administration of the BALLI, pre-service teachers complete the questionnaire individually and not in dyads. The researcher does not read out the items on the questionnaire but is available throughout the administration of the questionnaire to give clarification on any point (See Appendix A on the accompanying cd for a copy of the script used during administration of the questionnaire). One item will be omitted: item 21 *It is important to practise in the language laboratory when learning a foreign language.* Omission of this item is due to its limited practice in secondary schools or colleges of education and thus pre-service teachers may be unfamiliar with the concept and therefore not in a position to respond to this item. Some small spelling changes will be made also to adhere to Hiberno-English conventions. "Practice" in items 12, 17 and 21 will be respelled as "practise". Similarly the subject "math" will be replaced with "mathematics" in item 29 in line with the subject titles in the Irish Primary School Curriculum (1999). In order to focus on the Irish context, "Americans" will be changed to "Irish people" in item 33: *Irish people are good at learning foreign languages*. Similarly, references in the original BALLI to "this language" and "the language I am learning" will simply be replaced with "the Irish language" (items 8, 12, 13, 18, 23, 27 and 28). Because of face validity and also its ease of administration, the Likert scales in the original BALLI are used in this study.

Pitfalls of questionnaire use have been described earlier as well as the techniques employed by other researchers to remedy these. To overcome the limitations of relying on quantitative research methods in studies of language beliefs, some other research methods complement the questionnaire. Reflection on the nature of their own language learning are sought during the interview.

3.4.2.2 Attitudes: Building on the AMTB

The items concerning attitudes to the Irish language are largely based on an adaptation another widely used instrument: the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (Gardner, 1985) and Harris and Murtagh (1999, 2003). The AMTB has been used in several studies internationally (Gardner, Smythe and Clément, 1977), and in an Irish context Harris and Murtagh (1999). Selected scales from this comprehensive instruments are included in this questionnaire:

- Motivation: Attitude to Learning Irish
- Integrativeness scale: Attitude to Irish speakers

In order to be able to compare accurately the findings in this study to previous studies that use these scales, the number of answer options is consistent: seven. This means that this is the only section in the questionnaire that contains seven answer options. (The other sections have five answer options).

3.4.2.2.1 Amendments to AMTB

Unlike the case of the BALLI, not all scales from the AMTB are used. Scales that are most pertinent to the present study were selected rather than using composite scores of several scales addressing one particular dimension of attitude or motivation. Reading stamina of the participants and the length of the questionnaire was also considered. The original AMTB contains three clusters: *Attitudes to the target language group*, *Attitude to learning the language* and *Attitudes to the learning situation*. Scales from two of these clusters were chosen. First, the scale *Attitudes to the target language group* is considered important as this has been shown to influence a learner's motivation in learning a language (Harris and Murtagh, 1999). It is also relevant to this study as a main requirement of initial teacher education is that the pre-service teacher spends time in the *Gaeltacht*. Also, as teachers have been shown to have an above average ability in Irish (INTO, 1985) and their critical role in revitalisation and maintenance of Irish (Harris, 2006) it is interesting to examine whether they describe themselves as Irish speakers or

consider themselves to belong to an (imagined) community of Irish speakers in the same way that they consider themselves to be members of the teaching community. Second, the scale *Attitude to learning the language* is considered useful also. Attitudes to languages *per se* and attitudes towards learning a language are shown to be different (Kouritizin, 2007). For this reason that attitudes specifically to Irish are explored. As previous research shows, that this can differ from attitudes to the language in general (Baker, 1992). The third cluster in the original AMTB *Attitudes to the learning situation* is not included in the questionnaire because it could be examined better in interviews reflecting on the actual experience of teaching Irish on school placement and teaching Irish during early professional practice. Teachers can refer to key moments and examples from the placements also provide a richer description of this attitude.

The scale concerning parental encouragement for children learning a SAL is also not as relevant and so omitted. External support is been shown to have a bearing on second or additional language learning (Gardner, Smythe and Clément, 1977). In the case of teachers, though, school and community support could be seen to have a similar influence so these areas are addressed in the form of open-ended questions. Due to the fact that affective beliefs may be more enduring than cognitive beliefs (Garrett, 2003), questions are asked about the enjoyment derived from learning Irish and later teaching Irish. This also mirrors some of the questions asked in Harris (2006) when looking at teachers' experience of teaching Irish in primary schools. There are some items in the BALLI that concern Motivations and Expectations but these are supplemented with other original items to explore whether positive attitudes and high motivation to Irish are maintained in pre-service and in-service teachers. Pre-service teachers are explicitly asked if their attitudes have changed during initial teacher education or early in-service practice and they are asked to outline reasons for this.

3.4.2.3 Perceptions: Building on items used in Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin (1994)

As previously mentioned, the BALLI provides a very effective baseline for exploring and measuring teachers' beliefs about the learning and teaching of Irish. Owing to the fact that Irish has some distinctive features, though, some other areas of inquiry are added to the questionnaire also. The first set of items concern revitalisation and maintenance of Irish in general and were asked to general public. Other original items specifically targeting perceptions of role as future teacher are also included. Compared to the previous two sections, this section has the most original items. Below is a description of the areas included in this section. This section is made up of scrambled items from two scales that appeared in Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin (1984; 1994).

- *Attitude to Irish as an ethnic symbol*

- *Teaching of Irish* (i.e. its obligatory nature in primary schools)

3.4.2.3.1 Amendments to items used in Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin (1994)

The scale *Attitude to Irish as an ethnic symbol* is an indicator of how much pre-service teachers support the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish generally. As this scale is used in several other studies, their support, or otherwise, for this initiative can then be compared to views of the general public and to those of practising teachers. The item concerning independence from Britain is omitted however, because of it lack of relevance to the study. A proofreading error was made in relation to the first item *'No real Irish person could be against the revival of Irish'*. This item appeared with stronger wording in the current study *'No real person could be against the revival of Irish'*. Predictably, teachers' reactions to this more strongly worded item were more extreme and so direct comparisons cannot be made between results of this teacher population and other populations who responded to this item previously.

The scale concerning the *Teaching of Irish* explores the extent to which Irish should be an obligatory subject for all pupils. When this scale was previously used it addressed certain situations e.g. where a child's parents did not wish them to learn Irish or where a child had special education needs. The wording of some items are changed to be more aligned with terms that are politically correct and are more consistent with terminology used in the present day e.g. special education needs. The obligatory nature of Irish for whom English is an additional language is absent from previous studies. This item is included in the current study to reflect more accurately the diversity of children who learn Irish in primary classrooms. Another item that is included concerns the obligation on primary teachers to teach Irish. This item is included to garner teachers' views on the debate on whether specialist or generalist teachers are more suited to the teaching of Irish.

3.4.2.3.2 Original Items in Section on Perceptions

Some areas that are key to the process of becoming a teacher of Irish or central to the day to day work of a teacher were also included to better understand how teachers anticipate their future role, and later to be able to compare these to the actual experiences.

3.4.2.4 Role of Teacher in Revitalisation and Maintenance of Irish

In previous studies, teachers showed a reluctance to delegate the responsibility for the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish to voluntary organisations (CILAR, 1975; INTO, 1985; Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin, 1994). As mentioned before, primary schools are crucial in the maintenance of Irish. Irish as a compulsory school subject sometimes generates a lot of debate,

however. Increasing the amount of subjects in the curriculum has placed increased demands on primary schools and sometimes the suggestion is made that specialist teachers are better suited to certain subjects like Irish. This point will be revisited in the current study. These items address the perceptions of the future role of the teacher of Irish, the degree to which it is part of their general identity as a primary teacher, and the perceived responsibility in promoting the language. These items will explore how teachers feel about their role and whether they consider it to be a privilege or a burden in their career. A combination of open and closed questions will be provided to get a better description of role perceptions.

3.4.2.5 Teacher Proficiency

Teacher proficiency in Irish is a key requirement in order to teach Irish effectively. Proficiency is needed in relation to three main areas: teaching the subject primarily through Irish, using Irish informally throughout the day and teaching other subjects from time to time through Irish (Harris, 2008). If a teacher chooses to work in an Irish-medium setting, this places demands on the teacher to have subject specific vocabulary for other curricular areas. Teachers are asked some closed questions relating to these three areas of teacher proficiency and also how reasonable they feel it is to expect teachers to improve their proficiency during initial teacher education. Supplementary open-ended questions provided allow them to describe their views in greater detail. Landmark documents such as the European Language Portfolio, concerning the teaching of foreign languages and the training of foreign language teachers place emphasis on consistency in standards of teaching and learning. Harris and Ó Duibhir note the long tradition in Ireland of encouraging Irish to be taught solely through the medium of Irish as is stated in the Primary School Curriculum (2011). However, the researcher is aware informally of pre-services teachers' questioning of this requirement of complete immersion during formal Irish lessons. Teachers' understanding of informal Irish is also of interest and the extent to which this is used as a strategy to encourage spontaneous use of Irish amongst children or to increase their exposure to Irish in school is explored. Significant support for the implementation of content and language integrated learning (CLIL) has been shown in previous language attitudes research (CILAR, 1975). This is suggested as a key way to increase exposure to the Irish language outside of the formal Irish lesson. Teachers' views of the importance and feasibility of such an approach is also examined. They will be asked which subjects they feel are conducive to CLIL approaches.

3.4.2.6 Anticipation of Key Experiences

Two key experiences during initial teacher education are school and *Gaeltacht* placement. Teachers have experiences usually to an extent of these experiences as learners. As a large part of

initial teacher education concerns the transition to teaching and the developing of a professional identity as a teacher, they are asked to consider their expectations of the first time they teach Irish, how easy or difficult it would be, the satisfaction they would derive from it, the interest the children would have in Irish and the proficiency the children would have. In terms of the *Gaeltacht* experience, pre-service teachers are asked about their views on its obligatory nature during initial teacher education, the expected learning outcomes that have been devised by the *Gaeltacht* Working Group for colleges of education, the satisfaction, enjoyment and value they will derive from the placement. Open-ended supplementary parts allow them to elaborate on any other perceived benefits and concerns associated with this placement.

3.4.2.7 Nurturing Positive Attitudes to the Irish Language and Culture

Along with teaching content, the affective dimension has an important role in the teaching of Irish. Culture and its role in language teaching has been explored by several researchers e.g. Byram and Grundy (2002). Cultural awareness is also a broad aim of the Irish curriculum so it is important to look at the extent to which pre-service teachers see this as valuable and feasible in the classroom. Teachers will be asked in the form of closed questions, about the cultural elements they feel are important in the teaching of Irish. As we have already seen this may mean that the teacher has to overcome negative attitudes to Irish reported by pupils (Uí Choistealbha, 2012). Teachers will be asked to discuss the level of interest they perceive children to have in the learning of Irish. Table 3.4.2.7 summarises the subsections in the questionnaire, as well as the scoring methods, where relevant.

Table 3.4.2.7
Overview of each section of the questionnaire

Beliefs section

Scale	*Source*	*Type of Scale*	*Scoring*
Difficulty of language learning	BALLI	5 positively worded items	Items analysed discretely
Learning and communication strategies	BALLI	5 positively worded items	Items analysed discretely
Nature of language learning	BALLI	6 positively worded items	Items analysed discretely
Foreign language aptitude	BALLI	8 positively worded items	Items analysed discretely
Motivation and Expectation	BALLI	2 positively worded items	Items analysed discretely

Attitudes section

Name	*Source*	*Type of Scale*	*Scoring*
Attitude to Irish speakers	AMTB (Integrativeness scale)	10 positively worded items	A high score on this measure indicates a positive attitude to Irish speakers Maximum = 5 Items also analysed discretely
Attitude to learning Irish	AMTB (Motivation scale)	10 item scale with 5 positively worded items and 5 negatively worded items. 7 Likert response options.	A high score on this measure indicates a positive attitude to learning Irish Maximum = 7 Items also analysed discretely

Role Perceptions section

Name	*Source*	*Type of Scale*	*Scoring*
Irish as an ethnic symbol	Irish as an ethnic symbol ITÉ (1993)	4 positively and negatively worded items *item concerning independence from Britain omitted	Items analysed discretely
Teaching of Irish	INTO (1985)	6 positively and negatively worded items *Item concerning teaching Irish to EAL learners included	Items analysed discretely
Teacher proficiency	Original scale	5 positively worded items 4 open-ended supplementary parts	Items analysed discretely Open-ended responses coded thematically
Role of primary teacher in the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish	Original scale	6 positively worded items 5 open-ended supplementary parts	Items analysed discretely Open-ended responses coded thematically

Anticipating Key Experiences Section

Name	*Source*	*Type of Scale*	*Scoring*
Anticipation of School placement	Original scale	5 positively worded items 1 open-ended supplementary part	Items analysed discretely Open-ended responses coded thematically
Anticipation of *Gaeltacht* Placement	Original scale	5 closed items 2 open-ended supplementary parts	Items analysed discretely Open-ended responses coded thematically

3.4.3 Issues of Confidentiality

We look now at some of the measures taken to preserve confidentiality during data collection.

Consideration is given to confidentiality in questionnaires, interviews, and transcription of data.

3.4.3.1 Issues of Confidentiality in Questionnaires

An initial list was drawn up containing student numbers and corresponding questionnaire numbers. This list was made available to the participants at the information session. Participants were asked to take note of their questionnaire number. Participants used this number when completing any questionnaire. Where a participant forgot this number, the researcher and participant were able to access the original list of numbers. Questionnaires are currently stored in the researcher's office under lock and key. After five years, they will be shredded. (All responses to open-ended supplementary parts are available in Appendices D (Group 1) and G (Group 2) on the cd accompanying the thesis).

3.4.3.2 Issues of Confidentiality in Interviews

The interviews were audio recorded and saved on the researcher's computer. The title of each audio file contained the number that each participant was given at the beginning of the study, and names are not visible in the title. Written transcripts of each interview are saved on the researcher's computer. In the transcription of the interviews, the participant's number is used and individual names are not mentioned. The title of the transcript document saved also contains the participant's number and names are not present in the title. Access to each of these files is password protected.

3.4.3.3 Transcripts

Transcription of the interviews was done by a research assistant who did not know any of the teachers involved in the study. Transcripts of the interview are saved on the researcher's computer. Transcripts can be made available to participants upon request. Participants could signal their interest to receive a transcript of the interview by email. (All transcripts for Group 1 are available in Appendix F, and in Appendix I for Group 2 on the cd accompanying this thesis).

3.5 Participants

This section will look at methods for selecting participants, the pilot phase of research and the issues arising. It will then describe how participants were selected to take part in the main study and how data was collected.

An area of concern in inviting teachers to participate in the study is that the researcher is also a lecturer in the college of education. Her role in the college extends to that of school placement, examiner and tutor. It is normal practice in this college of education, when lecturers are engaging in research that involves the pre-service teachers that efforts are made to ensure in

the first instance that no pre-service teacher feels under duress to partake in the research, or to give desirable responses. As the researcher works not only as lecturer not also as an Irish language examiner and school placement tutor, the researcher took three steps to minimise any possible conflict between these roles and her role as researcher. First, the researcher decided to offer the option of administering the questionnaires and conducting the interviews in English. She felt that her role as Irish-language lecturer may make some pre-service teachers feel intimidated if they were to respond in Irish. The second step she took as researcher was to apply to the college of education to be relieved from acting as an Irish-language examiner for first year oral examinations. This is because the oral examinations take place during the pre-service teachers' *Gaeltacht* placement and as already outlined, this is one of the key experiences to be investigated. It is thought that that the role as examiner may conflict with the role as researcher. The third step she took was to make an application to the college to only supervise pre-service teachers on school placement who are not involved in the study. Again, the researcher felt that her acting as a school placement tutor and awarding a mark may conflict with her role as a researcher. The local Ethics Committee considered whether the researcher should correct any assignment that students involved in the research study submit. Permission was provisionally granted by her head of function to employ an external marker, if required by the Ethics Committee, but this was not deemed necessary.

3.5.1 Pilot Study

Following several drafts of the research instruments, questionnaire and interview schedule, the researcher undertook a pilot phase of data collection as advised by several other researchers e.g. Dörnyei (2007). The purpose of each phase as well as the key considerations are described in these sections.

3.5.1.1 Pilot Study: Questionnaire

In April 2013, three students were invited to take part in a pilot study. The students chosen were second year students. The decision was made not to include first year students as they had not yet completed their first year programme of study. There were a remaining three weeks of lectures after the Easter holidays and a significant dimension of lectures during these three weeks is a discussion on experiences during school placement in methodologies modules, and discussion on experience in the *Gaeltacht* in Irish-language modules. The researcher felt that it would be more beneficial to ask students who had experienced the entire first year course to engage in the pilot interview. Students in second year were hence approached. Another reason for this decision is that there are potentially several other experiences during initial teacher education that can

influence beliefs, attitudes and perceptions. The researcher may not be aware of all of these experiences so the perspective of second years would be beneficial in reflecting on significant moments during the first two years of initial teacher education.

The main mode of communication between lecturers and students is usually email. As students' engagement in this pilot questionnaire was not related to their coursework, the researcher decided to contact the students in a different way and to phone them. The nature and scope of their participation was explained over the phone i.e. that their participation was voluntary, that their feedback would not be used in the main findings of the study but rather that it would inform the redrafting of the questionnaire. Students were reassured that none of their views would be attributed to them or made available to anyone. Although the students agreed to partake in the pilot questionnaire over the phone, the researcher still subsequently emailed them an outline of the study and a participant information leaflet. The three students chosen were from the same class grouping to facilitate their completion of the questionnaire and feedback session with the researcher within an hour slot outside of lecture time. Each student, however, was representative of a different profile of teacher of Irish: a native speaker (male), a student who had attended an all-Irish school (female), and a student who had attended an English-medium school (female). The purpose of this pilot phase was to examine the clarity of the wording in the questionnaire, to investigate the amount of time it took for them to complete the questionnaire, to discuss any other key experiences or issues, in their opinion, that were not covered in the questionnaire at present.

Of the three students invited, only two were in a position to attend the meeting on the day organised. It had been intended that the third student would complete the Irish-language version of the questionnaire so the piloting of this version had to be done at a later stage. As a token of appreciation of their participation, students were given a box of chocolates each. The researcher stayed in the room with the students as they completed the questionnaire. Students were asked to give as much detail as possible in their answers. Although this same message was given to the participants in the actual study, it should be noted that the students in the pilot phase spent almost an hour on the questionnaire, significantly longer than their peers. Below are some of the issues in the wording that the students referred to.

3.5.1.1.1 Issues Arising from Pilot Questionnaire

Some amendments were made to the research instruments in light of the pilot study. In terms of the questionnaire, these concerned layout, amending particular items, clarity and wording, and finally the translation of the questionnaire. In terms of the interview, these concerned interview style and areas addressed.

3.5.1.1.2 Questionnaire Layout

Some positive comments were that the questionnaire was generally well laid out and easy to follow. Some suggestions made by the students though related to the layout of the questionnaire including the benefit of including page numbers. The legibility of some instructions on the questionnaire was compromised by the tone of the shading in the box. Students expressed a view that sometimes there was not enough room on the questionnaire to answer a question in a comprehensive manner. Space for responding to question 11 had been omitted in error and was amended in the revised version. Repetition in two questions (q. 25 and 27) was examined and the researcher decided to omit the latter question in the revised version. Question 25 was reworded also. Some of the categories of answer options were amended too in consultation with the research supervisor.

3.5.1.1.3 Amended Items

The title of the questionnaire was reconsidered also so that it would be more succinct and hence changed from *The Evolution of Beliefs, Attitudes and Role Perceptions of Irish-language Teachers* to *Becoming a Teacher of Irish: the Evolution of Beliefs, Attitudes and Role Perceptions.* Questions 12 and 13 addressed one positive and one negative experience of the *Gaeltacht* and initial teacher education. The questions are worded in this way to allow an opportunity to reflect on both directions but it should be noted that the question did not allow the respondent the opportunity to describe whether their experience was *mostly* positive or *mostly* negative. This question was included in the amended version of the interview.

3.5.1.1.4 Clarity of Instructions and Wording

The scale at the top of each page was also perceived as helpful. Although the wording of items was perceived as clear in general, the students commented on the ambiguity around responding as learners or teachers of Irish, a confusion that Horwitz (1985) admits is a feature of the BALLI. There was some uncertainty as to whether "school placement" referred to all placements in general or to the most recent one. Some unease was expressed regarding the categories for competence in Irish, particularly the perceived difference between the two answer options of 'fluent speaker' and 'weak second language speaker'. This concern was noted but the researcher decided to retain the wording in the final version of the questionnaire for ease of comparability across studies.

3.5.1.1.5 Irish-language version

Cognisance was given to the correct terminology for the delineation of the three terms beliefs, attitudes and perceptions in the Irish-language version. It has been noted by several authors that issues can arise in the translation of terms from English to Irish (Ó Ruairc, 1997). In the case of the Irish term for beliefs "creidimh", this has a religious connotation in Irish and is strongly associated with the term "faith" in English. Other terms that were considered were "smaointe" meaning "thoughts". As discussed in the Chapter 2, however, this term pertains to a slightly different conceptual order of thinking and may not capture accurately the concept of cognitive beliefs relating to the teaching and learning of Irish. In the end the term "tuairimí" was used. Another challenge was the fact that the same word "dearcadh" is used in Irish to refer to both the concepts of "attitude" and "perception". It was thought that including the same term for two separate areas of investigation might prove confusing. The plural version of the term for attitude "dearcadh" is "dearcthaí" which is not as common in Irish. Another dimension in the translation of the questionnaire was that "the Irish language" is translated as "*An Ghaeilge*" and the collective noun "language" is omitted. As a result, the terms used in the Irish-language version are slightly more longwinded to ensure clarity. The literal translations of the terms used are as follows:

- Beliefs relating to language learning (Tuairimí maidir le foghlaim teanga)
- Attitudes to Irish (Dearcadh i leith na Gaeilge)
- Role of the teacher, in your view (Ról an mhúinteora, dar leat)

The researcher noted from this experience that students who opted to complete the questionnaire in Irish may need to be reminded in English of the three areas to be explored: beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions before completing the questionnaire. She also noted that English-language versions of the questionnaires would need to be available on the day if students were unclear about any individual item written in Irish. She also decided to offer students the option of taking an English version of the questionnaire but responding in Irish. This option was the most popular for teachers who wished to respond in Irish, and none chose to complete an Irish-language questionnaire.

3.5.1.2 Pilot Study: Interview

The pilot interviews highlight issues in the following areas: relationships with teachers in face to face interviews; the treatment of contradictory beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions; the need

for a focus on affective dimensions of learning; the exploratory nature of the study; and the need for a flexible interviewing style.

Two students from second year, and one practising teacher were asked to partake in a pilot interview. Although the interviews were conducted with individuals in the actual data collection, the researcher decided to conduct the pilot interview with the pre-service teachers together. This was to allow the researcher to brainstorm possible experiences during initial teacher education that could have an impact on beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions. This mirrors the practice used by Horwitz (1985) in initially compiling the list of items for the BALLI. The aim of this pilot study is to explore how long the interview questions took to answer, to investigate whether a semi-structured approach to the interview was beneficial in drawing out students' perspectives, and also to highlight other aspects of initial teacher education that may influence views. The researcher is particularly interested in the pilot phase of the interviews in looking at the feasibility of discussing two separate experiences, namely school placement and *Gaeltacht* experience, in one interview. She found that the two experiences were sufficiently different to allow the students to discuss each separately while still making links between the two in the formation of beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions. The researcher has access to results of this year group and so the two students that were chosen for the pilot interview represented two different standards in Irish-language competence. One was female and the other male.

The nature of an interview means that the participant is face to face with the researcher. The researcher observed that the tone of responses was more casual than it had been when the students were silently engaged in the pilot questionnaire in the other pilot phase. There was also a greater tendency during the pilot interview for the students to refer to specific events during initial teacher education and to name lecturers, class mates and other members of the college community. The most resounding memories of learning and teaching Irish during their time in college related mostly to the affective dimension, mainly the perceived "craic" in a lecture or the relationship with lecturers. At some points, they referred specifically to the researcher and experiences in her lectures. Experiences outside of lectures were also mentioned, in particular, a class trip to an Irish-language pub called *Conradh na Gaeilge* during the year. Unlike the questionnaire, at times it was hard to concentrate on just one of the three aspects: beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions, and responses tended to cover two or more of these aspects in describing a particular experience e.g. commenting that playing games was very important in infant classes and that it was the teacher's job to set up a fun environment for Irish because children might not have access to this in the home or community. Some other comments of this nature gave the researcher scope for including questions on co-influences in the interview. References to change in beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions were related to people they had

encountered during initial teacher education more so than content of lectures. Irish Gaelic culture was used mostly to refer to songs, dance, music and sports. Interestingly Irish - language literature was not viewed in as positive a light. Some attributed this attitude to the experience of studying aspects of literature for the Leaving Certificate.

Earlier drafts of the literature review examined the emergent identity of teachers beginning with initial teacher education, however, in the pilot interview, students referred to experiences that had occurred earlier than that e.g. comments overhead growing up by a family member who works in the teaching profession, observing a primary teacher while on work experience in transition year. Experiences in *An Ghaeltacht* were mostly framed in the context of the social experience e.g. the perceived freedom and time to spend with class mates. For some, there was a marked difference between this experience and previous visits to the *Gaeltacht* during primary or secondary school. Very little reference was made to interactions with locals. Where students had opportunities to become involved in local life e.g. through playing music with a local traditional music group, this was seen as very valuable but overall the students commented on a tendency to stay in their small groups and not to become involved in community life. A dichotomy between certain language learning beliefs and the feasibility of their implementation emerged. Students commented that while, in principle, they subscribed to the ideal of teaching Irish solely through Irish, in practice they found this quite challenging. This was the first variance between beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions and prompted the researcher to examine what other areas, if any, revealed a misalignment of these three areas.

The pilot interview provided a forum for students to come up with other experiences during initial teacher education that had influenced their beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions. One such example is the experience of hearing Irish spoken frequently on the corridor in college. In relation to school placement, the experience of teaching Irish to different class levels and in different schools had a bearing on the perceived ease or difficulty of teaching and on the satisfaction derived by pupils and pre-service teacher in lessons. Older classes were considered more challenging. Students reported a desire that Irish would remain a core feature of the primary school curriculum and initial teacher education but that it could be optional for English as an additional language (EAL) learners and for some children with certain special educational needs (SEN). When thinking ahead to their future career as primary teachers, the students anticipated some pressure in their role as teachers of Irish.

A second pilot interview was undertaken in July 2013 with a practising teacher during her third year in in-service practice. Similar issues were highlighted in this interview e.g. the relationship between the teacher and researcher meant that the teacher was likely to mention actual events or lecturers' names, known to the researcher, when reflecting on her experiences in

initial teacher education. This pilot interview underscored the need to examine the impact of school context on beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions. The teacher involved in the pilot interview had experience of working in different contexts and reported that some of these were more conducive than others to the effective teaching of Irish. Experience of conducting interviews with three different teachers revealed the need for different styles of interviewing. Where a teacher was not as comfortable expressing a view or where responses tended to be short, the researcher needed to insert some filler neutral remarks or encourage the speaker to elaborate by nodding or asking another question. The insights gained during the pilot phase were invaluable in the redrafting of the research instruments. This redraft was undertaken, in consultation with the research supervisor, immediately following the pilot study so that all suggestions were fresh in the researcher's mind.

3.5.2 Invitation to Participate in Study

The researcher was granted ethical approval from Trinity College and also from the host college in April 2013. She then made the decision to begin collecting data for Study 2 (Final Year Students and Early In-Service Practice). This meant that the data collection for all four stages of the research could be conducted within a year. The information briefing session for Group 2 was conducted in the first week after students returned from Easter holidays. This was done at the request of the Ethics Committee in the local college so that students could have one week to consider their participation in the study and that then they could complete the questionnaire in the second last week of lectures. Because of student workload in the final week of lectures as they prepare for exams, the Ethics Committee requested that this data collection point take place either before this week or after the examination period. The researcher, therefore, conducted the information briefing session in the third last week, offering the students the opportunity to complete the questionnaire in the second last week, but others who were willing to take part in the study but not available during this week, could complete the questionnaire after the examination period, a point that was explained during the information briefing session.

The researcher sought permission from a colleague to speak to the entire final year group at the end of a lecture. During this session, she outlined the nature and scope of the study. (Refer to Section 3.3.2.3 for an overview of the study). She decided to extend the invitation to participate to the entire group as this may make students more willing to partake in the study. Participant Information Leaflets (PIL) were distributed at this session to students partaking in Stage 3 and 4 (Group A) and to the rest who would be participating in Stage 3 only (Group B + C). Pre-service teachers were told, however, that if a critical mass of participants for Stage 4 was not attained in Group A, that students from the other two groups may be asked to partake in the

study. The PIL was also emailed to the students with the date, time and location for data collection the following week. The first date selected for data collection was during lecture time but this clashed with another college event and so an alternative lunch time session was also offered. When students came to complete the questionnaire, they were first asked to read and sign an Informed Consent (IC) document. (See Appendix C on the accompanying cd for copies of the PIL and Informed Consent forms). They were then each given a number to record on the questionnaire. Questionnaires were confidential but the list with student names and questionnaire numbers allowed the researcher to later contact anyone who may have omitted a section in the questionnaire or anyone who had agreed to participate in the study but was not available at the data collection times. In these cases, the questionnaire was emailed to the student. Of the 91 completed questionnaires, 65 were completed during the arranged data collection time, 16 were completed by students at home during this week, and 10 were completed by email in the week following the examination period. The researcher had originally aimed to collect 100 questionnaires but after the first week of the summer holidays, she was unable to contact the remaining students as they were abroad.

The information session and data collection for Stages 1 and 2 also followed this format. The researcher approached the incoming first years in September 2013 during their induction week to explain the nature and significance of the research. Permission was granted by the co-ordinator of induction week for the researcher to meet with the entire group for 15 minutes. Their first month of the initial teacher education programme specifically was chosen to give them time to consider their decision to take part in the research and also the extent to which they wish to be involved i.e. whether they were available for follow up the interview (Stage 2). Pre-service teachers were assured that their participation was voluntary, that it does not affect their grades in any way and that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time. As advised by other researchers, initial data collection took place very early on in the first year of initial teacher education before beliefs, attitudes and perceptions have been modified too much by experiences in college (Horwitz, 1985).

In conclusion, a creative longitudinal approach to this diachronic study was deemed the most effective in charting the evolution of beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions during initial teacher education and early in-service practice in a reduced amount of time as a purely longitudinal approach was not feasible. The research instruments needed to be suitably robust to capture change and so a combination of questionnaires and interviews were utilised. Qualitative elements were also included in questionnaire in the form of open-ended supplementary parts. There was great consistency in the research instruments in terms of the areas addressed (i.e. beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions) so that clear comparisons could be made between those

reported at different points of initial teacher education and early professional practice. The additional areas included in the questionnaire aim to highlight some of the unique features of the teaching of Irish e.g. the main role the primary teacher plays in promoting Irish. The researcher's role as lecturer and placement tutor to the teachers involved in the study also meant that potential bias had to be acknowledged and she needed to be cognisant of this in particular during the interviews.

Chapter 4

Early Beliefs, Attitudes and Role Perceptions: Findings from the Longitudinal Study of Group 1

4.0 Introduction

Results from each stage of data collection will be presented in this chapter and the next, tracking the evolution of beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions of teachers of Irish at key points of their initial teacher education and early in-service practice. It will be useful to summarise at this point the four sources from which the data in these two chapters come:

(i) A questionnaire administered to Group 1, containing both closed and open questions designed to assess the beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions of pre-service teachers of Irish at the beginning of their initial teacher education. The questionnaire also contains questions in which Group 1 teachers are invited to anticipate their experiences and feelings concerning their first school and *Gaeltacht* placements in so far as they relate to Irish.

The other three data sources concern change over time in these beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions:

(ii) Interviews with Group 1 after 7 months to explore changes in the earlier stages of the initial teacher education programme and to pinpoint the role of key first school and *Gaeltacht* experiences. The evidence for change is based on a longitudinal comparison, with the participants being invited to consider their original questionnaire responses and then to say which, if any, beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions have changed.

(iii) A second measure of changes in beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions focuses on the entire period of teacher education, results for Group 1 (beginning initial teacher education) and Group 2 (just finishing their three year programme and about to begin professional practice proper)

(iv) The final measure of change is an interview based exploration of beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions during the second term of professional practice immediately following the completion of three years of initial teacher education. This uses a longitudinal approach again, with Group 2 participants being invited to consider their questionnaire responses

made at the end of initial teacher education – that is, (iii) above - and then being asked which if any beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions have changed in the interim.

All four sets of data summarised above were collected over the course of a single year. It will be recalled that for the most efficient use of time, and to minimise disruption to the students' schedule, data collection with Group 2 began in May 2013 and ended with Group 1 almost a year later in April 2014 (See section 3.3.2.3 in Chapter 3 for a full schedule of data collection). For ease and clarity of presentation, however, it is preferable in reporting the findings to follow the normal chronological order of the pre-service teacher's progress through the education programme itself rather than according to the temporal order of data collection.

Thus, we begin in the present chapter with the data summarised under (i) and (ii) above: Group 1 questionnaire data obtained at the beginning of initial teacher education, including the pre-service teachers' anticipation of key school and *Gaeltacht* experiences; followed by interview based information obtained after the first school experience and *Gaeltacht* placement. In Chapter 5, then, we present questionnaire and interview data summarised in (iii) and (iv) above: i.e. data relating to later changes derived from Group 2 and from Group 1/Group 2 comparisons. In the present chapter, the topics dealt with in the various sections are as follows:

Section 4.1: Beliefs, Attitudes and Role Perceptions at the Beginning of Initial Teacher Education (Questionnaire 1)

Section 4.2: Anticipation of Key Experiences in Initial Teacher Education (Questionnaire 1)

Section 4.3: Stability and Change in Views Following School Placement (Interview 1)

Section 4.4: Stability and Change in Views Following first *Gaeltacht* Placement (Interview 1)

Section 4.5: School and *Gaeltacht* Placement: Anticipated Experience versus Actual Experience (Interview 1)

Section 4.6: Views of Teachers with High Proficiency in Irish

Section 4.7: Summary and Conclusions

4.1 Beliefs, Attitudes and Role Perceptions at the Beginning of Initial Teacher Education

This data from Group 1 is generated from a questionnaire administered to 75 pre-service teachers in their first week in initial teacher education. The questionnaire contains mostly closed multiple choice questions but also provides the respondents with opportunities to elaborate on or to explain their responses in open-ended supplementary questions. Most of the items used in the questionnaire are analysed discretely except where these form part of an established scale, as in

the case of items forming part of the scale *Attitude to the Irish Language and Irish Speakers* and *Attitude to Learning Irish*. As the answer options ranged left to right from 'Strongly Agree' to 'Strongly Disagree', whereas in other studies these answer options appeared in the reverse order, the data was coded so that a high mean score (i.e. 5) reflected very strong agreement with a positively worded item. A general overview of the responses of Group 1 teachers is first presented. All results are then given for individual items.

4.1.1 Beliefs: Beginning of Teacher Education

This section of the questionnaire was derived from the Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (Horwitz, 1985) and made up of five subscales: *Difficulty of Language Learning*, *Learning and Communication Strategies*, *Nature of Language Learning, Foreign Language Aptitude*, and *Motivation and Expectations*. Each of these subscales addresses particular beliefs about learning and teaching Irish. *Difficulty of Language Learning* measures the extent to which a teacher perceives Irish to be an easy or difficult language to learn. Items in the next two scales: *Learning and Communication Strategies* and *Nature of Language Learning* concern particular strategies that may be effective in learning a language and views on learner errors. *Foreign Language Aptitude* gives an indication of whether or not a teacher believes that a foreign language aptitude exists. Finally, *Motivation and Expectation* explores personal and societal factors that encourage or discourage someone from learning Irish.

Horwitz (1985; 2008) stresses that the subscales do not yield a composite score and recommends that items in each subscale be analysed discretely. This approach has been adopted by other researchers e.g. Busch (2010) and hence will also be adopted here. Results relating to each item from the belief subscales will now be presented. The evolution of these same beliefs will also be tracked throughout the various stages of data collection.

Table 4.1.1.1 shows the percentage of teachers who agree (strongly agree or agree) with five statements regarding *Difficulty of Learning Irish*. The majority (86.7%) subscribe in some respects to a hierarchy of difficulty in terms of learning certain languages. Less than a quarter of teachers (21.3%) report a view that Irish is 'difficult' or 'very difficult' to learn and most (74.7%) estimate that it will take up to 5 years to learn to speak very well. Only a small number agree that that is easier to speak than to understand Irish (14.7%), or that it is easier to read and write in Irish than to speak and understand it (13.3%).

Table 4.1.1.1
Percentages of beginning pre-service teachers agreeing (strongly agree or agree) with five statements regarding beliefs about the *Difficulty of Language Learning*

Item	Percentage of Teachers Agreeing
3. Some languages are easier to learn than others.	86.7
15. It is easier to speak than to understand Irish.	14.7
19. It is easier to read and write in Irish than to speak and understand it.	13.3
25. Learning the Irish language is very difficult or difficult.	21.3
26. If someone spent one hour a day learning Irish, it would take between 1 – 5 years for them to speak Irish very well.	74.7

Table 4.1.1.2 shows the percentage of teachers who agree with the five statements regarding *Learning and Communication Strategies* for learning and teaching Irish. Just about half of the teachers (50.7%) agree if you are allowed to make mistakes in Irish at the beginning, it will be hard to get rid of them later on. Yet, only a very small percentage (5.3%) agree you shouldn't say anything in Irish until you can say it correctly. Similarly, over half believe it is okay to guess if you don't know a word in Irish (57.3%). The majority agrees that repetition and practice is important when learning Irish (84.0%). Less than a quarter (21.3%) agree that it is necessary to speak Irish with an excellent accent.

Table 4.1.1.2
Percentages of beginning pre-service teachers agreeing (strongly agree or agree) with five statements regarding beliefs about *Learning and Communication Strategies*

Questionnaire Items	Percentage of teachers agreeing
4. It is necessary to speak Irish with an excellent accent.	21.3
6. You shouldn't say anything in Irish until you can say it correctly.	5.3
9. It's okay to guess if you don't know a word in Irish.	57.3
11. When learning Irish, it is important to repeat and practise a lot.	84.0
12. If you are allowed to make mistakes in Irish at the beginning, it will be hard to get rid of them later on.	50.7

In Table 4.1.1.3 we see the percentage of teachers who agree with five statements regarding the *Nature of Language Learning*. As can be seen, the majority of teachers agree it is better to learn Irish in a natural speaking environment the *Gaeltacht* (72.0%). Presumably, the key factor for them is that the *Gaeltacht* is an Irish-speaking environment, rather than the exposure to *Gaeltacht* culture, since only a minority (13.3%) agree it is necessary to know about Irish culture in order to speak Irish. The majority believe that learning Irish is different from studying other subjects (66.7%). When it comes to how Irish is learned, around a third (36.0%) believe it is mostly a matter of learning a lot of grammar rules, and the same proportion believe it is a matter of learning new vocabulary (36.0%). Only a minority believe that learning Irish involves mostly translating from English (10.7%).

Table 4.1.1.3
Percentages of beginning pre-service teachers who agree (strongly agree or agree) with statements regarding the *Nature of Language Learning*

Questionnaire Items	Percentage of Teachers Agreeing
5. It is necessary to know about Irish culture in order to speak Irish.	13.3
8. It is better to learn Irish in a natural speaking environment i.e. the *Gaeltacht*.	72.0
10. Learning Irish is mostly a matter of learning a lot of new vocabulary words.	36.0
12. Learning Irish is mostly a matter of learning a lot of grammar rules.	36.0
16. Learning Irish is different from studying other school subjects.	66.7
17. Learning Irish is mostly a matter of translating from English.	10.7

Data from items dealing with *Foreign Language Aptitude* are shown in Table 4.1.1.4 below. The overwhelming majority believes that everyone can learn to speak Irish (93.3%) and yet only a minority agree that Irish people are good at learning Irish (13.3%). Even fewer teachers believe that Irish speakers are 'very intelligent' (5.3%). The vast majority believe that children will find it easier than adults to learn Irish (86.7%). Over half, however, believe that some people have a natural aptitude for language learning (56.0%). Over a quarter (28.0%) believe that it is easier for someone who already speaks Irish to learn another language and a similar percentage (26.7%) believe that people who are good at mathematics or science are not good at learning Irish. Belief in a gender related foreign language aptitude though is supported by a very small minority of teachers (only 1.3% believe that girls are better than boys at learning Irish).

Table 4.1.1.4
Percentages of beginning pre-service teachers agreeing (strongly agree or agree) with selected statements regarding *Foreign Language Aptitude*

Questionnaire Items	Percentage of teachers agreeing
1. It is easier for children than adults to learn Irish.	86.7
2. Some people are born with a special ability which helps them learn languages.	56.0
7. It is easier for someone who already speaks Irish to learn another language.	28.0
14. Girls are better than boys at learning Irish.	1.3
20. People who are good at mathematics and science are not good at learning Irish.	26.7
22. People who speak Irish are very intelligent.	5.3
23. Irish people are good at learning Irish.	13.3
24. Everyone can learn to speak Irish.	93.3

The final two belief statements presented in Table 4.1.1.5 concern *Motivation and Expectations* when learning Irish. Teachers were asked first about their opinion on the importance which society places on the learning of Irish; and the perceived influence that competence in speaking Irish has on job prospects for teachers. Less than half of teachers (42.7%) believe that Irish people think it is important to speak Irish. However when asked whether if someone learned to speak Irish well it would aid them in getting a teaching job, the majority agreed it would (82.7%).

Table 4.1.1.5
Percentages of beginning pre-service teachers agreeing (strongly agree or agree) with two statements regarding *Motivation and Expectations*

Questionnaire Items	Percentage of teachers agreeing
18. If I learn to speak Irish very well it will help me to get a teaching job.	82.7
21. Irish people think it is important to speak Irish.	42.7

Looking at these results more generally, we can summarise the findings regarding the beliefs of pre-service teachers at the beginning of their education in the following terms. First, the vast majority believe that everyone can learn to speak Irish, though only a small percentage feel that Irish people are good at learning Irish. A majority believe that learning Irish is different to

studying other subjects. A belief in the existence of a gender related foreign language aptitude is reported by only a very small percentage. When it comes to specific strategies to learn Irish, most believe repetition and practice are important. Almost half feel that learning Irish is mostly a matter of learning grammar rules and the same amount believe that if you are allowed to make mistakes in the beginning, it will be difficult to get rid of them later on. Most believe it is more effective to learn Irish in the *Gaeltacht* than in a traditional classroom, although only a small minority think that acquiring knowledge of Irish culture is important to the study of the language. Presumably, this also suggests that the contact with an Irish-speaking environment is the important thing about learning in the *Gaeltacht*. Only a minority believe that learning Irish is mostly a matter of translating from English. We can also see that pre-service teachers associate high proficiency in Irish with being successful in getting a teaching job but high proficiency is not regarded as being as important for members of the general public. The issue of teacher proficiency is taken up again in section 4.1.3.4 below in the context of teachers' role perceptions.

4.1.2 Attitudes to the Irish Language: Beginning of Teacher Education

Two attitude scales used in previous studies of learners were included in the Questionnaire: *Attitude to Irish Speakers* and *Attitudes to Learning Irish* (Gardner and Lambert, 1975; Harris and Murtagh, 1999; Harris, 2006). On the scale *Attitudes to Irish Speakers*, mean item scores range from 1 to 5 (very positive). Pre-service teachers in this study had an overall item mean score of 4.0, indicating that they hold positive views on Irish speakers.

When we look at individual items in Table 4.1.2.1, we also see that there is a very positive perception of the Irish language with the vast majority agreeing with four statements concerning the importance and value of the Irish language. 93.3% of pre-service teachers believe that the Irish language is an important part of Ireland and the Irish people, the same proportion agree that people who speak Irish help to keep alive an old and beautiful part of the Irish way of life, 96.0% believe that if Ireland lost the Irish language and the Irish way of life, it would really be a great loss, and 90.7% agree that people who speak Irish help to make the Irish way of life special and different from other countries. Over three quarters agree that people in our country who only speak English should try harder to learn Irish (77.3%) and a very substantial minority agree that some of the best people in Ireland are Irish speakers (42.7%). It is interesting to note that items 1 and 10 that explore more directly the personality traits associated with Irish speakers (e.g. 'Most people who speak Irish are friendly and easy to get along with' and 'People who speak Irish are friendly, nice and interesting.') the percentages agreeing are much lower (26.7% and 37.3% for items 1 and 10 respectively). In the case of these two items, the percentages selecting 'Neither Agree nor Disagree' are large: 42.7% and 61% respectively. Nevertheless the majority agree that

the more they get to know people who speak Irish, the more they want to learn it (78.7%) and a similar proportion (76.6%) would like to know more people who speak Irish.

Table 4.1.2.1
Percentages of beginning pre-service teachers agreeing (strongly agree or agree) with statements regarding their *Attitude to Irish speakers*

Questionnaire Items	Percentage of teachers agreeing
1. Most people who speak Irish are friendly and easy to get along with.	26.7
2. The more I get to know people who speak Irish, the more I want to learn it.	78.7
3. The Irish language is an important part of Ireland and the Irish people.	93.3
4. Some of the best people in Ireland are Irish speakers.	42.7
5. If Ireland lost the Irish language and the Irish way of life, it would really be a great loss.	96.0
6. People in our country who only speak English should try harder to learn Irish.	77.3
7. People who speak Irish help to make the Irish way of life special and different from other countries.	90.7
8. People who speak Irish help to keep alive an old and beautiful part of the Irish way of life.	93.3
9. I would like to know more people who speak Irish.	76.6
10. People who speak Irish are friendly, nice and interesting.	37.3

Cronbach's alpa range: $\alpha = .808$

Attitude to Learning Irish is the only 7-point scale in the questionnaire (1 = Strongly Disagree; 7 = Strongly Agree). It should be noted that this scale differs somewhat from others in the questionnaire, in that all items are phrased in the first person, as opposed to the general statements in other scales. These items therefore refer directly to the pre-service teacher's own experience. With positively stated items, a mean score exceeding 4 would indicate predominantly positive attitudes. The mean score over students and items for this scale is 6.0, so it is clear that pre-service teachers enter initial teacher education with a very positive attitude to the experience of learning Irish. Crucially this mean score is higher than that reported for two types of Leaving Certificate students in English-medium schools in the Murtagh study (2007): Ordinary Level Irish programme students had a mean score of 3.9 while Higher Level students had a mean score of 4.8. Only in the case of Higher Level students in Irish-medium schools in the Murtagh study, does

the mean scale score for *Attitude to Learning Irish* (6.4) exceed that for pre-service teachers in the present study (6.0).

Reponses to individual items are presented in Table 4.1.2.2 and illustrate pre-service teachers' high level of enjoyment in learning Irish. The vast majority of pre-service teachers agree with the following positively-worded statements: 'I really enjoy learning Irish' (90.0%), 'I love learning Irish' (82.7%), 'Irish is an important part of the school programme (96.0%), and 'Learning Irish is really great.' (88.0%). There is also a very strong commitment to continuing to learn Irish: (85.3%) agree with the statement 'I plan to learn as much Irish as possible.' Note also in this context, the low percentage agreeing that they would like to spend their time on subjects other than Irish (14.7%), that learning Irish is boring (8.0%), that learning Irish is a waste of time (2.7%), that they hate Irish (4.0%) or that when they leave college, they will give up studying Irish entirely because they are not interested in it (1.3%).

Table 4.1.2.2
Percentages of teachers agreeing (strongly, moderately, or mildly) with statements regarding *Attitude to Learning Irish*

Questionnaire Items	Percentage of teachers agreeing
16. Learning Irish is a waste of time.	2.7
17. When I leave college, I shall give up this study of Irish entirely because I am not interested in it.	1.3
18. I really enjoy learning Irish.	90.0
19. I love learning Irish.	82.7
20. Irish is an important part of the school programme.	96.0
21. Learning Irish is really great.	88.0
22. I hate Irish.	4.0
23. I would rather spend my time on subjects other than Irish.	14.7
24. I think that learning Irish is boring.	8.0
25. I plan to learn as much Irish as possible.	85.3

Cronbach's alpa range: $\alpha = .904$

The above data show that pre-service teachers bring to initial teacher education a favourable view of the Irish language and Irish speakers. They also report an attitude to learning Irish and which is already considerably more favourable than that of the general body of students of the same age.

4.1.3 Role Perceptions: Beginning of Teacher Education

Items dealing with the pre-service teachers' perceptions of their role as it relates to Irish, came at the end of the questionnaire and were considerably more numerous than those dealing with beliefs and attitudes as reported above. The role perception items can be grouped under four main themes. Teachers were first asked to reflect on their general views of Irish as an ethnic symbol. Second, their views on Irish as an obligatory school subject in primary school were sought. Third, using both closed and open questions, they were asked about the role and responsibility of primary teachers in promoting Irish. Fourth, and again using both closed and open questions, they were asked to reflect on the importance of teacher proficiency in Irish. We will now summarise the findings in relation to each of these four groups of items.

4.1.3.1 Irish as an Ethnic Symbol

The scale, *Irish as an ethnic symbol,* has also been used in previous studies of the general public (Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin, 1984; 1994). A selection of the items in this original scale that are relevant to the current study were included, hence while comparisons can be made to some individual items, no direct comparisons can be made to mean scale score results reported in other populations.

This group of items explores the extent to which pre-service teachers identify with Irish ethnic symbol and relate this to their teaching of Irish in the classroom. Each of the four items on the scale is assigned score from 1 to 5-point (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree). With all positively stated items, a mean item score exceeding 3 indicates a generally positive view of Irish as an ethnic symbol. The items concerned the role of the Irish language and culture in an Irish identity and the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish more generally. As has been found in other language attitudes surveys, the general public identify very strongly with Irish as an ethnic symbol (CILAR, 1975; Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin, 1994). Support for the cultural value of Irish is high. As we see in Table 4.1.3.1 the vast majority agree with the statements 'Without Irish, Ireland would certainly lose its identity as a separate culture' (90.7%) and 'Ireland would not really be Ireland without Irish-speaking people' (78.7%), yet just under a third of teachers (32.0%) agree that it is necessary for people to speak Irish to understand Irish culture. Over a quarter (26.7%) believe that no real person can be against the revival of Irish. As mentioned in Section 3.4.2.3.1, the wording of the first statement in this group of items is more extreme than the wording used in other studies and so direction comparisons also cannot be made between pre-service teachers and other populations regarding this item.

Table 4.1.3.1
Percentage of teachers agreeing (strongly agree/ agree) with statements regarding *Irish as an Ethnic Symbol*

Questionnaire Items	Percentage of teachers agreeing
1. No real person can be against the revival of Irish.	26.7
2. To really understand Irish culture, one must speak Irish.	32.0
3. Without Irish, Ireland would certainly lose its identity as a separate culture.	90.7
4. Ireland would not really be Ireland without Irish-speaking people.	78.7

Table 4.1.3.2
Percentages of beginning pre-service teachers agreeing (strongly agree or agree) with statements regarding the obligatory nature of Irish in the primary curriculum.

Questionnaire Items	Percentage of teachers agreeing
5. Children for whom English is an additional language should not be obliged to learn Irish.	20.0
6. All children should learn Irish.	72.0
7. Children should learn Irish, even if their parents don't want them to.	58.7
8. If Irish were better taught in the schools, more people would speak it.	92.0
9. All primary school teachers should be obliged to teach Irish.	90.7
10. Children with special education needs should not have to learn Irish.	17.3

4.1.3.2 Obligatory Nature of Irish in Primary Schools

This is a group of items dealing with the obligatory nature of Irish and some related issues. In reporting the findings we confine ourselves to individual items since this group does not constitute a scale. In Table 4.1.3.2 above we see that the vast majority think that all teachers should be obliged to teach Irish (90.7%) and that it Irish were better taught in schools more people would speak it (92.0%). The majority of teachers think that all children should have to learn Irish (72.0%) and over half (58.7%) agree with the statement 'Children should learn Irish, even if their parents don't want them to.' A minority of teachers support exemptions form Irish in certain cases. Teachers were asked about the obligatory nature of Irish for children for whom

English is an additional language and 20.0% agree that children for whom English is an additional language should not be obliged to learn Irish. They were also asked about the obligatory nature of Irish for children with special education needs and 17.3% agree that children with special education needs should not have to learn Irish.

Table 4.1.3.3
Percentage of teachers agreeing (strongly agree or agree) with statements concerning the teacher's roles and responsibilities in relation to Irish

Questionnaire Items	Percentage of Teachers expressing this view
21. I feel very proud or proud about taking on the professional role and public image of a primary school teacher.	96.0
22. Irish is one of the most important subjects Irish or Irish is as important as other subjects.	58.7
23. My role as a teacher of Irish is very central or central to my image of myself as a primary teacher.	78.7
24. The primary school teacher is very important or important in the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish in Ireland.	94.7
25. The primary teacher should have:	
the main responsibility for the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish	12.0
a good deal of the responsibility for the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish	54.7
26. Irish society assigns to primary teachers:	
the main responsibility for the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish	26.7
a good deal of the responsibility for the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish	45.3

4.1.3.3 Teachers' Roles and Responsibilities in relation to Irish

The group of six items in Table 4.1.3.3 above looks at a number of aspects of how Irish fits in to the teacher's perception of her roles and responsibilities i.e. (a) how central is the fact of being a teacher of Irish in their overall view of being a primary teacher and (b) to what extent, as teachers of Irish, do they feel that they have, or do not have, a role or responsibility in relation to the revitalisation of the language. These responses will be summarised with reference also to responses provided in the five supplementary open-ended parts of the questions, which allowed teachers to provide more detail on why they held these views. It should be noted that the percentages reported in relation to the open-ended questions, refer to a percentage of the entire

group, in this case 75 teachers. Responses were coded thematically but it should be pointed out that teachers could indicate more than one view in the open-ended supplementary parts.

We now look at responses to the closed items summarised in Table 4.1.3.3, adding in any clarifying information derived from the supplementary open-ended questions as needed. The overwhelming majority of teachers feel 'very proud' or 'proud' when thinking about taking on the professional role and public image of a primary school teacher (96.0%). 62.7% of teachers elaborated on the pride they felt in taking on their future role. Pride in becoming a teacher was mostly related to a perception that teaching is a respected profession and vocation (45.3%), the experience of working with children (34.7%), an early desire to become a teacher (4.0%) and their own positive experiences in schooling (2.6%).

Over half consider Irish to be 'more important' or 'as important' as other subjects in the primary curriculum (58.7%). 64.0% of teachers elaborated on their answer in the open-ended part. Some saw the importance of teaching Irish in terms of maintaining the language and culture (38.6%) but just over a quarter simply state that Irish is as important as other subjects (25.3%). A minority expressed the view that Irish is less important than other subjects (2.6%). A small number referred to the importance of learning Irish for Leaving Certificate requirements (4.0%).

Being a teacher of Irish is 'very central' or 'central' to most pre-service teachers' overall identity as a primary teacher (78.7%). 58.7% of teachers chose to provide more detail in the open-ended part of the question. The most frequently expressed position here was that as part of their general teaching role they wanted to inspire a love of Irish in children and promote the language and culture (33.3%). Smaller percentages stated that teaching Irish a key part of being a primary teacher (9.3%), or that it is not central to their overall identity at all and that they see their role in more general terms (6.7%). A small number (4.0%) even at this early stage of initial teacher education were thinking of working in an Irish-medium school and reported that being a teacher of Irish was, therefore, a key part of their identity as a primary teacher.

A very large majority think that the primary teacher is 'very important' or 'important' in the revitalisation of Irish (94.7%). Only 12.0%, however, think that the primary teacher should have the 'main' responsibility in revitalising and maintaining Irish. 54.7% feel they should have a 'good deal' of the responsibility. In total, therefore, 66.7% feel they should have the 'main' responsibility or a 'good deal' of the responsibility.

When it comes to the perceived responsibility assigned to them by society, however, these weightings change somewhat. Over a quarter (26.7%) feel that society currently assigns the 'main responsibility' to them. 45.3% feel they are assigned 'a good deal' of the responsibility in the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish. 72.0%, therefore, feel that they are currently assigned the 'main responsibility or a 'good deal' of the responsibility'. Returning for a moment to the

previous item concerning teachers' perceptions of the role that primary teachers *should* have in the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish, 64.0% responded to the open-ended part. As we see in Table 4.1.3.4, teachers advanced two main rationales for primary teachers' role in the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish:

Teachers can compensate for a lack of intergenerational transmission (36.0%)

Teachers have the ability to expose children to Irish at a young age in school (24.7%)

These rationales acknowledge the school as a formative institution in society and teachers appear generally very willing to be involved in the revitalisation and maintenance initiative. In responses to the supplementary part of this question, almost a third, however, would like to see more agencies involved in promoting Irish (29.4%).

Table 4.1.3.4
Percentages of teachers providing responses to open-ended questions concerning the role and responsibilities of teachers in promoting Irish

Perceptions of why teachers should have a role in promoting Irish	% of teachers	Issues and concerns in promoting Irish	% of teachers
Teachers can compensate for a lack of intergenerational transmission	36.0	A disproportionate responsibility is placed on primary school teachers	32.0
Teachers can expose children to Irish at a young age in school	24.7	More people should be involved in promoting Irish	29.4
		Blame is placed on teachers	4.0
		Limited credit is given to teachers	2.7
		The public criticises the teaching of Irish	1.3

As regards the role that teachers are currently assigned, fewer teachers responded (52.0%) to the open-ended part but many of the issues involved in promoting Irish came to light. Just over a fifth of teachers reiterate that primary schools are an important site where Irish can be promoted (21.3%). Yet by looking at teachers' perceptions of the responsibility currently assigned to them we can see that several factors impact on their ability to effectively promote Irish, especially a view that a disproportionate level of responsibility is placed on primary school teachers (32.0%). A minority of teachers (4.0%) speak about the the perceived blame that is placed on teachers for the general public not having a high standard of Irish, the limited credit is given to teachers (2.7%), and the tendency for the public to criticise the teaching of Irish (1.3%). These findings in relation to the teacher's role in revitalising and maintaining Irish are summarised

in Table 4.1.3.4 above. All comments provided in response to the five open-ended questions 21, 22, 23, 25 and 26 are available in Appendix D on the cd accompanying the thesis.

4.1.3.4 Teacher Proficiency in Irish

We turn now to pre-service teachers' views on the importance, or otherwise, of teacher proficiency in Irish. Five questions were asked, four which also contained a supplementary open-ended component. We look at responses to each item as illustrated in Table 4.1.3.5, taking account of any additional views expressed in the open-ended supplementary component.

Table 4.1.3.5
Percentage of beginning pre-service teachers agreeing with statements concerning their role and responsibility in promoting Irish

Questionnaire Items	Percentage of Teachers expressing this view
11. It is very important/ important for pre-service teachers to improve their own Irish.	93.3
12. I feel the expectation that Irish should be taught primarily through the medium of Irish is:	
Very reasonable or reasonable	92.0
13. I feel that the advice for teachers to use Irish informally outside of the Irish lesson is:	
Very reasonable or reasonable	97.3
14. I feel the advice that the teacher should make an effort to teach other subjects through Irish from time to time is:	
Very reasonable or reasonable	57.3
15. I think the following subjects should be taught through Irish/ bilingually	
Mathematics	20.0
History	36.0
Geography	48.0
Science	24.0
*Irish (bilingually)	17.3
Visual Arts	65.3
Music	68.0
Drama	73.3
Religion	50.6
PE	84.0
SPHE	42.7

As Table 4.1.3.5 above shows, there is strong support by the majority of teacher (93.3%) regarding the importance in improving their own Irish during initial teacher education. Responses to the open-ended supplementary parts to this question allowed teachers to elaborate on their view or

at times to highlight any challenges involved. 48.0% of pre-service teachers responded to the supplementary and three main themes emerged in their responses:

Proficiency is central to confidence in teaching and to effective teaching (26.5 %)

Proficiency is need to motivate children and to inspire a love of Irish (9.3%)

Teachers need to maintain proficiency throughout their career (4.0%)

Three further issues related to proficiency were explored in the open and closed questions (a) the expectation in the curriculum documents that a teacher should teach the Irish lesson primarily through the medium of Irish (b) the expectation that a teacher will use Irish informally throughout the school day (c) that a teacher will teach other curricular subjects through Irish from time to time. In response to the closed item, the vast majority (92.0%) agree that it is 'very reasonable' or 'reasonable' to expect a teacher to teach the Irish lesson through the medium of Irish. In the open-ended supplementary part, a very small minority of teachers raise some concerns, however. In their responses most drew on their own experience as learners of Irish. 64.0% of responded elaborated on their answer in the supplementary open-ended part and four main themes emerged:

Teaching primarily through Irish is the ideal approach (51.0%)

Teaching through Irish promotes better fluency in Irish and encourages children to think through Irish (28%)

The risk of a child not understanding and disengaging from lesson (1.0%)

Need for some English (1.0%)

The vast majority of teachers (97.3%) feel that it is 'reasonable' or 'very reasonable' for informal Irish to be used outside of the formal Irish lesson. 69.3% chose to further comment on this in the open-ended part. As with the previous question, only a very small percentage of teachers noted the risk of a child not understanding a particular instruction (1.3%). The majority of the group listed two main benefits to this approach:

Promotes Irish as a live communicative language (79.1%)

Builds confidence informally in Irish and increases exposure to Irish in a fun and relaxed way (66.7%)

When it came to views about teaching another subject through Irish, over half of the pre-service teachers felt that this was very 'reasonable' or 'reasonable' (57.3%). The subjects most often recommended for teaching through Irish (or bilingually using both Irish and English) were PE (84.0%) and the arts (drama 73.3%, music 68.0% and visual arts 65.3%). A minority of teachers think Irish itself (as a subject) should be taught bilingually (17.3%), reinforcing some of the views

expressed in relation to question 12 that Irish should be taught primarily through Irish but that some English may need to be used. The role of English in the teaching of Irish as a subject will be returned to in the section on role perceptions following first school placement in section 4.3.3.

Just over two-thirds of teachers (66.7%) chose to respond to the open-ended part of this question. Over a third think that CLIL approaches might be too difficult for some learners (36.0%) but a similar amount see the benefits of such an approach in increasing proficiency and fostering more favourable attitudes to Irish (34.7%). A small number reiterate that some subjects may not be conducive to this especially 'information heavy' subjects (5.3%). Interestingly only a very small minority refer to the need for teacher proficiency in implementing CLIL (1.3%).

Responses to the five questions underscore the interaction between teacher proficiency and use of Irish, and children's engagement with Irish. It appears that teachers view high proficiency as being necessary to implement aspects of their role. They feel, however, that children's ability to comprehend content in the teaching of Irish is important and where children's own level of proficiency or interest in Irish is not considered high, teachers can be reluctant to teach primarily through Irish, to use Irish informally or to implement CLIL. All comments from teachers in relation to the four open-ended questions (11, 12, 13, and14) are set out in Appendix D on the accompanying cd.

The four areas addressed in the section on role perceptions: Irish as an ethnic symbol, the obligatory nature of Irish in schools, the role and responsibility of the teacher in promoting Irish, and teacher proficiency, allow some preliminary conclusions regarding role perceptions at the beginning of initial teacher education. First, pre-service teachers are generally supportive of the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish in society and they are particularly supportive of this within the primary education system. They identify a substantial role for primary teachers within this revitalisation and maintenance initiative but implicitly refer to their being assigned a greater role at present than they feel they should have. Finally, teachers agree that teacher proficiency is a key part of their role as teachers of Irish. Most agree in principle with teaching primarily through Irish, using Irish informally throughout the day and occasionally teaching another lesson through Irish, but they express some concerns about implementing these approaches if there is a risk that children will disengage from lessons.

4.2 Anticipation of Key Experiences in Initial Teacher Education

As part of the exploration of Group 1 pre-service teachers' beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions, they were asked on the questionnaire to anticipate school (first classroom) and *Gaeltacht* placements. This group of questions has a special importance in the longitudinal design of the study in that they relate to two key experiences pre-service teachers have in their first year of

initial teacher education. Anticipated reactions to these experiences were first sought in the questionnaire, and the interview conducted shortly after the actual experience allowed them to reflect on what changes, if any, had occurred. We are dealing here with the original questionnaire data on each of these two anticipated experiences.

4.2.1 Anticipating School Placement (Questionnaire)

Teachers were asked five closed questions and one supplementary open-ended question relating to school placement. They were asked about the anticipated ease or difficulty of teaching Irish, the satisfaction they expected to derive, the perceived interest level of their pupils, the perceived proficiency level of their pupils, and views on the inclusion of cultural elements in the teaching of Irish. 44.0% of teachers expect Irish to be 'very difficult' or 'difficult' to teach yet the vast majority (86.7%) expect to derive 'great satisfaction' or 'satisfaction' from teaching Irish. Over two-thirds of teachers (66.7%) expect children to have 'a lot' or some interest in Irish even though only 41.3% of teachers expect these same children to be 'very proficient' or 'proficient' in Irish. The majority of teachers believe that the following aspects of Irish culture are 'very important' or 'important' for pupils in their study of Irish: the language itself (94.7%), Irish songs (85.0%), Irish games (80.0%), Irish history (72.0%), Irish dance (68.0%). A lower proportion of teachers believe that Irish literature is 'very important' or 'important' for pupils (48.0%).

As we see in Table 4.2.1 there is a sizeable difference between teachers who think Irish to is 'very difficult' or 'difficult' to teach (44.0%) and the teachers that expect to derive 'great satisfaction' or 'satisfaction' from this experience (86.7%) An open-ended supplementary part allowed teachers to describe why they held these views and which aspects of teaching Irish may make it difficult to teach. Just over two-thirds (66.7%) of teachers responded to the open-ended question. 14.7% reported feeling confident about teaching Irish. The factors which could make Irish difficult to teach, however, reported are:

Children's negative attitudes (18.7%)

Ensuring children understand (16.0%)

Pre-service teachers' insecurity about their own proficiency in Irish (6.7%)

Teaching Irish grammar (2.7%)

A small number (4.0%) at this point indicate that they wish to teach in Irish-medium schools. All responses to this open-ended question (16) are available in Appendix D on the accompanying cd.

Table 4.2.1

Percentage of teachers agreeing with statements regarding the teaching of Irish on school placement

Questionnaire Items	Percentage of Teachers expressing this View
16. Irish will be difficult or very difficult to teach.	44.0
17. I will derive 'some satisfaction' or 'great satisfaction' from teaching Irish.	86.7
18. The pupils in my class will have a lot/ some interest in Irish.	66.7
19. The pupils in my class will be 'very proficient' or 'proficient' in Irish.	41.3
20. *It is very important/ important for pupils to study the following aspects of Irish culture:*	
Irish language	94.7
Irish history	72.0
Irish games	80.0
Irish songs	85.0
Irish dance	68.0
Irish literature	48.0

4.2.2 Anticipation of Gaeltacht Experience by Beginning Pre-Service Teachers (Questionnaire)

Group 1 pre-service teachers were asked on the questionnaire about any previous experiences they had in the *Gaeltacht* and also to anticipate their experience with their first *Gaeltacht* placement within the teacher education programme (they will complete a second and final *Gaeltacht* placement in second year). 68.0% of these beginning pre-service teachers report that they have already spent time previously in a *Gaeltacht*. It may be recalled that the actual experience of this *Gaeltacht* placement was later examined in a more detailed way through interviews so this group was asked to consider the *Gaeltacht* placement in a more comprehensive way in advance of going.

Teachers were asked four questions about this placement and three of these questions had an open-ended component. Responses to the closed aspects of the questions will be presented first. 85.3% feel that it 'very reasonable' or 'reasonable' that pre-service teachers are expected to spend time in the *Gaeltacht* as part of their initial teacher education. As we see in Table 4.2.2, a very high proportion (89.3%) expect to derive 'great satisfaction' or 'some satisfaction' from this placement, and the same proportion anticipate it will be 'very valuable' or 'valuable'. When asked about the expected key learning outcomes of the *Gaeltacht* placement, as laid out by the *Gaeltacht* working group and designers of the syllabus used while on placement, 98.7% believe that improving ability in spoken and written Irish is 'very important' or 'important',

94.7% believe that improving grammar and syntax in Irish is 'very important' or 'important', and 84.0% believe that gaining exposure to contemporary Irish *Gaeltacht* culture is 'very important' to 'important'.

Table 4.2.2
Percentage of beginning pre-service teachers agreeing with statements regarding their first Gaeltacht experience

Questionnaire Items	Percentage of Teachers expressing this view
12. It is very reasonable or reasonable to expect pre-service teachers to spend time in the *Gaeltacht*.	85.3
13. I expect to derive great or some satisfaction from this placement.	89.3
15. I expect this placement to be very valuable or valuable.	89.3
14. In my opinion, the Learning Outcomes of *Gaeltacht* Placement are:	
improving ability in spoken and written Irish	98.7
improving grammar and syntax in Irish	94.7
gaining exposure to contemporary Irish *Gaeltacht* culture	84.0

As we can see in Table 4.2.2, teachers are generally very optimistic, about the prospect of their *Gaeltacht* placement. Responses to the open-ended supplementary questions were coded thematically. Although they were presented as three separate supplementary questions in the questionnaire, there was some overlap in the responses between questions. For instance, the cost of the *Gaeltacht* placement impacted on views regarding the requirement to visit the *Gaeltacht* and also on the satisfaction they felt they would derive from the placement. Hence, these responses relating to benefits, satisfaction, and value of *Gaeltacht* placement are grouped together in table 4.2.3 below.

As we can see, teachers are optimistic about the *Gaeltacht* placement with over half reporting it will be of use to them in improving proficiency for their future career (57.3%) and a minority believe it will give them an opportunity to interact socially with peers (13.3%). A small number of them mention concerns in relation to the cost of this placement or its usefulness for teachers who already consider themselves to have high proficiency in Irish (4.0%). Only a very small proportion report that this placement will be useful to them in terms of being exposed to *Gaeltacht* culture (0.8%) and a similar percentage expect to interact with locals (0.9%). All comments from teachers in relation to these three open-ended supplementary questions (12, 13 and 15) are set out in Appendix D on the accompanying cd.

Table 4.2.3
Percentage of beginning pre-service teachers identifying perceived benefits and challenges in relation to first Gaeltacht placement

Anticipated Benefits	**Percentage of respondents expressing this view**	***Concerns***	**Percentage of respondents expressing this view**
Improving proficiency for future role	57.3	High costs incurred	7.1
Social interaction with peers	13.3	Placement should be optional where pre-service teacher already has high proficiency	4.0
Previous positive experiences in the *Gaeltacht*	5.3		
Interaction with locals	0.9	Anxiety because of low proficiency	1.3
Gaining awareness of *Gaeltacht* culture	0.8	Concern that English would mostly be spoken	0.9
		Timing of placement	0.9
		Difficulty in maintaining these levels of Irish upon return	0.4

4.3 Stability and Change in Views following First School Placement (Interview 1)

This is the first measurement of change and stability in beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions following a seven month period in initial teacher education, and specifically first school placement. The impact of school placement will first be dealt with as teachers engage in this placement before visiting the *Gaeltacht*. Change and stability in views following first *Gaeltacht* placement are dealt with in Section 4.4. Comparisons are also be made between teachers' anticipated experience and actual experience of engaging in school and *Gaeltacht* placement in Section 4.5.

4.3.1 First School Placement: Reflecting on Beliefs

Teachers were given the opportunity at the start off the interview to reflect on the responses that they initially selected in the questionnaire completed at the beginning of initial teacher education. They were asked to report any views that had since changed. Teachers reported a very high level of stability in the responses they had given at the beginning of the year in each of the areas of beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions. The vast majority still agreed with statements such as *'Everyone can learn to speak Irish'*, *'Learning Irish is different from studying other school subjects'* and *'When learning Irish it is important to repeat and practise a lot'*. The stability reported in beliefs is in some respects positive. For example, the beliefs part of the questionnaire asked

teachers for their views on traditional approaches to language teaching *'Learning Irish is mostly a matter of learning new vocabulary'* (36.0%) and *'Learning Irish is mostly a matter of translating from English'* (10.7%). At interview stage there was no increase in teachers reporting they reverted to these traditional teaching methods while on school placement. The interviews revealed that general beliefs about learning Irish had not changed much but some changes had occurred in relation to expectations of certain profiles of children, role of culture in teaching Irish, and the difference in teaching Irish compared to other subjects.

The stability and change reported in beliefs could be due to a number of factors – passage of time and maturation over seven months, impact of initial teacher education curriculum, interaction with other pre-service teachers – as well as classroom experience. Teachers were specifically asked to comment on any perceived change that occurred after their first formal experience of teaching Irish. First, their expectations of children's performance on the basis of gender had begun to change. At the beginning of initial teacher education, only a very small amount of teachers (1.3%) reported a belief that girls were better than boys at learning Irish. What is not evident from the table, however, is the high percentage selecting 'Neither agree nor disagree'. (Refer to Appendix J for further details). Following school placement, however teachers move from neither agreeing nor disagreeing to simply disagreeing that girls will outperform boys in learning Irish. This change in belief was linked to their experience of teaching both genders.

At the beginning of initial teacher education, there was a lack of clarity in responses concerning the role of culture in teaching Irish. Only a small minority of teachers felt that it was necessary to know about culture when learning Irish (13.3%), yet the majority agreed that certain aspects of Irish culture were important in the teaching of Irish e.g. Irish dance (68.0%), Irish songs (85.0%) and Irish games (80.0%). Over a quarter of teachers (26.9%) reported including some cultural elements in their teaching of Irish, mostly in the form of traditional songs and dances (19.2%), and in a small number of cases the use of contemporary Irish songs was reported (7.7%). Teachers also comment that they required more enthusiasm when teaching Irish, compared to other subjects, to motivate children. Representative comments from teachers are given in italics but the full collection of transcripts in Appendix F will contextualise these comments. For reasons of confidentiality, no initials or identifying details are given.

This shows us that teachers identify the first experience of teaching Irish, among other factors, as influencing their views on gender-related performance and also regarding the content that should be included in teaching Irish, in particular highlighting certain aspects of Irish Gaelic culture.

Table 4.3.1
Percentage of teachers reporting changes in beliefs following first school placement

Change or Stability in Belief after First School Placement	Percentage of Teachers Expressing this View (n = 26)	Representative Comments
Teachers now report no expectation that girls will outperform boys at learning Irish	100	*The girls would have their hands up more than the boys. But, if you ask the boys a question they will actually answer it, it's just that they are maybe not bothered to put up their hand.*
Over a quarter include cultural elements in the teaching of Irish	26.9	*I would have brought in books in Irish, we did a couple of songs in Irish, amhráin ghaelacha and then we did some modern songs... the Coláiste Lurgan ones.*
A minority of teachers choose traditional cultural elements e.g. dances and songs	19.2	
A minority of teachers choose contemporary cultural elements e.g. songs	7.7	*I definitely brought in music.*
Teachers identify that there is an increased level of enthusiasm needed to teach Irish	96.2	

Table 4.3.2
First School Placement: Percentage of Pre-Service Teachers reporting Change in Attitudes

Change or Stability reported in attitudes after First School Placement	Percentage of Teachers Expressing this View (n = 26)	Representative Comments
Attitudes to the Irish language and to Irish speakers are as positive or more positive	100	*It's (my attitude) more or less the same I suppose. I like Irish. I'm one of those people, before I came into teaching,*
School ethos or attitudes of staff have impacted on their attitudes to Irish	7.7	*(My attitude has become) Probably more positive. It definitely hasn't got negative since I taught Irish.*

4.3.2 First School Placement: Reflecting on Attitudes

At the beginning of initial teacher education, teachers reported favourable attitudes to Irish speakers and very favourable attitudes to learning Irish. Indeed their attitudes are higher than those of other Leaving Certificate students attending English-medium schools. At the beginning of their programme, the vast majority agree that the Irish language is an important part of the Irish people (93.3%). As we see in Table 4.3.2 above, following school placement, teachers mostly

reported this favourable attitude to be enduring. In a small number of cases their attitude to Irish was reported to be higher. This stability in favourable attitudes to Irish speakers and to learning Irish is very positive as a teacher's own interest in and commitment to Irish can contribute to high morale and sustain her in her work. Teachers in the interview did not feel that school ethos or other staff attitudes had much bearing on their own attitude and it is likely that attitudes are therefore more likely to be part of a personal teaching identity.

4.3.3 First School Placement: Reflecting on Role Perceptions

This section will look at the evolution of teachers' role perceptions, mainly in the areas of Irish as an ethnic symbol, the obligatory nature of Irish, the role and responsibility of the teacher in promoting Irish, and expectations regarding teacher proficiency.

4.3.3.1 Irish as an Ethnic Symbol

When interviewed after school placement, teachers did not report any change in views of Irish as an ethnic symbol. They still think the Irish language has an inherent cultural value and is important to Irish people. Teachers are, therefore, still very positive about the important role that primary teachers play in promoting Irish. We now look at three other areas they may be more aware of following school placement: the obligatory nature of Irish, the role of the teacher in the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish, and teacher proficiency.

4.3.3.2 Views on the Obligatory Nature of Irish in Primary Schools

One area of change is in relation to the obligatory nature of Irish in the primary school curriculum for students with EAL. As we see in Table 4.3.3.2 at the beginning of initial teacher education, only a minority of teachers agree that Irish should be not obligatory for children with EAL (20.0%). During school placement, only a very small number had experience of teaching children with EAL (15.4%) but having engaged in placement, teachers who did have this experience now spoke about the perceived advantage that children with EAL had in the area of learning Irish. They were more in favour of children with EAL being included in the teaching of Irish but with the necessary differentiated approach. When it came to beliefs about students with SEN, at the beginning of initial teacher education a minority of teachers (17.3%) agree that Irish should not be obligatory for these students. During school placement, only a small number of teachers had experience of teaching children with these needs (7.7%) but when asked about the obligatory nature of Irish they still remained unsure.

Table 4.3.3.2
Percentage of teachers reporting changes in views on Irish as an obligatory subject following school placement

Change or Stability in reported perception after First School Placement	Percentage of Teachers reporting view (n = 26)	Representative Comments
Only a very small number have experience of teaching Irish to children with EAL	15.4	*Well there was a foreign student in the class and he didn't really have much English but he was allowed to listen in on the oral Irish lesson...*
These teachers are now more in favour of children with EAL to be included in Irish lessons	15.4	*I was really amazed by that (his progress) and I felt well if he can do it then there's hope for the rest of the class.*
Only a very small number of teachers have experience of a child with SEN	7.7	*In certain cases, it should be let go for some kids.*
These teachers are still unsure about the obligatory nature of Irish for children with SEN	7.7	*By the end of the three weeks he (child with SEN) was used to it so it was fine.*

Table 4.3.3.3
Percentages of Teachers reporting change in views relating to the role of the teacher in promoting Irish

Change or Stability in in Role Perceptions reported after First School Placement	Percentage of Teachers expressing this view (n = 26)	Representative Comments
Most teachers would like to see the responsibility for the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish shared amongst other key stakeholders, in particular parents and the pupils themselves	61.6	*The teacher has a great deal of the responsibility but also I think that the main responsibility even though sometimes it mightn't be possible, should be with the parents.*
A small number would like to see other stakeholders e.g. media and government involved	11.6	*I think everybody, not only the Teacher. I think parents, the media, politicians, counsellors, I think everybody really should have a role.*

4.3.3.3 Reflecting on Roles and Responsibility in relation to Irish

We see in Table 4.3.3.3 above that most teachers (72.0%) feel at the beginning of initial teacher education think that society assigns to teachers the 'main responsibility' or 'a good deal' of the responsibility for the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish. We saw further in their open-ended answers in the questionnaire, that under a third of teachers (29.3%) highlight that more support was needed. Following first school placement over half of teachers indicate that they would like to see more parties involved (61.5%), in particular parents and to a lesser extent the media and

government bodies (11.6%). It is likely that teachers are becoming aware of their relative isolation in the task of promoting Irish.

Table 4.3.3.4
First School Placement: Percentage of Teachers reporting changes relating to teacher proficiency

Change and Stability in Role Perceptions reported after First School Placement	Percentage of Teachers reporting this view (n =26)	Representative Comments
A minority report insecurity in their own proficiency in Irish	23.1	*Not really, no. I do know Irish, obviously if I'm teaching it, but I wouldn't consider myself fluent, I know that much!*
Most teachers report teaching Irish completely through Irish on school placement	84.6	*Yes, you need to teach it completely through Irish, definitely. But it's hard when the kids come back to you with English words, to try to get them across more in Irish, even the meaning of a word, if they say it in English and you have to talk back in Irish, that's difficult.*
Many teachers speak about the difficulties that this presents to them in term of proficiency, children's comprehension, and children's comfort level with this approach	57.7	
The types of informal Irish used by teachers focus on developing receptive language and there is little opportunity for children to respond in Irish	92.3	*Things like suígí síos, seasaigí suas, éistigí, tá sé in am don lón. I would try to have regular instructions.* *Things like 'dun an doras', 'oscail an fhuinneog'*
Teachers in English-medium schools did not have an opportunity to implement this on school placement	n/a	

4.3.3.4 Views on Teacher Proficiency following First School Placement

At the beginning of initial teacher education, 93.3% of teachers report a view that it is important for primary school teachers to improve their proficiency in Irish. We see in Table 4.3.3.4 above, following school placement, almost a quarter describe insecurity in relation to their own level of proficiency (23.1%) and the impact of this on their teaching of Irish. For example, at the beginning of initial teacher education 92.0% of teachers are in favour of teaching Irish completely through Irish. While the vast majority report adhering to this view on school placement (84.6%), over half report difficulty in doing so (57.7%) because of their own level of proficiency, children's comprehension and sometimes their own limited experience with this approach.

An interesting finding emerges in relation to the use of informal Irish outside of Irish lessons. At the beginning of initial teacher education, 97.3% of teachers are in favour of this strategy (See Table 4.1.3.5 earlier). When asked about the types of informal Irish used on school placement though, the examples given for the most part centre on developing receptive language

skills e.g. children responding to instructions given in the imperative. Although teachers were asked about their views of CLIL at the beginning of initial teacher education, it was not possible to explore this further in the interviews as teachers had no experience of this on placement.

4.4 Stability and Change in Views following first Gaeltacht Placement

We now examine further stability and change in views during first year of initial teacher education, especially any change that could be linked to *Gaeltacht* placement. Teachers were asked at the beginning of the interview to comment whether any changes had occurred in their views since they began *Gaeltacht* placement. They could speak about specific incidents in the *Gaeltacht* or other factors e.g. maturation, reflection and interaction with other pre-service teachers. Unlike the impact reported above in relation to school placement, the *Gaeltacht* placement appears to be most influential in the area of attitudes.

4.4.1 Beliefs: Stability and Change following First Gaeltacht Placement

Although teachers are exposed to teaching methods through their Irish language classes, this placement does not provide opportunities to practise their teaching in the way that the school placement does. It is perhaps not surprising then that in its current model, teachers' beliefs about learning and teaching Irish remain relatively stable. Only in a very small number of cases do teachers report that the *Gaeltacht* placement has influenced their beliefs about how Irish should be taught. A small number indicate that they would like to bring into their future teaching some of the cultural aspects that they have been exposed to while in the *Gaeltacht* (19.2%). The same proportion also reports a desire to expose children to different dialects of Irish following their experience in the *Gaeltacht* (19.2%).

4.4.2 Attitudes: Stability and Change following First Gaeltacht Placement

Although the positive attitudes to Irish were maintained since the beginning of initial teacher education, as illustrated in Table 4.4.2, some changes in the direction of more positive attitudes have occurred. The vast majority (76.9%) report that *Gaeltacht* placement has impacted positively on their attitudes and the remainder (23.1%) say that their attitude has remained as positive. The vast majority also (84.6%) report this experience as being different to studying Irish in college. At the beginning of the year, the majority (76.6%) expressed a desire to know more Irish speakers. When asked about their interaction with local people, only a minority (19.2%) report having this opportunity and often where they do, these conversations are restricted to informal greetings in public places and in a small number of cases, a conversation in local amenities. Teachers report

spending most of their time with their peers. For a minority of teachers, they are concerned that this does not afford them many opportunities to improve and practise their oral Irish (19.2%). At the beginning of initial teacher education, 44.0% rate themselves as having native like or very fluent speaking ability, which is lower than that reported by teachers in 1985 (25% claimed to be fluent and 40% good). Following the *Gaeltacht* placement only 9 of the 26 teachers consider themselves Irish speakers i.e. 34.6%. Even in these cases, teachers very often qualify that they do not perceive themselves to be fluent and that they do not have many opportunities to speak Irish. Nevertheless, teachers report attributing certain traits with Irish speakers following experiences in the *Gaeltacht*. They are more likely to associate certain personality traits with Irish speakers e.g. 'friendly' (57.1%), 'open' (23.1%), 'traditional' (11.6%) and 'religious' (11.6%).

Table 4.4.2
Percentage of teachers reporting changes in attitudes following First *Gaeltacht* Placement

Change and Stability in Reported Attitude after First *Gaeltacht* Placement	**Percentage of Teachers Expressing this view (n = 26)**	**Representative Comments**
Teachers report that experiences in the *Gaeltacht* have impacted positively on attitudes to Irish.	76.9	*It (My attitude) has changed. You definitely need the Gaeltacht.*
Teachers report that their attitude is as positive as at the beginning of initial teacher education	23.1	*It's just a lot different because we are out here and we are talking Irish all the time at home. I think I'm just more positive towards it really.*
Teachers report this experience as being different to their studying of Irish in college	84.6	*You definitely need the Gaeltacht. No matter how many lectures you have in college, you are not speaking Irish the whole time so you are not learning it every day.*
Only a minority report interacting with local speakers of Irish	19.2	*They are full of life and energetic. They are really enthusiastic about what they are saying. ... They are really friendly. My bean an tí is an absolute gem of a woman. I really like her and her Irish is really great.*
A minority are concerned that they do not have opportunities to improve their Irish	19.2	
A minority of teachers now identify as being an Irish speaker	34.6	
Vast majority of teachers identify very positive traits with Irish speakers Teachers associate the following personality traits with Irish speakers:	73.1	*They are really open I think.*
Friendly	57.7	*Enthusiasm I think is a big one and passion.*
Open	23.1	
Traditional	11.6	*Life on the island is so different. There is a bit more emphasis on religion and things like that than I would be used to.*
Religious	11.6	

4.4.3 Role Perceptions: Stability and Change following First Gaeltacht Placement

Limited change is reported in relation to role perceptions with the exception of some views on Irish as an ethnic symbol. As mentioned in Table 4.1.3.1 earlier, teachers are very supportive of Irish as an ethnic symbol in terms of its cultural value with the overwhelming majority agreeing the Irish language contributes to a unique identity (90.7%). Teachers were asked in interviews about the role of speaking Irish in constructing an Irish identity and whether experiences in the *Gaeltacht* had influenced these previously held views. As we see in Table 4.4.3, when reflecting on the *Gaeltacht* placement, almost half (46.1%) felt that by speaking Irish, people experienced a more intense version of Irish culture.

Table 4.4.3
Percentage of Teachers reporting changes in Role Perceptions following First *Gaeltacht* Placement

Change and Stability in reported in Role Perceptions after First *Gaeltacht* Placement (n = 26)	**Percentage of Teachers Expressing this perceptions (n = 26)**	**Representative Comments**
Nearly half of teachers feel that by speaking Irish one can have a different cultural experience to someone who speaks English only	46.1	*I suppose they would because they would have two languages. I suppose they would be more immersed in the whole Irish tradition.* *They definitely have a different cultural experience. I do think they do but it's hard to explain how.*

In sum, data from the interviews suggest that some changes happen in the areas of beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions during first year of initial teacher education. These changes may be linked to myriad of personal and professional experiences. When asked specifically what contribution school and *Gaeltacht* placement makes to their views, teachers report that school placement influences some beliefs about teaching Irish, in particular expectations of certain children and the role of culture in teaching Irish. School placement is also reported to influence role perceptions, namely how much responsibility is placed on the primary teacher in revitalising and maintaining Irish, and the challenges of teacher proficiency in the classroom. The *Gaeltacht* placement on the other hand, is reported to influence attitudes to Irish speakers with teachers developing more positive attitudes and associating more personality traits with them.

4.5 Key Experiences in Initial Teacher Education: Anticipated Impact versus Actual Experiences

We will now look at the expectations that teachers initially have in relation to school and *Gaeltacht* placement and the extent to which these expectations are matched by the later actual experience.

4.5.1 School Placement: Anticipated versus Actual Experiences

Teachers at the beginning of initial teacher education were asked to anticipate their first experience of teaching Irish on school placement. Although presented as 3 different questions related to satisfaction, difficulty and enjoyment in teaching Irish in the questionnaire, at interview stage teachers tended to interweave views on these dimensions of the experience into one answer. At the beginning of initial teacher education, most teachers reported an expectation that they would derive 'great satisfaction' or 'satisfaction' from teaching Irish (86.7%). As we see in Table 4.5.1, later the vast majority of teachers report that the experience of teaching Irish had been enjoyable (92.3%).

Table 4.5.1
Percentage of teachers reporting a change in view between anticipated and actual experience of school placement

Experiences on First School Placement	Percentage of Teachers Expressing this View (n = 26)	Representative Comments
The experience of teaching Irish had been enjoyable	92.3	*It's not that I didn't enjoy it, (teaching Irish) I just found it difficult. I still liked teaching it.*
Teaching Irish:		*Just when they understood you and they got it. If you heard them saying a word the next day and you knew they learned it.*
was easier than expected	73.1	
matched my expectations	15.4	
was more challenging	11.5	
Almost half of teachers working in English-medium schools find it a challenge to nurture positive attitudes to Irish amongst children	46.2	*When I was introducing the lesson or starting the lesson saying 'take out your Irish books', they would be saying 'awwww!'*
Teachers in Irish-medium schools do not report a challenge in nurturing positive attitudes	0	*They're always saying 'oh do we have to do Irish?, nobody uses it'*

As we see in Table 4.5.1 above, teachers explain that enjoyment of teaching Irish was not necessarily linked to a view that Irish was easy to teach. At the beginning a large majority expected Irish to be difficult to teach (44.0%). Most found teaching Irish to be easier than expected (73.1%), for others the experience matched their expectations (15.4%) while a small number found it to more challenging (11.5%). Following their first school placement, teachers were asked generally whether their experience of school placement matched their expectations. No clear patterns emerged in the responses given by teachers following this first experience. Experiences in the classroom appear to be context specific. At the beginning of initial teacher education, just over two-thirds of teachers expect children to have a basic interest or little interest in learning Irish (66.7%). Teachers in Irish-medium schools do not report any challenge in nurturing positive attitudes to Irish but almost half of teachers (46.2%) in English-medium schools report this as challenging.

4.5.2 Gaeltacht Placement: Anticipated Impact versus and Actual Experiences

The vast majority (89.3%) at the beginning of the year expected to derive 'great satisfaction' or 'satisfaction' from the placement and a similar proportion (84.6%) reported this at the end of the placement. The majority of teachers at questionnaire stage agreed that it was 'very reasonable' or 'reasonable' to expect pre-service teachers to visit the *Gaeltacht* as part of initial teacher education (85.3%) but a small minority expressed a view in the open-ended responses that this should be optional for pre-service teachers who already had high proficiency in Irish (4.0%). At interview stage, most still agreed with this requirement and the majority highlighted the social benefits of the experience (88.5%) but a minority of teachers feel their learning needs were not being met during the *Gaeltacht* placement (11.5%). At the beginning of initial teacher education prior to the *Gaeltacht* placement, pre-service teachers' questionnaire responses indicated that they believed that it was necessary for primary teachers to attend the *Gaeltacht* placement, but the financial cost was mentioned as a negative factor by some teachers (7.1%). Following this placement, most agreed that it was valuable but a slightly higher percentage now mention the financial cost (11.6%).

The vast majority of teachers (85.3%) at the beginning of the year expect to gain exposure to Irish Gaelic culture while on placement. Almost half (46.2%) feel they have been exposed to Irish Gaelic culture, with most of this group reporting an exposure to traditional art and cultural forms (38.5%) and a much smaller amount report being exposed to contemporary art and cultural forms (7.7%). A minority of teachers now question the relevance of this exposure to Irish Gaelic culture for their future career.

Table 4.5.2
Percentage of teachers reporting a change in view between anticipated and actual experience of *Gaeltacht* placement

View after Experience of *Gaeltacht* Placement	Percentage of Teachers Expressing this View (n = 26)	Representative Comments
Most teachers report satisfaction with the *Gaeltacht* experience	84.6	*Yes. I thought beforehand why should we have to go to the Gaeltacht, we don't need to go to Science camp or anything else, why do we have to go to the Gaeltacht? But, being here, I have enjoyed it.*
Social elements of the *Gaeltacht* experience as contributing to this satisfaction	88.5	
A minority is still concerned about the cost of the *Gaeltacht* placement	11.6	*I have spoken with some of the locals along passing, saying hello and stuff. ..but it's mostly with the girls in the house or the Teachers in the college.*
A minority of proficient teachers feel their learning needs are not being met.	11.5	*Not much to be honest. Obviously we have our bean an tí, fear an tí and their kids... We're not in situations really unless it's in the pub chatting to someone.*
Almost half feel that they have been exposed to some aspects of *Gaeltacht* culture:	46.2	*I think so, to an extent. It's hard to know because I think a lot of it is fabricated for us. They are putting on céilís for us or whatever and I'm not sure how much of that is in the everyday life of the locals.*
traditional	38.5	*Well, we watched that video on X Gaeltacht and the way they go about things. While I was learning it I was thinking 'how is this relevant to teaching it', I'm not going to be teaching them about Inis Meáin so I think I would change that.*
contemporary	7.7	
A very small amount question the relevance of this exposure	11.6	

4.6 Views of Teachers with High Proficiency in Irish

Teachers provided some other biographical details in relation to the language of the home, their schooling for primary and secondary education, and their self-related oral proficiency and general proficiency. Although these questions appeared separately on the questionnaire, an overlap existed between teachers who reported either exposure to Irish in the home or experience of Irish-medium schooling, and their perceived proficiency. General proficiency was typically rated at the same level as oral proficiency. Many teachers in this group had either experience of Irish in the home or Irish-medium schooling, and they also reported a high level of general competence,

however a small number of other teachers who did not have this early exposure to Irish also self-identified as proficient or very proficient Irish speakers. For this reason, a category of teachers reporting high oral proficiency was created and correlation tests were run to examine the impact of this variable. Strength of reported correlations at the beginning and end of initial teacher education are also be compared. Correlations with a significance level $p \leq 0.05$ are reported below.

4.6.1 Correlations between High Proficiency and Beliefs

As we see in Table 4.6.1, for teachers at the beginning of their programme, high proficiency in Irish negatively correlates with the belief that people who are good at mathematics and science are not good at learning Irish ($r = -.327$). High proficiency in Irish is positively correlated with two other beliefs: that Irish people think it is important to learn Irish ($r = .236$) and that learning Irish is 'very easy' or 'easy' ($r = .459$).

Table 4.6.1
Correlations between beliefs and teachers with high oral proficiency in Irish

Beginning of programme	
20. People who are good at mathematics and science are not good at learning Irish.	(r = -.327)
21. Irish people think it is important to learn Irish.	(r = .236)
25. Learning Irish is 'easy' or 'very easy'.	(r = .459)

4.6.2 Correlations between High Proficiency and Attitudes

In relation to attitudes to the Irish language, and high proficiency in Irish no significant correlations exist regarding either of the scales. Some significant correlations exist, however, in relation to items in the scale. We will first look at the scale *Attitudes to the Irish Language and Irish Speakers*. For teachers at the beginning of their programme, high proficiency in Irish is positively correlated with the following beliefs: 'People in Ireland who don't speak Irish should try harder to learn Irish' ($r = .427$) and 'I would like to know more Irish speakers' ($r = .294$).

Taking the scale *Attitude to Learning Irish*, for teachers at the beginning of their programme, high proficiency in Irish is positively correlated with three attitude statements: that the teacher really enjoys learning Irish ($r = .440$) , that the teacher loves learning Irish ($r = .408$) and that the teacher thinks learning Irish is really great ($r = .338$). High proficiency is negatively correlated with the belief that learning Irish is a waste of time ($r = -.293$).

Table 4.6.2

Significant correlations between reported high proficiency and attitude statements

Group 1	Correlation
Attitude to Irish Speakers	
6. People in Ireland who don't speak Irish should try harder to learn Irish.	(r = .427)
9. I would like to know more Irish speakers.	(r = .294)
Attitude to Learning Irish	
1. Learning Irish is a waste of time.	(r=-.293)
3. I really enjoy learning Irish.	(r = .440)
4. I love learning Irish.	(r = .408)
6. Learning Irish is really great.	(r = .338)

4.6.3 Correlations between High Proficiency and Role Perceptions

At the beginning of their programme, high proficiency in Irish has no significant correlation with responses to items concerning Irish as an ethnic symbol. High proficiency does, however, significantly correlate with each of the six items relating to the obligatory nature of Irish. There is a significant positive correlation between teachers reporting high oral proficiency in Irish and the following views: All children should learn Irish (r = .428), Children should learn Irish, even if their parents don't want them to (r = .419), All primary teachers should be obliged to teach Irish (r = .275). High proficiency in Irish also correlates to a view that the following elements of Irish culture are important to study: the Irish language (r =.282), Irish songs (r = .298) and Irish literature (r = .358). Finally, high proficiency in Irish negatively correlates with the view the Children for whom English is an additional language should not be obliged to learn Irish (r = -.368).

Table 4.6.3

Correlations between high proficiency and views concerning the obligatory nature of Irish in primary schools

Group 1	Correlation
5. Children for whom English is an additional language should not be obliged to learn Irish.	(r = -.368)
6. All children should learn Irish.	(r = .428)
7. Children should learn Irish, even if their parents don't want them to.	(r = .419)
9. All primary teachers should be obliged to teach Irish.	(r = .275)
15. Elements of culture that are important in teaching Irish:	
Language	(r =.282)
Irish songs	(r = .298)
Irish literature	(r = .358)

High proficiency is also positively correlated with some views concerning teacher proficiency and expectations of first school placement. First high proficiency significantly correlates with view that it is reasonable to expect teachers to teach other subjects through Irish (r = .358) and an expectation that the teacher will derive great satisfaction from teaching Irish (r = .432). Finally high proficiency is positively correlated with a view that being a teacher of Irish is 'very central' or 'central' to one's identity as a primary teacher (r= .316).

Table 4.6.4
Correlations between views on teacher proficiency and teachers with high oral proficiency in Irish

Beginning of Programme	Correlation
14. It is reasonable to expect teachers to teach other subjects from time to time through Irish.	(r = .358)
17. I expect to derive great satisfaction from teaching Irish	(r = .432)
23. Being a teacher of Irish is very central to my identity as a primary teacher	(r= .316)

It can therefore be summarised that a higher level of proficiency influences, in a variety of ways, the views of beginning pre-service teachers. First these teachers are more likely to believe that learning Irish is easier than the rest of the group, and that Irish people think it is important to learn Irish. They are less likely that their peers to think that people who are good at are not good at learning mathematics and science are not good at learning Irish. High proficiency teachers have very positive attitudes to learning Irish, they associate greater satisfaction with learning Irish, and express a desire to get to know more Irish speakers. They are more in favour of the obligatory nature of Irish in primary schools and report that Irish is a core part of their identity as a teacher. They also expect to derive satisfaction form teaching Irish and they are more willing to teach other subjects through Irish.

4.7 Summary and Conclusions

Data from the questionnaire and interview with Group 1 allow us to outline some general features of teachers' views at the beginning of initial teacher education and following two key experiences in initial teacher education. It also allows us to explore the perceived degree of congruence between prior expectations and the actual experience of these key experiences. An overview of the findings from the questionnaire will first be presented, followed by an overview of the findings from the interview. This will be followed by a summary of the evolution of beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions in the first year of initial teacher education.

4.7.1 Overview of Group 1 Findings regarding initial Beliefs, Attitudes and Role Perceptions

We can summarise the findings regarding the beliefs of pre-service teachers at the beginning of their education in the following terms. Only a minority of teachers agree with traditional translation methods of learning Irish and most are in favour of allowing learners to make mistakes. The majority think that everyone can learn to speak Irish and that it should take around 5 years to learn to speak Irish well if someone spends one hour per day studying the language. Some teachers believe that certain learners have a foreign language aptitude that will help them learn Irish but only a very small amount believe that this aptitude is gender related. The vast majority, however, believe that everyone can learn to speak Irish, though only a small percentage feel that Irish people are good at learning Irish. A majority believe that learning Irish is different to studying other subjects. When it comes to specific strategies to learn Irish, most believe repetition and practice are important. Most believe it is more effective to learn Irish in the *Gaeltacht* than in a traditional classroom, although only a small minority think that acquiring knowledge of Irish culture is important to the study of the language. Presumably, this also suggests that the contact with an Irish-speaking environment is the important thing about learning in the *Gaeltacht*. We can also see that pre-service teachers associate high proficiency in Irish with being successful in getting a teaching job but high proficiency is not regarded as being as important for members of the general public.

Pre-service teachers' initial attitude to the Irish language and Irish speakers is positive and the overwhelming majority support the notion of the Irish language providing a distinct cultural identity and being an important part of Irish people. We also see that they have an above average positive attitude to learning Irish compared to other Leaving Certificate students, namely students studying the Higher and Lower level Irish programmes in English-medium schools. In relation to role perceptions, they rate the Irish language highly as an ethnic symbol and see the teaching of Irish as having a very key role in primary schooling. Being a teacher of Irish is 'central' or 'very central' to their overall identity as a primary teacher and teachers are keen to play a role in the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish. Teacher proficiency is seen as a key element of their role but some teachers report some insecurity relating to the demands that will be placed on them in teaching primarily through Irish, using Irish informally and teaching other subjects from time to time through Irish. Teachers generally anticipate favourably the experience of school and *Gaeltacht* placement and see these as being an important part of their development as teachers.

We can see from the responses given to different parts of the questionnaire that some beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions are inter-related. While the beliefs part addresses the learning of Irish in a general way, we can see how this relates to views of learning and teaching

Irish as a pre-service teacher. For example, 72.0% agree that *'It is better to learn Irish in the Gaeltacht'* and later 85.3% express that it is 'reasonable' or 'very reasonable' to expect pre-service teachers to spend time in the *Gaeltacht* as part of initial teacher education. The mean scale score for *Attitudes to Learning Irish* is very high (6.0) and teachers later assert that being a teacher of Irish is 'central' or 'very central' to their overall identity as a primary teacher (78.0%). This centrality of teaching Irish in their general role is also evident in the view expressed by the vast majority (90.7%) that all primary teachers should be obliged to teach Irish and the majority also agree that if Irish were better taught in schools more people would speak it (92.0%).

Some parts of the questionnaire help to clarify a view expressed e.g. it is clear that the majority of pre-service teachers (66.7%) feel they should have the 'main' responsibility or a 'good deal' of the responsibility in the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish, however 72.0%, therefore, feel that they are currently assigned the 'main responsibility or a 'good deal' of the responsibility. A small percentage (12.0%) think that teachers should have the 'main responsibility' in promoting Irish but over twice this amount feel they are currently assigned the main responsibility (26.7%). This points to an early awareness of the responsibility placed on teachers in promoting Irish and their relative isolation in this role.

At times though, some contradictory views are expressed throughout the questionnaire. The majority (84%) describe the exposure to *Gaeltacht* culture as an 'important' or 'very important' learning outcome of the *Gaeltacht* placement and a minority would like to expose their own class to aspects of *Gaeltacht* culture in the future (19.2%). Few agree that *'It is necessary to know about Irish culture in order to speak Irish'* (13.3%) and yet the majority agree that particular elements of culture should be included in the teaching of Irish (e.g. Irish songs, dance and games). Finally the vast majority (93.3%) agree that *'Everyone can learn to speak Irish'* but 44.0% expect Irish to be 'difficult' or 'very difficult' teach.

We see elevated levels of agreement with certain items for teachers with self-reported high oral proficiency. Significant correlations exist in relation to beliefs that Irish is easy to learn and that Irish people think this is important. Significant correlations exist in relation to some items that reflect positive attitudes to the Irish language and Irish speakers, and also attitudes to learning Irish. Finally significant correlations exist in relation to views on the obligatory nature of Irish, aspects of teacher proficiency and views on the role and responsibility of the teacher in promoting Irish. In general, teachers reporting high oral proficiency also report more favourable dispositions to each of these areas.

4.7.2 Overview of Group 1 Findings regarding Stability and Change from Interviews

Data from the interviews shows that beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions are generally stable after school and *Gaeltacht* placement. As mentioned previously, several factors can influence beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions over the course of the year. Teachers were asked specifically in the interviews, however, to reflect on the contribution of school and *Gaeltacht* placement on this views reported at the beginning of the year. Teachers perceive school placement to influence their beliefs and role perceptions. These changes happen in relation to their expectations of children based on gender, educational needs and language capacity. They do not report much impact of this key experience on attitudes to Irish. Conversely, teachers report the *Gaeltacht* to have an influence to a certain extent on attitudes to the Irish language and to Irish speakers, namely that they become more positive. Teachers do not report this experience to contribute to their perception as a speaker of Irish. They perceive the *Gaeltacht* experience to influence their identity construction to an extent as an Irish person. They report, however, little influence on their beliefs about teaching Irish based on this experience.

The optimism with which pre-service teachers begin initial teacher education is mostly maintained. Some changes occur in relation to the way they feel Irish should be taught e.g. including cultural elements. Where attitudinal changes occur, they are mostly in a more favourable direction e.g. attitudes becoming more favourable to Irish speakers. In relation to role perceptions, teachers become more aware of the responsibility placed on them in promoting Irish following their first school placement. They are also more conscious of the effort and investment that needs to be made in providing an Irish-speaking environment and nurturing positive attitudes to Irish.

Teachers favourably anticipate the two key experiences of school placement and *Gaeltacht* placement. Reactions to the *Gaeltacht* placement are generally very positive and highlight include the social aspect of mixing with peers, and to a lesser extent with people in the target language community. Reactions to the *Gaeltacht* placement are similar across the group with teachers by and large experiencing the same programme. Reactions to the first classroom teaching experience during school placement, are more varied but still quite positive. Some of the changes that are reported to occur during initial teacher education are linked to specific experiences on school placement e.g. due to the fact that they happen to be working with girls and boys, children with SEN or EAL learners. Because these placements are for relatively short periods of time, the level of change may not be as great as that which is reported to occur during first year of in-service practice presumably when the teacher has gained more experience in the role.

In conclusion, teachers report that changes in beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions relating to Irish occur during the first year of initial teacher education. They report further that some changes are linked to experiences of school and *Gaeltacht* placement, with school placement influencing beliefs and role perceptions, while *Gaeltacht* placement influences attitudes, though other more general factors such as maturation and personal and professional experiences may also play a role. Optimism about their future role and positive attitudes to the Irish language are broadly maintained but teachers are more cognisant of the challenges involved in their role particularly in relation to their role in promoting Irish, nurturing positive attitudes amongst children, and the demands placed on them in relation to teacher proficiency.

Chapter 5

Later Changes in Teachers' Views: Cross-sectional and Longitudinal Comparisons

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter we continue tracking the evolution of beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions in teachers of Irish, focussing this time on changes which have occurred by the end of the three-year programme, but looking also at evidence for any subsequent change during early in-service practice. This time, we make use of cross sectional as well as longitudinal comparisons. As outlined at the beginning of Chapter 4, data or information from two sources are to be reported and analysed in the present chapter: sources (iii) and (iv) as outlined in Section 4.0.

> (iii) Data relating to changes in beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions over the entire three-year period of teacher education derived from a cross-sectional comparison between questionnaire results for Group 1 (beginning initial teacher education) and Group 2 (just finishing their final year and about to begin professional practice proper). This includes a comparison of early anticipated reactions to classroom and *Gaeltacht* experiences with later reflections on actual experiences at the end of three years.

> (iv) Information derived from an interview designed to explore changes in beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions during the second term of professional practice immediately following the completion of initial teacher education. The approach here is longitudinal, with Group 2 participants being invited to consider their questionnaire responses made at the end of initial teacher education – that is in (iii) above - and then being asked which, if any, beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions have changed in the interim.

In the tables presented in Chapter 5, only the numeric results (as percentages) of responses obtained for the collapsed 'strongly agree' and 'agree' categories are shown. The asterisked values indicating the presence of a statistically significant difference pertains to the overall threefold set of responses, as explained above. In the commentary below, we will look at both cases where statistically significant changes are/ are not found, but also in some cases where there is a clear shift (or lack of shift) in responses at the higher end of the scale (in the 'strongly

agree/ agree' category of responses shown in the tables) even where these do not correspond to statistical shifts (or lack of shifts) across the three categories of responses stated.

These data on later changes in beliefs, attitudes and perceptions, as well as the anticipated and actual experience of school and *Gaeltacht* placement, are presented in the following order:

Section 5.1: Comparing Views at the Beginning and End of Initial Teacher Education (Questionnaire 1 and 2)
Section 5.2: School and *Gaeltacht* Experiences: Anticipations versus Terminal Reflections (Questionnaire 1 and 2; Interview 1 and Questionnaire 2)
Section 5.3: Change and Stability during Early Professional Practice (Questionnaire 2 and Interview 2)
Section 5.4: Summary and Conclusions

In order to identify changes and stability in beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions, approaches used by other researchers were replicated, drawing in particular on those that pinpoint changes in views (as in the studies conducted by Amuzie and Winke, 2011; Horwitz, 1985; Riley, 2009; Tanaka and Ellis, 2003). These researchers also recommend the inclusion of a qualitative dimension to allow respondents to reflect on any change that has occurred.

Using these approaches as a guide, the data from questionnaires i.e. the answer options selected by each respondent on the Likert scale, were analysed using SPSS. Cronbach's alpha was also conducted to test inter-item reliability in two scales used (*Attitude to Irish Speakers* and *Attitude to Learning Irish*). Following this, any statistically significant changes in these two mean scale scores with $p \leq 0.05$ were identified.

In analysing single item statistics, a different approach was chosen. It will be recalled that items in the BALLI do not yield a composite score and so these items, as well as a number of other items that form part of established scales, or original questionnaire items specifically developed for this study, are analysed discretely. Levene's Test to assess equality of variance was first undertaken, to establish whether or not there was an equal variance in Group 1 and Group 2 for each item. The categories of 'strongly agree' and 'agree' were combined, as were the categories of 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree'. The neutral category 'neither agree nor disagree' was retained. Hence, the previously five-point scale now has three points. In the case of the scale *Attitude to Learning Irish*, however, there were seven points. Therefore, the categories of 'strongly agree', 'moderately agree' and 'mildly agree' were combined to form a new category 'agree'. Similarly the categories of 'strongly disagree', 'moderately disagree' and 'mildly disagree'

were combined to form a new category 'disagree'. Again, the neutral category 'neither agree nor disagree' was retained. Hence, the seven-point scale now also has three points.

The data below are the results of Chi Square tests undertaken to examine any significant differences across these three points: 'agree' (strongly agree/ agree or strongly agree/ agree/ moderately agree), 'neither agree nor disagree', and 'disagree' (disagree or strongly disagree or moderately disagree/ disagree/ strongly disagree and) with each item.

Statistically significant changes emerging from the Chi Square tests (i.e. with a $p \leq 0.05$) are reported. For consistency in analysis the same test for significant was used with all items. Chi square tests reveal significant changes in the whole population across the three points – 'agree', 'disagree' and 'neither agree nor disagree'. The statistical measures don't necessarily capture the shift at the top end of the scale, i.e. percentages agreeing with a particular item, which are illustrated in the following tables. At times, there may appear to be a substantial difference in the proportions agreeing with a particular item but this does not prove to be statistically significant across the entire population. Conversely, at times there appears to be little difference between the percentages agreeing with an item but this difference is significant when examined across the entire population for the three scale points. Where these cases emerge in the subsequent tables, attention is drawn to trends in percentages agreeing with items (i.e. focussing on the high end of the scale only) which may be indicative of the direction of change.

It is hoped that by providing the statistically significant results, as well as some of the declines in the response category 'Strongly agree - agree' that fit with the general trends observed, a more thorough picture of the evolution of views will be given.

Results for each of these indices of stability and change are presented in this chapter but a more comprehensive account of the testing and coding is available in the appendices on the accompanying cd:

Appendix D: Coded Responses from Group 1 to Open-Ended Supplementary Questionnaire Items

Appendix E: Thematic Coding of Group 1 Interviews with Representative Comments

Appendix F: Full Collection of Interview Transcripts from Group 1

Appendix G: Coded Responses from Group 2 to Open-Ended Supplementary Questionnaire Items

Appendix H: Thematic Coding of Group 2 Interviews with Representative Comments

Appendix I: Full Collection of Interview Transcripts from Group 2

Appendix J: Results from Chi Square Tests (Questionnaire 1 and 2)

Appendix K: Results from Correlation Tests between High Oral Proficiency and Views (Group 1)

Appendix L: Results from Correlation Tests between High Oral Proficiency and Views (Group 2)

5.1. Comparing Views at the Beginning and End of Initial Teacher Education (Questionnaire 1 and 2)

In this section we compare questionnaire data for Group 1 and Group 2. As we will see, Group 1 (beginning of initial teacher education) and Group 2 (end) tend to have generally similar beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions across the various domains explored. Where difference in percentages of teachers selecting a particular answer option occur, more often than not they are not statistically significant across the three response categories. The answer option most frequently selected by respondents is also, generally speaking, the same for the two groups. Comparisons between Group 1 and Group 2 responses in relation to beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions are now presented. Cases where there is a statistically significant change, across the three collapsed scales, between the beginning and end of initial teacher education in relation to a particular item are highlighted with an asterisk within each group of items. As we will see, statistically significant changes emerge in relation to beliefs in the following domains: *Difficulty of Language Learning*, *Learning and Communication Strategies*, *Nature of Language Learning*, and *Foreign Language Aptitude*. A small number of changes occur in relation to items in the scales *Attitude to Irish Speakers* and *Attitude to Learning Irish.* Finally, some significant changes occur in the area of role perceptions, particularly concerning aspects of Irish as an ethnic symbol, teacher proficiency and the role and responsibility of the teacher in promoting Irish. Other declines at the top of the response categories in relation to attitudes and general support for the revitalisation of Irish and its role in primary education are also evident.

5.1.1 Beliefs: Stability and Change in Initial Teacher Education

There is a general, though not universal, tendency towards stability in teachers' beliefs about learning and teaching Irish from the beginning to the end of initial teacher education. The table 5.1.1.1 and the following tables show numeric (percentage) results for the high end ('agree/ strongly agree') responses only, and the asterisk shown with particular responses shows the significance of differences across all three sets of responses. Cases do arise where the reader could potentially be confused, as on occasion there could appear to be a mismatch between the numbers shown and the statistical results – i.e., in that the statistical difference can occur even when numeric differences (for these high end responses) appear to be minimal (and vice versa). In the discussion of these results therefore, such striking 'mismatches' are pointed out. Note that what is being tested for significance is changes across the 3 groups ('strongly agree/ agree',

'neither agree nor disagree', 'strongly disagree/ disagree'). While tables in Chapter 5 show percentage differences only for the high end ('Strongly agree/ agree') of responses.

Table 5.1.1.1
Percentages of pre-service teachers at the beginning and end of initial teacher education agreeing (strongly agree or agree) with five statements regarding beliefs about *Difficulty of Language Learning*

Questionnaire Item	Beginning of programme Group 1 n = 75	End of programme Group 2 n = 91
3. Some languages are easier to learn than others.	86.7	81.1
*15. It is easier to speak than to understand Irish.	14.7	8.9
19. It is easier to read and write in Irish than to speak and understand it.	13.3	12.1
*25. Learning the Irish language is 'very difficult' or 'difficult'.	21.3	42.9
26. If someone spent one hour a day learning Irish, it would take them 1 -5 years to speak Irish very well.	74.7	68.5

*Q 15: X^2 (2, N= 165) = 6.19, p ≤.05
*Q 25: X^2 (2, N= 166) = 8.86, p ≤.05

As we can see from table 5.1.1.1 above, in relation to the *Difficulty of Language Learning*, responses to three out of the five items do not change significantly by the end of initial teacher education. Teachers at the end of their three-year programme still generally agree (81.1%) with those at the beginning of the programme (86.7%) that some languages are easier to learn than others. There is relatively little change in the small minorities who feel it is easier to read and write in Irish than to speak and understand it (13.3% at the beginning, 12.1% at the end). The majority of Group 1 (74.7%) and Group 2 (68.5%) agree that if someone If someone spent one hour a day learning Irish, it would it take them 1- 5 years to speak Irish very well, though it appears that teachers in Group 2 may begin to consider that the process will take longer.

There is a fall in the percentage who agree that it is easier to speak than to understand Irish (14.7% at the beginning and 8.9% at the end, X^2 (2, N= 165) = 6.19, p ≤.05), and twice as many pre-service teachers at the end of their course think that learning Irish is 'very difficult' or 'difficult (X^2 (2, N= 166) = 8.86, p ≤.05).

When it comes to *Learning and Communication Strategies*, responses to three out of the five belief statements do not change. As we see in Table 5.1.1.2, the proportions of teachers believing that you shouldn't say anything in Irish until you can say it correctly are small and little changed from the beginning (5.3%) to the end (2.2%) of the programme. Two items concerning

more communicative approaches to teaching do not change significantly, yet there is a trend for teachers to be more in favour of allowing children time to practise the language and teachers are in favour of allowing mistakes during this stage of language development. Repetition and practice is viewed by the majority of teachers at the end of their programme as being important (92.3%), a higher percentage than at the beginning (84.0%), though there is no significant change across the three response categories. Over half of teachers in Group 1 (57.3%) believe that it is okay to guess if you do not know a word in Irish and there is an increase in pre-service teachers reporting this belief in Group 2 (68.1%), though the change is not significant across the entire data set. These changes in percentages who 'strongly agree' or 'agree' do point however to the movement of beliefs in the direction of a more communicative approach.

Table 5.1.1.2
Percentages of teachers at the beginning and end of initial teacher education agreeing (strongly agree or agree) with statements regarding *Learning and Communication Strategies*

Questionnaire Items	Beginning of programme Group 1	End of programme Group 2
*4. It is necessary to speak Irish with an excellent accent.	21.3	5.5
6. You shouldn't say anything in Irish until you can say it correctly.	5.3	2.2
9. It's okay to guess if you don't know a word in Irish.	57.3	68.1
11. When learning Irish, it is important to repeat and practise a lot.	84.0	92.3
*12. If you are allowed to make mistakes in Irish at the beginning, it will be hard to get rid of them later on.	50.7	31.9

*Q4: X^2 (2, N= 166) = 13.54, p ≤.05
*Q12: X^2 (2, N= 166) = 8.00, p ≤.05

Some statistically significant changes do occur across the three answer categories, however. In relation to the necessity to speak Irish with an excellent accent, the minority of Group 1 teachers holding this view at the beginning (21.3%) falls to a still lower level among those completing the programme (5.5%) (X^2 (2, N= 166) = 13.54, p ≤.05). In addition, just under a third of teachers (31.9%) finishing their programme feel that if you are allowed to make mistakes in Irish at the beginning, it will be hard to get rid of them later on, a considerable fall on the 57.3% of teachers beginning their programme holding this view X^2 (2, N= 166) = 8.00, p ≤.05 .

Table 5.1.1.3 shows the percentage of teachers who agree (strongly agree or agree) with statements regarding the *Nature of Language Learning*. As can be seen from this table, beliefs do not change significantly in the case of four of the six items. A small minority in beginning Group 1 teachers (13.3%) believe it is necessary to know about Irish culture in order to speak Irish, and this

amount has decreased, though not significantly, by the end of the programme (6.7%) showing the tendency to marginalise the role of culture when learning Irish. The majority of teachers in Group 1 and Group 2 believe that it is better to learn Irish in the natural Irish-speaking environment of the *Gaeltacht* (72.0% and 74.7% respectively). Finally, the small minority who believe that learning Irish mostly involves translating from English remains stable from the beginning until the end (10.7% and 10.0% respectively), and who believe that learning Irish is mostly a matter of learning grammar rules (36.0% and 31.9% respectively). The fall in teachers agreeing with these items, i.e. changes at the high end of the scale only, fit with the general tendency to support communicative approaches to teaching at the end of initial teacher education.

Table 5.1.1.3
Percentages of teachers at the beginning and end of initial teacher education agreeing (strongly agree or agree) with statements regarding the *Nature of Language Learning*

Questionnaire Items	Beginning of programme Group 1	End of programme Group 2
5. It is necessary to know about Irish culture in order to speak Irish.	13.3	6.7
8. It is better to learn Irish in a natural speaking environment i.e. the *Gaeltacht*.	72.0	74.7
*10. Learning Irish is mostly a matter of learning a lot of new vocabulary words.	36.0	27.5
13. Learning Irish is mostly a matter of learning a lot of grammar rules.	36.0	31.9
*16. Learning Irish is different from studying other school subjects.	66.7	73.6
17. Learning Irish is mostly a matter of translating from English.	10.7	10.0

*Q10: X^2 (2, N= 166) = 7.29, p ≤.05
*Q16: X^2 (2, N= 165) = 9.39, p ≤.05

In terms of methods or approaches to learning Irish, there are two statistically significant movements across the three response categories. A somewhat smaller percentage of those completing the programme, than of those at the beginning, approve of more traditional methods of learning Irish the beginning. Under a third of teachers in Group 2 believe that learning Irish is mostly a matter of learning new vocabulary (27.5%), compared to 36.0% at the beginning (X^2 (2, N= 166) = 7.29, p ≤.05). The second significant change relates to a belief that learning Irish is different from studying other subjects with more teachers at the end of the programme (73.6%) agreeing compared to 66.7% at the beginning (X^2 (2, N= 165) = 9.39, p ≤.05).

Table 5.1.1.4
Percentages of teachers at the beginning and end of initial teacher education agreeing (strongly agree or agree) with statements regarding *Foreign Language Aptitude*

Questionnaire Items	Beginning of programme Group 1 n = 75	End of programme Group 2 n – 91
3. It is easier for children than adults to learn Irish.	86.7	86.8
4. Some people are born with a special ability which helps them learn languages.	56.0	61.5
8. It is easier for someone who already speaks Irish to learn another language.	28.0	36.3
*14. Girls are better than boys at learning Irish.	1.3	1.1
21. People who are good at mathematics and science are not good at learning Irish.	26.7	24.2
25. People who speak Irish are very intelligent.	5.3	5.5
26. Irish people are good at learning Irish.	13.3	7.6
27. Everyone can learn to speak Irish.	93.3	95.6

*Q14: X^2 (2, N= 165) = 8.72, p ≤.05

Table 5.1.1.4 above shows the percentage of teachers who agree (strongly agree or agree) with statements regarding *Foreign Language Aptitude*. Beliefs regarding seven of the eight items do not change significantly across the entire data set by the end of initial teacher education. The majority of Group 1 and Group 2 believe it is easier for children than adults to learn Irish (86.7% and 86.8% respectively). Similar proportions of teachers at the beginning and end of initial teacher education agree that people who are good at mathematics and science are not good at learning Irish (26.7% and 24.2%), that people who speak Irish are very intelligent (5.3% and 5.5%), and that Irish people are good at learning Irish (13.3% and 7.6%). The overwhelming majority though believe that everyone can learn to speak Irish and this remains so for those beginning the programme (93.3%) and those who have completed initial teacher education (95.6%). There are some increases at the high end of the scale. Over half of Group 1 (56.0%) believes that some people are born with a special ability which helps them to learn languages, compared to 61.5% in Group 2. There is also an increase in the percentage of teachers who agree that it is easier for someone who already speaks Irish to learn another language (28.0% at the beginning compared to 36.3% at the end), though there is no statistically significant change across the three groupings of response options.

One statistically significant difference does occur. This related to the proposition that girls are better than boys at learning Irish. The difference is significant, ($p \leq .0.05$) as can be seen in Appendix J available on the accompanying cd. The difference arises in the considerably larger numbers in Group 2 who respond 'disagree or strongly disagree' as opposed to 'neither agree nor disagree'. Note that this difference does not show up in the 'agree or strongly agree' responses shown in Table 5.1.1.4. In fact, note that the apparent slight difference showing up in the table is only an artefact of the fact that this is shown as a percentage value (1.3% and the beginning and 1.1% at the end), and that the size of the group is different.

The final two belief statements presented in Table 5.1.1.5 concern *Motivation and Expectation* to learn Irish. No significant change emerges in relation to either item across the entire data set though there are some changes in the 'strongly agree- agree' category. A third of teachers (37.4%) in Group 2 believe that Irish people think it is important to speak Irish compared with 42.7% in Group 1. The majority of both groups agree that learning to speak Irish very well will help them get a teaching job (82.7% at the beginning and 72.5% at the end).

Table 5.1.1.5
Percentages of beginning pre-service teachers at the beginning and end of initial teacher education agreeing (strongly agree or agree) with two statements regarding *Motivation and Expectations*

Questionnaire Items	Beginning of programme Group 1 n = 75	End of programme Group 2 n = 91
21. Irish people think it is important to speak Irish.	42.7	37.4
18. If I learn to speak Irish very well, it will help me get a teaching job.	82.7	72.5

As we see from the five tables above some significant changes occur across the three collapsed response categories in relation to four of the subscales in the BALLI (*Difficulty of Language Learning*, *Language and Communication Strategies*, *Nature of Language Learning* and *Foreign Language Aptitude*), amounting to seven significant changes in total. Changes at the top end of the scale, though not significant across the three collapsed response categories, are further evidence of change. It is clear that a lot of beliefs about learning Irish, however, do not change significantly between the beginning and end of initial teacher education. Examples of beliefs that are relatively stable from the beginning (Group 1) to the end (Group 2) of the programme are that the majority of Group 1 and 2 also believe that anybody can learn Irish and that it is more effective to learn Irish in the *Gaeltacht* than in a traditional classroom. The existence of foreign language aptitude is only supported by a minority. When it comes to specific strategies to learn

Irish, most agree with communicative approaches to language learning e.g. allowing learners to make mistakes, an importance on practice and repetition, while only a minority believe that you should rely on grammar translation approaches when learning a language.

5.1.2 Attitudes: Stability and Change in Initial Teacher Education

This section compares Group 1 and Group 2 responses to two scales: *Attitude to Irish Speakers* and *Attitude to learning Irish*. The former explores their integrative orientation and perceptions of Irish speakers, while the later explores attitudes to the actual learning situation. The scale *Attitude to Irish Speakers* is discussed first.

5.1.2.1 Stability and Change in Attitudes to Irish Speakers

The mean scale score for *Attitudes to Irish Speakers*, which can range from 1-5, is 4.0 amongst beginning pre-service teachers. Among Group 2 teachers at the end on initial teacher education the mean is higher (4.3) but there is no statistically significant difference between these two scores. Responses to individual items in are illustrated in Table 5.1.2.1. Responses to nine out of the ten items do not change significantly across the three collapsed response categories, though on closer inspection we do see a movement towards less positive attitudes to Irish speakers at the high end of the scale.

A majority of Group 1 and 2 believe that the Irish language is an important part of Ireland and the Irish people (93.3% and 94.5% respectively), that if Ireland lost the Irish language and the Irish way of life, it would really be a great loss (96.0% and 96.7% respectively), that people who speak Irish help to make the Irish way of life special and different from other countries (90.7% and 88.9%), and that people who speak Irish help to keep alive an old and beautiful part of the Irish way of life (93.3% and 95.6%). A substantial minority of teachers believe that people who speak Irish are friendly and easy to get along with (26.7% at the beginning and 30.8% at the end), that people who speak Irish are friendly, nice and interesting (37.3% at the beginning 31.1% at the end), but less agree that some of the best people in Ireland are Irish speakers by the end of initial teacher education (42.7% at the beginning and 29.7% at the end). Despite a majority of Group 1 (78.7%) agreeing that the more they get to know people who speak Irish, the more they want to learn there is a slight drop in this proportion for Group 2 (70.8%). A similar fall occurs in relation to wanting to know more Irish speakers (76.6% at the beginning compared to 67.0% at the end) which could be linked to experiences in the *Gaeltacht*. These falls at the high end of the scale, though not significant across the three collapsed categories, do show a decline in interest in getting to know Irish speakers.

Results from the Chi square test highlight one significant change that occurs regarding the view that people in Ireland who speak English only should try harder to learn Irish. As shown in Table 5.1.2.1, over half of teachers at the end of initial teacher education (56.0%) agree that people in our country who only speak English should try harder to learn Irish, a fall from 77.3% at the beginning (X^2 (2, N= 166) = 8.27, p ≤.05).

Table 5.1.2.1
Percentages of teachers at the beginning and end of initial teacher education agreeing (strongly agree or agree) with statements regarding *Attitudes to Irish speakers*
*Q6: X^2 (2, N= 166) = 8.27, p ≤.05

5.1.2.2 Stability and Change in Attitude to Learning Irish

Questionnaire Items	Beginning of programme Group 1	End of programme Group 2
1. Most people who speak Irish are friendly and easy to get along with.	26.7	30.8
2. The more I get to know people who speak Irish, the more I want to learn it.	78.7	70.8
3. The Irish language is an important part of Ireland and the Irish people.	93.3	94.5
4. Some of the best people in Ireland are Irish speakers.	42.7	29.7
5. If Ireland lost the Irish language and the Irish way of life, it would really be a great loss.	96.0	96.7
*6. People in our country who only speak English should try harder to learn Irish.	77.3	56.0
7. People who speak Irish help to make the Irish way of life special and different from other countries.	90.7	88.9
8. People who speak Irish help to keep alive an old and beautiful part of the Irish way of life.	93.3	95.6
9. I would like to know more people who speak Irish.	76.6	67.0
10. People who speak Irish are friendly, nice and interesting.	37.3	31.1

The scale *Attitude to Learning Irish* runs from 1-7, as opposed to 1-5 in the other scales and individual answer options used in the questionnaire. Both Group 1 and Group 2 report a very high mean scale score for *Attitude to Learning Irish* at the beginning and end of initial teacher education, 6.0 and 5.8 respectively. Though the difference in mean scale score from beginning to end is not significant, it is noteworthy that it is greater than the mean scale score reported for other Leaving Certificate students in English-medium schools studying the ordinary and higher level syllabus (3.9 and 4.8 respectively). This shows that pre-service teachers enter and leave initial teacher education with a very positive attitude to the experience of learning Irish. All

attitude statements and responses are presented below in Table 5.1.2.2. In the case of nine out of the ten items, there is no statistically significant change in proportions agreeing with the statement. Nevertheless, we can see a decline in favourable attitudes to learning Irish at the high end of the scale, though this is not significant across the threefold set of responses.

Table 5.1.2.2
Percentages of teachers at the beginning and end of initial teacher education agreeing (strongly moderately or slightly) with items regarding
Attitude to Learning Irish

Questionnaire Items	Beginning of programme Group 1 n =75	End of programme Percentage of Group 2 n =91
16. Learning Irish is a waste of time.	2.7	3.3
17. When I leave college, I shall give up this study of Irish entirely because I am not interested in it.	1.3	2.2
*18. I really enjoy learning Irish.	90.7	75.8
19. I love learning Irish.	82.7	74.7
20. Irish is an important part of the school programme.	96.0	91.2
21. Learning Irish is really great.	88.0	79.1
22. I hate Irish.	4.0	5.5
23. I would rather spend my time on subjects other than Irish.	14.7	19.8
24. I think that learning Irish is boring.	8.0	14.3
25. I plan to learn as much Irish as possible.	85.3	75.8

* Q18: X^2 (2, N= 166) = 6.39, p ≤.05
Cronbach's Alpha: Group 1 α =.904; Group 2 α = .898

A majority of teachers at the beginning of initial teacher education agree that they love learning Irish and this falls slightly by the end (82.7% and 74.7%), as does the view that that Irish is an important part of the school programme (96.0% at the beginning and 91.2% at the end) and that learning Irish is really great (88.0% at the beginning and 79.1% at the end). Only a minority of teachers in Group 1 and 2 agree with any of the negatively worded statements concerning the learning of Irish e.g. that learning Irish is a waste of time (2.7% and 3.3% respectively), that they hate Irish (4.0% and 5.5% respectively), but slightly more teachers at the end would rather spend time on subjects other than Irish (14.7% at the beginning and 19.8% at the end) and slightly more also think that learning Irish is boring (14.3% compared to 8.0% at the beginning). Only a very

small minority in either group, however, agree that when they leave college, they will give up studying Irish entirely because they are not interested in it (1.3% and 2.2% respectively).

As already mentioned, no significant change was found between Group 1 and Group 2 in relation to the mean scale score for *Attitude to Learning Irish,* although a statistically significant change was found in relation to one item in this scale: the proportion of teachers agreeing that they really enjoy learning Irish (90.7% at the beginning and 75.8% at the end) (X^2 (2, N= 166) = 6.39, $p \leq .05$).

As can be seen in the two tables above, very positive general attitudes to learning Irish are maintained during initial teacher education, indeed the mean scale score for both *Attitude to Irish Speakers* and *Attitude to Learning Irish* does not change significantly during the course of the programme. We also see from these tables that responses to most attitude items between the beginning and end of initial teacher education are generally positive but this wanes somewhat by the end of their programme.

5.1.3 Role Perceptions: Stability and Change in Initial Teacher Education

Results from four different aspects of role perceptions are now presented: Irish as an ethnic symbol, the obligatory nature of Irish, role and responsibilities of the teacher in promoting Irish, and teacher proficiency.

5.1.3.1 Irish as an Ethnic Symbol

Teachers were asked to respond to a group of items concerning Irish as an ethnic symbol. As we see in Table 5.1.3.1, there is no significant change in the proportions agreeing with three out of the four statements concerning Irish as an ethnic symbol though we do see a slight decrease in support for its cultural value. The majority in Group 1 and 2 agree with certain statements regarding the cultural value of Irish. 90.7% of teachers at the beginning of their programmes that without Irish, Ireland would certainly lose its identity as a separate culture compared to 76.9% at the end. As well as this, 68.9% of teachers at the end agree that Ireland would not really be Ireland without Irish-speaking people compared to 78.7% at the beginning. Just over a quarter (26.7%) of Group 1 agree that no real person can be against the revival of Irish compared with 19.8% of Group 2. Predictably, given this extreme wording, the percentages agreeing are relatively low compared to previous surveys using the more reasonable wording (Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin, 1984 (73%); 1994 (66%). Falls in the category 'strongly agree – agree' generally reflect less support for the value of Irish as an ethnic symbol.

One statistically significant change occurs in relation to percentages agreeing that it is necessary to speak Irish in order to understand Irish culture (32.0% at the beginning and 20.9%) at the end (X^2 (2, N= 166) = 8.29, p ≤.05). This is highlighted in Table 5.1.3.1

Table 5.1.3.1
Percentages of teachers at the beginning and end of initial teacher education agreeing (strongly agree or agree) with items regarding *Irish as an Ethnic Symbol*

Questionnaire Items	Beginning of programme Group 1 n = 71	End of programme Group 2 n = 91
1. No real person can be against the revival of Irish.	26.7	19.8
*2. To really understand Irish culture, one must speak Irish.	32.0	20.9
5. Without Irish, Ireland would certainly lose its identity as a separate culture.	90.7	76.9
6. Ireland would not really be Ireland without Irish-speaking people.	78.7	68.9

*Q2: X^2 (2, N= 166) = 8.29, p ≤.05

It is therefore clear that significant changes do not generally occur across the three collapsed response categories in the extent to which teachers identify with the Irish language as an ethnic symbol during initial teacher education, but data from the 'strongly agree – agree' category, as was shown in relation to attitudes above, indicates that this support weakens somewhat throughout their programme. Significant differences are found in relation to one item, concerning the need to speak Irish to understand Irish culture, and the proportions agreeing with this item are also lower than the proportions observed in other language surveys conducted in Ireland (Ó Riagáin, 1986).

5.1.3.2 Obligatory Nature of Irish

The group of items used in this part of the questionnaire concerns the teaching of Irish and its obligatory nature in primary schools. As we see in Table 5.1.3.2, the majority of teachers generally think that all children should have to learn Irish (72.0% at the beginning and 70.3% at the end). The vast majority of both groups also agree that all primary teachers should be obliged to teach Irish, though this proportion decreases somewhat throughout initial teacher education (90.7% at the beginning and 85.7% at the end) as does the view that if Irish were better taught in the schools, more people would speak it (92.0% at the beginning and 84.6% at the end). A slightly higher proportion of teachers in Group 2 think that children with special education needs should not be obliged to learn Irish (26.4% compared to 17.3% at the beginning). Note that despite the

fall in percentages agreeing with these items, there is no significant change across the three categories of responses.

We see in Table 5.1.3.2 that significant changes occur in relation to two items. In cases where parents don't want children to learn Irish 38.9% of Group 2 feel that children should still be obliged to learn Irish compared to over half of teachers in Group 1 (58.7%) (X^2 (2, N= 165) = 6.44, p ≤.05). There is also a significant fall by the end of initial teacher education in the number of teachers who think that children for whom English is an additional language should not be obliged to learn Irish (20.0% compared to 11.0%) (X^2 (2, N= 166) = 9.55 , p ≤.05).

Table 5.1.3.2
Percentages of teachers at the beginning and end of initial teacher education agreeing (strongly agree or agree) with statements regarding the obligatory nature of Irish

Questionnaire Items	Beginning of programme Group 1 n = 75	End of programme Group 2 n = 91
*5. Children for whom English is an additional language should not be obliged to learn Irish.	20.0	11.0
6. All children should learn Irish.	72.0	70.3
*7. Children should learn Irish, even if their parents don't want them to.	58.7	38.9
8. If Irish were better taught in the schools, more people would speak it.	92.0	84.6
9. All primary school teachers should be obliged to teach Irish.	90.7	85.7
10. Children with special education needs should not have to learn Irish.	17.3	26.4

*Q5: X^2 (2, N= 166) = 9.55 , p ≤.05
*Q7: X^2 (2, N= 165) = 6.44, p ≤.05

5.1.3.3 Roles and Responsibilities in Teaching Irish

Teachers responded to questions concerning the perceived pride, or otherwise, of taking on the role as primary teacher, the importance of Irish in the primary curriculum, the centrality of being a teacher of Irish in their overall self-image, as well as the role they felt they should have in promoting Irish, and the role they feel they are currently assigned by society. Comparisons between percentages agreeing with the five closed items regarding roles and responsibilities in teaching Irish are presented in Table 5.1.3.3.

Views on these areas are supplemented with responses to open-ended questions. All comments provided in response to open-ended supplementary questions 21, 22, 23, 25 and 26 are available in Appendix G, as well as the thematic coding used, on the accompanying cd. Significant differences in the proportions mentioning any given theme in the open-ended supplementary questions are indicated within an asterisk in Table 5.1.3.4. Please note that where

a percentage is given in relation to the open-ended responses, it refers to the percentage of the entire group (i.e. a percentage of the 91 pre-service teachers) and not the percentage of respondents to this particular question.

Table 5.1.3.3
Percentage of teachers at the beginning and end of initial teacher education agreeing and disagreeing with statements regarding the role of teachers in promoting Irish

Questionnaire Items	Beginning of programme Group 1 n = 75	End of programme Group 2 n = 91
22. I feel very proud/ proud about taking on the professional role and public image of a primary school teacher.	96.0	94.4
23. Irish is one of the most important subjects.	58.7	37.4
24. My role as a teacher of Irish is very central/ central to my image of myself as a primary teacher.	78.7	67.8
25. The primary school teacher is very important/ important in the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish in Ireland.	94.7	96.7
26. The primary teacher *should* have		
(a) the main responsibility for the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish.	12.0	5.6
(b) a good deal of the responsibility for the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish	54.7	65.6
***26. At present, society assigns to teachers**		
*(a) the ***main responsibility*** for the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish	27.0	44.4
(b) ***a good deal*** of the responsibility for the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish	44.9	44.4

*Q26 a: X^2 (2, N= 164) = 6.97, p ≤.05

The overwhelming majority of teachers at the beginning and end report being 'very proud' or 'proud' when thinking about taking on the professional role and public image of a primary school teacher (96.0% at the beginning and 94.4% at the end). The open-ended supplementary parts allowed teachers to elaborate on responses. 80.2% of teachers elaborated on the pride they felt in taking on their future role. These reasons are mostly related to the same ones identified by Group 1. Almost half of teachers at the end of their programme believe that teachers are well respected in society (51.6% compared to 45.3% at the beginning). Over a third of teachers at the end are proud to get the experience to work with children (34.1% compared to 34.7% at the beginning). A small minority at the beginning and end report an early desire to become a teacher (4.0% and 5.5% respectively). It will be recalled that a small minority of teachers at the beginning commented on positive experiences in schooling (2.6%) but this theme did not emerge in

responses provided by teachers at the end of their programme. A small minority of teachers at the end mention two issues that affect the perceived pride in taking on this future role: criticisms made of teachers (2.2%) and general anxiety in taking on this future role (2.2%).

As we saw in Table 5.1.3.3, over a third at the end of their programme consider Irish to be one of the most important subjects in the curriculum (37.4%) which is less, but not significantly so, than the proportion at the beginning (58.7%). Though there is not a significant change in views across the threefold set of categories, we do see that the direction in which this view changes is suggestive. Greater classroom experience or the general maturation process as they advance through their programme may offer them more opportunities to consider other educational priorities and other needs of children, apart from Irish. 88.9% of teachers responded to the open-ended part of the questions and the reasons supporting this view are by and large the same as in Group 1: Importance of Irish for cultural identity (41.0% compared to 38.6% at the beginning), and a view that English, Irish and mathematics are the most important subjects (33.1% compared to 25.3% at the beginning). Of this 33.1% in Group 2 however, 10.1% associated the importance of Irish with primary and secondary education and not necessarily with the "real world" (compared to 4.0% at the beginning). We see again a more nuanced view of educational priorities of Group 2 in their open-ended answers perhaps because they have had greater opportunity to reflect on the curriculum by this stage. Under a third report that Irish is not more important than other subjects (27.5%) which is significantly more compared to the very small minority reporting this (2.6%) at the beginning (X^2 (2, N= 166) = 18.576, $p \leq .05$).

Being a teacher of Irish is 'very central' or 'central' to most people's overall identity as a primary teacher (67.8% compared to 78.7% at the beginning). Though the majority still express the centrality of Irish in their overall role, this fall at the high end of the scale may be explained by their awareness of their role in fostering the holistic development of children and not just specific subjects. It also fits with their reluctance to assume the main responsibility for promoting Irish. 74.7% of teachers chose to provide more detail in the open-ended part of the question. Some spoke about their role in inspiring a love of Irish language and culture amongst children (31.1% compared to 33.3% at the beginning). The centrality of being a teacher of Irish in their overall role is underscored in the open-ended responses where under a third describe it as a key part of role (27.5%) which is significantly more than the small minority (9.3%) expressing this at the beginning (X^2 (2, N= 166) =8.693, $p \leq .05$).

For teachers who were thinking of teaching in Irish-medium schools being a teacher of Irish is seen as a very significant element of their identity (5.5% indicated that they would like to teach in an Irish-medium school compared to 4.0% at the beginning). A very small number stated that the primary teacher is one of the people who first exposes children to Irish (3.3%). A small

number of teachers at the end of initial teacher education, link their desire to be a teacher to their own experiences as learners speaking about negative experiences that they had as learners of Irish and the motivation to become effective teachers of Irish as a result (5.5%). Insecurity in levels of Irish is reported by a small minority at the end also (4.4%).

A very large majority in both groups think that the primary teacher is 'very important' or 'important' in the revitalisation of Irish (96.7% at the end and 94.7% at the beginning). At the beginning 12.0% of teachers think they should have the main responsibility but less than half of this percentage agree with this level of responsibility at the end (5.6%). Though this is not a significant change, it does fit in with the general trend of teachers asserting that the level of responsibility assigned to them is too great. At the beginning, over half (54.7%) of teachers feel that rather than the 'main responsibility' they should have 'a good deal' of the responsibility but by the end almost two-thirds (65.6%) feel they should have 'a good deal' of the responsibility, which again suggests that teachers would be more comfortable with a lesser degree of responsibility. 87.8% of teachers elaborated on this view in the open-ended part of the question, highlighting three reasons why they felt teachers should have some measure of responsibility in the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish. Two of these already emerged in Group 1, but significantly more teachers in Group 2 mentioned the importance of teachers in revitalising and maintaining Irish because children are exposed to Irish at a young age in school (X^2 (2, N= 166) =9.251, p ≤.05). We also see a decline in teachers agreeing '(strongly agree – agree') that schools can compensate for a lack of intergenerational transmission. This decline at the high end of the scale may reveal a greater awareness of their isolation in promoting Irish and a more realistic evaluation of how much the primary teacher can revitalise and maintain Irish:

*Children are exposed to Irish at a young age in school

(24.7% Group 1; 48.4% Group 2)

Schools can compensate for lack of intergenerational transmission

(36.0% Group 1; 23.1% Group 2)

Teachers in Group 2, however, also mention the role of schools in fostering positive attitudes to Irish (26.4%), while at the same time expressing a desire for a more collective effort in society, particularly the need for more support from the government and media (38.5%).

As we saw in Table 5.1.3.3, only one statistically significant change occurs in the closed questionnaire items in relation to the responsibility that teachers perceive society to currently assign to them. Over a quarter of teachers (27.0%) at the beginning of initial teacher education feel they are currently assigned the main responsibility whereas at the end, significantly more feel they are currently assigned the main responsibility (44.4%). In total 71.9% of teachers at the beginning feel they are assigned the 'main responsibility' or 'a good deal of the responsibility',

while 88.8% of teachers at the end feel they are assigned this level of responsibility. This view is further reinforced in the responses to the open-ended question concerning the amount of responsibility they feel they are currently assigned by society. 75.6% of teachers responded to this supplementary part. Over a quarter stress that teachers are key players in revitalising and maintaining Irish (24.2%) but three main issues in implementing this role arise, as had with Group 1. Significantly more teachers in at the end of their programme, however, mention the blame that they perceive to be placed on teachers for low standards of Irish (X^2 (2, N= 166) =8.363, p ≤.05).

Society has unrealistic expectations of teachers

(32.0% Group 1; 45.1% Group 2)

More support is needed for teachers in in exercising their role in relation to Irish

(29.4% Group 1; 26.4% Group 2)

*Teachers are often blamed for low standards of Irish in the general public

(4.0% Group 1; 18.7% Group 2)

Table 5.1.3.4

Percentage of teachers at the beginning and end of initial teacher education raising particular issues regarding the role of teachers in promoting Irish in open-ended supplementary questions

Questionnaire Items	Beginning of programme Group 1 n = 75	End of programme Group 2 n = 91
*22. Irish is not more important than other subjects.	2.6	27.5
*23. Being a teacher of Irish is a key part of my role as a primary teacher.	9.3	27.5
*24. Children are exposed to Irish at a young age in school.	24.7	48.4
*25. Teachers are often blamed for low standards of Irish in the general public.	4.0	18.7

*22: X^2 (2, N= 166) = 18.576, p ≤.05
*23: X^2 (2, N= 166) =8.693, p ≤.05
*24: X^2 (2, N= 166) =9.251, p ≤.05
*25.: X^2 (2, N= 166) =8.363, p ≤.05

5.1.3.4 Views on Teacher Proficiency during Initial Teacher Education

Teachers were asked 5 questions in relation to teacher proficiency in Irish. Four of these questions contain an open-ended component. Responses to closed questionnaire items are presented in Table 5.1.3.5.

Responses to the open-ended questions allow teachers to elaborate on their responses and to reflect on their experiences on five school placements during initial teacher education. Many of the same themes emerge as did with Group 1 when they were first anticipating their

future role. Significant differences in percentages of teachers identifying particular themes in their open-ended responses are presented in Table 5.1.3.6. More teachers in Group 2 in general responded to the open-ended questions than did teachers in Group 1. In general also, Group 2 referred to the curriculum frequently and to certain profiles of learners to support their answers more than Group 1 did.

Table 5.1.3.5
Percentage of teachers at the beginning and end of initial teacher education agreeing with statements regarding teacher proficiency

Questionnaire Items	Beginning of programme Group 1 n =75	End of programme Group 2 n = 91
11. It is very important or important for pre-service teachers to improve their own Irish.	92.0	93.4
*12. I feel that the expectation to teach Irish primarily through Irish is very reasonable or reasonable.	93.2	57.1
13. I feel that the advice to use Irish informally outside of Irish lessons is very reasonable or reasonable.	97.3	100
14. I feel the advice that the teacher should make an effort to teach other subjects through Irish from time to time is very reasonable or reasonable.	57.3	57.1
15. I think the following subjects should be taught bilingually/ Irish only		
Mathematics	20.0	26.4
History	36.0	36.3
Geography	48.0	42.9
Science	24.0	24.2
Irish	17.3	31.9
Visual Arts	65.3	60.4
Music	68.0	69.2
Drama	73.3	69.2
Religion	50.6	49.5
PE	84.0	82.4
SPHE	42.7	29.7

*Q12: X^2 (2, N= 165) = 27.21, p ≤.05

Teachers at beginning and end of initial teacher education overwhelmingly support the notion that teacher proficiency in Irish is a key requirement for the primary teacher's work, as can be seen in the responses to the following items. The vast majority, both at the beginning and end, feel that is 'very important' or 'important' for teachers to improve their own Irish during initial teacher education (92.0% and 93.4% respectively). 84.6% of pre-service teachers in Group 2 elaborated on their answers and seven main themes emerged in their responses, including four themes that had already emerged in Group 1. Significantly more teachers in Group 2 mentioned that proficiency is central to confidence in teaching effectively (X^2 (2, N= 166) =29.351, p ≤.05) and

that proficiency is needed to motivate children and to inspire a love of the language (X^2 (2, N= 166) =12.293, p ≤.05):

*Teacher proficiency in Irish is central to confidence in teaching effectively

(26.5% Group 1; 65.9% Group 2)

* Proficiency is needed to motivate children and to inspire a love of the language

(9.3% Group 1; 31.9% Group 2)

Teachers need to maintain their proficiency throughout career

(4.0% Group 1; 1.1% Group 2)

Table 5.1.3.6
Percentage of teachers at the beginning and end of initial teacher education raising particular issues regarding teacher proficiency in open-ended supplementary questions

Questionnaire Items	Beginning of programme Group 1 n =75	End of programme Group 2 n = 91
11.		
(a) Teacher proficiency in Irish is central to confidence in teaching effectively	26.5	65.9
(b) Proficiency is needed to motivate children and to inspire a love of the language	9.3	31.9
12.		
(a) There is a need for a judicious use of English while teaching Irish	1.0	33.0
(b) Children might not understand and as a result might disengage from lesson	1.0	24.2
14.		
(a) Some subjects are more conducive to CLIL approaches	5.3	24.2
(b) There is a risk of children not understanding	36.0	22.2
(c) CLIL places demands on teacher proficiency	1.3	13.2

11a: X^2 (2, N= 166) =29.351, p ≤.05
11b: X^2 (2, N= 166) =12.293, p ≤.05
12a: X^2 (2, N= 166) =27.09, p ≤.05)
12b: X^2 (2, N= 166) =17.974, p ≤.05
14a: X^2 (2, N= 166) =11.051, p ≤.05
14b: X^2 (2, N= 166) =3.983, p ≤.05
14c: X^2 (2, N= 166) =8.003, p ≤.05

Teachers at beginning and end of initial teacher education overwhelmingly support the notion that teacher proficiency in Irish is a key requirement for the primary teacher's work, as can be seen in the responses to the following items. The vast majority, both at the beginning and end, feel that is 'very important' or 'important' for teachers to improve their own Irish during initial teacher education (92.0% and 93.4% respectively). 84.6% of pre-service teachers in Group 2 elaborated on their answers and seven main themes emerged in their responses, including four

themes that had already emerged in Group 1. Significantly more teachers in Group 2 mentioned that proficiency is central to confidence in teaching effectively (X^2 (2, N= 166) =29.351, p ≤.05) and that proficiency is needed to motivate children and to inspire a love of the language (X^2 (2, N= 166) =12.293, p ≤.05):

*Teacher proficiency in Irish is central to confidence in teaching effectively

(26.5% Group 1; 65.9% Group 2)

* Proficiency is needed to motivate children and to inspire a love of the language

(9.3% Group 1; 31.9% Group 2)

Teachers need to maintain their proficiency throughout career

(4.0% Group 1; 1.1% Group 2)

Respondents at the end of their programme also mention in their open-ended responses, the need to teach "correct" Irish to children (24.2%), the low standard of Irish amongst the general public (3.3%) and the need for classroom specific vocabulary (2.2%). Only a very small minority mention the need for specialist teachers of Irish (1.1%). These three areas concerning the teacher's role in improving children's proficiency were not previously mentioned be Group 1 when the main concerns express were associated with the teacher's own proficiency.

The vast majority of teachers at the beginning and end think that the advice to use Irish informally throughout the school day is 'very reasonable' or 'reasonable' (97.3% at the beginning and 100% at the end). Using Irish informally through the school day was regarded by the majority of teachers in both groups as a very positive strategy. 89.0% of participants chose to further comment on this strategy and listed three main benefits to this approach, two of which were identified by Group 1:

Promotes Irish as a live communicative language

(79.1% Group 1; 84.6% Group 2)

Builds confidence and interest informally in Irish

(66.7% Group 1; 56.0% Group 2)

Teachers at the end of initial teacher education also mention that informal Irish is easy to do (8.8%) and such Irish is the most memorable Irish learned in school (8.8%). While teachers comment on these advantages, a very small minority raise concerns about the risk of a child not understanding a particular instruction and the risk of some children not understanding, especially EAL pupils (1.1%), very similar to the small minority in Group 1 raising such concerns (1.3%).

When it comes to views about teaching another subject through Irish, over half of teachers in Group 1 and 2 feel that this is 'very reasonable' or 'reasonable' (57.3% and 57.1% respectively). The most popular subjects to teach through Irish or bilingually are consistent

between the two groups with PE and the arts (music, drama and visual arts) the most highly ranked.

91.2% of teachers in Group 2 chose to respond to the open-ended part of this question. Most are in favour of this approach because teaching other subjects through Irish can increase proficiency and foster more favourable attitudes to Irish (40.0% compared to 34.7% at the beginning). In terms of implementing CLIL, we see that teachers' views move from a concern that children won't understand the content, to a concern that they may not have the proficiency to teach a subject effectively through Irish. Significantly more teachers at the end (24.2%) comment that some subjects are more conducive than others to this approach, compared to 5.3% at the beginning) (X^2 (2, N= 166) =11.051, p ≤.05). Significantly less teachers at the end however are concerned about the risk of children not understanding (22.0% compared to 36.0% at the beginning) X^2 (2, N= 166) =3.983, p ≤.05), while significantly more teachers at the end highlight the demands on teacher proficiency (13.2% compared to 1.3% at the beginning)(X^2 (2, N= 166) =8.003, p ≤.05).

*Some subjects are more conducive to CLIL approaches

(5.3% Group 1; 24.2% Group 2)

*There is a risk of children not understanding

(36.0% Group 1; 22.2% Group 2)

*CLIL places demands on teacher proficiency

(1.3% Group 1; 13.2% Group 2)

Teachers at the end of initial teacher education also mention the potential for negative attitudes to Irish influencing experience of other subjects (16.5%), the need for subject specific vocabulary (5.5%), and appropriate resources to implement CLIL (2.2%). Around a tenth of teachers think that CLIL could be implemented successfully on a partial basis though (10.1%) and a very small number report a view that CLIL is not a good idea in primary schools (2.2%). All comments in response to these 4 open-ended questions (11, 12, 13 and 14) are available in Appendix D and G on the accompanying cd.

As we saw in Table 5.1.3.5, one change that is reported in the closed questionnaire items concerns the expectation that Irish should be taught primarily through Irish. Chi square tests reveal a significant difference in the proportions agreeing with that Irish should be taught primarily through Irish (93.2% at the beginning compared to 57.1% at the end) (X^2 (2, N= 165) = 27.21, p ≤.05). When asked about teaching Irish primarily through the medium of Irish 89.0% of Group 2 elaborated on their answer in the supplementary open-ended part and while teachers are generally still in favour of teaching Irish primarily through Irish, they raise a number of issues in relation to implementing this effectively. Teachers draw on their experiences on school

placement and as learners of Irish in lectures which are usually conducted for the most part through Irish. Significantly more teachers at the end suggest that there is a need for a judicious use of English in the teaching of Irish (X^2 (2, N= 166) =27.09, p ≤.05) and that there is a risk that children might disengage from the lesson if it is taught primarily through Irish (X^2 (2, N= 166) =17.974, p ≤.05):

Teaching primarily through Irish is the ideal approach

(51.0% Group 1; 56.0% Group 2)

*There is a need for a judicious use of English while teaching Irish

(1.0%; Group 1; 33.0% Group 2)

*Children might not understand and as a result might disengage from lesson

(1.0% Group 1; 24.2% Group 2)

Teachers at the end of initial teacher education also mention the following three factors:

Children's may have limited experience of immersion practices (15.4%)

Teachers are anxious about their ability to teach completely through Irish (5.5%)

Total immersion may not be beneficial for EAL and SEN children, and some class levels (2.2%)

Although 57.1% of teachers are in favour of teaching Irish primarily through Irish, some teachers are in favour of the inclusion of some English during lessons to ensure pupils understand what is happening and can fully participate in the lesson. It should be noted that teachers later mentioned the expectation of teaching primarily through Irish, as one of the main factors that makes Irish difficult to teach (see Section 5.2.1).

In conclusion, we can summarise role perceptions of pre-service teachers in the following way. Teachers continue to think of the Irish language as an ethnic symbol to some extent during their time in initial teacher education, though the decline at the top end of the scale is suggestive. They remain supportive of the revitalisation of Irish in primary education, and its obligatory nature. As they advance through initial teacher education though, they become more aware of the responsibility that is placed on them in revitalising Irish. They also become more cognisant of the demands placed on them in terms of teacher proficiency. Teachers begin to feel that the expectation of teaching Irish primarily through Irish is a little unreasonable, but remain in favour of using informal Irish.

5.2 School and Gaeltacht Experiences: Anticipations versus Terminal Reflections (Questionnaire 1 and 2)

Teachers in Group 2 responded to questionnaire items requiring them to reflect on two key experiences of School Placement and *Gaeltacht* placement. Group 1 had previously responded to

equivalent questionnaire item anticipating these same key experiences (refer to section 4.2 for a complete description of this anticipated experience).

5.2.1 School Placement: Group 1 Anticipation versus Group 2 Actual Experience

Teachers in Group 2 were asked to respond to four closed questions and one open-ended question on the questionnaire concerning their experiences on school placements. Results are presented in Table 5.2.1. At the time teachers completed this questionnaire, they had engaged in five school placements whereas teachers in Group 1 were asked to anticipate their first school placement. The items in the questionnaire were broadly equivalent but for Group 2 they were asked to consider the experience in retrospect. In relation to views about how difficult Irish is to teach, almost half of Group 1 anticipates Irish being 'very difficult' or 'difficult' to teach but for Group 2, reflecting on the experience of teaching Irish several times, there is a fall in the numbers agreeing it is 'very difficult' or 'difficult' (44.0% and 31.2% respectively). 93.4% of teachers in Group 2 elaborated on their views regarding the ease or difficulty of teaching Irish on school placement and this can be compared to the anticipated experiences of Group 1. 24.2% of teachers in Group 2 report feeling confident about teaching Irish but no teachers in Group 1 explicitly report this in their responses. For teachers at the beginning of initial teacher education they are concerned with ensuring children understand (16.0%), later teachers having gained experience are concerned about maintaining children's interest (25.3%). The factors though which could make Irish difficult to teach reported by teachers in Group 2 were similar to Group 1:

Children's negative attitudes

(15.4% compared to 18.7% Group 1)

Teachers' insecurity about their own proficiency in Irish

(5.5% compared to 6.7% in Group 1)

In addition to this, teachers at the end of their programme also mention the following issues:

Children's low level of proficiency (5.5%)

Challenges in ensuring children understand (16.0%)

Expectations of teaching Irish in Irish-medium and English-medium schools were also highlighted. No teachers in Group 2, however, mentioned anxiety about teaching grammar as occurred in Group 1. We saw earlier in section 5.1.3.4 that teachers at the beginning felt 'correct' Irish needed to be taught to children and teachers in their final year also mention this.

The overwhelming majority of teachers in Group 1 (86.7%) expect to derive 'great satisfaction' or 'satisfaction' and this is maintained by the end of initial teacher education (86.8%). The aspects of Irish culture that both groups feel are important in teaching Irish are similar in the

two groups with a majority agreeing that each of the aspects of culture mentioned are important in the study of Irish. The Irish language considered by both group as a 'very important' or 'important' aspect of Irish culture to study (94.7% at the beginning and 94.5% at the end). Irish literature on the other hand is considered by almost half of Group 1 as important (48.0%) and almost two-thirds of Group 2 (65.6%). Almost three quarters of teachers at the beginning (72.0%) compared to 88.9% of teachers at the end believe that Irish history is important. The majority of teachers in Group 1 and 2 believe that Irish games are important (80.0% and 82.4% respectively), as well as songs (85.0% and 94.3% respectively), and Irish dance (68.0% and 81.0% respectively).

As we see in Table 5.2.1, significant changes occur in relation to two items: perceptions of children's level of interest and proficiency in Irish. Group 2 teachers report children to have a higher interest in Irish than Group 1 with over three quarters of teachers stating children have 'a lot' or ' some interest' in Irish (75.3% compared to 66.7% at the beginning) (X^2 (2, N= 164) = 7.48, p ≤.05). When asked about children's proficiency in Irish, 41.3% of teachers in Group 1 report that pupils are 'very proficient' or 'proficient' in Irish compared to the 29.5% in Group 2.

Table 5.2.1
Percentages of teachers agreeing with statements concerning school placement at the beginning and end of initial teacher education

Questionnaire Items	Beginning of programme Group 1 n = 75	End of programme Group 2 n = 91
16. Irish is difficult or very difficult to teach	44.0	31.2
17. I derive some or great satisfaction from teaching Irish	86.7	86.8
*18. The pupils in my class have a lot/ some interest in Irish	66.7	75.3
*19. The pupils in my class are very proficient or proficient	41.3	29.5
20. It is very important/ important for pupils to study the following aspects of Irish culture:		
Irish language	94.7	94.5
Irish history	72.0	88.9
Irish games	80.0	82.4
Irish songs	85.0	94.3
Irish dance	68.0	81.1
Irish literature	48.0	65.6

*Q18: X^2 (2, N= 164) = 7.48, p ≤.05
*Q19: X^2 (2, N= 163) = 20.35, p ≤.05

In sum, teachers at the beginning and end of their programme report satisfaction in the teaching of Irish though a substantial minority of both groups consider Irish to a degree to be 'very difficult' or 'difficult' to teach. Teachers support the notion of children studying aspects of

Irish culture, in particular the Irish language. Significant changes occur, however, in relation to perceptions of children's proficiency and interest in Irish. All comments in response to question 16 are available in Appendix G on the accompanying cd.

5.2.2 Gaeltacht Placement: Group 1 Anticipation and Group 2 Actual Experience

Teachers in Group 2 were provided an opportunity in Questionnaire 2 to reflect on the two *Gaeltacht* placements that the teachers engaged in during initial teacher education. Table 5.2.2 provides a quantitative summary in thematic form of all qualitative information given in the open-ended responses provided by Group 2 at the end of their programme, and Group 1 anticipating the placement in first year. It will be recalled that the vast majority (89.3%) of Group 1 expect to derive 'great satisfaction' or 'satisfaction' from the placement, that a similar proportion (85.3%) agreed that it was 'very reasonable' or 'reasonable' to expect pre-service teachers to visit the *Gaeltacht* as part of initial teacher education, and that the same amount (84.0%) expect to gain exposure to Irish Gaelic culture while on placement. It should be noted that all Group 2 respondents commented on positive aspects of the *Gaeltacht* placement and 88.0% of Group 2 respondents mentioned negative aspects of this placement. While the responses to these three closed items by Group 2 are overwhelmingly positive, some more nuanced views emerge in the open-ended supplementary parts to these questions. Although the format of the items (on the questionnaire) was different for the two groups, similar themes concerning the benefits and challenges of the *Gaeltacht* experience were identified by both groups but the percentages mentioning each theme at times varied substantially.

In Table 5.2.2, we see that in Group 1 over half of teachers (57.3%) see the *Gaeltacht* in terms of the potential to improve proficiency yet in Group 2, this is mentioned by under a third (32.0%) (X^2 (2, N= 166) =10.855, p ≤.05). The relatively low percentage in Group 2 commenting on the potential of the placement to improve proficiency is perhaps explained by their views on this placement in terms of offering different types of cultural and social opportunities, namely to gain awareness of *Gaeltacht* culture (32.0% compared to 0.8% at the beginning) (X^2 (2, N= 166) =25.891, p ≤.05, to interact with locals (32.0% compared to 0.9% at the beginning) X^2 (2, N= 166) =25.891, p ≤.05), and to interact with their peers (15.4% compared to 13.3% at the beginning).

As we see in Table 5.2.2 there are some perceived benefits unique to Group 1. We see in the first column and below the broken horizontal line, a minority of Group 1 teachers at the beginning mentioned that they had previously had positive experiences in the *Gaeltacht* and that this had added to their anticipation of the placement. Similarly teachers in Group 2 also mentioned three new factors that had not emerged in Group 1's responses which are indicated in

the second column below the broken horizontal line in Table 5.2.3: the activities organised and relaxed atmosphere (32.0%), immersion in the language (8.8%) and the opportunity to develop new teaching strategies (3.3%).

Table 5.2.2
Percentages of teachers reporting particular benefits and concerns relating to the *Gaeltacht* Placement(s)

Anticipating the *Gaeltacht* Placement Group 1	**Reflecting on the *Gaeltacht* Placement Group 2**
Benefits	***Benefits***
*Improving proficiency for future role (57.3%)	Improving proficiency for future role (32.0%)
*Gaining awareness of *Gaeltacht* culture (0.8%)	Gaining awareness of *Gaeltacht* culture (32.0%)
*Interaction with locals (0.9%)	Interaction with locals (31.0%)
Social interaction with peers (13.3%)	Social interaction with peers (15.4%)
Benefits unique to Group 1	**Benefits unique to Group 2**
Previous positive experiences in the *Gaeltacht* (5.3%)	The activities organised and the relaxed atmosphere (32.0%)
	Immersion in language (8.8%)
	Developing new teaching strategies (3.3%)
Concerns	***Concerns***
*Anxiety because of low proficiency (1.3%)	Anxiety because of low proficiency (17.6%)
*Concern that English would mostly be spoken (0.9%)	Concern that mostly English is spoken by locals and peers (18.7%)
Concerns unique to Group 1	**Concerns unique to Group 2**
High costs incurred (7.1%)	Poor quality of teaching and activities during the placement (23.1%)
Placement should be optional where pre-service teacher already has high proficiency (4.0%)	Emphasis on grammar (19.8%)
Difficulty in maintaining these levels upon return (0.4%)	Perceived criticism when speaking Irish (6.6%)
Timing of placement (0.9%)	Rural location (2.2%)
	Focus on the oral language exam at the end of the placement (2.2%)
	Homesickness (1.1%)

* Improving proficiency for future role: X^2 (2, N= 166) =10.855, p ≤.05
*Gaining awareness of *Gaeltacht* culture: X^2 (2, N= 166) =25.891, p ≤.05
*Interaction with locals: X^2 (2, N= 166) =25.891, p ≤.05
*Anxiety about low proficiency: X^2 (2, N= 166) =11.81, p ≤.05
*Concern that English is mostly spoken: X^2 (2, N= 166) =12.799, p ≤.05

As Table 5.2.2 illustrates, teachers' early anticipations of the positive aspects of the *Gaeltacht* placement are matched to some extent with the actual experience reported by teachers at the end of initial teacher education, though the percentages mentioning these positive aspects differ between the two groups. On the other hand, when it comes to concerns about the *Gaeltacht* placement, there is not the same level of consistency in the concerns expressed by both groups. Only a very small minority of Group 1 teachers express anxiety about their proficiency in Irish (1.3%) but significantly more of Group 2 teachers at the end of the programme report this (17.6%) X^2 (2, N= 166) =11.81, p ≤.05). Teachers in Group 2 raise other issues not mentioned by Group 1 which are indicated below the broken horizontal line in the second column. They are more critical of the quality of the teaching they experienced during their spell in the *Gaeltacht* with almost a quarter noting this as a cause of concern (23.1%). They also note the emphasis on grammar as a concern (19.8%), and a tendency for English to be spoken (18.7%), which is significantly more than the percentage raising this at the beginning (0.9%) (X^2 (2, N= 166) =12.799, p ≤.05). Small minorities in Group 2 perceive themselves to be a target of criticism when speaking in Irish (6.6%), do not report favourable attitudes to the rural location of the placement (2.2%), report anxiety in relation to the oral language exam at the end of this placement (2.2%) and report homesickness (1.1%). These different concerns suggest a real impact of experience, or of the programme itself, on how the *Gaeltacht* experience is ultimately interpreted and assessed by teachers.

One additional area included in the questionnaire administered to Group 2 only, was an open-ended question exploring whether there were any other key experiences during initial teacher education that impacted positively or negatively on their own attitudes to the Irish language generally. 96.2% of teachers responded to this open-ended question. Of this group, 86.0% reported experiences during initial teacher education that had positively influenced their views. These experiences included events organised by *An Cumann Gaelach* and visiting *Conradh na Gaeilge* (36.3%), Irish modules undertaken in college (27.5%), influence of peers (17.6%), perceived progress in their own proficiency in Irish (4.4%) and attending Irish-language events (1.1%).

As regards experiences that negatively impacted attitudes, 31.0% of respondents reported no such negative experience. The most commonly cited negative factor relates to the teacher's language anxiety (30.8%). Other negative experiences mentioned relate to their own experiences as learners in lectures e.g. an emphasis on grammar (16.5%), teaching methods that are not interactive (13.2%), stigma attached to being in streamed tutorials (6.6%), total immersion approaches in lectures (5.5%), perceived criticism (3.3%), emphasis on literature (1.1%), and difficulties teaching Irish on school placement (1.1%).

5.2.3 Evolving Views between the End of First Year and End of Final Year (Group 1 Interviews and Group 2 Questionnaires)

This section compares the findings of Group 1 interviews, conducted immediately after first school placement and during first *Gaeltacht* placement, with Group 2 questionnaires administered at the end of initial teacher education. We examine here whether Group 1 reflections, particularly in relation to the experience of first school and *Gaeltacht* placement, manifest the beginnings of any of the changes in beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions evidenced between Group 1 and Group 2 in the questionnaire data. We also look at reflections made by Group 2 teachers on the key experiences of all school placements (5) and *Gaeltacht* placements (2) during initial teacher education, comparing them to early reflections on first school and *Gaeltacht* placements.

Table 5.2.3.1
Percentages of teachers reporting changes in beliefs following first school placement compared to changes reported at the end of initial teacher education

Change Reported in Beliefs by the End of Initial Teacher Education	Percentage of Teachers reporting this change following first school placement
5.5% agree that is necessary to speak Irish with an excellent accent.	0
27.5% agree that learning Irish is mostly a matter of learning a lot of new vocabulary words.	0
31.9% agree that if you are allowed to make mistakes in Irish at the beginning, it will be hard to get rid of them later on.	0
1.1% agree that girls are better than boys at learning Irish	100% now disagree
8.9% agree that is easier to speak than to understand Irish.	0
73.6% agree that learning Irish is different from studying other school subjects.	96.2%
42.9% agree that learning the Irish language is very difficult or difficult.	0

5.2.3.1 The Perceived Impact of School Placement on Views

For the most part, teachers commented that their general beliefs had not changed, as we see in Table 5.2.3.1 above. This finding is consistent with the stability in beliefs reported in the questionnaire at the end of initial teacher education also. Experience on school placement appears to reinforce their beliefs about a communicative approach to language learning. Teachers generally still believe that everyone can learn to speak Irish and that if someone spent one hour a day learning Irish, it would take between one and five years to learn to speak Irish very well. As

we see in Table 5.2.3.1, by the end of initial teacher education significantly less teachers believe that it is easier to speak than to understand Irish, that It is necessary to speak Irish with an excellent accent, that if you are allowed to make mistakes at the beginning it will be difficult to get rid of them later on, and that learning Irish is mostly a matter of learning new vocabulary. Following first school placement, however, teachers do not mention changes in any of these areas. Indeed, in their interview responses, they mention more frequently particular resources or games used in the teaching of Irish rather than particular strategies. Change in these particular beliefs therefore is not necessarily prompted by first school placement. At the end of initial teacher education, most teachers feel that learning Irish is 'very difficult' or 'difficult'. Though teachers do not necessarily refer to the increased investment needed to teach Irish as being 'difficult,' they do list many of the challenges in teaching Irish and the resources needed.

Table 5.2.3.2
Percentages of teachers reporting changes in views about the obligatory nature of Irish following first school placement and at the end of initial teacher education

Change Reported in Views about the obligatory nature of Irish by the End of Initial Teacher Education	Percentage of Teachers reporting change in this view following first school placement
11% agree that children for whom English is an additional language should not be obliged to learn Irish.	15.4% now disagree
38.9% agree that children should learn Irish, even if their parents don't want them to.	0
26.4% Children with special education needs should not have to learn Irish.	7.7% now disagree

We see some evidence, however, for beliefs that begin to change following first school placement in Table 5.2.3.2 above. By the end of initial teacher education significantly more teachers believe that learning Irish is different from learning other subjects. Teachers after first school placement express a view that teaching Irish is different from other subjects because of the enthusiasm needed to foster positive attitudes and interest in Irish amongst children (96.2%). Teachers explicitly refer to one change in belief: that girls are better than boys at learning Irish. While only a very small minority agreed with this belief at the end of initial teacher education (1.1%), all teachers report during the interview report disagreeing with the statement because of their experience on school placement. There is a change, therefore in the proportions who previously selected the 'neither agree nor disagree' option who now select 'disagree'.

Teachers do not attribute any change in their attitude to the Irish language and Irish speakers generally, or their attitude to teaching Irish to experiences on school placement. They

also do not report any changes in views concerning Irish as an ethnic symbol; views that may be more influenced by macro factors and formed relatively early in life. We see in Table 5.2.3.2 some changes in views regarding the obligatory nature of Irish.

Significantly less teachers by the end of initial teacher education agree that EAL learners should not be obliged to learn Irish. Following first school placement, only a minority have experience of teaching this profile of learner but those that do report an uncertainty as to whether EAL learners should be exempt from learning Irish. Following school placement, teachers do not report any change in the view that children should learn Irish even if their parents do not want them to though by the end of initial teacher education there is a significant change in view. Teachers at the early stage of their professional development usually work directly with the host teacher and may not have much contact with parent which may be why they do not report a change in belief. It is noteworthy though that even at this early stage of professional development, teachers with experience of teaching children with SEN also question exemptions from Irish for this group. There is no significant difference in views of teachers at the beginning and end of initial teacher education concerning this item possibly because only a minority of teachers have substantial experience of working with children with SEN.

Table 5.2.3.3
Percentages of teachers reporting changes in views about teacher proficiency following first school placement and at end of initial teacher education

Change Reported in Views about teacher proficiency by the End of Initial Teacher Education	Percentage of Teachers reporting change in this view following first school placement
57.1% feel that the expectation to teach Irish primarily through Irish is 'very reasonable' or 'reasonable'.	84.6% report teaching Irish primarily through Irish 15.4% report not being able to do this 57.1% report difficulties in teaching primarily through Irish in English-medium schools

In terms of roles and responsibilities in promoting Irish, we see in Table 5.2.3.3 above that following school placement the vast majority of teachers (84.6%) report teaching Irish primarily through Irish though over half (57.7%) say that this approach poses certain challenges in engaging children's attention and ensuring they understand the content. We see that this view changes dramatically by the end of initial teacher education with a fall from 92.0% to 57.1% in teachers agreeing that it is 'very reasonable' or 'reasonable' to expect teachers to teach primarily through Irish, though this view does not appear to change following first school placement. Teachers following school placement report being in favour of using informal Irish and we see that by the end of initial teacher education, this is the one area over which teachers unanimously agree.

Finally, as we see in Table 5.2.3.4, in terms of the role and responsibility of the teacher in promoting Irish, 61.6% of teachers now refer to their growing awareness of substantial role society assigns to them in revitalising and maintaining Irish, and a minority 11.6% express a desire for more stakeholders to be involved in promoting Irish. Teachers identify some of the challenges in promoting a language that is not reinforced in society and their relatively isolated role in doing this.

Table 5.2.3.4
Percentages of teachers reporting changes in views about roles and responsibilities in promoting Irish following first school placement and at the end of initial teacher education

Change Reported in Views about teacher proficiency by the End of Initial Teacher Education	Percentage of Teachers reporting change in this view following first school placement
44.4% feel that society currently assigns the 'main' responsibility' to teachers in the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish.	61.6% like to see the responsibility for the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish shared 11.6% would like to see other stakeholders involved

These findings suggest that the direct experience of teaching children influences views about foreign language aptitude, and how different or difficult it may be to teach Irish compared to other subjects in the curriculum. The experience of working with different learners also seems to influence views concerning the obligatory nature of Irish for EAL learners, and the ease or difficulty in teaching primarily through Irish. Early changes in these areas following first school placement are perhaps further accentuated as the teacher engages in subsequent school placements. Some significant changes that occur between the beginning and end of initial teacher education however do not appear to begin following school placement such as the significant decrease in teachers agreeing that it is easier to speak than to understand Irish, that It is necessary to speak Irish with an excellent accent, that if you are allowed to make mistakes at the beginning it will be difficult to get rid of them later on, and that learning Irish is mostly a matter of learning new vocabulary. Teachers may not yet have sufficient experience of these areas or it may be that their immediate concerns are in relation to lesson planning and selecting resources and that as they progress through their programme they begin to consider more general approaches to teaching Irish in a more detailed manner.

5.2.3.2 The Perceived Impact of *Gaeltacht* Placement on Views

When asked about any perceived changes in views following *Gaeltacht* placement, teachers do not report any changes in beliefs related to this placement presumably because they have no

experience of teaching Irish as they do while on school placement. Teachers report in the interview that broad views about Irish as an ethnic symbol or the obligatory nature of Irish in primary education have not changed since they began the placement and we see that by the end of initial teacher education, there is also no significant change in relation to most of these items. Where some changes occur in relation to individual items, as we saw in the section above, teachers attribute this mostly to their school placement experiences. Teachers also do not report any changes in views about the role and responsibilities of the teacher in promoting Irish following *Gaeltacht* placement.

Teachers report the *Gaeltacht* placement however, to be linked, to a certain extent, to changes in attitudes. We see that by the end of initial teacher education, there are no significant changes in relation to the mean scale score for either *Attitude to the Irish Language and Irish Speakers* or *Attitude to Learning Irish*, though by the end of their programme significantly less teachers agree with the following individual items: 'People in our country who only speak English should try harder to learn Irish' (56.0%) and 'I really enjoy learning Irish' (75.8%). Immediately following *Gaeltacht* placement, however, 76.9% of teachers report that experiences in the *Gaeltacht* have positively influenced their attitude to Irish. It may therefore be the case that while attitudes are influenced by this placement, it is only for the short-term and while they are in this environment. Though teachers mention that this experience of learning Irish is different to learning Irish in college lectures, they do not mention that their attitude to Learning Irish has changed substantially.

By the end of initial teacher education, in open-ended supplementary responses significantly more teachers refer to the need for proficiency to teach Irish effectively (65.9%) and to motivate children (31.9%). Significantly more teachers at the end (17.6%) also mention in their open-ended supplementary questions that they are anxious about their own level of proficiency which can impact on their ability to meaningfully engage in the *Gaeltacht* placement. During the interview, we see some early signs of this trend of this language anxiety. First we see that 23.1% report anxiety in their own level of Irish and only around a third of teachers (34.6%) identify as an 'Irish speaker' possibly due to a tendency to compare themselves to native speakers of Irish that they have met while on placement, and a lack of identification with a community of Irish speakers, real or imagined, in their day to day life. Second, a substantial minority (19.2%) are concerned about a lack of opportunities to improve their Irish by engaging with local speakers beyond simple greetings and rather tend to stay with their teaching peers.

In sum, the positive attitudinal change in relation to the Irish language generally following *Gaeltacht* placement does not seem to be maintained by the end of initial teacher education, though it should be noted that attitudes are still favourable at the end of their programme. The

potential for language anxiety later on in initial teacher education is highlighted at this early stage with teachers reporting limited opportunities to practise and improve their Irish and also some hints at insecurity because of being a second or additional language speaker.

5.2.3.3 Comparing Reflections on First School Placement to Reflections on all School Placements

We can compare interview responses of the teachers in Group 1 who were interviewed following first school placement to the responses given by Group 2 in the questionnaire at the end of initial teacher education which comprised five closed and four open-ended questions relating to all five school placements. Some trends appear consistent between first school placement and the reflections of final year teachers on five placements particularly in relation to perceived difficulty of teaching Irish, and the satisfaction associated with teaching Irish.

Following first school placement, a substantial minority report Irish as being more challenging to teach than expected (11.5%). For teachers on first school placement, these difficulties relate to nurturing positive attitudes amongst children (46.2%). For teachers at the end of initial teacher education, we see in the open-ended supplementary responses that these difficulties relate more to ensuring the children are interested in the lesson content (25.3%) and addressing children's low level of proficiency (5.5%). We generally therefore see that by the end of initial teacher education, teachers are concerned with a broader range of issues in the teaching of Irish. Nevertheless following first school placement, the vast majority (92.3%) report satisfaction in teaching Irish as do teachers at the end (86.8%).

Some significant changes that occur by the end of initial teacher education do not emerge following first school placement. At the end of initial teacher education significantly less teachers (29.5%) report that children are 'very proficient' or 'proficient' but as we see in the interview data, teachers following first school placement do not mention children's proficiency often. Instead they speak more about their own perspective in planning and resourcing lessons. Equally, while significantly more teachers agree at the end than at the beginning of initial teacher education (75.3%) that children are very interested in Irish, this awareness of children's interest is not as evident following first school placement where the focus in interview responses centres mostly on teacher's preparation. As well as that, while at the end the majority (between 65.6% and 95.4%) consider aspects of Irish culture to be 'very important' or 'important' in the study of Irish e.g. Irish games and songs, following first school placement, but just over a quarter (26.9%) teachers report including these elements on first school placement.

In sum, difficulties in teaching Irish begin to be identified following first school placement but there is a consistency in satisfaction reported by teachers after their first and final placement. Views about how Irish should be taught do not necessarily include a concern for children's

proficiency and interest in Irish during first school placement but by the end of initial teacher education, more teachers express some anxiety about this. Finally, although teachers at the end of their programme are in favour of including cultural elements in the teaching of Irish, there is little evidence of this on first school placement.

5.2.3.4 Comparing Reflections on First *Gaeltacht* Placement to Reflections on both *Gaeltacht* Placements

As we saw in Table 5.2.3, proportions of teachers reporting particular benefits and challenges associated with the *Gaeltacht* placement vary significantly between the beginning and end of their programme. We also see that teachers in Group 2 report some unique benefits and challenges of the placement that do not emerge for Group 1 when they anticipate this placement. This section examines whether and in what way these perceived benefits and challenges emerge following first *Gaeltacht* placement.

Significantly less teachers at the end of initial teacher education express that the *Gaeltacht* placement is of benefit in improving proficiency (32.0%) though the vast majority still agree that it is 'very important' or 'important' for teachers to improve their own Irish during initial teacher education. Significantly more teachers at the end of initial teacher education associate this placement with greater awareness of *Gaeltacht* culture and interaction with locals (31.0%), and with peers (15.4%). Following first *Gaeltacht* placement, some teachers report that although they view this type of learning in an immersive environment as being different to learning Irish in college, they sometimes have limited opportunities to use Irish outside of classes (19.2%). The same proportion report spending a great deal of their time with other teachers on the course and speaking in English. These two factors might explain why by the end of initial teacher education, less teachers see the placement as valuable in terms of improving proficiency.

Almost a third of teachers at the end of initial teacher education (31.0%) report interacting with locals but reports by teachers following first *Gaeltacht* placement relate this interaction more to informal greetings in public places rather than to lengthy conversations or the development of friendships with locals. It is possible that teachers in Group 2 are also referring to this type of limited interaction considering the significant fall in percentage of teachers reporting their period in the *Gaeltacht* to influence their proficiency in Irish (57.3% to 32.0%). Almost a third of teachers at the end of initial teacher education identify the benefit of gaining awareness of *Gaeltacht* culture yet it is reported by many teachers following first *Gaeltacht* placement that this exposure can at times be tokenistic or reliant on traditional rather than contemporary culture (7.7%). It is not, however, clear from the responses of Group 2 what type of cultural exposure they are referring to. We saw that following first *Gaeltacht* placement, teachers did not associate

any influence on their beliefs about how Irish should be taught, yet a very small minority of teachers (3.3%) at the end claim this experience helps them develop new teaching strategies.

A minority of teachers at the end of initial teacher education (17.6%) show a heightened anxiety about their proficiency in Irish. They now cite other factors that contribute to this language anxiety when reflecting on *Gaeltacht* experiences: English being spoken by locals and peers (18.7%), poor quality of teaching and activities during the placement (23.1%), over emphasis on grammar (19.8%), and a small minority perceive themselves to be the target of criticism (6.6%). Although it emerges in the interviews following first *Gaeltacht* placement that only a minority feel they can identify as an Irish speaker (34.6%), this concern over proficiency is not as pronounced possibly because they are at an earlier stage of their career whereas for final year teachers they will imminently take on the role as a teacher of Irish.

We will now summarise the findings from teachers following the key experiences of school and *Gaeltacht* placement, and the end of initial teacher education, highlighting any significant changes that begin to occur after these key experiences. It is appears from the interview data that the direct experience of teaching Irish influences views about foreign language aptitude and the obligatory nature of Irish, with more teachers now disagreeing that girls will outperform boys, and also questioning the exemption of Irish for EAL learners and children with SEN. Teaching Irish for the first time makes teachers consider how different it is to teach Irish compared to other subjects and to review to a certain extent the expectation that Irish should be taught primarily through Irish and over half mention that this approach can be problematic. Difficulties such as these in teaching Irish begin to be identified after first school placement but by the end of initial teacher education, these difficulties encompass a broader range of factors from both the cognitive and affective dimensions, namely children's proficiency and interest in Irish. After school placement, teachers reflect to a certain extent on the responsibility that is assigned to primary teachers in revitalising and maintaining Irish. By the end of initial teacher education, this theme emerges frequently in open-ended responses in relation to the generally low standard of Irish in the general public, the perceived blame placed on teachers and a lack of support in the community. Significantly less teachers at the end of their programme feel they should be charged with this high level of responsibility. Nevertheless, following first school placement, teachers associate a high level of satisfaction with teaching Irish and this trend continues to the end of initial teacher education. Other changes in relation to general beliefs about a communicative approach to language learning appear to occur later in initial teacher education possibly as the teacher matures, or amasses more experience in the classroom. School placement does not seem to have any real effect on attitudes to the Irish language generally or to learning the language.

Some positive attitudinal change is reported following first *Gaeltacht* placement but this is not an enduring change and has little or no effect on attitudes reported at the end of initial teacher education. Issues of proficiency and identification as an Irish speaker are raised by teachers following first *Gaeltacht* placement and this may be why we later see at the end of initial teacher education that they are more critical of limited exposure to Irish, teaching methods while in the *Gaeltacht*. During the interview, teachers speak about the tendency to associate more frequently with their fellow teachers than with locals. It is not surprising then that by the end of initial teacher education, teachers view the *Gaeltacht* placement as one that has social benefits and that the potential to develop proficiency is reported by less teachers.

5.3 Change and Stability during Early Professional Practice (Questionnaire 2 and Interview 2)

This data represents the second part of the longitudinal study of Group 2 where the evolution of views reported by Group 2 were tracked from the end of their initial teacher education to early in-service practice. These teachers had completed Questionnaire 2 concerning their beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions in their final month of initial teacher education, and later interviews were conducted with participants during their second semester of teaching, at a time when teachers had sufficient experience in their role as teachers of Irish. This is also the third measurement of change in the study and the aim of these interviews was to (1) explore the extent to which beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions that have begun to change over the course of teacher education, continue to evolve during professional practice and (2) to identify other additional changes that are reported to occur as the teacher advances in her career. Representative comments from teachers are given in italics in the tables below. For reasons of confidentiality, no initials or identifying details are given. Appendix H contains the thematic coding for these interview and Appendix I contains the full transcripts on the accompanying cd.

5.3.1 Beliefs: Stability and Change during Early In-service Practice

We will first examine change and stability in responses to questionnaire items before exploring other areas of change that teacher report since they began teaching. Before the interview, teachers were asked to review their questionnaire and to identify any areas in which their view had changed since they began teaching. We look at the two changes that emerged in relation to questionnaire item responses since the teacher began professional practice, and then other beliefs not captured by the questionnaire that teachers report to change since they began teaching. As we see in Table 5.3.1, at the end of initial teacher education, many were previously unsure about the existence of a gender-related foreign language aptitude. During early in-service

practice, however, no teacher at all agrees that gender has any real bearing on the language learning performance of pupils.

Table 5.3.1
Percentages of teachers reporting change and stability in beliefs during first year in-service practice

Change and Stability Reported in Beliefs	Percentage of Teachers Expressing this Change in Belief	Representative comments
Teachers now report no expectation that girls will outperform boys at learning Irish	100	*I just thought it was a very stereotypical view that girls learn better... I would say in the Gaelscoil that the boys are at the same level as the girls. I don't think gender comes into the equation at all when you are learning a subject.*
Some teachers with high proficiency in Irish mention this strength in the interview.	13.3	*Because I'm from the Gaeltacht and I am a fluent Irish speaker, Irish is one of the main things that would stand out for me on a CV or on my teaching application form so whenever I would go into the interviews I would be asked about Irish, definitely yes.*
Teachers working in Irish-medium schools report that proficiency in Irish was a key part of job criteria and the interview was conducted through Irish	13.3	
Very few teachers working in English-medium report proficiency in Irish as being mentioned in job application criteria	6.7	*I found myself going into the interview and learning off an Irish question.*
Very few teachers report being asked a question in Irish at interview	6.7	
Some teachers suggest that Irish question asked was tokenistic	10.0	

In the other case a dramatic reversal in Group 2 teachers' views during early in-service practice. At the end of initial teacher education, most teachers believed that proficiency in Irish would be an advantage when applying for jobs and for undertaking interviews (72.5%). When teachers in early in-service practice are asked to reflect on the application and interview process for jobs though, only a minority feel that proficiency in Irish was examined greatly or required at either application or job interview stage (6.7%). Teachers who consider themselves to be very proficient in Irish, however, do mention that they use this ability to their advantage in an interview. However, for the rest of teachers, only in a small number of cases was Irish actually mentioned as a desirable criterion for applicants in the job advertisement and in these cases it was for a position in an Irish-medium school (13.3%).

Teachers generally view proficiency in Irish as an advantage in so far as it means one can apply to both English-medium and Irish-medium schools, but as having no added advantage for an application to an English-medium school. Teachers applying to work in an Irish-medium school are interviewed through Irish and so proficiency in Irish and general commitment to promoting the language within a school context is assessed during the interview. Nobody reported being asked about their commitment to promoting the language and culture in the wider community context though. In interviews for English-medium schools, a small number of participants reported being asked a question in Irish (6.7%). Some alluded to the tokenistic nature of this question however, and described how one standard rehearsed answer could be used regardless of the question posed.

Table 5.3.1.1
Percentage of Group 2 teachers reporting changes in beliefs about teaching Irish in early in-service practice

Beliefs about teaching Irish have changed because of:	Percentage of Teachers expressing view	Representative Quotes
class level	64.5	*Especially in older classes, they do need to learn how to structure the language and how to put sentences together, some formal work has to go in to that.*
school ethos	13.0	
working in Irish-medium school	16.1	*...obviously in Irish (medium schools) they are used to the Irish and they all have a very positive attitude towards Irish.*
working in English-medium DEIS school	23.0	*I'm in a DEIS school so the main focus is on literacy and numeracy. The attitude that the children have towards Irish is really, really negative.*
experiences in teaching Irish	6.5	*Mostly I have found that in English school there is kind of a negative attitude towards Irish in that it is not their favourite subject to do so it is kind of hard to influence them and get their interest.*
feedback from school community	3.2	

5.3.1.1 Other Changes in Beliefs

We now look at other beliefs that are not captured by the questionnaire. In the interview, teachers were asked if their beliefs concerning the way Irish should be taught had changed since they began teaching. They were asked in particular whether the following areas had an influence on how they now believed Irish should be taught: class level, particular school context and environment, experiences in teaching Irish, or feedback from people in the school community. Class level and school context are reported by teachers in this study to be catalysts for change in

beliefs, but experiences in teaching and feedback from people in the school community are not reported to have a great effect on beliefs. These recent changes since they started professional practice are presented in Table 5.3.1.1 above.

Teachers report that teaching the infant classes gives more scope for them to set up routines and teach Irish in the way they felt most appropriate, usually through the use of lots of informal Irish, games and songs and other communicative activities. When it comes to older classes though, most teachers (64.5%) describe how the teaching strategies the pupils experienced in previous years affect the way in which they as teachers currently are obliged to teach Irish. For example, while some teachers say that ideally they would like to speak Irish throughout the lesson, when children have limited experience of such an approach to date, they are less likely to do so. They also report more usage of games and rhymes in younger classes (20.0%). Not surprisingly, teachers report that their beliefs about teaching Irish would change if they were in an Irish-medium school, with the likelihood of their using more Irish and using more challenging content mentioned (5.5%). Challenges in locating suitable resources are mentioned by teachers working in Irish-medium schools (16.1%).

Many of these teachers are working as substitute teachers and so have experience of working in a number of different schools. This means that they can meaningfully reflect on any influence that a particular school environment has on the way they teach Irish. Some of these substitute teachers report adopting a different approach to teaching depending on the school in which they find themselves. This approach is also seen as being short term and one that they might change upon teaching their own class fulltime. Many teachers speak about changes that they would implement in the future when they have their own class e.g. introducing more immersion strategies and informal Irish from the beginning.

The particular ethos or patronage of a school is reported by a minority (13.0%) as having much bearing on how they taught Irish. For the most part though when teachers have experience of teaching and subbing in a number of schools, there was no explicit mention of a difference between Catholic or Educate Together schools. The language of the school is reported to influence their approaches to teaching Irish. All teachers working in Irish-medium schools (16.1%), report that pupils had noticeably more positive attitudes to Irish and to learning Irish. Early total immersion is the most popular approach to teaching Irish in Irish-medium schools but all teachers in English-medium schools report this as being quite challenging. In English-medium schools generally, teaching Irish is considered somewhat different to teaching other subjects, and the majority of teachers (66.7%) speak about needing more resources and the necessity of spending more time nurturing positive attitudes to Irish amongst the children. Almost a quarter (23.0%) report that the classification of a school as having disadvantaged status (DEIS school), influences

how they teach Irish. For teachers working in English-medium schools DEIS schools, a priority is perceived to be placed on the teaching of English and mathematics, and the implications of this for the teaching of Irish are discussed. Often this means that less time is spent on Irish and that expectations, in terms of learning outcomes for Irish, are not in line with curriculum guidelines. Reported lower levels of ability in Irish also mean that use has to be made of textbooks that are really more suited in content for younger classes. It is interesting in the cases above that teachers speak frequently about strategies adapted to get children more interested, but there is very little mention of adapting strategies for pupils with a higher ability in Irish.

Each participant was asked about key moments while teaching Irish that changed the way they thought Irish should be taught. Participants generally attribute positive feelings to their experience of teaching Irish and times when they witness pupils making progress or enjoying a lesson imbue them with a sense of pride. Only a small minority of participants (6.5%) could recall a particular strategy or incident that influenced their beliefs. Indeed most commented that they were implementing a communicative approach to the teaching of Irish. A smaller percentage reported that their beliefs were influenced by feedback from members of the school community (3.2%).

5.3.2 Attitudes: Change and Stability in Early In-service Practice (Interview 2)

The percentages in Table 5.3.2 relate to views expressed at interview during early in-service practice in relation to attitudes. As we see, favourable attitudes are maintained or reported to become more favourable after some experience teaching. The first row of Table 5.3.2 shows that 93.3% of teachers reported at interview that their original positive attitudes to Irish as recorded on Questionnaire 2 remained unchanged or had become more positive. As we see in the second row, of this 93.3%, over three quarters (78.8%) claim that positive attitudes remain more or less the same in their first year in the classroom, and a substantial minority claim they have become more positive (16.2%). Only 6.7% report that their attitudes to the Irish language generally are negative and even in these cases, teachers are still in favour of Irish being taught in primary school. Although positive attitudes to teaching Irish were linked to positive attitudes to the language in general, these were not synonymous. In some cases, even where the teacher reported not enjoying teaching Irish, this was distinct from their general attitudes towards Irish (10.0%). Also, although teachers mentioned challenges in teaching Irish, it is clear from the teachers' continuing positive attitudes to the Irish language generally just reported, that they can withstand the daily difficulties and challenges experienced in teaching Irish. Only a small minority

report visiting the *Gaeltacht* since they began teaching (6.5%) or being involved in Irish-speaking communities (19.4%). The majority do not explicitly identify as an Irish speaker (77.4%) a higher proportion, but not significantly so, than after first *Gaeltacht* placement (63.6%). In sum, attitude to teaching Irish is seen as distinct from attitude to the language in general, and also identifying as an Irish teacher is distinct from identifying as an Irish speaker.

Table 5.3.2

Percentage of teachers reporting changes in attitudes to the Irish language and Irish Speakers and Attitude to Learning Irish during first year in-service practice

Stability or Change in Attitude Reported	Percentage of Teachers Expressing Change (n = 30)	Representative Comments
Attitude to Irish generally Irish is as positive or more positive but teachers are more aware of the challenges involved in teaching it	93.3	*I find it [teaching Irish] quite difficult even though my attitude towards it is quite positive.* *I still feel that it is a very important part of Ireland and Irish culture. I still believe it should be taught every day as one of the core subjects.*
A small number report negative attitudes to Irish but are still in favour of it being taught in primary school	6.7	
Attitudes to the Irish language and to Irish speakers have remained very positive	78.8	*I have always had a very positive attitude to Irish. I love the Irish language and Irish culture and I really try to pass that on to any class that I am teaching, so it has definitely stayed the same.*
Some teachers report that their attitude to the Irish language generally has become more favourable since they began teaching	16.2	*I really like Irish. It is probably that bit more positive. It's one of my favourite subjects to teach in school.*
A small number mention that their attitude to the language in general is separate from their attitude to teaching Irish	10.0	
A very small number report visiting the *Gaeltacht* since entering professional practice	6.5	
A very small number report being involved in Irish-speaking communities	19.4	
Most teachers do not explicitly identify as being an Irish speaker	77.4	

5.3.3 Role Perceptions: Stability and Change Early In-service Practice

This section now explores the extent to which responses to the following groups of items change during early in-service practice: Irish as an ethnic symbol, the obligatory nature of Irish, the role and responsibilities of teachers in promoting Irish, and teacher proficiency.

5.3.3.1 Irish as an Ethnic Symbol

During early in-service practice teachers were asked again about the contribution the Irish language makes to an Irish identity. In particular, the extent to which a person needs to speak Irish to have a sense of "Irishness" evolved during in-service practice. As we see in Table 5.3.3.1 over a third of teachers (36.7%) feel that knowledge of Irish language and culture is important in understanding Irish culture. Teachers who are involved in Irish-speaking communities report a unique insight and cultural experience (22.6%), whereas teachers involved in solely English-speaking communities do not report this as frequently. Knowledge of Irish language and culture is therefore, seen as an advantage but not a requirement in creating an Irish identity.

Table 5.3.3.1
Percentage of teachers reporting change in perceptions of Irish as an ethnic symbol

Stability or Change in relation to Irish as an Ethnic Symbol	***Percentage of Teachers Expressing Change***	***Representative Comments***
Some teachers still feel that knowledge of Irish language and culture is important but not necessary in identifying as an Irish person	36.7	*Without your history, your language or your heritage there is no grounding in the meaning of being Irish.*
Some teachers feel that by speaking Irish one can experience a "subculture" of Irish culture	22.6	*I wouldn't say it's necessary as part of being Irish...it probably would help your feeling of identifying yourself as Irish the more immersed you are in Irish culture and tradition.* *I wouldn't say you have to know everything about Irish and Irish language to be an Irish person.*

Most of the changes that are reported to happen in first year of in-service practice relate to role perceptions. During initial teacher education, the aspects of role perceptions that are reported to change are in relation to the obligatory nature of Irish for some children, the role teachers feel they should have in promoting Irish, and also teacher proficiency, especially the expectation that Irish should be taught primarily through Irish, and that Irish should be used

informally outside of the Irish lesson. Teachers were asked in the interviews about these areas. They were also given an opportunity to speak about other aspects of their role that they were becoming more familiar with: nurturing positive attitudes to Irish, implementing CLIL and exposing children to cultural elements during the teaching of Irish.

5.3.3.2 Obligatory Nature of Irish

Teachers had previously been asked about the obligatory nature of Irish for different learners e.g. children whose parents did not want them to learn Irish, EAL learners and children with SEN. Expectations concerning children with EAL continue to evolve, again as teachers obtain more experience working with these children. As we see in Table 5.3.3.2, a small percentage of teachers (14.0%) have experience of teaching children with EAL but teachers with this experience overwhelmingly report the advantage of children with other language competencies being present in Irish lessons (11% out of the 14%), particularly because of their positive attitudes to learning Irish (9% out of 14%). While a minority of teachers at the end of initial teacher education think that EAL learners should not be obliged to learn Irish (11.0%), the vast majority of teachers who now have experience of working with EAL learners are in favour of them being included in the teaching of Irish (11% of the 14%). For a small number of teachers, where there is a large proportion of EAL learners in a class though, teachers now question the value of teaching Irish to children whose parents did not speak Irish and for whom Irish was not reinforced in their home life (6.7%). No teachers mention that parents indicated they did not want their child to learn Irish, however.

Less than half of the teachers interviewed had experience of working with children with SEN (46.7%) but for teachers who did have this experience, views on the obligatory nature of Irish for these children continued to evolve. At the end of initial teacher education, over a quarter of teachers (26.4%) felt that children with SEN should not be obliged to learn Irish. After experience in the classroom however, teachers reveal a greater awareness of the range of SEN present in classrooms and almost half of teachers with this experience were in favour now of including children with SEN in Irish lessons provided there was a differentiated approach (23.0%). Teachers in first year in-service practice give a more nuanced description of the implications of mild versus general learning difficulties, or language-specific versus more generalised learning difficulties or disorders, on a pupil's ability to learn Irish. These teachers with the benefit of early in-service practice, are better versed in the range of special needs that can be encountered in the primary school and views over the obligatory nature of Irish are better linked to the specific learning condition or disability of a particular child. Teachers tend to view that Irish should not be obligatory for children who have moderate or profound learning difficulties but that in some

cases, exemptions from Irish are given out too readily. Only in a minority of cases do teachers interpret SEN as including children with higher ability (10.1 %). The advantage of learning Irish for these children is mentioned by the same proportion of teachers (10.1%).

Table 5.3.3.2
Percentage of teachers reporting changes in views on aspects of the obligatory nature of Irish

Stability or Change in relation to Views on the Obligatory Nature of Irish	***Percentage of Teachers Expressing Change***	***Representative Comments***
A minority of teachers have experience of teaching children with EAL in their classes	14.0	*I find children who have another language pick up Irish so much easier.*
Teachers are more in favour of children with EAL to be included in Irish lessons	11.0	
EAL learners are viewed as being a great asset to the teaching of Irish	11.0	*I found with the EAL children, because that (negative) attitude wasn't at home, they are a lot more enthusiastic learners.*
EAL learners have positive attitudes to Irish	9.0	
In classes with a high percentage of EAL learners, the value of learning Irish is now questioned	6.7	*So I would question a little bit on spending half an hour every day with the kids teaching Irish but they will never ever, ever use it at home. Their parents don't know any Irish...Will this all be useful to them?*
Less than half of teachers have experience of children with SEN in their classes	46.7	*I think it very much depends on the special needs that the child has.*
Teachers are more aware of the range of SEN that exist and they are in favour of exemptions from Irish where a child has a profound learning difficulty or disability, or a language specific difficulty, disability or impairment	30.0	*If it's something like dyslexia, not so much a special education need but they can have difficulty with spelling and reading and that can be really hard*
Teachers are in favour of children with SEN being included in the Irish lesson but with appropriate differentiation	23.0	
A minority highlight the advantages of learning Irish for higher ability pupils	10.1	

5.3.3.3 Role and Responsibilities in Promoting Irish

When they completed the questionnaires at the end of initial teacher education, the vast majority expressed a view that primary teachers had a 'very important' to 'important role' in the revitalisation of Irish (96.7%). Upon leaving initial teacher education, some felt that they had been assigned the main role (44.4%) but that it would be more effective if they were working in tandem with other partners. We see in Table 5.3.3.3 that in early in-service practice, the disproportionate responsibility placed on teachers in promoting Irish is mentioned again by many teachers (86.7%), echoing previous views expressed by teachers in the 1930s and 1980s. Responses in the interview reveal a greater awareness than emerged in the questionnaire data relating to the demands of their future role in revitalising and maintaining Irish outside of school. After the experience of teaching in the classroom, most are more in favour of a collaborative approach (86.7%), sharing responsibility for the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish with others in the community. No teacher expresses the desire for the revitalisation of Irish to be removed as a goal or responsibility from the primary school context, and indeed it was noted that a more co-ordinated revitalisation and maintenance effort could be made in a formal institution such as the school.

Table 5.3.3.3
Percentage of teachers reporting change in relation to the role and responsibilities of the teacher in promoting Irish

Change and Stability in relation to Role and Responsibility	Teachers Expressing this Change	Representative Comments
Most teachers would like to see the responsibility for the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish shared amongst other key stakeholders, in particular parents, the government and local organisations.	86.7	*Teachers only see children from 9am – 3pm so there is a lot outside of the 9am – 3pm to make sure Irish is a living language rather than just a school-based language.* *I think there needs to be a sense of community about it and everybody needs to work together to reinforce it.*

5.3.3.4 Teacher Proficiency

In their first year of in-service practice, teachers have more experience of the demands that are placed on them in terms of teacher proficiency e.g. teaching primarily through Irish, using Irish informally, and teaching other subjects from time to time through Irish. Some further changes are reported in each of these three areas.

5.3.3.4.1 Teaching Irish primarily through Irish

The greatest change in relation to views on teacher proficiency occurs regarding the teaching of Irish primarily through Irish as we see in Table 5.3.3.4.1.

Table 5.3.3.4.1
Teaching Primarily through Irish: Change in Views in First Year Professional Practice

Change and Stability in View about Teaching Primarily through Irish	Teachers Expressing this Change	Representative Comments
Most teachers report that ideally Irish only would be spoken during the Irish lesson.	87.1	*I think it's (teaching primarily through Irish) definitely something to strive for 99% of the time.*
Teachers working in Irish-medium schools overwhelmingly support this approach	19.4	
	58.1	*It is reasonable (to expect a teacher to teach Irish through the medium of Irish) but I find sometimes that it is exhausting.*
Most teachers in English-medium schools, however, report using some English during Irish lessons to clarify instructions and for certain aspects of classroom management	52.1	
Most teachers in English-medium schools report a concern that by teaching completely through Irish, children might disengage	58.1	*They were looking at me like I was a Martian coming in talking Irish to them all the time.*
Most teachers report that children have limited experience of full immersion during the Irish lesson	58.1	
Time and investment needed so children become comfortable with immersion strategies	10.1	*If you don't know what's being taught, if you don't get it even after it has been explained to you in Irish, you kind of feel a bit lost for the rest of the lesson.*
A small number report anxiety in their own level of proficiency in order to teach primarily through Irish		*I do think a couple of sentences in English wouldn't hurt anybody.*

At the end of initial teacher education, there was a significant fall in the percentage of teachers who felt it was 'very' reasonable' or 'reasonable' to expect Irish to be taught primarily through Irish. A third of teachers also in their open-ended responses perceive English to have some role in the teaching of Irish (33.0%). We see in Table 5.3.3.4.1. that over half of teachers in early in-service practice, working in English-medium schools, report using English during Irish lessons to clarify instructions and to aid in classroom management (58.1%) though the overwhelming majority still believe that Irish should ideally be taught completely through Irish

(87.1%). All teachers working in Irish-medium schools (19.4%) support the total immersion approach to teaching Irish. The investment of time and energy so that children get used to immersion strategies is also noted by most teachers (58.1%). Some teachers express insecurities with their own level of proficiency in order to be able to teach fully through Irish (10.1%), although it should be noted that even teachers reporting a very high standard of oral proficiency e.g. someone from the *Gaeltacht*, who had been in Irish-medium education or who had obtained a high level of Irish in an English-medium school, or who have experience of teaching in Irish-medium schools, still report difficulties in aspects of teaching through Irish in English-medium schools. Over half of teachers also note the danger of children disengaging (52.1%) and that children may have little experience heretofore of such an approach (58.1%).

5.3.3.4.2 Use of Informal Irish

Teachers were also asked at the end of initial teacher education about their willingness to implement certain strategies that are considered effective in language teaching e.g. use of informal Irish, CLIL and exposing children to cultural elements in the teaching of Irish. The interview stage allowed the researcher to explore whether and to what extent these approaches were being implemented, and teachers' views about the value and feasibility of doing this. As Table 5.3.3.4.2 reveals, teachers at the end of initial teacher education are in favour of using Irish informally throughout the school day to increase children's exposure to the language. The interview stage gave teachers an opportunity to expand on the type of informal Irish that they use. The majority of teachers report using informal Irish during the school day for simple greetings, instructions and rhymes at various intervals during the day (65.1%). The rationale most often given for using Irish in this informal way is that, children pick up a good deal of Irish when it was used in this informal way. When for examples of informal Irish used, however, it is evident that most of the informal Irish used with children concerns giving instructions or developing receptive language skills.

Table 5.3.3.4.2
Percentage of teachers reporting on their practice of using informal Irish

Change and Stability in View about Informal Irish	Teachers Expressing this View	Representative Comments
The types of informal Irish used by teachers focus on developing receptive language and there is little opportunity for children to respond in Irish	65.1%	*It makes the job a lot less of a burden if they are learning some of the nathanna (phrases) during the day.*

5.3.3.4.3 Teaching Other Subjects through Irish (CLIL)

Table 5.3.3.4.3 we see that by the end of initial teacher education, over a third of teachers support the implementation of CLIL (37.4%) but teachers raise concerns over children's ability to comprehend the material and the risk of them disengaging if they do not have a positive attitude to Irish. In their first year of initial teacher education, the number of teachers who have actually done this is very low (6.7%) and where it has been done, it is only on a partial basis in the arts subjects or in PE. Most practising teachers (53.3%) now feel that CLIL is an unrealistic aim as it places great demands on the teacher in terms of language proficiency and pedagogical knowledge i.e. how to teach new concepts effectively through Irish. Even where teachers report being very proficient in Irish, the vast majority (84.1%) express concern that pupils may not understand what is being taught or that they may develop a dislike for the subject being taught through Irish if they are already not positively disposed to Irish. Another concern is that children might disengage from the lesson taught through Irish (74.2%).

Table 5.3.3.4.3
Percentage of teachers reporting changes in views concerning the teaching of other subjects through Irish

Stability and Change reported in relation to CLIL	% of Teachers Expressing this Change	Representative Comments
Only a very small minority have implemented CLIL and it has been on a partial basis	6.7	*I think something like History, Geography or Drama could be taught bilingually but I think subjects like Maths and English need to be taught through English. I would see them as being very, very important subjects in their own right.*
Many teachers do not feel that they have the proficiency in Irish to implement CLIL effectively	53.3	*I don't think I could teach a History lesson completely through Irish at that level (senior classes).*
Many teachers report a concern that children would not understand the lesson if it was taught through Irish	84.1	*I would just wonder would there be a lot lost on that lesson, would a lot of things be lost through translation?*
Many teachers report a concern that children would disengage from a lesson taught through Irish	74.2	*The children wouldn't get the full value of the content of the lesson.*

5.3.4 Other Changes in Role Perceptions

During the interviews, teachers also revealed their perspectives on other aspects of their role, in particular including cultural elements in the teaching of Irish, maintaining proficiency in Irish, nurturing positive attitudes to Irish, and becoming a linguistic and cultural representative for students. These new changes are outlined in Table 5.3.4.4.

5.3.4.1 Inclusion of Cultural Elements in Teaching Irish

At the end of initial teacher education, the vast majority of teachers are in favour of certain cultural elements being included in the teaching of Irish e.g. songs, dances, and games. The interview aimed to identify whether this was happening in practice, and what type of Irish culture was being explored through the teaching of Irish. During the interview, Irish culture was mostly interpreted by teachers as traditional Irish Gaelic culture e.g. traditional dance, songs and literature. A small number reported that inclusion of traditional dance, songs and literature featured regularly in their teaching of Irish (16.7%). Many noted that contemporary music forms, particularly those produced by Coláiste Lurgan, an Irish summer programme aimed at teenagers, or other translated songs were popular choices by teachers for use in lessons (12.1%). Contemporary music originally composed in Irish, e.g. by the band Kíla, was not mentioned by anyone. Teachers described "sometimes" adding these elements into their teaching of Irish but it is noteworthy that when asked to speak about general approaches to teaching Irish or a recent lesson taught at the beginning of the interview, nobody mentioned the inclusion of any cultural elements.

5.3.4.2 Maintaining Proficiency

During first year of in-service practice, teachers are gaining more experience in their role and so are better able to identify any challenges at this stage than they were at the end of initial teacher education. Challenges reported to emerge since they began teaching are in relation to maintaining proficiency and in nurturing positive attitudes to Irish. During the interview, a minority of teachers spoke about an automatic association being made by the general public between the identity of a primary teacher and a speaker of Irish (15.0%). The majority stated at the end of their programme that improving proficiency in Irish was a key part not only of being a teacher of Irish, but also as a primary teacher in general (93.4%) yet issues of language anxiety appeared frequently in their open-ended answers. During their first year of in-service practice, most teachers referred to the ideal that a primary teacher would have proficiency in Irish was mentioned again by the majority of teachers but the difficulty in achieving and maintaining this

was noted by half of the group (50.0%). They report limited opportunities to do this and a very small proportion report insecurities in their own proficiency (6.7%).

5.3.4.3 Nurturing Positive Attitudes to Irish

During their first year of in-service, teachers also become more aware of the challenges in nurturing positive attitudes to Irish. The formation of positive attitudes is very significant in the teaching of Irish, more so than in other subjects (Harris, 2006). Teachers in Irish-medium school report no issue in nurturing positive attitudes. For teachers in English-medium schools, however, this is reported as one of the most challenging dimensions of their work (66.7%). Teachers who report a high level in Irish proficiency report no major difficulties in planning for an Irish lesson or in delivering content. It is interesting to note though, that difficulties in nurturing positive attitudes to Irish amongst children is still noted though even by very proficient speakers.

Table 5.3.4.4
Other Reported Changes in Role Perceptions in Early In-Service Practice

Stability and Change reported in Role Perceptions	% of Teachers Expressing this Change	Representative Comments
A minority of teachers view cultural elements as central to the teaching of Irish and where included, the focus tends to be on using contemporary songs translated from English	16.7	*The traditional Irish isn't to the taste anymore of the young Irish I think using the old to embellish the new, that's what we can add to the culture.* *...but it's not the traditional Irish dance or Irish songs, it's more modern, songs that Colaiste Lurgan do.*
Half of teachers still agree that it is important for teachers to improve their proficiency in Irish but some teachers report that it is difficult to find opportunities	50.0	*I think people assume once you are a primary school teacher that you are fluent in Irish.*
A small number report insecurity in their own proficiency in Irish	6.7	*I still feel that part of my image is to feel strongly about trying to promote Irish with the children so I still feel that it is part of my image as a primary Teacher.*
Most teachers working in English-medium schools find it a challenge to nurture positive attitudes to Irish amongst children	66.7	*When you say 'Irish', it's all 'Oh God' and this feeling that they can't do it.* *Sometimes when I tell them to take out their Irish book they say 'Ohhhhh'.*

5.3.4.4 Becoming a Linguistic and Cultural Representative

At the end of initial teacher education, we see from the mean scale score attitudes to Irish speakers as being mostly favourable. They also respond favourably to statements concerning Irish

as an ethnic symbol. The researcher was interested in finding out in the interviews if, upon entering the professional service, they now identify as Irish-language speakers or feel a sense of belonging to an Irish-speaking network or community. The interview allowed the researcher to examine the extent to which an identity as a speaker of Irish is part of the teacher's professional and/or personal identity.

As mentioned earlier, teachers at questionnaire stage reported that being a teacher of Irish was 'very central' to or 'central' to their identity as a teacher (67.8%). The extent to which a teacher was involved in Irish-speaking networks outside of school was explored. Most teachers in early in-service practice, report that speaking Irish belongs mostly to their professional identity and is not synonymous with being an Irish speaker (77.4%). Only a very small number of teachers have attended any Irish-language event since they began teaching (19.4%). When they did, it was not because of their new professional role in teaching Irish but rather because of an interest they had in aspects of Irish traditional music before they began initial teacher education. Very few report visiting the *Gaeltacht* since beginning teaching (3.2%). Being a speaker of Irish is therefore, more closely aligned with elements of their professional rather than their personal identity.

Table 5.3.4.5
Percentages of teachers reporting certain views concerning their perceived identity as an Irish teacher and/or Irish speaker

Change and Stability reported in view of self as Irish speaker	Percentage of Teachers Expressing this Change	Representative Comments
For most, being a teacher of Irish is not synonymous with identifying as an Irish speaker	77.4	
Some teachers see the advantages of speaking Irish in terms of widening your world view	40.0	*If you only have English, you are just missing out on that little part.* *There is a whole side to this country that we live in that can remain untapped or untouched if you are not in any way exposed to the Irish language.*

5.3.5 Teachers with High Proficiency in Irish

Strength of reported correlations between high oral proficiency and particular beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions, at the beginning and end of initial teacher education are compared here. Only correlations with a significance level $p \leq 0.05$ are reported. Appendix K contains results from

the correlation tests for Group 1 whereas Appendix L contains results from the correlation tests for Group 2 on the accompanying cd.

5.3.5.1 Correlations between High Proficiency and Beliefs

As we see in Table 5.3.5, for teachers at the beginning of their programme, high proficiency in Irish is positively correlated with the following beliefs: that Irish people think it is important to learn Irish (r = .236) and that learning Irish is 'very easy' or 'easy' (r = .459). High proficiency negatively correlates with the belief that people who are good at mathematics and science are not good at learning Irish (r = -.327). For teachers at the end of their programme, high proficiency in Irish is also correlated with the belief that learning Irish is 'very easy' or 'easy' (r =.340). For teachers at the end of their programme, high proficiency is correlated with three further beliefs. First it is positively correlated with a belief that if someone spent an hour a day learning Irish it would take them 1-2 years to learn Irish (r = .228). It will be recalled that the majority of the group believed that it should 1 – 5 years. High proficiency is negatively correlated with a belief that it is easier to speak than to understand Irish (r= -.210) and that learning Irish is mostly a matter of translating from English (r =-.241). Teachers with high proficiency at the end of their programme therefore unsurprisingly expect Irish to be easier to learn than their peers but do not necessarily think that Irish people generally feel it is important to learn Irish.

Table 5.3.5.1
Correlations between beliefs and teachers with high oral proficiency in Irish

Beginning of programme	Correlation	End of Programme	Correlation
20. People who are good at mathematics and science are not good at learning Irish.	(r = -.327)	15. It is easier to speak than to understand Irish.	(r= -.210)
21. Irish people think it is important to learn Irish.	(r = .236)	17. Learning Irish is mostly a matter of translating from English.	(r = -.241)
25. Learning Irish is 'easy' or 'very easy'.	(r = .459)	25. Learning Irish is 'easy' or ' very easy'	(r = .340)
		26. If someone spent one hour a day learning Irish, it would take them 1- 2 years to speak Irish very well.	(r = .228)

5.3.5.2 Correlations between High Proficiency and Attitudes

In relation to attitudes to the Irish language, for high proficiency in Irish no significant correlations exist regarding either of the scales *Attitude to the Irish Language and Irish Speakers* or *Attitude to*

Learning Irish. Some significant correlations exist, however, in relation to items in the scale. We will first look at the scale *Attitudes to the Irish Language and Irish Speakers*. For teachers at the beginning of their programme, high proficiency in Irish is positively correlated with the following beliefs: People in Ireland who don't speak Irish should try harder to learn Irish (r = .427). I would like to know more Irish speakers (r = .294). Interestingly for teachers at the end of their programme, high proficiency in Irish is negatively correlated with the belief that most people who speak Irish are friendly and easy to get along with (r =-.221) which may be linked to views about being the perceived target of criticism by Irish speakers while in the *Gaeltacht* or to the fact that they do not report knowing many speakers of Irish.

Table 5.3.5.2
Correlations between attitudes and teachers with high oral proficiency in Irish

Group 1	Correlation	Group 2	Correlation
Attitude to Irish Speakers		**Attitude to Irish Speakers**	
6. People in Ireland who don't speak Irish should try harder to learn Irish.	(r = .427)	1. Most people who speak Irish are friendly and easy to get along	(r =-.221)
9. I would like to know more Irish speakers.	(r = .294)		
Attitude to Learning Irish		**Attitude to Learning Irish**	
1. Learning Irish is a waste of time.	(r= -.293)	1. Learning Irish is a waste of time.	(r = -.311)
3. I really enjoy learning Irish.	(r = .440)		
4. I love learning Irish.	(r = .408)	2. When I leave college, I shall give up this study of Irish entirely because I am not interested in it.	(r = -.393)
6. Learning Irish is really great.	(r = .338)		
7. I hate Irish.	(r = -.340)	3. I really enjoy learning Irish.	(r = .467)
		4. I love learning Irish.	(r = .396)
		6. Learning Irish is really great.	(r = .420)
		8. I would rather spend my time on subjects other than Irish.	(r = -.256)
		10. I plan to learn as much Irish as possible.	(r= .256)

We see in Table 5.3.5 above that in relation to the scale *Attitude to Learning Irish*, for teachers at the beginning of their programme, high proficiency in Irish is positively correlated with three attitude statements: that the teacher really enjoys learning Irish (r = .440), that the teacher loves

learning Irish (r = .408) and that the teacher thinks learning Irish is really great (r = .338). High proficiency in Irish is negatively correlated with the view that learning Irish is a waste of time (r = -.293) or that they hate learning Irish (r = -.340). For teachers at the end of their programme, high proficiency in Irish is also negatively correlated with the view that learning Irish is a waste of time (r = -.311), and further is negatively correlated with the view that when the teacher leaves college he/she will give up his/her study of Irish because he/she is not interested in it (r = -.393), and that the teacher would rather spend his/ her time on subjects other than Irish (r = -.256) and interviews reveal that this minority of high proficiency teachers maintain connections with Irish-speaking communities. As we saw in Group 1, high proficiency in Irish among teachers at the end of their programme is positively correlated with the following views: the teacher really enjoys learning Irish (r = .467), that the teacher loves learning Irish (r = .396) and that the teacher thinks learning Irish is really great (r = .420). High proficiency among teachers at the end of their programme is also positively correlated with a desire to learn as much Irish as possible (r= .256). In sum, high proficiency is linked to greater enjoyment and willingness to learn Irish.

5.3.5.3 Correlations between High Proficiency and Role Perceptions

We saw in Chapter 4 that for teachers at the beginning of their programme, high proficiency in Irish has a significant correlation with views regarding the obligatory nature of Irish. No such correlation exists for teachers at the end of their programme. Equally, there is no significant correlation either at the beginning or the end of their programme between high proficiency in Irish and views on Irish as an ethnic symbol, which indicates that views of teachers as a whole group tend to move in the same direction and that less differences exist between high and lower proficiency teachers in relation to broader ideals of compulsory Irish in primary education and the ethnic value of the language.

For teachers at the beginning of their programme, high proficiency is positively correlated with a view that it is reasonable to expect teachers to teach other subjects through Irish (r = .358) and an expectations that the teacher will derive great satisfaction from teaching Irish (r = .432). Significant correlations exist for high proficiency teachers at the end of their programme in relation to these two statements also. High proficiency amongst teachers at the end of their programme is positively correlated with a view that it is important for teachers to improve their own Irish (r = .265) and an expectation that he/she will derive great satisfaction from teaching Irish and that children in her class will have a lot of interest in Irish (r = .212). In sum, high proficiency at the end of their programme is linked to a greater willingness to maintain proficiency and use Irish outside of the formal lesson. It is also linked to greater satisfaction in

teaching Irish and an expectation that children will have a greater interest in Irish, presumably because this high level of proficiency can motivate and enthuse children more.

Taking account of all of these significant correlations, it can be summarised that a higher level of proficiency influences, in a variety of ways, the views of teachers during initial teacher education. First these teachers are more likely to believe that learning Irish is easier than the rest of the group, they have more positive attitudes to learning Irish, they associate greater satisfaction with teaching Irish, and they are more willing to teach other subjects through Irish. High proficiency, therefore can give rise to an increased confidence in teaching during initial teacher education. The impact of high proficiency on views concerning aspects of the obligatory nature of Irish in primary schools weakens as the teacher moves through initial teacher education. Indeed correlations for most items are stronger at the beginning, showing that at the end of initial teacher education, there are other factors influencing teacher views.

Table 5.3.5.3
Correlations between role perceptions and teachers with high oral proficiency in Irish

Beginning of Programme	Correlation	End of Programme	Correlation
14. It is reasonable to expect teachers to teach other subjects from time to time through Irish.	(r = .358)	11. It is important for teachers to improve their own Irish	(r = .265)
		14. It is reasonable to expect teachers to teach other subjects from time to time through Irish.	(r = .296)
17. I expect to derive great satisfaction from teaching Irish	(r = .432)		
		17. I expect to derive great satisfaction from teaching Irish	(r = .235)
		18. The children in my class will have a high level of interest in Irish	(r = .212)

5.4 Summary and Conclusions

Data from questionnaires administered to Group 1 and Group 2, and the follow up interview with Group 2 allow us to make some general conclusions about the evolution of beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions during initial teacher education, and early in-service practice. We will first summarise the findings of the cross-sectional comparison of Group 1 and Group 2 at the beginning and end of initial teacher education. Then we will then summarise the findings of the cross-sectional comparison of Group 1 after School and *Gaeltacht* placement, and Group 2 at the

end of initial teacher education. Finally we will look at the longitudinal study of Group 2 as they move from the end of initial teacher education into early professional practice.

5.4.1 A Comparison of Teacher Views at the Beginning and End of Initial Teacher Education (Questionnaire 1 and 2)

Data from questionnaires reveal that there is some stability in beliefs about learning and teaching Irish. Teachers still believe in a hierarchy of difficulty in terms of learning different languages and believe to an extent in foreign language aptitude and that it will be easier for children than adults to learn Irish. They also still estimate a similar amount of time (1-5 years) to learn to speak Irish very well. The majority at beginning and end are in favour of guessing if someone does not know a word in Irish and support the notion of repetition and practice when learning Irish. Teachers at these two points in their career also believe that learning to speak Irish very well will be of benefit to them in applying for jobs. Changes, which are significant across the three collapsed categories as well as trends observed in the high end category 'agree', are in the direction of more communicative approaches to language learning with significantly less teachers placing an emphasis on an excellent accent (5.5%) or believing that Irish is mostly a matter of learning new vocabulary (27.5%). We see by the end of the programme a greater tolerance for learner mistakes with less (31.9%) teachers believing that making mistake early on will mean these mistakes will be hard to get rid of later on. More teachers at the end consider Irish to be different from studying other subjects a (73.6%) and simultaneously a substantial minority (42.8%) begin to believe that it is more difficult. Significantly less teachers (only 8.9%) believe at the end that it is easier to speak than to understand Irish and issues surrounding oral proficiency are later mentioned in open-ended supplementary questions. Only a very small minority (1.3%) at the beginning of the programme believe in a gender-related foreign language aptitude and more disagree with this belief by the end. Culture is considered by teachers at the beginning and end as having only a minor role in the teaching of Irish.

Attitudes too, remain generally very positive with no significant change in mean scale score for *Attitude to the Irish Language and Irish speakers* and *Attitude to learning Irish* but the reduction in proportions agreeing with a number of items is indicative of waning positive attitudes. The vast majority of both groups associate enjoyment and satisfaction with the learning of Irish, and a desire to keep learning Irish and get to know Irish speakers. At the end of initial teacher education, teachers report other experiences such as attending Irish-language events or taking classes in Irish as positively influencing their general attitudes. Views concerning the group of items *Irish as an Ethnic Symbol* also remain positive, though there are some hints at a declining

support for its cultural value, and significantly less teachers feel one needs to speak Irish to understand Irish culture.

Teachers at the beginning and end of initial teacher education agree generally with the obligatory nature of Irish in primary schools but significantly less teachers believe that children should have to learn Irish if their parents don't want them to. Teachers by the end also question the exemption from Irish for EAL learners. In terms of their role in promoting Irish, teachers still report a great deal of pride in their role as a primary teacher, and their role specifically as a teacher of Irish as being 'very central' or 'central' to their overall identity. There is a trend however, for teachers by the end to consider their role more generalist terms and significantly more teachers in their open-ended responses however express that Irish is not more important than other subjects. Teachers still feel that primary teacher play an important role in revitalising and maintaining Irish especially because they have the ability to expose children to Irish at a young age, but we see by the end of initial teacher education a reluctance to accept the main responsibility. Teachers also mention the blame placed on them for low standards in Irish amongst the population at large. They are now more in favour of the responsibility in promoting Irish being shared amongst other key stakeholders in society and are aware of the difficulties placed on them by societal expectations.

The need for proficiency in Irish in order to be confident and teach effectively, as well as to motivate children and to inspire a love of the language, is noted by more teachers in Group 2 in their open-ended answers. Indeed issues of teacher proficiency are outlined by teachers at the end of their programme more frequently in different sections than teachers at the beginning. For a small minority at the end (2.2%) language anxiety affects the pride they feel in taking on their future role. A small minority (5.5%) mention this language anxiety again when asked about how central being a teacher of Irish is in their overall identity. The same amount is anxious about their ability to teach completely through Irish (5.5%). For almost a third of teachers (30.8%), language anxiety impacts on their experiences in the *Gaeltacht*. While the vast majority at the beginning and end feel it is important for teachers to improve their own Irish they begin to question some of the expectations placed on them. Significantly less teachers feel it is reasonable to expect Irish to be taught primarily through Irish and almost a third in their open-ended answers identify a need for English. Also, there is a decline in teachers who are in favour of implementing CLIL and a minority of teachers mention their own proficiency as a factor in this, as evidenced by drops at the high end of the scale. Teachers at the beginning and end are in favour of using informal Irish, however, which is deemed as easy to implement.

In terms of the two key experiences of school and *Gaeltacht* Placement, teachers anticipate these positively at the beginning of initial teacher education and actual experience of

these is also reported to be generally positive. Some of the challenges anticipated by beginning pre-service teachers in relation to teaching Irish evolve during initial teacher education with teachers at the end thinking more about children's proficiency and interest in the lesson. Adding to the challenge of teaching Irish is the fact that a small number of teachers feel that there are low standards of Irish in the general public (3.3%) and that almost a quarter of teachers (24,2%) feel they need to teach "correct" Irish to children. Nevertheless the satisfaction and enjoyment associated with teaching Irish is consistently high. It can be seen therefore, that teachers' expectations of this placement is generally optimistic and realistic.

Teachers usually have some experience of the *Gaeltacht* placement before they come to initial teacher education. At the beginning teachers view the placement mostly as an opportunity to improve proficiency but by the end, significantly less teachers think this placement is of benefit to their proficiency but rather that it holds opportunity to experience *Gaeltacht* culture and to interact socially with locals and their peers. Teachers at the end are also more critical of the quality of teaching and the opportunities to speak Irish while on placement. It should still be noted however, that teachers at the end report this experience as influencing positively their attitude to Irish. Teachers with high proficiency in Irish appear to have some advantage over their peers in terms of being more optimistic about the teaching of Irish and expect to derive great satisfaction from teaching Irish. We see, however, that correlations between high proficiency and beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions are usually stronger at the beginning of initial teacher education.

5.4.2 A Comparison of Teacher Views after Key Experiences and later at the End of Initial Teacher Education (Interview 1 and Questionnaire 2)

We can draw together findings from teachers' views of the two key experiences, school and *Gaeltacht* placement, at three points in time: beginning of initial teacher education, following these first key experiences, and also at the end of initial teacher education, to chart the evolution of beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions, and also anticipated versus actual experience of these placements. Teachers identify some initial changes in beliefs about teaching Irish and role perceptions linked to classroom experiences, but they do not report any change in the domain of attitudes. Direct experiences in the classroom may make teachers readjust their views about how different Irish is compared to other subjects particularly because of the affective dimension and the need to motivate children which they do not see as being as pronounced in other subjects. The direct experience of teaching also calls into question any support for a gender-based foreign language aptitude. Other changes in beliefs that are reported by the end of initial teacher education do not arise during first school placement for example teachers do not mention the

role of learner errors or the importance of accent. At this stage of their career, teachers do not speak often about the perspective of the child, her level of proficiency and interest but this insight appears to grow by the end of initial teacher education.

Teachers do not consider school placement to affect their attitude to the Irish language generally or to views of Irish as an ethnic symbol, though immediately following the *Gaeltacht* experience, teachers identify some positive attitudinal change but as we see in questionnaires at the end of their programme, this effect is minimal. Other events that are reported to influence attitudes reported by teachers at the end of their programme are activities by *An Cumann Gaelach and* visiting *Conradh na Gaeilge*, Irish modules undertaken in college, the influence of peers, perceived progress in their own proficiency in Irish, and attending Irish-language events.

Having engaged in school placement a small minority have experience of working with EAL learners and children with SEN and their views on obligatory Irish start to become more developed and automatic exemptions from Irish are challenged, a trend that is more pronounced by the end of their programme presumably as they engage in further placements. After the first experience of teaching Irish teachers show a burgeoning awareness of the responsibility they have in promoting Irish and the difficulties involved because they are under supported. It is not until the end of initial teacher education, however, that they explicitly name the other parties who should be involved or start to speak about the unrealistic expectations placed on them and the blame sometimes attributed to teachers for low levels of public competence in Irish. Issues of teacher proficiency are raised following first school placement but given the short period of this placement and guidelines for it, teachers have no experience of CLIL. It is not surprising therefore that views on CLIL do not change at this early stage though we see later that after more experience, teachers are more reluctant to try this approach. By the end of initial teacher education we also see teachers moving away from the conviction that Irish should be taught primarily through Irish to a more judicious use of English. At the early stages of initial teacher education, the vast majority cling to the ideal of teaching primarily through Irish though they begin to note some inherent challenges. Using informal Irish on the other hand is viewed as easy to implement though the focus is more on teachers giving instructions in Irish and children responding rather than encouraging children to use Irish informally.

Reports following first school placement suggest that there is a high level of satisfaction associated with teaching Irish and this is stable by the end of initial teacher education. Teachers anticipate a degree of difficulty in teaching Irish and following school placement they are more aware of particular challenges involved, though they still expect to derive satisfaction from the experience, and this is later reported following the placement. Later concerns about teaching Irish, in particular, children's proficiency and interest do not come to the surface following first

school placement and so may be linked to greater experience or reflection at the end of their programme.

Generally they anticipate the *Gaeltacht* placement very positively also. This early anticipation is matched in some respects by actual experience. Teachers initially see it as an opportunity to improve proficiency, but by the end teachers frame it more in terms of its social and cultural benefits. Following first *Gaeltacht* placement, teachers begin to identify some anxieties in their language proficiency and the limited opportunities they have to improve and to be part of an Irish-speaking community. When we look at the reports of final year teachers, we can see though that concerns regarding this placement are somewhat different for both groups and some of the concerns reported by teachers after first *Gaeltacht* placement are echoed by teachers at the end of their programme and also some further concerns are raised.

Apart from the impact of key experiences in initial teacher education, teachers also point indirectly out that there is a lack of a social dimension for using the language as in the low number who report attending Irish-language events outside of college and the low incidence of speaking Irish with community members in the *Gaeltacht*. These point to limited opportunities to not only improve their language skills, but also the reluctance to identify the speaking of Irish with one's personal life.

5.4.3 A Comparison of Teacher Views at the End of Initial Teacher Education and During Early In-Service Practice (Questionnaire 2 and Interview 2)

Most beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions are generally stable in the first year of professional practice. Teachers by and large maintain their very positive attitudes to Irish while gaining a greater insight into the daily demands of their role. Some beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions continue to evolve as the teacher gains more experience in the classroom. The original belief that high proficiency in Irish would be of benefit in getting a job is now challenged by teachers working in English-medium schools with very few reporting that proficiency in Irish was mentioned in the job criteria or addressed in the interview. With the increased experience of teaching, teachers more firmly disagree that girls will be better at learning Irish than boys. Teachers also describe some flexibility in their beliefs and a tendency to change their approaches if they teach a different class level and understandably if they move from an English-medium to Irish-medium school. Interestingly, almost a quarter believe that working in an English-medium DEIS school influences their beliefs about how Irish should be and can result in material being adapted to a lower level.

Attitudes to the Irish language in general have remained favourable or become more favourable since teachers have begun in-service practice. Attitudes to teaching Irish are still

favourable but teachers are more aware of the challenges involved especially nurturing positive attitudes to Irish in English-medium schools. Teachers do not report much change in views on Irish as an ethnic symbol though almost a third now say that one does not need to speak Irish to feel a sense of "Irishness" but that speaking Irish can expose someone to a more intense subculture. Teachers also remain in favour for the most part of compulsory Irish in primary schools but they give more nuanced responses in relation to the compulsion for EAL learners. Although only minority of teachers have experience of teaching children with EAL in their classes, they are now more in favour of children with EAL to be included in Irish lessons, and see these learners are viewed as being a great asset to the teaching of Irish particularly because of positive attitudes. Less than half of teachers have experience of children with SEN in their classes but they are more aware of the range of SEN that exist and they are in favour of exemptions from Irish where a child has a profound learning difficulty or disability, or a language specific difficulty, disability or impairment.

After several months teaching we see a heightened awareness of the teacher's roles and responsibilities in promoting Irish. The vast majority (86.7%) would like to see the responsibility for the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish shared amongst other key stakeholders, in particular parents, the government and local organisations and refer frequently in the interviews to their somewhat limited capacity to revitalise and maintain Irish to the level that is expected of them in society. Teachers are now aware of other challenging expectations relating to their role such as acting as a linguistic and cultural ambassador, especially when they report anxiety in their language proficiency and a sense of distance form an Irish-speaking community, but mostly they note how difficult it can be to nurture positive attitudes to Irish amongst children. This affective dimension in the teaching of Irish is seen to impact on other aspects of their role. One main concern about teaching primarily through Irish or in teaching other subjects through Irish is that children might disengage from the lesson or that negative attitudes to Irish will make them less positively disposed to another subject through Irish. Having amassed some experience in the classroom, teachers also take into account whether children have previous experience of these two approaches. Insecurities in proficiency is mentioned by a minority but generally the whole group comments that there are very few chances to meet other Irish speakers and to maintain their standard of Irish which is another factor in their reluctance to teach primarily through Irish or to implement CLIL. Teachers remain very supportive of the use of informal Irish though this is utilised mostly to promote receptive language skills. Teachers who identify as an Irish speaker during early in-service practice have considered themselves as such for a long period and it is not necessarily related to their professional role. For most teachers despite speaking Irish being a feature of their day-to-day work, teachers do not necessarily identify as an Irish speaker. As well

as this, despite an elevated willingness initially to teach other subjects from time to time through Irish, teachers with high proficiency are no more likely to do this during early in-service practice.

Chapter 6

The Evolution of Views during Initial Teacher Education and Early In-Service Practice

6.0 Introduction

Studies of language beliefs discussed in this thesis so far have explored teachers of various different languages e.g. English (Mori, 1999; Horwitz, 1985), and French, German, and Spanish (Altan, 2005). Studies of language attitudes, on the other hand, have highlighted the views of people concerning minority languages and their revitalisation e.g. Welsh (Garrett, 2003), or of certain demographics in relation to attitudes to the Irish language - the general public (e.g. CLAR, 1975), attitudes of pupils and parents (e.g. Harris and Murtagh, 1999; Murtagh, 2007) or the attitudes of teachers specifically (e.g. INTO, 1985; Harris, 2006). Studies of role perceptions too, have examined views of teachers of different languages e.g. Irish and English (CILAR, 1975; Busch, 2010; INTO, 1985), regarding language in education policy and practices. The purpose of this discussion, therefore, is to locate our new data about pre-service and early in-service teachers of Irish within in the national and international context documented in these studies. A major focus of the discussion will be the extent to which pre-service teachers of Irish are a distinctive group, bringing particular set of beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions to the profession from the very beginning. Our discussion of the profile of Group 1 should help to answer this question. Another major focus is whether, and to what extent, certain elements of this initial profile changes or modifies during initial teacher education and early practice. Discussion of the comparisons between Group 1 and Group 2, and longitudinal data from each group, will help to answer this question.

Data from questionnaires and interviews point to some general trends concerning the evolution of beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions during initial teacher education and early in-service practice. Data also reveal how teachers anticipate and experience school and *Gaeltacht* placement, and later their first year of professional practice. We will discuss the topics in the same order as they appear in the results chapters, beginning with the profile of teachers of Irish at the beginning of initial teacher education in relation to beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions. We will then discuss the changes in each of these areas during the educational programme itself and early professional practice, making particular reference to the key classroom and *Gaeltacht* experiences while still mindful of some of the differences between the groups which could also account for the changes in views expressed (refer to Chapter 1, pp.2-3, for a reminder of the

differing profiles of Group 1 and Group 2). The extent to which teachers of Irish are similar or different to teachers of other languages will be then examined, as well as examining the experience of teachers with higher reported proficiency in Irish. The process of becoming a teacher of Irish will hence be discussed in the following manner:

Section 6.1: Characteristic Profile of Pre-Service Teachers

Section 6.2: Evolution of Views during Initial Teacher Education

Section 6.3: Perceived Impact of Key Experiences in Initial Teacher Education on Views

Section 6.4: Evolution of Views during Early In-Service Practice

Section 6.5: Comparing Teachers of Irish to Teachers of Other Languages

Section 6.6: The Experience of Teachers with High Proficiency in Irish

Section 6.7: Summary and Conclusions

6.1 Characteristic Profile of Pre-Service Teachers

We already know that practising teachers have some distinctive characteristics compared to the general public e.g. an above average ability and commitment to the Irish language (INTO, 1985; Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin, 1994). We don't know, however, exactly the background factors and experiences that contribute to this distinctiveness. This mirrors a kind of nature versus nurture debate i.e. do pre-service teachers enter initial teacher education with particular unique characteristics? Or do the experiences during initial teacher education give rise to their distinctiveness? It was found in the analysis of the questionnaire administered to Group 1 at the beginning of initial teacher education, that a combination of both factors may be the case. We will first look at the characteristic profile of teachers at the beginning of initial teacher education. We will then explore the types of beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions that they report, followed by their anticipation of the two key experiences of School and *Gaeltacht* placement.

6.1.1 Teachers compared to the General Public

Some measurements of proficiency in Irish amongst the general public come from the national census data or from language attitudes surveys (e.g. INTO, 1985; Mac Gréil and Rhatigan, 2009). Being considered an 'Irish speaker' under these measurements is a somewhat generous term as it includes together people with only basic proficiency (Walsh, 2010). Results will, therefore, be compared to recent studies where the scale for self-reported proficiency is more aligned with the current study. The self-assessed *Ability in Spoken Irish* scale has been used in a variety of national surveys of ability in Ireland (Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin, 1994 in Murtagh 2007) and so was included in this study too. In the 2000 national survey conducted by *Foras na Gaeilge* 14.6% of the population claimed they had high proficiency in Irish. In the current study, however, over half of

teacher (58.7%) claimed to have 'native speaker ability' or to be able to partake in 'most conversations' even at the beginning of initial teacher education. So it is clear that pre-service teachers have a higher proficiency than that of the general public. In the Harris (2006) study, teachers' proficiency in three different school settings (Irish-medium Gaelscoil, Irish-medium *Gaeltacht* school and English-medium school) were given. It was not possible to do this for the current study as all pre-service teachers could theoretically choose to work in any of these three settings so fair comparisons could not be made.

We can also compare teachers to Leaving Certificate students of a similar age. In the Murtagh study (2007) over 80.0% of students who attended Irish-medium secondary schools report 'native-speaker ability in Irish' and the rest of this group report being able to take part in 'most conversations'. In this study, two-thirds of students who attended Irish-medium primary schools report 'native-like ability' and the rest report being able to take part in 'most conversations'. It should be noted, however, that the incidence of pre-service teachers coming from Irish-medium secondary schooling is low (4.2%). The findings in relation to pre-service teachers who attended English-medium schools are more interesting.

No students from English-medium schools in the Murtagh study (2007) report 'native speaker ability', but almost half report being able to partake in 'most conversations' (48.1%). In this study, a small minority of pre-service teachers who attended English-medium schools report having 'native speaker ability' (4.2%), and over half of them report being able to partake in most conversations' (57.0%). By combining the categories of 'native speaker' and 'most conversations', there are 48.0% reporting high proficiency in Murtagh's study of Leaving Certificate students but 61.2% in present study. So, more beginning teachers who attended English-medium secondary schools report high proficiency than their Leaving Certificate peers. Practising teachers generally report an above average self-reported standard of proficiency (Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin, 1994; INTO, 1985) and it appears that there is a tendency for pre-service teachers to do so too even at the beginning of their programme.

One concern, however, is the minority of pre-service teachers from English-medium schools who report low or very low proficiency in Irish (7.5%) i.e. they report being in the following categories: can speak 'a few simple sentences', the 'odd word' or 'none'. It should be noted that this comprises 6.7% of the total group. It may be that standards of oral proficiency are slipping amongst Leaving Certificate students, or that the reduced percentage of pre-service teachers reporting high levels of proficiency may relate to the type of language they use. Cummins differentiates between academic language needed to access the curriculum (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) and the type of language that is needed for social interaction (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) (2001). It is possible that pre-service teachers are more

aware of the demands that will be placed on them in teaching Irish and in using academic language, as opposed to speaking Irish with peers, and therefore a minority rate themselves as less proficient. Nevertheless, it is a cause of concern that pre-service teachers report low proficiency upon entering initial teacher education especially since low proficiency, and limited opportunities to improve standards of Irish in teachers, has been reported as a cause of concern in the profession (DES, 2007a; Harris, 2006).

6.1.2 Pre-Service Teacher Beliefs

Several researchers have used the BALLI, in whole or in part, to study language beliefs of certain learners. It would not be possible to compare each response reported to individual items on the inventory across such a large number of studies. However, an overview of general trends in responses as suggested by Horwitz (1985), the original designer of the BALLI will be presented. These trends have also been observed in language learners at university level who will not continue on to become teachers. The discussion on pre-service teachers of Irish will however be compared only to other studies where the BALLI was administered specifically to pre-service teachers. Comparisons will also be made with other studies of pre-service teachers that address beliefs. Though the wording in some items differ, there is some overlap in themes addressed. Most of these studies concern the teaching of English or another modern language by a non-native pre-service teacher and so parallels can be drawn between their circumstances and the pre-service teachers of Irish in this study. Findings will be compared to the following studies: Altan, 2006 (Spanish, German and French); Busch, 2010 (English); Horwitz, 1985, 1999 (English); Wong, 2010 (English).

Horwitz makes some general comments about how pre-service teachers respond to items on the BALLI (1985). In her later work, she reiterates that there is a general uniformity in pre-service teachers' beliefs despite being teachers of different languages (1999). She argues that the macro effects of culture on language learning beliefs are minimal but are usually linked to micro effects of the learning circumstance. She argues that pre-service language teachers have more sophisticated views of language learning than the general public. First on the scale *Difficulty of Language Learning* they tend to agree that some languages are more difficult to learn than others, but the one they are learning is relatively easy. More recent studies e.g. Altan (2005) reveal this trend too where teachers of Spanish and French tend to view their languages as easier than do teachers of German. Pre-service teachers also usually estimate then that it will take up to 5 years to learn to speak a language well. In relation to the *Nature of Language Learning/ Learning and Communication Strategies*, they generally believe that language learning is different from studying other subjects. They believe that listening and repeating is important in language

learning but they are usually accepting of communication errors. More recent studies e.g. Altan (2005) shows a decline in support for repetition and drill practices, and a minority believe that learning a language is mostly a matter of learning vocabulary or grammar.

Responses from teachers in this study are generally consistent with this trend. Because teachers were also asked about their attitudes and role perceptions, we can see some links between their beliefs and later the attitudes and role perceptions reported. They estimate that it will take 1-5 years to learn to speak Irish well as do teachers of other languages, and that learning Irish is different from the study of other subjects. Less than a third of beginning pre-service teachers agree with traditional non-communicative approaches to learning Irish e.g. a dependency on translating from English or the rote learning of vocabulary. Beliefs are more aligned with communicative approaches to language learning e.g. allowing learners to make mistakes. In relation to *Foreign Language Aptitude* studies have shown a limited support for belief in a gender related foreign language aptitude at the beginning of initial teacher education as is revealed in Altan's study (2005) or an age related aptitude as illustrated in Nikitina and Furuoko's study (2007). Most teachers of Irish don't believe in a foreign language aptitude though the majority do believe that age can be a critical factor. As noted in the literature review, beliefs are differentiated from role perceptions in this study, and although some studies on 'beliefs' included reference to the role of culture or the importance of teaching primarily through the mother tongue, these areas are discussed in relation to role perceptions in Section 6.1.4.

6.1.2.1 Unique Beliefs for Teachers of Irish

There are some areas over which pre-service teachers of Irish appear to differ from teacher beliefs reported in other studies which may be linked to the minority status of Irish and particular sociolinguistic status. These beliefs are linked to the difficulty of learning Irish, the value society places on language learning, the role of grammar, and similarities and differences between teaching and learning Irish.

A substantial minority of pre-service teachers of Irish believe that learning Irish is 'very difficult' or 'difficult' and as we have seen, intensifying by the end of their programme with almost twice as many teachers believe this. In other studies, however, pre-service teachers tend to think that the language they are learning is 'relatively easy' (Horwitz, 1985). Pre-service teachers of Irish may, therefore, be aware of other non-linguistic factors that make the learning of Irish difficult. Teachers of Irish support repetition and drill practices when learning the language, perhaps because of the limited social situations available outside of school in which to practise Irish. Two-thirds of teachers in Altan's study agree that people in their country think it is important to learn the respective language. Less teachers in this study agree with this statement highlighting the

particular sociolinguistic context of Irish and its status as a minority language. In relation to the value of learning Irish in order to get a teaching position specifically, many agree it is indeed important. This is consistent with other national studies e.g. Ó Laoire (2007). Other studies using the BALLI show that there are certain elements of some languages that pre-service teachers can find difficult, for example writing characters in Kanji script for future teachers of Japanese (Mori and Sato, 2007). Teachers appear to possess a similar anxiety when it comes to teaching Irish grammar at the beginning of initial teacher education. This issue also arises in open-ended responses. We can see that this is not a new issue for teachers of Irish. Almost a quarter of teachers of Irish in 1985 also stated that teaching grammar was too difficult for most children and a minority asserted that teachers did not have enough guidance on this area.

This concern with teaching grammar is a bit surprising given the other beliefs that generally reflect a communicative approach to teaching language. It should be noted, however, that teachers in this study may have experienced a mixture of the 1970's curriculum in place until the late nineties, and the 1999 Revised Curriculum which was not fully implemented until several years afterwards. Pre-service teachers' views on learning Irish may reflect their own experiences of learning Irish via the behaviourist methods of the 1970's curriculum (i.e. behaviorist oriented audiolingual method (Ó Laoire, 2007) as well as the constructivist approach via the 1999 curriculum (i.e. a communicative approach to language teaching). This may give rise on one hand, to views that reflect communicative approaches to language learning e.g. accepting learner errors, but also a focus on form rather than function when learning Irish. It is likely that if this study were to be replicated with another group in the future, that the beliefs about learning Irish reported by the group would be more closely aligned the type of curriculum they had experienced i.e. the 1999 curriculum only.

As the original designer of the BALLI acknowledges, there is some overlap between beliefs about learning and beliefs about teaching a language (1985). Even at this early stage, teachers of Irish identify some of the subtle differences in views regarding learning versus teaching Irish. The vast majority express a view that everyone can learn to speak Irish effectively and that this should take between 1 to 5 years. They also suggest, however, that Irish people are not very good at learning Irish and a majority think that if Irish were better taught, more people would speak the language. This is a common belief held by the public too. In more recent studies in Ireland e.g. Foras na Gaeilge (2000) there was great support amongst the public for a competent teaching of Irish policy. A sizeable amount of pre-service teachers expect Irish to be difficult to teach, illustrating that there are other factors that can make teaching Irish more complex, perhaps the low level of interest and proficiency that they expect children to have, as revealed in their responses to later parts of the questionnaire.

6.1.3 Pre-Service Teacher Attitudes

With primary schools playing such a key role in promoting Irish, there is great importance placed on the attitudes of teachers of Irish (Harris, 2006). Teachers in other BALLI studies were not asked to comment on their attitudes to the target language. The situation in which they find themselves teaching is slightly different though in that they have chosen to be a teacher of this language rather than becoming a language teacher by default when they become a primary teacher, as is the case of Irish. It is likely then that teachers of other languages in the BALLI studies have a positive attitude to the target language through their choice to become a language teacher.

6.1.3.1 Attitude to Irish Speakers

A recent study of attitudes to Irish speakers shows that Irish society has very favourable attitudes to Irish speakers. Mac Gréil and Rhatigan use a scale that concerns *Social Distance to Irish speakers* (2009). This is a measure of inter-group tolerance and prejudice and necessarily positions the person answering the questions as an 'outsider' of the Irish-speaking group. It concerns the favourabilty or otherwise, of attitudes people hold towards including Irish speakers in their social circles. It does not examine, however, the extent to which a person identifies as a member of the Irish-speaking community. In the Mac Gréil and Rhatigan (2009) survey, respondents show very positive attitudes to Irish speakers and most report that they would be happy to have Irish speakers as friends, relatives or co-workers. Teachers in this study too, showed favourable attitudes to Irish speakers at the beginning of initial teacher education and express a desire to get to know more speakers of Irish.

6.1.3.2 Attitudes to Learning Irish

The mean scale score in relation to *Attitudes to Learning Irish* reported by pre-service teachers in this study is 6.0 which higher than that of Leaving Certificate students undertaking honours Irish in an English-medium school (4.8), but less than that of Leaving Certificate students who attend Irish-medium schools (6.4). This is understandable given that there is a mixture of teachers who attended either English-medium or Irish-medium schools in the current study. Only 4.2% of pre-service teachers attended Irish-medium secondary schools in this study (though a further 6.7% attended Irish-medium primary schools) so that means that the mean scale score for *Attitudes to Learning Irish* reported by pre-service teachers who attended Irish-medium schools is less than those reported in the Murtagh study (6.0 compared to 6.4), but this score still reflects a very positive attitude to learning Irish. What is interesting however, is the substantially higher mean scale score on this scale reported by pre-service teachers who attended English-medium schools

is (6.0 compared to 4.8). Students in English-medium schools who wish to enter initial teacher education, already have a more positive attitude to learning Irish than their peers.

Another measure of attitude to learning Irish is the likelihood of the student attending a *Gaeltacht* course outside of school. In the Murtagh study, a minority reported that they had attended the *Gaeltacht* previously (49.0%) but the incidence of attending a *Gaeltacht* course was much higher amongst pre-service teachers (68.0%). It is likely that the emergent identity as a primary teacher is very closely linked to their commitment to the Irish language. Entry requirements to initial teacher education, including a minimum C3 grade in honours Irish (or B2 as per the Common European Framework), underscore this early decision to attain a high level of Irish before applying via the Central Admissions Office to attend initial teacher education. A commitment must, therefore, be made early in one's secondary schooling to engage in the learning of Irish.

6.1.4 Pre-Service Teacher Role Perceptions

Teachers unsurprisingly reported some different views on the role of the teacher than members of the general public. This is probably due to their heightened awareness of what the role entails. We will look at views of Irish as an ethnic symbol, the obligatory nature of Irish in schools, the role of the teacher in promoting Irish, and aspects of teacher proficiency.

6.1.4.1 Views on Irish as an Ethnic Symbol

Selected items from the scale used in previous language studies (INTO, 1985; Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin, 1984; 1994) were included in the current questionnaire. Views regarding Irish as an ethnic symbol are reported to have become more favourable in the period between 1973 and 1983 (Ó Riagáin, 1986) and to still be high in the present day (Mac Gréil and Rhatigan, 2009). Support for the cultural value of Irish is very high amongst pre-service teachers with the vast majority agreeing with the statements *'Without Irish, Ireland would certainly lose its identity as a separate culture'* and *'Ireland would not really be Ireland without Irish-speaking people'*. Pre-service teachers' views differ from the general public in relation to one item, however. Only 38.7% of pre-service teachers, compared to 61.0% of the public agree with the statement *'To really understand Irish culture one must speak Irish'* (O' Riagáin, 1997) and we see later, teachers express some uncertainty over defining or teaching 'Irish culture'.

6.1.4.2 Obligatory Nature of Irish

Teachers have been shown to be in favour of Irish being obligatory in primary schools and they show reluctance for the thrust of the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish to be removed from

the school. In 1973 and 1983, just under two-thirds of the population agreed with the obligatory nature of Irish in schools. In the current study a similar percentage agreed with this statement. This higher level of support for the obligatory nature of Irish may be due in fact that primary teachers generally were very successful learners of Irish achieving an above average competency and demonstrating associated high levels of enjoyment and satisfaction with the experience. Over half of teachers in 1973 and 1983 reported a view that children with particular special learning needs should generally be involved in the learning of Irish but that the skills learned may be more modest. This view is more pronounced with the current set of teachers, perhaps given the emphasis on differentiation in primary schools and the statutory obligation on schools to accommodate the individual needs of learners which is underscored in the 1998 Education Act. There is also a greater likelihood that teachers in this study were accompanied by EAL learners and children with SEN during their own schooling than respondents of previous language surveys, when there was no statutory requirement on schools to provide reasonable accommodation for individual learning needs.

6.1.4.3 Role of the Teacher in Promoting Irish

Some authors have examined the differences between claimed and assigned identity (e.g. Varghese, 2005). Teachers in this study show an awareness of these two dimensions in their overall identity as a teacher. We already know that teachers are very supportive of the obligatory nature of Irish in primary school, of teachers being obliged to teach Irish, they rate Irish as 'one of the most important subjects' or a subject that is 'as important' as other subject, and they agree that the teacher should have the 'main' or a 'good deal' of the responsibility in promoting Irish. Almost half of teachers in 1985 agreed that a teacher's competence is often judged on the teaching of Irish. Though this item was not included in the current study, teachers' views on the centrality of teaching Irish in their overall identity as a primary teacher, reveals a similar view with 78.7% seeing it as being central to their overall identity as a teacher.

Part of their "claimed" identity, it seems is as acting as a language advocate and promoting Irish through their teaching. Their "assigned" identity, however, as language advocates is perhaps of a more intense and demanding nature. Language attitude surveys conducted in Ireland to date show that the public implicitly assigns a role to teachers in promoting Irish (Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin, 1984; 1994). Teachers in this study too, are aware of the responsibility assigned to them, as are other minority language teachers (Benton and Benton, 2001; Lastra, 2001) but they report a view that they are assigned a role that is greater than that which they feel they should implement, redolent of teacher views expressed earlier by INTO members (1936) and

in the 1980 White Paper on Education. Even at this early stage, teachers are beginning to be aware of the challenging role they will have in promoting Irish as part of their professional duties.

6.1.4.4 Teacher Proficiency

In terms of role perceptions, another positive characteristic of pre-service teachers entering initial teacher education, is that the vast majority associates high proficiency in Irish as being a necessary part of their job. The vast majority is also optimistic that everyone can learn to speak Irish. Though children's exposure to Irish is limited outside of school, the majority of teachers show a willingness to create a strong Irish-medium environment in school by promoting Irish as a live communicative language, outside of the Irish lesson through the use of informal Irish. Teaching Irish completely through Irish is favoured by the vast majority of pre-service as they believe that this will encourage children to think and communicate in Irish. Over half are willing in principle to teach other subjects through Irish from time to time in order to improve children's vocabulary in other curricular areas.

6.1.4.5 Anticipation of Key Experiences at the Beginning

Pre-service teachers appear to have considered in quite an in-depth way aspects of their future role as indicated by the high number who respond to supplementary open-ended parts of questions. They also generally come to initial teacher education with previous experience of the two key placements they will encounter during their college years. First, as Lortie (1975) describes, teachers enter initial teacher education following "an apprenticeship of observation" having spent around 14 years already in education and observing teachers and teaching styles. Second, and to a lesser extent, most (68.0%) have experience of visiting the *Gaeltacht* and for the vast majority it was a formal experience of learning Irish through a dedicated programme of study as opposed to visiting the *Gaeltacht* on a holiday. There is no comparable data in the general public to establish how often, if ever, members of the general public have attended *Gaeltacht* programmes in their lifetime but it is likely that attending *Gaeltacht* courses before initial teacher education is related to a desire to improve Irish before undertaking the Leaving Certificate in Irish. We have already seen for instance that pre-service teachers report attending a *Gaeltacht* course more frequently than other Leaving Certificate students (Murtagh, 2007).

Anticipation of how difficult Irish may be to teach also does not seem to influence how much enjoyment they expect to derive from teaching Irish with most expecting to derive 'great satisfaction' or 'some satisfaction'. Though the wording is slightly different in the 1985 survey compared to the current one, there is still a tendency for the majority of teachers to enjoy teaching Irish. Almost three quarters of teachers in 1985 reported being 'enthusiastic' about

teaching Irish and a similar percentage of pre-service teachers in this study expect to enjoy teaching Irish. It is possible that this elevated level of enthusiasm is linked to their stage of career and that this may decrease in time. Nevertheless, because they enter with such positive views, while still expecting a degree of challenge in teaching Irish, it is not perhaps that surprising that we see later these positive views are strong enough to withstand daily pressures.

In sum, an above average proficiency and attitude to learning Irish is part of the enthusiasm that pre-service teachers of Irish bring to the profession. Pre-service teachers have positive attitudes towards to Irish upon entry which is presumably linked to positive experiences and success in learning Irish either in formal education or in the *Gaeltacht*. Their proficiency is generally high given that they meet the entry requirements in Irish, requirements higher than those needed in English and mathematics, to gain a place in initial teacher education and the beliefs and role perceptions they report evidence a high commitment to promoting Irish in their roles as primary teachers. Some of their views are more complex especially in relation to how easy it is to learn versus to teach Irish. It appears that these views are not fully formed at this point in their career. They have some experience of the two key placements they will later encounter during first year of initial teacher education and they anticipate these favourably.

It may be the case that teachers enter initial teacher education with particular unique traits and views about teaching Irish and that these become more pronounced because of common experiences in college. Teachers experience by and large the same type of college education. Unlike other arts degrees, the element of choice in selecting modules to take is significantly less. With a more prescribed syllabus than occurs at other third level institutes, and the fact that initial teacher education up until very recently typically took place in specialised centres rather than as part of a wider university campus, it is not surprising that views at the end of initial teacher education are quite uniform. Changes reported in beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions within the group also tend to move generally in the same direction as we see in Section 6.2.

6.2 The Evolution of Views during Initial Teacher Education

Many beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions are stable throughout initial teacher education. This is important because as mentioned above (Section 6.1.), the beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions with which they enter initial teacher education are mostly conducive to teaching Irish effectively and to promoting Irish through their role as teachers. Some statistically significant changes do happen in beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions during initial teacher education. Some falls in percentages agreeing with certain items, i.e. in one of the response categories, also indicate the beginning of change. We can see that some of these changes influence one or more

of the areas of beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions. This can give us an insight into how beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions are inter-related e.g. beliefs about accepting learner errors and perceptions of the role of the teacher in constructing an Irish-speaking environment; beliefs in a foreign language aptitude and perceptions of the obligatory nature of Irish for EAL learners and children with SEN; perceptions of their own identity as an Irish teacher and/or Irish speaker; and finally attitudes to Irish language and culture and later perceptions of their role as a linguistic and cultural representative or advocate.

6.2.1 The Evolution of Language Learning Beliefs

Most of the international studies that deal with change in views of pre-service or in-service teachers' views are related to language learning beliefs. As Horwitz, argues, these changes can be linked to learning circumstances, or micro factors, and so can be quite specific to the particular language and how it is taught (1999). Not all pre-service teachers of English, for example, report the same types of changes because they are attending initial teacher education in a variety of countries and settings. Below however, are some general changes in beliefs that are reported across a number of studies.

In relation to teachers of Irish, beliefs in relation to a hierarchy of difficulty in terms of learning different languages and in aspects of a foreign language aptitude remain stable. Similarly they still estimate that it takes a period of 1-5 years to learn to speak Irish very well, though it seems that Group 2 is beginning to estimate this may take a bit longer, and are in favour of guessing if someone does not know a word in Irish, while also support the notion of repetition and practice when learning Irish. Other international studies most frequently report changes in the area of *Learning and Communication Strategies* (Busch, 2010; Kuntz, 1999; Tanaka and Ellis, 2003). Learners tend to change from agreeing with the statements to disagreeing with them *'Learning a language is mostly a matter of learning grammar rules'*, *'Learning a language is mostly a matter of learning new vocabulary'*, *'You shouldn't say anything in a language until you can say it correctly'*. As participants in these studies engage more in their own learning of the language or began teaching the language to someone else, their beliefs about language teaching became more aligned with communicative approaches.

Over the course of initial teacher education, teachers' beliefs move in the direction of a communicative approach presumably because of the course content they are exposed to in their programme and the requirements on school placement to implement this approach, though culture is still considered by teachers at the beginning and end as having only a minor role in the teaching of Irish. Less teachers at the end are in favour of rote learning of vocabulary or in emphasising the need for an excellent accent. Although a substantial minority mention the need

to expose children to different dialects of Irish, after their *Gaeltacht* placement, dialects are not mentioned again by teachers at the end of initial teacher education or during early in-service practice. They become more accepting of learners' errors and less teachers feel that a learner should avoid speaking in Irish if they have low proficiency and may make a mistake. This is a positive change in language learning beliefs because, as shown by Corder (1967) the interlanguage used by learners is an important part of their developing proficiency. Other studies have shown that children are likely to make certain types of semantic and syntactical errors in when learning Irish and this can be linked to the environment in which they learned Irish (Ó Duibhir, 2009). Most teachers are learners of Irish and this greater acceptance of mistakes may be linked to their own experience of learning Irish throughout their programme. Acknowledging learners' errors as a natural part of the learning of Irish, may contribute to a climate where children are more comfortable experimenting with their language skills. This is of critical importance in the case of Irish where the classroom is the main forum in which children are exposed to the language and can use Irish to communicate with their peers and with members of the school community. Indeed the school for L2 learners may also be the sole source for interlanguage development (Ó Laoire, 2007). As the teacher advances through the programme, he/she more strongly agrees that learning Irish is different from studying other subjects and simultaneously a substantial minority begin to believe that it is more difficult, possibly because of an increasing awareness of other non-linguistic dimensions that impact on this learning such as attitudes and a lack of reinforcement of the language in the community. Difficulties in oral proficiency in particular are highlighted and only a small minority by the end only a small minority believe that it is easier to speak than to understand Irish.

By the end of initial teacher education some changes in expectations were clear. Teachers more strongly disagree that girls will necessarily outperform boys in learning Irish. This change is important so that teachers do not lower their expectations of boys in their class which may impact on their progress. It is also important in mixed sex classrooms that teachers give the same level of attention to both boys and girls. Expectations regarding EAL learners will be dealt with in Section 6.2.3.1. Changes in expectations of different profiles of learners is very important because as the "Pygmalion Effect" outlines, teachers' expectations of how children will perform can have a bearing on how they interact with these children which in turn may influence children's self-efficacy beliefs and performance in Irish (Pedrosa and Lasagabaster, 2011).

6.2.2 The Evolution of Language Attitudes

Similar to the stability of positive attitudes reported in the general public (Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin, 1994), it appears by and large teachers' overall positive attitudes to Irish are enduring

throughout initial teacher but there are a number of issues to bear in mind. While it was not possible to control for all variables, the difference in composition of the two groups may influence results. Positive attitudes reported at the end of initial teacher education may also have to do with the fact that Group 2 contained more teachers from an Irish-speaking background, a variable that has been shown to correlate with positive attitudes, and may not necessarily reflect a maintenance of very positive attitudes.

Positive attitudes to the language in general appear to belong to a personal and professional identity and they are strong enough to withstand challenging encounters in the classroom. Teachers maintain very positive attitudes to learning Irish too and as we will see later, which can explain why they also report a high level of satisfaction in teaching Irish. Teachers report these positive attitudes to the Irish language and to Irish speakers, and seem to be positively influenced by the period spent in the *Gaeltacht*, and to a lesser extent by experiences on school placement, in lectures and through college life. As well as this, we must also take into account whether aspects of this positive attitude are in decline. Despite the general favourability of attitudes to learning Irish, it is important to note the marked decrease in teachers agreeing with certain attitude statements which points to the difficulty of maintaining such positive attitudes.

Use of Irish and general attitude to Irish though, are not necessarily aligned with teachers' attitudes remaining consistently high but reported use of simultaneously low. This mismatch between proficiency and use has been noted by others (Murtagh, 2007). In the open-ended questions at the end of initial teacher education, teachers were able to describe specific events in the *Gaeltacht* that caused their attitudes to the language in general to change e.g. spending time in the language community, gaining awareness of *Gaeltacht* culture, and interaction with locals. Studies conducted immediately after the learner spends time in the target language community can often reveal elevated levels of positive attitudes to the language and to the people who speak it (Tanaka and Ellis, 2003). Equally studies conducted immediately after a pre-service teacher has engaged in school placement also suggested that a change in attitude has occurred (Busch, 2010). Interviews conducted immediately after school and *Gaeltacht* placement point to a more positive attitude to teaching Irish and the Irish language in general and teachers have explored to a degree, characteristic traits of an Irish speaker's identity, one of the aims of the placement (An Mheitheal um theagasc na Gaeilge ar an Tríú Leibhéal, 2011). There is no statistically significant change in the mean scale score for *Attitudes to the Irish Language and Irish Speakers* or *Attitude to Learning Irish* reported at the end of initial teacher education, however. The extent to which attitudinal change may be short lived is discussed more in Section 6.3.2.

6.2.3 The Evolution of Role Perceptions

Positive views regarding the teacher's role in promoting Irish in primary education and concerning Irish as an ethnic symbol, are broadly maintained through the college years. The changes that occur in relation to views on the obligatory nature of Irish, the role of the teacher in revitalising and maintaining Irish, and teacher proficiency, however, can affect teacher morale and the way she engages in her role. Other studies have focused on the factor of attitude in determining challenges that may exist in the teaching of Irish e.g. INTO (1985); Harris (2006). Data from this study shows, however, that general attitudes can remain high but supports are most needed in helping teachers implement effectively aspects of their role in the areas of teacher proficiency (e.g. teaching primarily through Irish, using Irish informally, and teaching other subjects through Irish from time to time), and also in acting as a linguistic and cultural advocate (e.g. maintaining proficiency, identifying as an Irish speaker, and nurturing positive attitudes to Irish language and culture).

6.2.3.1 Obligatory Nature of Irish

It is important to get a perspective on the teaching of Irish to EAL learners as this has been noticeably absent from other studies on the teaching of Irish e.g. DES (2007a). At the beginning of initial teacher education, a minority agree with the statement 'Children for whom English is an additional language should not be obliged to learn Irish', but almost twice as many select 'Neither Agree nor Disagree' as an answer option. This may be in part to the perceived usefulness of learning Irish for these learners or to a perception that they will have difficulty in learning the language when they are already learning English. Through their exposure to course content in lectures and through experience of working with EAL learners on school placement, they have presumably considered this in a greater manner. At the beginning, it seems that for a minority of teachers, beliefs regarding EAL learners may be more in line with the 'language as problem' mind-set (Cummins, 2005) and a view that this can impede the learning of another language. By the end of initial teacher education, though teachers' beliefs begin to show evidence of agreeing with the Common Underlying Principle whereby knowledge of one language can aid the learning of another.

At the end of initial teacher education, views on the obligatory nature of Irish for children with SEN have not changed significantly with around a quarter agreeing that children with SEN should not have to learn Irish. Teachers have less experience of working with these types of learners while in college and it is understandable then that views concerning children with SEN will evolve more during in-service practice rather than during initial teacher education.

6.2.3.2 Role of Teacher in Promoting Irish

Other changes happen in relation to teachers' perceptions of the role of the teacher in the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish. In the 1984 survey, Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin claim that teachers are more likely to use Irish in their professional and personal lives. A much clearer divide is evident in this study though between the use of Irish in the private and professional sphere with teachers reporting very few incidences of using Irish outside the classroom. At the end of initial teacher education, they report a willingness to be involved in the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish and see the advantage of their role in exposing young children to Irish. They report a perception of being assigned a greater role in promoting Irish than they do at the beginning and less teachers, though not significantly so, in their open-ended answers report that schools can compensate for a lack of intergenerational transmission. We see in the open-ended responses that teachers come to view their role in more generalist terms and more teachers emphasise that Irish should not be seen as a higher priority compared to other subjects. They also have concerns that the high level of responsibility in promoting Irish can be at times overwhelming and unrealistic, which is not a new concern for teachers (e.g. INTO, 1941; White Paper on Education, 1980). While traditionally the revitalisation of Irish was centred on the primary school this emphasis has declined in recent years (Harris, 2008). The role a teacher should play in this initiative outside of her usual teaching duties is not is not explicitly addressed in initial teacher education in Ireland in the same way it is in other minority contexts e.g. Hawaii where pre-service teachers engage in modules on their future identity as Hawaiian speakers and the role they will play in the community. It may be the case that their reluctance to accept the 'main' responsibility for the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish is linked to the fact that they generally do not identify as an Irish speaker and that speaking is mostly a part of professional rather than personal identity. Teachers of Irish also generally do not tend to come from Irish-speaking homes and communities. Therefore, this role in promoting Irish is limited to the classroom and it is understandable that the limited support from others in the community can make their role more difficult.

By the end of initial teacher education they are perhaps more aware of the challenge in being charged with this role. A small number of teachers in their open-ended responses allude to a perceived blame that society places on teachers concerning the way Irish is taught. Several researchers have highlighted the peculiar situation of pupils engaging in over 1600 hours of learning Irish with very few demonstrating high proficiency in Irish at the end (Murtagh, 2007). In 1973 and 1983, the just under a third of the public agreed with the statement *'If Irish were better taught, more people would speak it.'* In 2009 over twice as many agreed with this statement. We can see that even though teachers are aware of the challenges in teaching Irish, particularly their

relative isolation in promoting Irish, the vast majority of teachers at the beginning and end of initial teacher education still feel that if Irish were "better taught" more people would speak it. It is interesting to note then that teachers self-impose blame on themselves also.

6.2.3.3 Teaching Primarily Through Irish

Teachers move to being more aware of challenges in teaching in general as they gain more experience (Bontempo and Digman in Ezer et al, 2010) and the same is true for teachers of Irish. The extent to which mother tongue can be used in teaching a target language is raised in other international studies teachers (Liao, 2006; Wong, 2010). By the end of initial teacher education, many teachers of Irish reveal that while they think that as much Irish as possible should be used through the Irish lesson, there is a very significant decline in the proportions agreeing that it is 'very reasonable' or 'reasonable' to expect Irish to be taught primarily through Irish and almost a third in their open-ended answers identify a need for English. Data from the INTO (1985) survey can be compared to current teachers' role perceptions in relation to teaching primarily through Irish where less than a quarter reported teaching totally through Irish and three quarters reported teaching partially through Irish. One key difference between the teachers in this study and the teachers in the previous studies of 1973 and 1983 is the primary school curriculum which they are teaching. Teachers in this study are implementing the 1999 curriculum which contains more subjects that the previous 1970's curriculum and allegations are sometimes made that the curriculum is 'overloaded'. This can impact on teachers' ability to meaningfully engage with particular subjects including Irish.

6.2.3.3.1 Teacher Proficiency and the Ability to Teach Primarily through Irish

Issues of language proficiency emerge in open-ended responses to several parts of the questionnaire, and also in the interviews. Low proficiency may be an issue in teaching Irish primarily through the target language. Some cite the expectation of teaching through Irish as a challenge in the teaching of Irish, and a minority claim to have low proficiency in Irish (6.7% in Group 1 and 5.5% in Group 2) though this is less than reported in other studies of teacher proficiency (DES, 2007b) which may indicate that teachers in this particular college of education report an-above average ability in Irish. As outlined in Chapter 1, changes in the structure of colleges of education, including the physical move of some colleges to larger university campuses may mean that this particular college of education no longer attracts such a large proportion of students from the *Gaeltacht* areas in the West of Ireland. Therefore this elevated ability in Irish may not be found if the study were to be replicated in a number of years. It is possible that there are other mitigating factors that lead teachers to change their perceptions on the role of English

in the teaching of Irish. Recommended approaches in the teaching of Irish i.e. communicative language teaching, favour immersion strategies. This is somewhat at odds with strategies recommended for EAL learners where use of mother tongue is advised during language teaching. It is possible that through their experience of teaching English to additional language speakers on school placement, and through being exposed to content in lectures on effective teaching for EAL learners, that teachers begin to question this expectation of total immersion in the teaching of Irish. It is recommended that for EAL learners, their home language should be seen as a resource in all other language learning (Cummins, 2007) but that in the case of learning Irish, the home language of the children, mostly English, is not usually acknowledged. This perceived difference in approach to language teaching was mentioned by a small minority in the interviews. More recent research has called for a more integrated approach to language teaching that acknowledges the inter-relationship of literacy across languages (Ó Duibhir and Cummins, 2011). Teachers at the end of initial teacher education express a desire for English to be used judiciously and where necessary, e.g. to clarify an instruction or to ensure a child has understood the content. Teachers still, however, express a desire for as much Irish as possible to be spoken during the lesson.

It is of course necessary to outline some of the differences between an EAL learner learning English and an Irish child learning Irish. Baker's (2011) distinction between additive and subtractive bilingualism is of use here to understand the differences between the experiences of an EAL learner e.g. a Polish child learning English in an Irish primary school classroom, and an Irish child learning Irish. In the first case, the type of bilingualism can be seen as subtractive if the pupil is submerged into the new language, English, without much recognition of his home language. This is all the more worrying if his home language is not used or affirmed in the community either. The second case is slightly different, however, as it can be seen as a form of additive bilingualism where the child is learning a new language, Irish, but their home language is still used frequently throughout the day, explicitly taught for periods also, and then reinforced in his community. It is most likely that a child's learning will succeed in the latter situation (Cummins, 2001).

6.2.3.3.2 Using Informal Irish and Implementing CLIL

While teachers are in favour of including some more English in the teaching of Irish, it is interesting that by the end of initial teacher education, the vast majority remain in favour of using informal Irish outside of the Irish lesson. This is perhaps to compensate for the slight decrease in Irish being used in the actual lesson, and to increase exposure to Irish during the school day. Teachers at the end of school placement though, report use of informal Irish for closed communication e.g. giving instructions or greeting the class. They do not report using Irish informally to engage children in conversations or encouraging them to talk to peers. Ó Laoire

suggests that a more passive engagement with the language e.g. through watching television or through listening to informal Irish in this case, may not improve proficiency but can contribute to the development of positive attitudes (2007). It may be the case then, that children build up receptive language skills, and develop more positive attitudes, but have less opportunities to use their expressive language skills. We see a decline at the top of the response categories, in teachers in favour of implementing CLIL and issues of proficiency emerge in open-ended responses, but it may also be because they are afforded very few, if any, opportunities throughout initial teacher education to implement CLIL.

In conclusion, a number of beliefs and role perceptions are reported to change throughout initial teacher education. Most evidence for this is in the statistically significant changes that are reported in views, but a number of changes in pre-service teachers agreeing with certain items also fit in with the general trends observed. These changes can make substantial differences in the way a teacher will engage in her role. Some of these changes are positive e.g. in relation to expectations of children. Other changes point to a need for more guidance e.g. in relation to the potential role that English has in the teaching of Irish and how teachers can be supported by other members in the community in promoting Irish. Attitudes appear more immutable however, with positive attitudes to learning Irish and to the Irish language enduring throughout college years. These findings must be interpreted, however, within the context of two different groups in the sample and certain variables e.g. language background, were not controlled for, and while also acknowledging some declines at the top end of the scale i.e. ;strongly agree- agree' only.

6.3 Perceived Impact of Key Experiences in Initial Teacher Education on Views

Although the two groups potentially have differences in terms of profiles and the course structure they are exposed to, School placement in so far as it pertains to the Irish language, and *Gaeltacht* placement, are consistent across Group 1 and Group 2. Therefore fair comparisons can more easily be made in relation to these key experiences and their impact on views. Hence we now consider initial anticipations and later reflections on the two obligatory placements. We also analyse the extent to which the changes that occur in beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions are linked to the key experiences of school and *Gaeltacht* placement, drawing together data from questionnaires at the beginning of their programme, interviews conducted with Group 1 teachers after school and *Gaeltacht* placement, and questionnaires completed by teachers at the end of initial teacher education.

6.3.1 Perceived Influence of School Placement on Views

Teachers show favourable views to the prospect of teaching Irish for the first time, after first school placement they report satisfaction with the experience, and this is maintained by the end of their programme. Their initial optimism is tempered somewhat by the actual experience of teaching with more teachers reporting difficulty in teaching Irish by the end of their programme, a trend that begins to emerge following first school placement.

Teachers report in the interview that since engaging in school placement some beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions have changed. These changes manifest the early signs of some of the statistically significant differences reported by teachers at the end of their programme. As predicted by Busch (2010) the direct experience of teaching can prompt pre-service teachers to re-examine some previously held beliefs and role perceptions. Changes occur in the areas in which the teacher gains experience. Expectations concerning the superiority of girls over boys in the learning of Irish were challenged by many teachers after their first placement, with more now disagreeing with this language myth, as they had experience of teaching boys and girls. It would appear that teachers' expectations following school placement are more linked to individual children's strengths and needs as opposed to particular profiles of pupils.

Teachers who taught children with EAL also began to question the necessity of exemptions for this group and again this view strengthened during initial teacher education resulting in a significant change in views reported by the end. Experience of teaching children with special education needs was not common during first year school placement but for the small number of teachers who did have this experience, their beliefs concerning exemptions from Irish began to change. We do not see a significant change in view concerning this issue at the end of initial teacher education possibly because the group as a whole have limited experience of working with children with SEN. Change in views from an additional language being a hindrance, to it being a resource for the primary teacher is very important considering the changing landscape of Irish primary education in which the profile of pupils is not homogeneous. Sensitivity is very much needed in relation to the strengths and needs that this diversity in learners presents to teachers.

Some changes that occur in beliefs do not seem to happen immediately following first school placement. Teachers report, for example, a greater tolerance for learner errors by the end of initial teacher education. This is not mentioned, however, by teachers after their first school placement. After first school placement too, teachers rarely if ever mention children's proficiency or accent in Irish, tending more often to speak about their own proficiency or issues in selecting appropriate resources. Issues in children's proficiency emerge frequently in open-ended responses for teachers at the end and how this impacts their ability to teach mainly through the

target language, use informal Irish or teach other lessons through Irish. It is likely then that this tolerance for children's interlanguage and a concern for children's emergent proficiency develops as the teacher engages in other placements and gains more experience in the classroom.

Changes in attitudes on the other hand do not appear to be heavily influenced by first school placement. Teachers are not always aware of staff attitudes to Irish and teachers' main concern seems to be around preparing and delivering lessons. They maintain their very high attitudes to the language and to learning Irish though and we see by the end of initial teacher education no significant change in attitudes reported. As Garrett (2003) suggests, attitudes appear to be enduring and relatively immutable.

The area of role perceptions is a bit more complex. Teachers, following first School placement, tend to still agree with ideals of how Irish should be taught i.e. primarily through Irish, and with the important role that the teacher plays in revitalising and maintaining Irish. Although they don't formally report these role perceptions to have changed, it is after this experience, that they begin to acknowledge the inherent challenges in these aspects of the role. Challenges in creating an Irish-speaking environment, when it is not reinforced in the home or the community, are more obvious to teachers following first School placement. They do not report this challenge as impacting on teacher morale, indeed many express that it spurs them to try harder to achieve this, but the resilience of this mind set after several years of teaching may not be as strong. We see by the end of initial teacher education, that teachers also report an ideal that Irish would be taught primarily through Irish but in their open-ended answers, there is a keener awareness of inherent challenges in maintaining children's interest and attention. It appears that role perceptions, therefore, begin to be challenged and changed following first school placement. It would be interesting, however, to revisit these views again after a number of years of in-service practice.

6.3.2 Perceived Influences of *Gaeltacht* Placement on Views

The majority of teachers have undertaken a *Gaeltacht* placement before they come to initial teacher education and many of the perceived benefits of the upcoming placement are linked to these previous experiences. We see however, following first *Gaeltacht* placement a mismatch between anticipations of this placement and actual experience, and by the end of their programme, teachers become more critical of elements of the placement. Teachers generally express by the end of their programme that the potential to improve proficiency during this placement is not fully harnessed. Teachers at the end are also more critical of the quality of teaching and the opportunities to speak Irish while on placement. Significantly less teachers at the end compared to the beginning in their open-ended answers list improvement in proficiency

as a perceived outcome of the placement. Following first *Gaeltacht* placement, some factors contributing to this declining view are evident. In interviews conducted with beginning pre-service teachers, the opportunity to interact socially with locals, and to a lesser extent with peers was mentioned. It is perhaps no wonder then that teachers at the end frame this experience more in terms of its social and cultural benefits. It has been suggested in other studies, that learner interaction with native speakers can be quite low during study abroad programmes (Lee Amuzie and Winke, 2009) and that they don't always result in an increase in proficiency. The case of pre-service teachers of Irish is further complicated. Unlike Erasmus or study abroad programmes for other languages, pre-service teachers attend the *Gaeltacht* in large groups, often the entire year group travel together, and so the potential to interact and engage with locals and speak the language with native speakers is lessened by the fact that they socialise with their peers mostly. Although teachers' attitudes are reported to be influenced positively by this experience, and their views of Irish speakers, developing an identity as an Irish speaker does not always occur. Indeed when asked if they view themselves as an Irish speaker, most are inclined to say 'no'. It should still be noted however, that teachers at the three points of data collection associate positive experiences with this placement. Teachers identify an advantage of this *Gaeltacht* placement in being exposed to *Gaeltacht* culture and almost a fifth assert that they will bring this into their future teaching, yet some question the relevance of this exposure for their career. The incidence of teachers reporting the inclusion of cultural elements in their teaching of Irish is quite low though, and where they do, it is usually not related to *Gaeltacht* culture they were exposed to but more to traditional songs, poems and dances they were exposed to in their own schooling or in lectures.

In the interview, teachers report their *Gaeltacht* placement to have some impact on attitudes, and to a lesser extent on beliefs and role perceptions. Some research has shown that knowledge of a language can influence the way the speaker views the world (Boroditsky, 2003). A small number of teachers begin to consider knowledge of Irish as contributing to a unique cultural outlook following *Gaeltacht* placement, and this view becomes more pronounced by the end of initial teacher education which could be linked to the fact that they have now engaged in two *Gaeltacht* placements, or be part of a general maturation process. As well as this, though teachers report their attitude to Irish as becoming more favourable while in the *Gaeltacht*, again there is no statistically significant change in attitudes reported between the beginning and end of initial teacher education.

One possible explanation is that the change in views concerning Irish following the *Gaeltacht* placement is short lived and that as contact with Irish speakers decreases, so do their positive attitudes. Another possibility is that the questionnaire does not provide an opportunity

for teachers to elaborate on their attitudes to Irish in the form of an open-ended supplementary part to the question. Benefits of combining quantitative and qualitative research methods is hence underscored in order to provide an overview of general trends that change in a group, and also allowing individuals to talk about their personal experience of these changes.

Some teachers allude to the concept of the "ideal language self" in interviews and mention that they would like to have better proficiency in Irish but this is not matched, however, with a commitment to seeking out opportunities to improve their own Irish. Engagement in Irish-speaking communities, real or imagined, does not seem to increase when teachers decide to enter initial teacher education and few teachers report attending Irish-language events since beginning college. This is worrying because teachers are by and large second or additional speakers of Irish and the weight of teacher development in Irish occurs at pre-service level. Entering professional service with a high competency in Irish does not ensure that this level will be maintained throughout her career. Also, limited proficiency in Irish has been noted as a concern of inspectors in the DES when supervising pre-service and in-service teachers (DES, 2007a). For other teachers of minority languages e.g. Basque and Scots Gaelic, funded programmes are available to allow teachers in immersion education programmes to spend time in the target language community during professional practice to allow them to improve proficiency. Teachers of Irish may benefit from such a programme seeing as limited opportunities to improve Irish has been raised as a concern in this study.

In Group 1 and in Group 2, a very small minority of teachers consider themselves to have low proficiency in Irish. Although modesty may play a part in this low number of teachers identifying as Irish speakers the situation still remains that opportunities to use Irish outside of lectures are not readily availed of. A situation where teachers travelled in smaller numbers and had more opportunities to take part in local life while in the *Gaeltacht* or of becoming involved in Irish-speaking networks while in initial teacher education, might enhance this experience. Visiting the *Gaeltacht* is not usually a feature of in-service practice and as such, opportunities for attitudes to continue to evolve are not as prevalent after teachers leave initial teacher education. Involvement with Irish-speaking networks and attendance at Irish-language events outside the *Gaeltacht* is not common for pre-service teachers and again the opportunity to develop an identity as an Irish speaker is not fully harnessed.

As already mentioned, teachers come to initial teacher education with significant experience of the two placements they will encounter in their first year. It might be the case that because they enter with realistic expectations, experiences while on these placements are not surprising and therefore there is only a small number of changes in beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions. While teachers report that some changes in views are directly linked to experiences

on school placement and in the *Gaeltacht,* it is possible too that the general passage of time, other life experiences and maturity have coloured these views. One change that does not seem to occur though is that of Irish learner to Irish speaker and member of an Irish-speaking network. Teachers report their knowledge and use of Irish to be confined to their professional identity and this may impact on other aspects of their role perceptions e.g. their role in the revitalisation and maintenance initiative.

6.4 Evolution of Views during Early Professional Practice

As we have seen, teachers' beliefs and role perceptions begin to evolve as they engage in aspects of their role on school placement. It is likely therefore that these will continue to evolve as the teacher gains more experience of working with pupils and matures (Flores and Day, 2005). An increase in experience in the classroom is often linked to a move in focus from the teacher's needs to the pupils' needs, and further changes may occur that are not always contained in the original research instrument (Farrell, 1999). We will look in particular at the extent to which changes occur in (a) beliefs, particularly, the experience of teaching Irish in different contexts, (b) attitudes, particularly attitudes to the value of knowing Irish in developing a unique vantage point on the world, and (c) role perceptions, in particular aspects of teacher proficiency and acting as a linguistic and cultural representative.

6.4.1 Evolution of Beliefs about Teaching Irish in In-Service Practice

Changes are reported in relation to beliefs about teaching Irish during the first year of professional practice. Teachers report their experiences of teaching Irish to be quite individual and context specific. Changes are linked to micro factors, and beliefs about how Irish should be taught under particular circumstances are open to change (Nikitina and Furuoka, 2007). Influences on teaching Irish in 1985 were reported to be significantly influenced by feedback from the DES Inspector (INTO, 1985). In the current study however, the class context and individual children's needs were reported to be the greatest influences on teachers' beliefs about teaching Irish.

Although teachers during initial teacher education, rely mostly on input from methods lecturers and the host teacher in planning for lessons, changes in approaches to teaching occurs when a teacher moves to a new context as predicted by Bailey (1992) e.g. from an English-medium to an Irish-medium school. Other changes are reported when a teacher has a different class level or class group (INTO, 1985). Reported changes by teachers in early in-service practice changes include incorporating more games into their teaching. It is a positive finding that teachers are flexible in their teaching of Irish and that they show an ability to adapt to the needs of

different groups of children. These reported changes in beliefs also point towards an inclination to re-evaluate views regularly as the teacher encounters new children and new situations.

Although teachers expected that high proficiency in Irish would help them get a teaching job, their experiences during early professional practice negate this early belief. The minority of teachers who are working in Irish-medium schools report that proficiency in Irish was obviously a key criterion in the application process but the majority of teachers working in English-medium schools do not associate and real benefit with high proficiency and securing a job. High proficiency teachers were able to highlight this strength amongst others in the interview but few mention that it was specifically addressed in the interview barring a tokenistic question. This finding may be also linked to other changes in teachers' views concerning the priority or otherwise of Irish in the primary curriculum as they gain greater experience in their role.

6.4.2 Evolution of Attitudes to Irish in In-Service Practice

There is no experience during professional practice that is comparable to the *Gaeltacht* placement. It may be the case therefore, that attitudes that begin to change following *Gaeltacht* placement will remain fairly stable during a teacher's career unless the teacher decides to become actively involved in an Irish-speaking network. Attitudes to the Irish language generally and to teaching Irish particularly, are related but not synonymous concepts. Attitudes to the language generally do not appear to change over the course of initial teacher education or early in-service practice. Other research has also indicated that general attitudes to Irish are relatively enduring (Murtagh, 2007). Attitudes to the value of the Irish language in providing a unique cultural outlook can be seen to evolve during early professional practice though. Some of these attitudes are reported following *Gaeltacht* placement. A substantial amount of teachers (40.0%) in their first year of in-service practice are more likely to think that speaking Irish provides a unique cultural experience. It may be that this view on the value of learning Irish evolves over time as the teacher has more experience of teaching Irish.

In 1985 over two-thirds of teachers reported that their attitude has remained as positive or become more positive (67.0%) since they began teaching and a similar finding is present in this study. Attitudes to teaching Irish though can become a bit more complex as the teacher is in early professional practice. For a small number of teachers who do not enjoy teaching Irish, they generally still report a positive attitude to the language and view it as a key part of their role. Teachers become more aware of attitudes to teaching and learning Irish that are held by other members in the school community. Some teachers report a view amongst the school community that Irish is not as important as other subjects such as English and mathematics. At times the recent Numeracy and Literacy Strategy (2011) is used to defend the decision to prioritise these

subjects over Irish, and other subjects. As well as this, views held by the school community regarding children's ability to learn Irish well, especially in schools with designated disadvantaged status (DEIS), can mean that expectations are lowered, and that less investment is put into the teaching of Irish. Teachers' initial beliefs that everyone can learn to speak Irish well can be challenged therefore by class and school practices. As already mentioned, teachers' expectations of children can impact how they interact with them and also influence children's self-efficacy beliefs. Lowering expectations of children's performance because of their attendance at a DEIS school is of concern and may negatively impact the child's experience of learning Irish. It is also worrying that an artificial divide is constructed between developing English and Irish literacy skills. "Literacy" in the Numeracy and Literacy Strategy is broadly interpreted by teachers in this study working in English-medium schools as referring to English literacy skills only. It also reveals teachers' continued uncertainty about the transferability of language skills in one language to the learning of another.

6.4.3 Evolution in Role Perceptions in In-Service Practice

Changes that have begun to occur in role perceptions appear more accentuated during the first year of in-service practice. This is not surprising given the fact that teachers have more experience of teaching by this stage and in particular, more experience of teaching different profiles of students. Some other changes in role perceptions namely challenges in maintaining proficiency, in nurturing positive attitudes to Irish and in being a linguistic and cultural representative were also raised by teachers in in-service practice. These aspects will be discussed in Section 6.5.1 when teachers of Irish are compared to teachers of other languages.

6.4.3.1 Obligatory Nature of Irish

During in-service practice, teachers have more experience of working with children for whom English is an additional language. Views of EAL learners continue to evolve during professional practice and many practising teachers begin to see these children as real assets in the teaching of Irish. Teachers perceive EAL learners to lack a negative attitude to Irish and also to have an above average capacity for language learning linked to the fact that they already speak additional languages. The attitudinal disposition of EAL learners is particularly important in the teaching of Irish as teachers report great difficulty in nurturing positive attitudes to the language and culture.

Views of children with SEN too continue to evolve. Teachers in in-service practice are more aware of the range of SEN that can be present in the classroom and the implications of different types of SEN on the teaching of Irish. It should be noted though that in responding to this question in the interview, special education needs were interpreted by most teachers as

referring to the needs of children of weaker ability. Rarely was it mentioned that the challenge of learning Irish could be of benefit to a child who is gifted linguistically. Generally, they are in favour of all children being included in the Irish lesson but with necessary differentiated approaches. This finding is very positive in terms of building an inclusive classroom environment. The Irish lesson provides a space where children from many different backgrounds can be on a more "even playing field". The potential of the Irish lesson to provide an inclusive environment for different types of learners has been generally overlooked in other research, and claims have been made that the obligatory nature of Irish is an impediment to certain children's meaningful engagement with primary education (Mac Namara, 1966). Concerns over exemptions being granted too readily in relation to Irish is voiced by teachers and it is perhaps positive that they beginning to consider this in detail.

6.4.3.2 Role and Responsibilities of the Teacher in Promoting Irish

While teachers begin to feel that they have been assigned a substantial role in revitalisation and maintenance of Irish at the end of initial teacher education, it is not until teachers are in in-service practice that they really become aware of their relative isolation in promoting the language. Teachers in early professional service now express a view that the locus of responsibility on primary teachers is too great and that teachers need to be supported in their roles. Teachers feel that ideally parents should have a role in transmitting Irish to their children and in working in tandem with the class teacher, but that in reality this support does not always exist. Local organisations that promote aspects of Irish traditional culture include The Gaelic Athletic Association and *Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann*, a group that promotes traditional music. Almost half of teachers in 1985 report an awareness of local Irish-language organisations but even in the present day while they may have developed some links with schools, teachers still feel that their role could be strengthened to include the teaching of some games, and musical instruments or singing through Irish.

6.4.3.3 Teacher Proficiency

It is not surprising that teachers are more conscious of the demands placed on them in terms of teacher proficiency when they reach in-service practice. By this time, the vast majority report challenges in implementing effectively aspects of their role such as teaching Irish primarily through Irish, and CLIL. It is evident also that more guidance and support is needed in their understanding of the use of informal Irish. In 1985, a quarter of practising teachers claimed to be 'fluent' and two fifths claim to be 'good' in relation to speaking Irish. One worrying finding of the 1985 study is that a substantial minority claim that their standard has disimproved since they

began teaching. Teachers in the current study implicitly identify some factors that can contribute to this potential decline.

6.4.3.3.1 Teaching Irish primarily through Irish

Most teachers raised this topic in the interviews without being prompted. Concern around implementing this successfully in English-medium schools was mentioned by the vast majority of teachers. Interestingly, their concerns were only sometimes linked to perceived limitations in their own standard of Irish. More often the main concern expressed by teachers was children's limited experience of this approach and the risk of them not understanding the content. We saw by the end of initial teacher education that teachers had a growing concern and awareness of children's proficiency and interest in Irish and this appears to be heightened now. The limited exposure to Irish outside of school has been a main argument for the implementation of total immersion approaches to teaching Irish. Even if we agree though that the classroom is the most sustained contact that the pupil has with Irish, does that mean that a no English policy should apply?

In the case of Irish-medium schools, Ó Laoire and Harris (2006) have recommended that conventions be "relaxed" a bit and that pupils be given the opportunity to discuss aspects of a task in whatever language is easier for them and then to report back to the class in Irish. This kind of an approach stems from Cummins' (2001) research on the value of mother tongue use in learning another language and also allows the pupils to investigate complex material in a richer way by using the language they are more proficient in, while still allowing them to improve their Irish vocabulary by reporting back to the class in Irish. Some authors advocate the use of mother tongue for certain aspects of the lesson e.g. clarification purposes or giving instructions (Liao, 2006). Teachers in this study report a similar approach and while total immersion is the preferred approach, a judicious use of English is sometimes employed, as was also reported in 1985. It may be the case that along with this recommendation to "relax conventions" in Irish-medium schools, teachers in English-medium schools should also be encouraged to use some English, where necessary, for clarification purposes or to allow the pupil to make explicit links between a new concept or word in both languages.

6.4.3.3.2 Use of Informal Irish

In some cases, the potential for implementing aspects of their role, and positive changes to the way Irish is taught, is not fully utilised. Although teachers are very positively disposed to the idea of using Irish informally throughout the school day, a focus on the teacher using the imperative mostly and not for communicative purposes may impact the way children experience the Irish

language. As with teachers in the current study, two-thirds of teachers in 1985 report using Irish informally in greetings and giving instructions but a much lower percentage report that children spontaneously communicate with the teacher through Irish. There is a tradition of focussing, therefore, on the development of receptive and not expressive language skills. Another more worrying outcome of using this register of language is that children may begin to associate communication in Irish as following orders and develop negative associations with this experience. Given that the informal Irish used focuses on instructions, it is likely then that signage in Irish displayed in the classroom follows a similar approach and that children's opportunities to engage in more communicative approaches to language, through speech or reading, are hindered.

6.4.3.3.3 Teaching Other Subjects through Irish (CLIL)

As found in previous research (Harris, 2006) while parents are in support or alternative models of immersion education, and while teachers express an interest in implementing this, these plans have yet to come to fruition. It is likely that limited resources to support teachers in implementing this, and lack of a co-ordinated strategy at school level, are factors in this approach being underutilised. The choice of subjects that teachers would be willing to teach through Irish is also interesting. PE and the arts subjects (drama, music and visual arts) are the most common subjects chosen and this is linked to a view that encouraging vocabulary development would not be as challenging in these subjects. There is a view that subjects perceived to have more content such as history, or more technical terms such as mathematics and science, would not be suitable for a CLIL approach as children may be confused or disengage from the subject. This is somewhat surprising given that CLIL approaches have been reported to be quite successful for the teaching of mathematics through French (Grenfell, 2002). Teachers in Irish-medium schools, necessarily engage in CLIL through their teaching of other subjects in the curriculum. Many mention the limited resources available to them in comparison to teachers in English-medium schools e.g. text books, websites and work sheets that are available to them. Almost three quarters of teachers in 1985 wished to see more resources made available for the teaching of Irish. In the current study, this percentage was higher amongst teachers in Irish-medium schools. Unlike teachers in the 1985 study who were using mostly the *Buntús* Lessons, an Irish language syllabus, teachers in this study were using a variety of text books and programmes and so it is not surprising that a variety in views exist regarding the teaching of Irish. There can also be some reported difficulty in teaching complex concepts through a second or additional language, challenges that have been reported elsewhere (Ó Laoire and Coady, 2002).

In sum, it was found that beliefs about how Irish is taught are reported to be very much context specific and as the teacher encounters a new class level, a new school context and a new

range of pupils with varying strengths and needs, so too will her beliefs about how Irish should be taught change. Attitudes remain stable and very positive attitudes to Irish speakers are maintained, though teachers do not seem to self-identify as an Irish speaker. Role perceptions experience the greatest changes during in-service practice as the teacher gains more experience in teaching Irish. Views concerning the use of English in the teaching of Irish can be seen to continue to evolve as the teacher's experience in the classroom increases. Teachers report limited opportunities to implement CLIL at this stage of their career, and there is a tendency to use informal Irish to give instructions but not for any real communicative purpose.

6.5 Comparing Teachers of Irish to Teachers of Other Languages

Garza (2012) suggests that in becoming a language teacher, one needs to be mindful not only of general teaching methodologies, but of language teaching methodologies, and also of specific features of teaching the particular language. Horwitz argues further, that the way in which a language is taught is very significant in the formation of views (1999). This study explored the question of how unique the process of becoming a teacher of Irish may be. We will look at first, the high incidence of reported change in teachers of Irish compared to teachers of other languages; and then at the particular sociolinguistic context of teaching Irish.

6.5.1 Measuring Change Successfully

Compared to other studies of pre-service teachers of different languages e.g. English by Mori (1999) more changes are reported to occur in the group in the current study. Are teachers of Irish particularly unique in this regard? There is also the question of whether a solely longitudinal approach would have been preferable in identifying change. This format would have encouraged one group of teachers to actively reflect on their views at key junctures and possibly enhance the researcher's ability to track change. It would also have limited the kinds of variables that could affect the reported change in views. Apart from the direct experiences during initial teacher education and in-service practice, it is useful to examine any other factors that are linked to this high level of reported change in views. This may be in part because the research instruments were more comprehensive and addressed aspects of the affective dimension previously overlooked by some studies. Also, the inclusion of qualitative methods as suggested by Busch (2010) that have been shown to capture change more accurately may have increased the likelihood of identifying any changes. As outlined earlier, studies that report change in beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions are in the minority. A common thread in these studies, however, is a reliance on quantitative methods (e.g. Mori, 1999; Vipulphol, 2004). Studies that incorporate qualitative

research methods however are more successful in identifying change that has occurred (e.g. Busch, 2010; Tanaka and Ellis, 2003).

This study utilised both quantitative and qualitative methods and a similar trend emerged. By comparing the questionnaires of Group 1 and Group 2, statistically significant changes in proportions agreeing with certain questionnaire items were clear. The qualitative elements of the study i.e. the open-ended answers and the interviews were more revealing though and allowed teachers to explain why they held certain views or had changed their view. Teachers might state for instance that the requirement to attend the *Gaeltacht* is 'very reasonable' or 'reasonable' but in their open-ended response comment on other factors such as the cost and the timing of the placement.

6.5.2 Types of Change that Occur for Teachers of Irish

We examine now the types of changes that occurred in relation to the cognitive and affective domain, changes to deep-seated views versus recently formed views, and views formed under the macro or micro context.

The idea that cognitive dimensions are more likely to change than affective dimensions has been suggested by other researchers (Garrett, 2003). Some studies have shown that attitudes belonging to the affective dimension are unlikely to change e.g. Festinger (1957). It must be noted that the Festinger study addressed attitudes that people were very heavily invested in. People in the study were members of a cult-like group, had moved home to live with other members and their attitudes concerning an imminent apocalypse were very tightly bound up in their overall identity as a member of the group. A lack of change in these attitudes even in the face of contradictory evidence is to a certain degree understandable. The attitudes and role perceptions explored in this study that belong to the affective dimension are arguably not as intense as those present in the above mentioned studies and therefore greater flexibility in attitude change can be expected.

How early these beliefs or attitudes are formed also is a factor in their likelihood to change. A clear distinction between the malleability of beliefs compared to attitudes was evident in this study. Because of the entry requirements to initial teacher education in relation to Irish (a minimum C3 in honours level Irish - or B2 under the CEF - compared to a C3 in ordinary level English or a D3 in higher level English, and a D3 in ordinary level mathematics), teachers may have to commit to learning Irish from a young age. Because of this early commitment they may feel strongly about engaging in their study of Irish and therefore hold very positive views. It is noteworthy that the scale *Attitude to learning Irish* was the only one in the questionnaire in which teachers tended to pick the extreme points of the scale (i.e. Strongly Disagree or Strongly Agree).

Role perceptions provide an interesting liminal space, however. Aspects of role perceptions relate to the cognitive domain e.g. beliefs that Irish should be used informally outside of the Irish lesson or that Irish should be taught through the medium of Irish. How a teacher feels about actually implementing these beliefs belongs to the affective dimension. In the realm of role perceptions, malleability of the affective dimension, not the cognitive dimension appears more likely. Unlike attitudes, which are formed very early on and which teachers claim belong, to an extent, to both their personal and professional identity, teachers' general role perceptions in relation to being a teacher seem to emerge from an early stage with most stating they are 'very proud' or 'proud' to be taking on this future role. This might relate to some macro factors which it has been suggested are not likely to change as much (Nikitina and Furuoka, 2007). Macro factors influencing role perceptions regarding Irish include the fact that primary teaching is generally a respected profession in Ireland with teachers being relatively well paid compared to their European counterparts. It is a profession that attracts students that perform very well in the Leaving Certificate also. Teachers' first real experience of implementing specific key aspects of the role however, only occur during classroom experience and are therefore subject to micro factors such as the particular location and ethos of the school or the children in the class. Views formed by the micro context may be more open to change and so direct experience, for example, of difficulties in teaching primarily through Irish may begin to change. Teachers become more aware of the issues involved when they gain this concrete experience during school placements and it is not surprising that this awareness is heightened in teachers in early in-service practice.

In sum, the greatest predictors of change in teachers' views found in this study are the (1) length of time the teacher has held a particular view, with longer held views being more resistant, and (2) whether the view was formed under the macro or micro context, with views formed under the latter context more susceptible to change. Cognitive and affective dimensions of views are influenced by these two variables and some areas of role perceptions can comprise both of these components.

6.5.3 Sociolinguistic Context of Irish

We will now turn our attention to the sociolinguistic context of teaching Irish to explore how this might impact on the experience of becoming a teacher of Irish, and a linguistic and cultural representative for learners. As we saw in Section 6.1.2, sometimes the beliefs reported by pre-service teachers of Irish were different than those of other pre-service teachers and these may be linked to the sociolinguistic case of Irish. The Irish language has been classified as a 'special case' language given its official status in Ireland and yet its limited pool of L1 speakers (Ó Riagáin,

2006). It stands to reason therefore, that some distinguishing features of Irish will mean that the process of becoming a teacher of Irish will also have some unique features.

6.5.3.1 Becoming a Linguistic and Cultural Representative

The identity of a primary teacher as a teacher of Irish evolves during early in-service practice. This usually concerns the emergent role of the teacher as a linguistic and cultural representative. As other researchers have asserted (Gorter, 2012), this is a critical element for people who work with minority languages. It seems more likely in the case of Irish that teachers develop an identity as a linguistic and cultural *advocate*, but not necessarily as a *representative* of the target language community. This is due to their identification as a teacher, but not a speaker of Irish, issues in maintaining proficiency in a minority language, difficulties in choosing cultural elements to explore with children, and issues in nurturing positive attitudes to the language. These four aspects may also be complicated by some residual post-colonial outlooks.

6.5.3.1.1 Teacher versus Speaker of Irish

Being a teacher of Irish and identifying as a speaker of Irish are related areas but some differences exist between the two. First being a teacher of Irish is associated mostly with teaching the language as opposed to being a regular speaker, involved in an Irish-speaking network and a cultural advocate promoting Irish Gaelic culture in the local community. For many teachers in the beginning of initial teacher education, the entry requirement means that studying Irish may have a large role in their identity as a pre-service teacher. Teachers in their first year of in-service practice, however, are more likely to describe their role as a primary teacher in a more general way and as contributing to the holistic development of the children.

6.5.3.2 Maintaining Proficiency

Unlike other minority language teachers, the teacher of Irish is not typically an L1 speaker. There is therefore an added challenge in becoming a proficient speaker of Irish. Teachers in this study all enter initial teacher education with an above average proficiency in relation to the general public. It is interesting though that a minority of teachers in the two groups rate themselves as being 'weak' or 'very weak' in relation to competence in Irish. In interviews it was illustrated that teachers tended to compare themselves to "native" speakers and a sense that they were not, nor would ever be, on a par with this level of proficiency. Although teachers through their day to day work speak Irish more often than most of the general public, they still had a reluctance to self-identify as an Irish speaker because of a comparison to the ideal native speaker.

For some this cause of insecurity may be the limited opportunities available to improve proficiency. Colleges of education are physically situated at a distance from Irish-speaking communities unlike initial teacher education for other teachers of minority languages e.g. Basque. Opportunities to engage with Irish speakers are concentrated into initial teacher education experiences where teachers attend two *Gaeltacht* placements and also are on campus where a students' union group is actively promoting Irish language and culture. Teachers do not often report that these opportunities are readily availed of. These opportunities are not as frequent in in-service practice and unlike the case of other minority languages e.g. Basque, teachers are not usually afforded opportunities to visit Irish-speaking areas during their career. The concentration of professional development, in relation to Irish, at pre-service level as opposed to existing across the continuum of a teacher's career, is of concern because as many teachers report that limited opportunities to use and improve their Irish impacts on their self-efficacy beliefs and self-rated proficiency. This lack of support for improving one's own proficiency is of great significance in the case of Irish because of the critical responsibility of teachers in revitalising and maintaining Irish in society. Teachers of other majority languages do not face this challenge because the language they are teaching is widely spoken, if not in Ireland, then in another country. Even for teachers of other minority languages e.g. Basque, Catalan, Hawaiian, the language is reinforced regularly in the community so teachers have easy access to other speakers.

Primary teachers in Ireland are charged with very generalist duties in their teaching of 11 subjects but the teaching of Irish is more of a specialist area which demands not only content and pedagogical knowledge, as most other subjects do, but also proficiency to communicate in Irish. Although most teachers assert that they have very favourable attitudes to Irish, for the teachers that do not, or who perceive themselves to have a low level of proficiency in Irish, they are still placed with the responsibility of teaching Irish as there is at present no option to delegate this teaching to another specialist teacher. For teachers choosing to teach in Irish-medium schools they face increased pedagogical demands in terms of proficiency, despite experiencing by and large the same training in teaching methodologies for Irish during initial teacher education. Some concerns relate to limited resources to support the teaching of other subjects through Irish, and the demands on them to become proficient in subject specific vocabulary.

6.5.3.3 Nurturing Positive Attitudes to Irish Language and Culture

Creating an Irish-speaking environment for pupils and nurturing positive attitudes to Irish language and culture, can be challenging for teachers who do not perceive themselves as part of the Irish-speaking community. Choosing cultural elements to expose children to is one aspect that

teachers over which teachers report uncertainty. Teachers also report challenges in nurturing positive attitudes.

6.5.3.3.1 Inclusion of Cultural Elements in Teaching Irish

Interview responses show that there is a lack of clarity concerning the role of culture in the teaching of Irish. Many agree that aspects of Irish culture are important in the study of Irish e.g. Irish songs, dance, and music but conversely only a small minority believe it is necessary to know about Irish culture when learning Irish. Defining culture can be difficult and other researchers have asserted that it is also difficult to "teach" culture (Hall, 1959). Cultural approaches to teaching a language date back to the 1980s and we can compare teachers in this study to other teacher populations investigated in previous years.

In 1973 very few teachers felt that there was a need for a cultural dimension in the teaching of Irish. By 1983, almost half of teachers were in favour of this. Interestingly, only a minority of teachers in this study report using aspects of Irish culture in their teaching of Irish. In 1985, almost half of teachers felt that the cultural background of the textbooks was suited to the experience of most children and a quarter felt that Irish cultural tradition were reflected sufficiently in the subject matter of the textbooks used. Given the changing demographics of Irish classrooms it would be interesting to explore further whether teachers now feel that the contemporary multicultural population of Ireland and new speakers of Irish are reflected sufficiently in Irish-language books and curriculum.

Teachers in English-medium schools, regardless of their own proficiency or attitude to Irish, report that nurturing positive attitudes to Irish amongst children is difficult and that children's limited interest in learning Irish can mean that great efforts have to be made when introducing the subject. This is consistent with other studies e.g. Devine (2003) and Uí Choistealbha (2012) that show that children report Irish as being one of their least favourite subjects. There is therefore, a greater demand placed on teachers in their roles as a teacher of Irish than in many other subject areas or other language teaching. Teachers also have a huge role in providing corrective feedback to children to help them improve and also it is a subject that parents, even parents in Irish-medium schools, may not have a competency in (Kavanagh and Hickey, 2012). Although teachers in early professional practice do not comment that this increased need for enthusiasm affects their morale when teaching Irish, it is possible that a cumulative effect may occur after a number of years of service.

We can see by the responses given during interviews in early professional practice that some confusion exists as to whether culture is a static traditional product or whether treatment of Irish culture in language lessons should include up to date art forms. Most teachers interpreted

it as traditional Gaelic culture e.g. traditional singing, dancing, music and literature, but not contemporary culture from the *Gaeltacht* or from other Irish-speaking communities, whether newer or longer established. Mostly the researcher needed to prompt the teachers to consider contemporary aspects of Irish Gaelic culture. The popularity of recent translations of songs into Irish was clear though. Contemporary Irish Gaelic culture that is not as heavily influenced by English was not mentioned often if at all. Recent children's literature written in Irish, original Irish language music or other art forms were not mentioned at all. While most agree that there is a culture associated with the Irish language, it is seen as an elusive property of the language. For teachers of what were traditionally called "foreign" languages, teaching about the target culture is perhaps more straight forward. It usually entails the teacher exploring with a class cultural norms and practices from a different culture. For teachers of Irish, this issue is more complex because all Irish people broadly share the same culture. Also, second or additional language speakers outnumber native speakers so they may not have much experience of the target culture. Some of the contemporary approaches to teaching culture therefore, can be seen to be more aligned with the very early "foreign language" approaches and not with an intercultural approach that is advised.

6.5.3.4. Tacit Post-Colonial Mind-Sets

Overcoming post-colonial mind-sets is a necessary step for many speakers and teachers of minority languages (Kornusova, 2006). With the exception of the Mac Gréil (2009) study, most studies of attitudes to Irish exclude an analysis of the impact of post-colonial mentalities which may influence on a subconscious level some teacher's role perceptions and decisions in teaching Irish. Traditionally post-colonial attitudes are linked to shame surrounding the speaking of Irish which an be understood in the context of the very punitive measures in school and community to erase all use of Irish. A second form of post-colonial reaction may be present amongst teachers, one that seems in ways diametrically opposed to perceptions of Irish as an inferior language, i.e. that a pure form of Irish should be used and that English syntax or borrowings should be avoided.

Although there was no specific question on this in the questionnaire or interview schedule, some hints of a post-colonial mentality were evident in teachers' views particularly in the wish to keep the teaching of English very much separate from the teaching of Irish. Mac Gréil and Rhatigan (2009) suggests that Irish people may experience a 'post-colonial attitudinal schizophrenia' which can lead to erratic views concerning the language. As we saw in Section 6.4.2, teachers often artificially impose a division in their minds between the teaching of English and the teaching of Irish. Very rarely are literacy skills between the two languages seen to be transferable. It appears that the pendulum swing from schools being the site where Irish

language is eroded in the 19th century, to the main centre for language revitalisation, has resulted in some polarised views on the importance of Irish and the type of Irish that is desired.

At present the curriculum for Irish is separate to the curriculum for English and even includes different strand and strand units. This division between the languages is reflected in ideas about keeping them quite separate in the primary classroom. Another element of this mind-set is in relation to the desire for language purity and teaching "correct" Irish. Obsessions with language purity are well documented in the case of Irish (Cronin, 2005). This comes in the form of criticisms of literature that was not perceived to be rooted in traditional Irish Gaelic culture or the inclusion of words into the language that lack a traditional root (Cronin, 2005; Ó Ruairc, 1996). In terms of resources for teaching Irish or teaching through Irish, in some studies, teachers have commented on their dislike of words in Irish that are heavily influenced by English syntax (INTO, 2004).

It is possible that there is a residual post-colonial mind frame still present in the approaches to teaching Irish and that a somewhat defensive position is taken in the teaching of Irish. This is revealed particularly in desire to preserve an Irish-only environment and the reluctance to include any reference to English while teaching Irish. Despite speaking at length of the need to include some English in the teaching of Irish, teachers still say that the ideal situation for them was one in which only Irish was spoken in the lesson. Also, the fact that total immersion programmes in Irish are the most frequently offered programmes, as opposed to other more flexible models, reflects a desire to prioritise an increase in speakers of Irish and to reduce the amount of English that students in immersion programmes are exposed to. It is curious that only one model currently and officially is present in Ireland, where dual language instruction approaches are common in other minority language settings e.g. the Basque Country. The system could benefit from a plurilingual approach to language teaching at primary level where the totality of 'language' is addressed in one coherent curriculum as is suggested by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (Ó Duibhir and Cummins, 2012).

In conclusion, the higher incidence of change in beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions compared to other pre-service teachers is perhaps linked to the research methods of the study. The experience of becoming a teacher of Irish does have some distinctive features though which might also contribute to this phenomenon. First the system is reliant for the most part on second or additional language speakers who have few chances to improve their own Irish during in-service practice and who also report being under-supported in their roles in promoting Irish. Despite receiving broadly the same initial teacher education, teachers are qualified to teach in an English-medium or Irish-medium school, where there is an increased demand on proficiency and pedagogical skills. Teachers of Irish face additional challenges in becoming linguistic and cultural

representatives or advocates, compared to other minority language teachers, because of their limited identification with the target language community.

6.6 Experience of Teachers with High Proficiency in Irish

Several variables have been explored in other research on beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions. Some studies have examined, for example, differences between males and females in relation to attitudes (Garrett, 2003). Given the general homogeneity of the group in the following study though, it was difficult to divide the group into clear subgroups with a balance of people in each group. In In the first instance, there was a predominance of females to males and so a fair comparison could not be made between genders. Also, age could not be examined in an in-depth manner as the teachers' ages in Group 1 and Group 2 were mainly concentrated mainly into a three to five year span. Research on minority languages has shown that favourable attitudes correlate with experience of the language from an early age at home or in schooling, mostly primary education (Garrett, 2003; Lasagabaster, 2007). The very low percentage of teachers who had attended secondary schooling through Irish meant that they could not be compared fairly to the majority of the group. Because teachers in this study report that many of the challenges in teaching Irish are related to the fact that they are mostly second or additional language speakers, and they do not identify as part of the target language community (real or imagined), the researcher was interested in finding out whether teachers reporting high proficiency in Irish experienced similar challenges.

6.6.1 High Proficiency and Teacher Views

The variable of proficiency was selected for further examination though for three main reasons (1) Limited teacher proficiency in the teaching of Irish has been noted as a cause of concern by several authors (DES, 2007b), (2) Teachers in this study also refer to language insecurity as hindering their ability to engage in aspects of their role, and (3) Because of the challenges in comparing two different groups and potential intergroup variance, particularly in terms of proficiency in and experience of Irish, correlation tests were undertaken to examine the variable of proficiency and its influence, if any, on views.

6.6.1.1 High Proficiency Teachers and Beliefs

It seems that teachers as a group are fairly uniform in relation to their beliefs about teaching Irish. Their beliefs are presumably linked to the way in which they experienced learning Irish in primary school. All teachers by and large learned Irish in a similar manner i.e. through a mixture of the 1970's and 1999 curriculum in Ireland broadly within the same time frame. More proficient

teachers in both groups are more likely to think that Irish is 'easy' or 'very easy' to learn. This is not surprising given their success in language learning. Correlation tests show that high proficiency in Irish is linked to some different types of beliefs at the beginning and end of initial teacher education though. More proficient teachers in Group 1 do not believe that people who are good at mathematics and science are not good at learning Irish. They also are more likely to think that Irish society places a high value on learning Irish. There is no correlation in Group 2 between high proficiency teachers and this belief. It is not perhaps surprising given that teachers at the end of initial teacher education are more aware of their key role in promoting Irish and the limited reinforcement of the language outside of school. Correlations are generally stronger in Group 1 than in Group 2 regarding beliefs. Teachers in Group 2 are less likely to agree that it is easier to speak than to understand Irish, or that it is mostly a matter of translating from English. They estimate that it will take less time to learn Irish than teachers at the beginning. This differs from other studies that show more proficient learners of a language to believe it will take longer to learn the language (Busch, 2010).

6.6.1.2 High Proficiency Teachers and Attitudes

High proficiency in Irish correlates with positive attitudes to the Irish language and to learning Irish. This attitude is most likely linked to the fact that each member shares the decision to become a teacher, and to the ease of learning and teaching Irish when one has a high standard. Teachers of high proficiency in Irish are more likely to agree with the statement *'People in Ireland who speak English only should try harder to learn Irish'*, and *'I would like to know more people who speak Irish'*. This shows us that beginning pre-service teachers are eager to belong to an Irish-speaking community but as we have seen, they do not report taking measures to achieve this e.g. attending Irish-language events. Opportunities to speak Irish with native speakers are present in the *Gaeltacht* placement but this opportunity is not always seized. This initial enthusiasm that beginning pre-service teachers have to belong to an Irish-speaking groups seems to wane with time. By the time teachers of higher proficiency in Irish reach the end of initial teacher education, no such correlation exists between their proficiency in Irish and a desire to get to know other Irish speakers. Limited opportunities to socialise through Irish may impact on enthusiasm, and equally a decline in enthusiasm may influence their willingness to engage in Irish-speaking networks. It is of concern that this eagerness to interact with other Irish speakers is not maintained, not only because of later concerns they report in proficiency, but also because of the isolation they report in promoting Irish. It is likely linked to structures of the *Gaeltacht* placement too, and the limited chances teachers have or avail of, to engage with the local Irish-speaking community.

In relation to the scale *Attitudes to Learning Irish*, however, higher proficiency in Irish gives rise to more positive attitudes to most items on the scale, at the beginning and end of initial teacher education. Teachers are more likely to agree with the positively worded items and to disagree with the negatively worded items. In Group 1, high proficiency correlates with attitudes to 4 items, whereas in Group 2, high proficiency correlates with attitudes to 7 items. This is presumably linked to their own positive experiences in learning Irish and the relative ease of this pursuit given their standard of Irish.

6.6.1.3 High Proficiency Teachers and Role Perceptions

High proficiency in Irish, for teachers in both groups, does not correlate with their views on the importance of Irish in the curriculum, or with their views on whether or not teachers should take on a greater responsibility in relation to the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish. It seems that these views are widespread in the two groups, and possibly linked to teachers' claimed identity rather than being solely related to proficiency in Irish.

Confidence in implementing aspects of the teacher's role is correlated with high proficiency in both groups. As we saw in the open-ended responses, teachers associate higher proficiency with being able to engage in their work more effectively. The greater the proficiency, the more willing the teacher is to implement CLIL. Proficiency also has an impact on the satisfaction that a teacher thinks is associated with teaching Irish. They expect to derive 'great satisfaction' from teaching Irish where most other teachers expect to derive 'great satisfaction' or 'some satisfaction'. In Group 2, teachers with high proficiency are more likely to think that it is important for pre-service teachers to improve their proficiency in Irish. This is probably linked the greater amount of experience that they have in teaching and their awareness of how central proficiency is to the teaching of Irish. Teachers in Group 2 also think that children will have more interest and proficiency in Irish. It is likely that this is due to the fact that most undertake school placement in an Irish-medium school, and as we can see from open-ended responses, teachers do not report difficulty in motivating children or nurturing positive attitudes to Irish, in these settings. Teachers frequently raise the issue of children's attitudes or limited resources, for example, and how this can affect their views on how Irish is taught. It should also be noted that reported correlations are relatively weak which shows that high proficiency in Irish plays some role in the formation and evolution of views, but that it may not play as large a role as experiences in the classroom.

One interesting insight is the extent to which proficiency still influences views during in-service practice. While the questionnaire stage of data collection, at the beginning and end of initial teacher education, allowed teachers to indicate their general willingness to teach primarily

through Irish or to implement CLIL, it was in the interview stages, after first school placement and first year in in-service practice, that teachers could describe their actual experience of these expectations on the teacher. Many of the expected roles of the teacher of Irish are predicated on the teacher having proficiency in Irish e.g. teaching primarily through the medium of Irish, using informal Irish outside of the Irish lesson and teaching other subjects through Irish (CLIL). The potential impact of a higher proficiency on these three areas of role perceptions was explored in the interview and they were more revealing. When teachers had an opportunity to give a thick rich description of their experiences in the classroom, proficiency was not reported as significant a factor. Indeed teachers in this subgroup with higher proficiency in Irish reported similar issues to the main group in terms of teaching primarily through Irish and nurturing positive attitudes to Irish. Teachers with high proficiency who chose to work in Irish-medium schools did not report these same challenges, although they are cognisant of the limited resources available for Irish-medium schools compared to English-medium schools. This points to the need for teachers to be supported in their day-to-day work in promoting Irish, particularly in English-medium schools, which is for the vast majority of pupils the environment in which they learn Irish. The relative isolation of this role has been highlighted before (Harris, 2006) and this finding adds urgency to this need for support.

6.7 Summary and Conclusions

In conclusion, pre-service teachers already demonstrate some characteristic traits. They have an above average level of proficiency in Irish and a more positive attitude to learning Irish. They have experienced in some way aspects of the two key placements during initial teacher education and so they enter with generally realistic and also optimistic views, presumably linked to previous experiences in school or in the *Gaeltacht*. The distinctive traits associated with pre-service teachers can become more pronounced as they engage in their programme and changes, significant across the threefold answer options or evident just in the amount 'agreeing' with an item, in beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions are generally consistent across the group. Where a change occurs it seems to be experienced by virtually the whole group or large majorities as we saw with the decline in support for teaching primarily through Irish, and the increase in percentages feeling that society ascribes to teachers a good deal of the responsibility in revitalising and maintaining Irish.

This study shows that changes begin in relation to beliefs and role perceptions when the teacher begins initial teacher education, especially after first experiences of teaching Irish and engaging in the *Gaeltacht* placement. Changes begin to occur in relation to beliefs about learner errors, expectations of children, differences between teaching Irish compared to other subjects,

and the difficult of learning Irish. These changes continue to evolve as the teachers' experience of her role increases and this flexibility in view can impact positively on how Irish is taught. Attitudinal evolution happens within more finite latitude as these attitudes are usually deeply rooted. While the *Gaeltacht* placement appears to provide some catalyst for change, no parallel experience is present for teachers at other stages of their career and attitudes can remain fixed after a certain point. Changes in role perceptions relate especially to views on teacher proficiency and how a teacher can implement these effectively, and also to views concerning the onerous role of the teacher in promoting Irish with little reinforcement in the community, showing that teachers need further support in their role and they have needed these supports for a long time. Removing the locus of responsibility for the day-to-day teaching of Irish from the DES, as well as a lack of co-ordinated effort to remedy long-reported issues for teachers can make their role all the more challenging.

Changes in views can be measured in part by quantitative research methods, but combining this approach with qualitative elements affords the opportunity for personal reflection on these changes, and allows teachers to explore changes in a more meaningful way. Critical reflection on the process of becoming a teacher of Irish is of great importance as, while teachers support in theory several approaches that lead to effective language teaching e.g. target language use in the teaching of Irish, use of informal Irish outside of the Irish lesson, and including to a certain extent cultural elements in the teaching of Irish, they still report some uncertainty in how to implement these elements effectively. Issues around proficiency and the psychological dichotomy between English and Irish in teaching language generally would also benefit from being teased out further.

A solely longitudinal approach with one group over the entire four years may have facilitated this type of frequent and in-depth reflection better, but was as previously mentioned, beyond the scope of the study. Although we are dealing with two different groups, evidence from experiences on school placement and later professional practice, indicates that it is the direct experience of teaching that modifies beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions and not necessarily background factors such proficiency. Both higher and lower proficiency teachers report similar challenges in teaching Irish.

Higher proficiency in Irish offers teachers the option of teaching in Irish-medium or English-medium schools. Proficiency in Irish is a concern for a number of teachers in English-medium schools though, and for some teachers in Irish-medium schools in terms of teaching other areas of the curriculum through Irish. In cases where teachers enter initial teacher education with higher levels of proficiency, they display more positive attitudes to aspects of their

future role. Yet when it comes to actually implementing these aspects of their role, teachers still report a need for more support.

Chapter 7

Conclusions and Recommendations

7.0 Introduction

This final chapter provides a summary of the study followed by the main findings. Then some recommendations are given concerning the process of becoming a teacher of Irish and how this could be further supported and enhanced. Finally some areas that warrant further research are identified. Hence, this Chapter will be divided into the following sections:

Section 7.1: Overview of Study
Section 7.2: Theoretical Background to the Study
Section 7.3: Research Methods Employed
Section 7.4: Main Findings of the Study: Early Changes in Views
Section 7.5: Main Findings of the Study: Later Changes in Views
Section 7.6: Becoming a Teacher of Irish: Supporting and Enhancing the Process
Section 7.7: Areas for Further Research
Section 7.8: Conclusions

7.1 Overview of Study

The findings of this study present the experience of a group of professionals who are heavily embedded in the national revitalisation and maintenance initiative of Irish, the official yet a minority language in Ireland: pre-service and early practising primary teachers. Where other studies have given a static picture of general trends in the national population at a particular point in time (CILAR, 1975) or of practising teachers (INTO, 1985), or have looked at teachers of other languages (e.g. English Busch, 2010; Horwitz, 1985), this diachronic study tracks how views of a pre-service teachers relating to Irish specifically, can grow and develop over the course of four years.

Three particular dimensions of teachers' views were explored: beliefs about teaching Irish, attitudes to the Irish language and Irish speakers, and role perceptions. It is argued that each of these dimensions is important in understanding the cognitive and affective dimensions to the teaching of Irish and though some overlap exists between these three dimensions, they were found to have distinctive features e.g. context under which they are formed and likelihood of change. Many studies up until now have analysed the cognitive dimension of language teaching

(e.g. Horwitz, 1985; Mori, 1999) but by including the affective dimension we were able to examine its contribution to teacher morale and experience. Beliefs about language learning, for the purpose of this study, referred to the cognitive beliefs that pre-service teachers hold concerning which strategies are the most effective to teach the target language. It also included views on such issues as the difficulty of language learning, language and communication strategies, the nature of language learning foreign language aptitude, the nature of language learning, and motivation and expectations in language learning, as outlined in the original Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (Horwitz, 1985). Attitudes belong to the affective domain and the areas addressed in this study were the personal and/or professional views that a teacher holds regarding the target language itself and language community, as well as attitudes to teaching the language. Role perceptions it was found, belong in part to the cognitive and to the affective dimension. Role perceptions reveal *what* a teacher thinks she should do in fulfilling her role effectively, and *how* she feels about this claimed identity as a teacher of Irish and/or the identity assigned to her by society (Benton and Benton, 2001; Lastra, 2001; Varghese, 2005). In this study we sought general views teachers hold concerning Irish as an ethnic symbol, the obligatory nature of Irish in primary schools, and the responsibility society places on her in promoting the language. The study looked in more detail at the role of proficiency in teaching Irish: teaching Irish primarily through Irish, using Irish informally throughout the school day, and teaching another subject from time to time through Irish. It was shown that views on these four aspects of role perceptions can also influence views on acting as a representative for the target language and culture, as well as the teacher's role in nurturing positive attitudes to the language.

Along with these three dimensions of teachers' view – beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions – the two compulsory experiences of school and *Gaeltacht* placement that are undertaken to meet the requirements of becoming a teacher of Irish, were explored. This study examined how beginning pre-service teachers anticipate these two experiences, and how these experiences contribute to early beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions in their first year of initial teacher education. Later, teachers experience another key experience when they enter in-service practice and undertake the professional role as a teacher of Irish. The extent to which beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions continue to evolve was also examined during early professional practice.

A "creative longitudinal" design was employed (Dörnyei, 2007) to maximise the ability to track the experience of becoming a teacher of Irish during initial teacher education and early in-service practice (a four-year process), but in a relatively short period of time (one year). This involved combining a primarily longitudinal approach with aspects of a cross-sectional approach. Two groups are involved in the study: teachers at the beginning of initial teacher education, and

teachers at the end of initial teacher education who are entering in-service practice. The data from both groups was compared in a cross-sectional manner. Each group was also followed in a longitudinal manner over the course of a year, and follow up interviews were conducted with a subgroup showing that the experience of school and *Gaeltacht* placement, are sometimes early catalysts for change, and that other changes occur by the end of their programme. Similarly interview with teachers in early professional practice revealed the evolving nature of beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions as the teacher gains more experience and matures.

7.2 Theoretical Background to the Study

The remainder of this section gives a brief overview of the theoretical background to the study, the sociolinguistic context of teaching Irish, and the transition to primary teaching in Ireland.

7.2.1 Beliefs, Attitudes and Role Perceptions

It was shown in Chapter 2 that developing and refining beliefs about language learning, attitudes to a language, and perceptions of the role of the language teacher are three related but distinct aspects of becoming a language teacher. Evidence for the distinctive nature of each of these three constructs is the fact that the incidence and rate of change for each is shown to be different, with attitudes being the most enduring. Each of these three areas has an influence on how a teacher engages in her role.

7.2.1.1 Origins, Nature and Alignment of Views

Beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions can be influenced by macro factors e.g. broad cultural norms and the value a society places on language learning, the type of language education that exists in a country (Kouritzin, 2007). Beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions can also be influenced by micro factors e.g. experiences in the home, experiences in particular learning contexts (Nikitina and Furuoka, 2007). Some of these beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions appear to be formed very early on such as a positive attitude to the minority language due in part to an early exposure to the language in the home and in schooling (Garrett, 2003) while others, particularly role perceptions can be formed later e.g. views on the obligatory nature of learning Irish for EAL learners.

Beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions may be aligned at times e.g. reporting a positive attitude to the target language and also reporting great satisfaction in teaching the language, but dissonance may exist between the three at times, particularly between cognitive and affective components. For example, a person may express a belief in minority language education but in fact may harbour negative feelings about such education (Baker, 1992) or express a belief that

language should be taught primarily through the target language but feel in practice that this is very demanding and unrealistic.

7.2.1.2 Significance of Beliefs, Attitudes and Role Perceptions

Beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions were shown to be three important constructs in understanding the process of becoming a teacher of Irish. They help us understand approaches to the teaching the language, how much satisfaction or otherwise is associated with this experience, and also any potential challenges facing language teachers.

Teachers' beliefs about language learning influence in a significant way how language classes are planned and delivered. General beliefs teachers have about teaching Irish will inform much of their lesson planning and methodologies employed in the classroom and interactions with children e.g. how easy or difficult they think it is to learn Irish, whether they think some people have a natural ability for language learning, the extent to which they feel learners should be allowed to make mistakes, the role of grammar in language teaching. This is all the more important in the case of a minority language like Irish, where the language is obligatory in primary schooling and where the classroom is the most sustained, and sometimes only, contact that children will have with the Irish language and culture.

Attitudes to the Irish language generally, and to learning Irish particularly have been shown to be related but distinct concepts (INTO, 1985). We saw in this study that attitudes to the language in general and attitudes to *teaching* the language can also exist independent of each other. Attitudes to teaching and to learning Irish have significance in initial teacher education because pre-service teachers are still learners of Irish, while also gaining some experience in teaching Irish and acting to an extent as linguistic and cultural ambassadors for children in their classes. Practising teachers' attitudes to the Irish language have been measured in the past and their increased commitment to the Irish language and above average standard of Irish compared to the general public has been noted. The role of experiences in initial teacher education and their contribution to this commitment and more favourable attitudes, has not until now been explored in any in-depth manner. The ability of the education system to nurture positive attitudes to Irish language and culture is dependent on the attitudes of primary teachers (Harris, 2006) and so we need to understand how to encourage and maintain these favourable attitudes amongst teachers.

Third, role perceptions deal with the expectations that teachers feel are placed on them e.g. teachers' views on the demands that are made of them in terms of proficiency, and they also give us an insight into how supportive the teacher is in general about the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish and its promotion through primary education. Primary teachers also have the potential to implement approaches to enhance the teaching of Irish such as using informal

Irish and CLIL in order to increase pupils' exposure to the Irish language during schooling. Given the critical position that primary teachers have in the revitalisation of Irish, exploring pre-service teachers' needs and potential anxieties about their future role, was an important component of the study, as well as attempting to understand whether their very substantial role in promoting Irish is considered a privilege or a daunting and arduous task that lies ahead of them. This is all the more important in the context of the decline in satisfaction in teaching Irish that has been reported (Harris, 2006) and findings from the Chief Inspector's Report that 24% of teachers are less than satisfactory in the teaching of Irish.

7.2.2 The Impact of the Sociolinguistic Context

We saw in the second part of Chapter 2 that in the case of a minority language, beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions of teachers can be influenced by the extent to which the teacher identifies as a member of the target language cultural group, the support for the language in the community, historical factors and the environment in which they teach (Benton and Benton, 2001; Lastra, 2001).

Teachers of Irish are by and large second or additional language speakers as are the learners of Irish and may not feel a sense of belonging to Irish-speaking communities (real or imagined). The main weight of the revitalisation and maintenance initiative has traditionally been placed on primary schools, and there is little tangible support for teaching the language in the local community, outside of *Gaeltacht* areas which places increasing demands on the teacher of Irish in creating an Irish-speaking environment and promoting Irish as a live communicative language. A history of colonialism too, can influence role perceptions (Kornusova, 2006). Irish speakers in Ireland are also English speakers, and the hegemonic position of English beside Irish can make it vulnerable. This can give rise to mixed feelings amongst the public, including teachers, concerning the value of promoting the language (Mac Gréil and Rhatigan, 2009). Support for revitalising the language may also wane with time (O'Rourke, 2011). This impact of post-colonial mentalities has not been explored in a comprehensive way in many studies and yet latent post-colonial mind sets may exist that impact on the teaching of Irish.

Finally, teachers despite receiving by and large a uniform pre-service education, have the option of teaching in English-medium, or Irish-medium schools in the *Gaeltacht* (community in which Irish is primarily spoken) or in the *Galltacht* (a community in which English is primarily spoken). Another dimension in the teaching of Irish is that teachers do not specialise in teaching Irish as occurs with teachers of other minority languages, but rather are generalist teachers engaging in 11 other subject areas. The three different settings for the teaching of Irish can pose distinct challenges. There are many reports of low levels of interest amongst children in English-

medium schools. In Irish-medium schools, there is currently a lack of a targeted programme during initial teacher education to prepare teachers for these settings. Also, there are some complaints that resources for teaching Irish and other curricular areas through Irish are lacking.

7.2.3 The Transition to Teaching

We saw in the final part of Chapter 2 that the transition to teaching involves the move from being a learner and a citizen to being in the vanguard in terms of the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish. The transition to teaching is of particular interest because while we know that practising teachers demonstrate above average standard of Irish and commitment to the language, we did not until now know whether these favourable dispositions are formed prior to initial teacher education, or if they are shaped by experiences in initial teacher education and early in-service practice. The malleability of beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions has been contested by many researchers whose findings suggest that little or no change occurs in these areas during initial teacher education (Mori, 1999). Teachers may be entrenched in some views when they come to initial teacher education but there are some key experiences that have been shown to modify beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions like teaching the language for the first time (Busch, 2010) and spending time in the target language community (Tanaka and Ellis, 2003). Similarly, experiences in the classroom have also been shown to be a catalyst for change in beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions (Bailey, 1992).

The general picture that emerges from the overview of the literature is that there are some distinctive features associated with becoming a teacher of Irish because of the sociolinguistic context in which Irish is taught. Initial teacher education and early in-service practice can provide a forum for refining beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions particularly the key experiences of school placement, *Gaeltacht* placement, and early professional practice.

7.3 Research Methods to Explore Change

Chapter 3 describes the research methods used in the current study, the selection of participants and approaches to analysing the data. Previous approaches were first consulted and the strengths and weaknesses of various methods were considered.

The study began with the following questions:

(a) What are the characteristics of pre-service teachers and how do these compare to the (inter)national profile? What beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions do teachers enter initial teacher education with? How do teachers anticipate the key experiences of school and *Gaeltacht* placement?

(b) What changes, if any, happen to these beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions during initial teacher education and are these changes linked to school and *Gaeltacht* placement?

(c) Do any of these beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions continue to evolve during in-service practice?

(d) Do teachers with reported higher proficiency in Irish experience the same growth and development of beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions?

In selecting appropriate research methods, several other studies were consulted. An advantage was observed in studies that combined quantitative and qualitative methods in measuring change (e.g. Tanaka and Ellis, 2003; Busch, 2010). It was decided that a questionnaire that was broadly similar would be used with two main groups: teachers at the beginning and end of initial teacher education. This questionnaire focused on the three areas of beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions, and also asked teachers to anticipate or reflect on the key experiences of school and *Gaeltacht* placement. The entire year group in first and final year of college were invited to participate. Questionnaires were administered during the first and second week of term before beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions were influenced by course content. Interviews with Subgroup 1 were conducted immediately after first school placement and during the *Gaeltacht* placement to examine its impact on views. Questionnaires were also administered to Group 2 in the second last week of lectures. Interviews with Subgroup 2 were conducted during the second semester of teaching, to examine the influence of this particular experience.

While these three broad themes were present in each stage of data collection, research instruments that were previously used to measure beliefs (e.g. Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory), attitudes (e.g. Attitude and Motivation Test Battery) and role perceptions (e.g. Irish as an Ethnic Symbol and Teaching of Irish in Schools) informed the design of the instruments used in the current study. Some original items were included to target specifically teachers' perceptions concerning teacher proficiency, nurturing positive attitudes to Irish and their role in promoting Irish. Following the recommendations of other researchers investigating potential change in beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions, (e.g. Tanaka and Ellis, 2003; Busch, 2010) qualitative elements in the form of write-in supplementary options were included in the main questionnaire to allow teachers elaborate on why they held certain views, to comment on whether their perception of a particular aspect of teaching differs from actual practice.

Analysis of questionnaires was done using SPSS software. All responses to open-ended items on the questionnaire were coded thematically and the data was entered into SPSS to compare percentages raising particular issues across Group 1 and 2. All interviews were

transcribed and also coded thematically. These research methods provided rich data for analysis that is summarised briefly in the sections that follow.

7.3.1 Limitations

While it is envisioned that the study will contribute to the fields of applied linguistics and general education, there are some limitations that must be identified. A purely longitudinal study may have been preferable, as the two groups experienced slightly different programmes (e.g. lecture hours and modes of learning), the focus was also on the two key placements that are similar across the older and newer models. It is also important to note that previous studies concerning teachers' attitudes to Irish and the teaching of Irish have surveyed a variety of teachers, some of whom were trained in the 1970's B.Ed. programme, and others who were trained prior to that (e.g. INTO, 1985). As the study took place in the college in which the researcher works certain steps were taken to minimise the potential for teachers to feel pressured into taking part (by providing information sessions and a plain language statement detailing the extent of their involvement, and allowing them a week to consider this before giving informed consent), and to encourage teachers to be as honest as possible and not simply give desirable answers (by treating the questionnaires confidentially and asking teachers to use a number rather than name in responding to the questionnaire, by requesting permission to be excused from acting as an examiner to the participants during school and *Gaeltacht* placement, and by offering the option of responding in English). For reasons of convenience, participants from one college of education where the researcher works were invited to participate in the study, though this does limit the ability of the study to track the evolution of beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions across a wider range of courses and location. The inclusion of several colleges of education in the study may have presented more robust findings but this was not possible within the confines of the study.

7.4 Early Beliefs, Attitudes and Role Perceptions

We saw in Chapter 4 that beginning pre-service teachers of Irish have a characteristic profile in relation to proficiency in Irish, as well as particular beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions.

7.4.1 Characteristics and Views of Beginning Pre-Service Teachers

Pre-service teachers of Irish, along with practising teachers, display some unique characteristics. First, they come with a positive attitude to the Irish language and speakers, in keeping with other research showing that practising primary teachers exhibit a more positive attitudes than that of the general public (Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin, 1994) and their attitude to learning Irish is higher than that of other pupils who have recently completed the Leaving Certificate in English-medium

schools. Pre-service teachers also have above average levels of proficiency compared to the general public and to other Leaving Cert students in English-medium schools, though a small minority describe themselves as being a 'weak' or very weak' second language speaker. Pre-service teachers report high levels of enjoyment in learning Irish, presumably linked to positive experiences and success in learning Irish either in formal education or in the *Gaeltacht*. It is also related to their emergent identity as a primary teacher which is often formed very early on e.g. a commitment to study honours level Irish or to attend *Gaeltacht* programmes to meet the entry requirements for college.

Beliefs of pre-service teachers of Irish are similar to those reported by other pre-service language teachers. First, the majority of them believe that learning Irish is different to studying other subjects, and that anybody can learn Irish. A very small minority support the notion of a gender related foreign language aptitude in the learning of Irish. Most believe repetition and practice are important in learning Irish, and a minority believe that learning Irish is mostly a matter of learning grammar rules. The majority express a belief that it is more effective to learn Irish in the *Gaeltacht* than in a traditional classroom. Nevertheless, acquiring knowledge of Irish culture is not seen as central in the study of the Irish language. We can also see that pre-service teachers regard high proficiency in Irish with enabling them to get a teaching job. Unlike pre-service teachers of other languages though, a substantial minority of teachers of Irish think that learning Irish is 'difficult' or very difficult' which may be linked to two other concerns reported. First issues around teaching Irish grammar emerge frequently in the open-ended supplementary questions and second, teachers of Irish are less likely to believe that Irish people think it is important to learn Irish. They are therefore aware of difficulties inherent in the language, which may be the reason that a substantial minority are in favour of granting exemptions to EAL learners and children with SEN, and also of their isolation in promoting Irish early on. Teachers with high proficiency in Irish, however, rate the language as easier to learn and believe that society places a greater value on the learning of Irish.

Pre-service teachers identify to an extent with the Irish language as an ethnic symbol especially for cultural reasons. They are very much in favour of the obligatory nature of Irish for all children in primary schools though. Most report that being a teacher of Irish is 'central' or 'very central' to their overall identity as a primary teacher, particularly for teachers who subsequently undertake school placement in an Irish-medium school. As such, teachers see a role for themselves in the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish more widely in society and particularly in inspiring a love of Irish in children, but even at this very early stage of their career they are cognisant of the weight of responsibility placed on them. Only 12.0%, however, think that the

primary teacher should have the 'main' responsibility in revitalising and maintaining Irish but over twice as many (26.7%) feel that society currently assigns the 'main responsibility' to them.

Pre-service teachers have some views on the demands that will be placed on them (Bontempo and Digman in Ezer et al, 2010) and for teachers of Irish, they are aware specifically of demands in terms of proficiency. Teacher proficiency comprises an expectation that Irish will be taught mostly through Irish, that the teacher will use Irish informally throughout the school day and that from time to time the teacher will teach other subjects through Irish (Harris, 2008). The vast majority support in principle, the teaching of Irish primarily through Irish but in the open-ended part of this question some concerns over this type of approach were raised e.g. ensuring children were able to fully understand what was going on in the Irish lesson. Using Irish informally through the school day was regarded by the vast majority of teachers as a very feasible strategy that could increase exposure to Irish during school time. When it came to views about teaching another subject through Irish, less teachers were in favour of this approach and where they were, it was usually support for a bilingual approach in a small selection of subjects: PE, and the arts (visual arts, music, drama).The main concerns in implementing CLIL approaches were outlined in the open-ended question e.g. the demands on the teacher in terms of subject-specific vocabulary, the difficulty in teaching a subject that is "information heavy" through Irish, and the risk of children not understanding content or disengaging from the lesson. A minority of teachers think Irish itself (as a subject) should be taught bilingually. Some teachers, therefore, at this early stage begin to identify a role for English in the teaching of Irish.

Teachers anticipate favourably school and *Gaeltacht* placement. The difficulty they expect in teaching Irish is separate from the satisfaction they expect to derive as we see that almost half of teachers expect Irish to be 'very difficult' or 'difficult' to teach but the majority still expects to derive 'great satisfaction' or 'some satisfaction' from teaching Irish. They also are optimistic about the *Gaeltacht* placement and expect to improve proficiency, and to a lesser extent be exposed to Irish Gaelic culture and to interact with locals and their fellow students.

Pre-service teachers, therefore, have positive views generally about the Irish language and learning Irish. They see a role for themselves in promoting Irish while at the same time being aware that they currently may be expected by society to do more than they are able. Teachers are cognisant to a degree of the future demands placed on them and the difficulty of engaging effectively with all of these, particularly concerning the proficiency in Irish that is expected of them.

7.4.2 Beliefs, Attitudes and Role Perceptions after Key Experiences

Pre-service teachers are seen to have reasonably realistic expectations about both key experiences – school and *Gaeltacht* placement - possibly because of their own experience as learners in school or possibly because the majority has previously attended a *Gaeltacht* programme. Teachers reported a very high level of stability in beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions after first school placement but some changes did occur.

7.4.2.1 Influence of School Placement

Beliefs and role perceptions were reported to be influenced by this experience, but attitudes were not affected as much. Attitudes were reported to be generally as positive or a bit more positive following the first experience of teaching Irish. This stability in very favourable attitudes to Irish speakers and to learning Irish is very positive as a teacher's own interest in and commitment to Irish can influence how she teaches Irish. Equally, beliefs about how Irish should be taught were strengthened and in tune with a communicative approach to language teaching. Teachers also noted that teaching Irish is different compared to other subjects because of the medium of communication and the need to nurture positive attitudes. Teachers reported some main changes to have occurred in their beliefs about teaching Irish after this first formal experience of teaching Irish and these relate to the expectations of certain profiles of children. Teachers now believe less in a gender related foreign language aptitude and that some children should not be obliged to learn Irish. Beliefs about the role of culture in the teaching of Irish begin to change following School placement where previously teachers indicated that elements of Irish Gaelic culture were of importance, there is limited evidence of their inclusion in teaching apart from a small number of traditional art forms and static representations of Irish Gaelic culture. Teachers report insecurity in successfully choosing cultural elements to include.

Perceptions of the role of the teacher are generally stable following first school placement with the majority supportive of Irish for its ethnic value and in favour of its obligatory nature in school. A minority of teachers who have worked with EAL learners, however, now think that they do not necessarily need an exemption from Irish but rather have a great capacity for language learning. Teachers reported that their approach to teaching Irish aligned closely with the beliefs reported at the beginning of the year i.e. teaching Irish primarily through Irish. While most noted the difficulties involved in this, as they had earlier predicted, they still did not deviate greatly from this approach. Teachers also reported using informal Irish to give instructions throughout the day. Despite any challenges mentioned, the majority of teachers reported that the experience of teaching Irish had been enjoyable but not necessarily easy to teach, as predicted at the beginning of their programme. They begin to identify a need for more support in teaching Irish, in particular

reinforcement of Irish in the home and community. It is likely that teachers are becoming aware of their relative isolation in the task of promoting Irish.

7.4.2.2 Gaeltacht Placement

Only in a very small number of cases do teachers report that the *Gaeltacht* placement has influenced their beliefs about how Irish should be taught or their role perceptions. This placement does however appear to influence attitudes to the Irish language and to Irish speakers. Although positive attitudes were reported at the beginning, some teachers now report that their attitude has become more positive. Through increased exposure to an Irish-speaking community in the *Gaeltacht*, there was no concomitant increase in interacting with Irish speakers and teachers reported spending most of their time with their peers, which is likely to be related to the fact that they generally travel to a small Irish-speaking community in a relatively large group of pre-service teachers. This differs from other Erasmus or study abroad programmes where the language learner travels in a small group or individually and therefore interacts with members of the community more frequently in the target language. Perhaps also if the teacher had responsibility for locating suitable accommodation and to select a course with peers from the target culture, as happens in other study abroad programmes, she would not only feel more ownership of her learning, but also have more opportunities to be involved with members of the target culture. Expectations of improving proficiency while in the *Gaeltacht* therefore, were not always met and positive experiences in the *Gaeltacht* are associated more frequently with the social aspect and some cultural aspects of this placement. Although teachers' attitudes are reported to be influenced positively by this experience, and their views of Irish speakers, developing an identity as an Irish speaker does not usually occur.

Because school and *Gaeltacht* placement are for relatively short periods of time (three weeks and two weeks respectively), the level of change reported in beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions is not as great as that which is reported to occur during first year of in-service practice as we will see in the next section, presumably when the teacher has gained more experience in the role.

7.5 Later Changes in Views

Chapter 5 describes and analyses the beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions of teachers in their final year of initial teacher education and their beginning year in in-service practice. We saw that some views that began to change after school and *Gaeltacht* placement continued to grow by the end of initial teacher education. In other cases, changes did not necessarily begin following first experience of teaching or spending time in the target language community, but rather after the

teacher had acquired more experience throughout her programme or because of other factors such as general maturation, and other personal, academic and professional experiences. In the presentation of results, significant changes across the entire data set were indicated with an asterisk within each table. A focus on percentages in the category 'strongly agree – agree' were also presented to examine whether shifts at the high end of the scale could manifest the beginning of changes. Finally, we looked at the changes that can occur between the end of initial teacher education and the teacher's first experience of professional practice, whether the same views continued to evolve or whether other views were now subject to change as the teacher advances in her career.

7.5.1 Views at the End of Initial Teacher Education

A great level of stability is reported in beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions between the beginning and end of initial teacher education. Nearly all teachers at both of these points tended to either agree or disagree on the same items but the percentage of people agreeing or disagreeing varied from item to item, though they were not statistically significant across the threefold response categories 'strongly agree – agree', 'neither agree nor disagree', and ' strongly disagree – disagree'. The answer option most frequently selected by respondents also was generally consistent though between the two groups showing that the two groups are broadly similar. In the majority of cases views reported are consistent with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approaches, except in the area of culture where teachers have ambivalent feelings to its inclusion and demonstrate uncertainty in selecting appropriate cultural forms to expose children to.

We do see some trends in the changes that occur. Changes happen in the cognitive domain and in aspects of the affective domain, particularly where these attitudes are not formed very early on. Several changes occur in the cognitive dimension of beliefs. More teachers at the end consider Irish to be different from studying other subjects and begin to believe that it is more difficult, an observation first noted after school placement in first year. Although only a very small minority believe in a gender-related foreign language aptitude, what is interesting is that more later disagree with the possibility of a gender-related language aptitude, and early signs of this were evident after first school placement. Less teachers at the end place emphasis on an excellent accent or believe that Irish is mostly a matter of learning new vocabulary, and simultaneously they become more tolerant of learner mistakes. Other studies of pre-service teachers have shown that as classroom experience increases, more attention is given by teachers to reflecting on teaching skills rather than learning outcomes for children (Farrell, 1999). It is not surprising then that it is at this point that teachers begin to concentrate more on the child's learning and

interlanguage. Significantly less teachers believe at the end that it is easier to speak than to understand Irish and demands in terms of oral proficiency emerge frequently in open-ended supplementary responses. Teachers appear to consider these areas in more detail by the end of their programme rather than following the first key experiences.

Looking at the attitudes of pre-service teachers in their final year, we can examine the impact of 5 school placements and 2 *Gaeltacht* placements, amongst other experiences, on their views. The very high positive attitudes to learning Irish are maintained between first and final year. In relation to the scale *Attitudes to Irish Speakers*, a more positive attitude to Irish speakers is reported at the end of the *Gaeltacht* placement, and to a certain extent after school placement, this does not give rise to a statistically different mean scale score reported at the end of initial teacher education. This may mean that the change is short lived or that it is only proportional to their continued engagement with Irish speakers. We must take into account however, the drops in percentages agreeing with certain items which suggest that favourable attitudes are beginning to decrease. Teachers indirectly mention the limited opportunities they have to socialise through Irish or to engage with Irish speakers, particularly in the *Gaeltacht* placement, and this might be linked to favourable attitudes beginning to wane.

Teachers still support the preservation of Irish for its cultural value and significantly more teachers by the end think that promoting Irish is a key part of their role because they can expose children to Irish at an early age but now they also feel that they are blamed for low standards in the general public. Other changes in the response category 'strongly agree – agree' point to this general trend, for example there is a fall in teachers believing that schools can compensate for a lack of intergenerational transmission. This level of awareness was not reported following first school placement. Teachers are now still supportive of the obligatory nature of Irish and feel that all learners, including EAL learners, should be included in the teaching of Irish, provided the necessary supports are in place. The degree of responsibility that they feel is placed on them in terms of promoting Irish has changed and they now feel they are assigned a disproportionate responsibility in promoting Irish and that there is a need for a more collective effort in society, a point raised after first school placement but that has become intensified by the end of their programme.

The intricacies of the teacher's role in teaching Irish were explored through their views on aspects of teacher proficiency. We saw after first school placement, however, that teachers were still overwhelmingly in favour of teaching primarily through Irish though some issues were noted. There is significantly less support for teaching Irish primarily through Irish amongst final year pre-service teachers because of many of the same issues raised by teachers at the beginning for their programme, but there is unanimous support for using Irish informally outside of Irish lesson. This

is perhaps a compensatory method to ensure children still receive the same amount of exposure to Irish during the school day and also because it is seen as easy to do. Teachers still regard proficiency in Irish as a key facet of their role and more teachers stress that proficiency is needed to be confident in teaching Irish and to motivate children, yet interestingly only a small minority in their open-ended responses mention the need to maintain proficiency. While teachers believe that ideally Irish should be taught mostly through Irish in English-medium schools, significantly more teachers at the end are in favour of selected and limited use of English during lessons to ensure pupils understand what is happening and can fully participate in the lesson. This view was not prevalent amongst teachers in Irish-medium schools. The biggest challenges for teachers in English-medium schools are in relation to nurturing positive attitudes to the Irish language and culture. This is linked to a perception that children have low interest in learning the language, a finding reported elsewhere (Devine, 2003; Uí Choistealbha, 2012) and also a sense of inauthenticity in acting as a linguistic and cultural representative in the classroom because they do not feel a sense of belonging to an Irish-speaking community. For teachers in Irish-medium schools, the greatest challenges are in locating suitable resources, particularly for teaching other curricular areas, and in acquiring and maintaining subject specific vocabulary. Though sizeable minorities at the beginning and end are theoretically willing to teach another subject through Irish from time to time, more teachers at the end are concerned about the demands it will place on their own proficiency and children's ability to understand content.

In terms of the two key experiences of school and *Gaeltacht* Placement, teachers anticipate these positively at the beginning of initial teacher education and actual reported experience of these is generally positive. Some of the challenges anticipated by beginning pre-service teachers in relation to teaching Irish e.g. language anxiety, are also reported by teachers at the end but it is significant that the satisfaction and enjoyment associated with teaching Irish is consistently high, where other studies show that optimism can wane with time (Tok, 2011). Teachers by the end have more fully developed ideas about children's proficiency and interest in Irish and these themes are mentioned more often in open-ended supplementary responses. Despite teachers reporting high satisfaction with the *Gaeltacht* placement at the end, issues of language anxiety and complaints regarding the limited opportunities to improve proficiency are more pronounced. Significantly more are now concerned that a great deal of English is spoken. Reflections by teachers in first year following the placement point towards these emergent frustrations and a large element in this is the tendency for teachers to remain with their peers rather than to engage in community life through Irish.

We can make some general conclusions about the evolution of beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions during initial teacher education. Positive changes in beliefs, attitudes and role

perceptions summarised above are reported to be linked to the obligatory placements in initial teacher education, and to a lesser extent to other experiences such as socialising through Irish and engaging in Irish-language modules, though these are not as plentiful. Changes are most likely to occur in the areas of beliefs and role perceptions, and most of these begin to happen in first year following school placement. The slight fall in positive attitudes and support for teacher's role in revitalising Irish may be linked to other issues such as the structure of the *Gaeltacht* placement, the lack of a social outlet for Irish and the challenges of children's low level of interest and proficiency in Irish. Increased anxiety in language proficiency by a minority of teachers at the end of initial teacher education is worrying, however, and we see that the potential of the *Gaeltacht* placement to encourage language development is not fully harnessed.

7.5.2 Views during Early In-Service Practice

Most beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions are generally stable in the first year of professional practice. Teachers by and large maintain their very positive attitudes to Irish while understanding more deeply the daily demands of their role. Some beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions continue to evolve as the teacher gains more experience in the classroom. Conversely, some beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions that were previously stable now begin to change. Changes will be given first and then the contribution of class and school context to these changes will be presented.

Beliefs about how Irish should be taught generally do not change but as we saw earlier, these beliefs are already in line with the communicative approach to language teaching. Teachers who have experience subbing though mention that the way they teach changes depending on the class level or needs of the children. It is positive that teachers show this professional flexibility and a greater concern for children's learning needs and styles. Teachers' views evolve concerning differentiation strategies. Teachers are now more sensitive to the range of SEN present in classrooms and are of differentiated approaches to meet the needs of individual children. This may be linked to a general maturation and understanding of the role of the teacher. Teachers spoke about changing or tweaking specific teaching strategies to meet the needs of individual children or a new class level. More often than not, however, changes that are introduced in the teaching of Irish are for the benefit of children with lower ability rather than higher ability, a trend observed in other studies (DES, 2007; 2012). Teachers with experience of teaching EAL learners overwhelmingly report the advantage of children with other language competencies being present in Irish lessons. Teachers in first year of in-service practice change from being unsure about whether children with EAL should be obliged to learn Irish, to seeing them as a huge asset to the teaching of Irish, this is due to a view that they have an increased capacity for language

learning. Teachers largely agree that home language skills can transfer to the learning of Irish but they comment specifically on the positive disposition of EAL learners to Irish.

Another change that occurs in early in-service practice is in relation to the role of Irish proficiency in getting a teaching job. Initial views about the importance of Irish-language proficiency are subject to a reality check when they begin applying for jobs. Teachers in English-medium schools rarely mention that this was listed as criteria in the job advertisement or that it was addressed in the course of the interview. An awareness of this low priority given to Irish in schools and other institutions is matched by the feeling that they have limited support by the general public in promoting Irish. Varying expectations regarding children in DEIS schools are mentioned by some teachers resulting in material for a lower class level sometimes being given to children. This approach is potentially dangerous and could impact on children's self-efficacy beliefs regarding Irish.

Teachers do not report attitudes to change much during early in-service practice but they do note the low level of interest in Irish expressed by interview panels, colleagues and children. At this stage though, teachers can sometimes separate better attitudes to teaching Irish versus attitudes to the language in general. In some cases, even where the teacher reported not enjoying teaching Irish, this was distinct from their general attitudes towards Irish. There is no experience during professional practice however that has any real parallel with the *Gaeltacht* placement. It may be the case therefore, that attitudes that begin to change following *Gaeltacht* placement do not undergo any further change.

Not surprisingly as the teacher gains more experience of her role, the perceptions of what this role entails begin to evolve. Teachers now have more experience of the type of proficiency that is expected of them in the classroom. Teaching Irish primarily through Irish is one expectation that teachers spoke at length about in interviews without being prompted. For teachers in Irish-medium schools, this was seen as an appropriate and useful strategy that encouraged the linguistic development of pupils. Teaching other subjects through Irish was reported to be somewhat more difficult because of the need for subject specific vocabulary, pedagogical knowledge to explain new concepts effectively to children, and ensuring children understand what is being said. In English-medium schools, the vast majority of teachers report a challenge in teaching Irish completely through Irish. Teacher proficiency is therefore a key factor in the ability to teach Irish primarily through Irish, but there are other situational factors that have a bearing on this too. This is sometimes because of the teacher's limited proficiency but mostly teachers refer to pupils' limited experience of this approach and difficulty in implementing it effectively.

The demands related to using informal Irish on the other hand are not seen as very high. When we look at the type of informal Irish used, however, it is evident that most of the informal

Irish used concerns a low level communicative function, usually the teacher giving an instruction and the children passively enacting said instruction. Content and Language Integrated Learning, on the other hand has not been widely implemented despite over half of teachers reporting that they were favourable to this idea. Only a very small minority have engaged in this on a partial basis. Some of the same challenges that arise in teaching Irish primarily through Irish were mentioned e.g. demands on the teacher in terms of language proficiency and pedagogical knowledge. Even where teachers reported being very proficient in Irish they expressed concern that pupils may not understand what was being taught or that they may develop a dislike for the subject being taught through Irish if they were already not positively disposed to Irish.

Teachers are still supportive of the promotion of Irish through teaching the language daily. They are however, now more aware of their relative isolation in promoting Irish. Limited support from parents, the community and government groups is more noticeable to them. They also frequently report school situations where Irish is given a low priority. Teachers now feel that societal expectations placed on them in revitalising and maintaining Irish could be somewhat unrealistic. After the experience of teaching in the classroom, most were more in favour of a collaborative approach.

The second dimension to the teaching of Irish over which teacher have now developed a greater insight, relates to their role in nurturing positive attitudes to the Irish language and culture. Challenges in teaching Irish can be linked to low proficiency in Irish but this is not the only issue, the attitudinal and affective dimension can effect in a substantial way how teachers engage with the class. We saw at the end of their programme, teachers with high proficiency believe that Irish is easier to learn and should take less time, than their peers. They also expect children to have more interest in learning Irish. The role of the affective dimension in teaching and learning Irish becomes more apparent. At times this is regarded as the most influential part of the experience of learning Irish. The majority of teachers report their role in nurturing positive attitudes as being one of the most challenging aspects of the job. This requires an increase in enthusiasm when teaching Irish compared to other subjects and it places great responsibility on the teacher to select stimulating and interesting content and resources. Difficulties in nurturing positive attitudes to Irish amongst children in English-medium schools were still noted by teachers of varying proficiency in Irish, including teachers who considered themselves to have 'native speaker ability' or to be 'a very fluent second language speaker'.

In terms of promoting positive attitudes to Irish culture, this necessitates the teacher exposing children to some cultural forms e.g. music, games or literature, through their teaching of Irish. It is clear that during early in-service practice Irish culture was mostly interpreted by teachers as traditional Irish Gaelic culture e.g. traditional dance and songs but usually these

elements did not feature in every lesson, although there was a greater tendency to included contemporary songs translated into Irish. Identity as an Irish speaker and language advocate though is complex. This identity is mostly related to a dimension of professional but not always personal identity. Although being a teacher of Irish is quite a central part of being a teacher of Irish, identity as a speaker of Irish does not seem to be heightened by the day to day work teachers undertake. Teachers who identify as an Irish speaker have considered themselves as such for a long period and not solely because they are teachers of Irish. They have often had exposure to Irish Gaelic culture from an early age and are more aware of certain art forms e.g. songs, dances and literature that may be suitable for the classroom. This is more difficult for other teachers who do not directly identify with the Irish-speaking community and have not had as much exposure to Irish Gaelic culture outside of their professional role. They may not feel comfortable 'speaking for' this culture in the classroom.

Satisfaction derived from teaching Irish does not seem to be affected in a large way by the challenges of teacher proficiency and nurturing positive attitudes to Irish language and culture. Teachers are imbued with a sense of pride when they begin professional practice and this may be the reason that despite the difficulties that can arise daily in the teaching of Irish, a high level of satisfaction is still associated with the teaching of Irish.

In sum, the direct experience of teaching in early professional practice contributes to changes in beliefs and role perceptions becoming more pronounced. Usually this means that more teachers by their first year in in-service practice agree with a particular item and in a small number of cases this means that a reversal in teachers' views is evident. There are not as many opportunities for attitudes to change in a positive direction given the low priority that teachers witness being accorded to the teaching of Irish at interview stage and by staff and children in schools. Teachers' description of their role perceptions are understandably more nuanced at this stage of their career rather than during initial teacher education and the pressures in promoting Irish and meeting the proficiency demands of the job can cause a degree of anxiety.

7.5.3 Explaining Changes that occur in Views

In Chapter 2 we saw that number of frameworks can be used to explain the types of changes that are evident in this study: changes in beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions because of a key experience, changes due to the cognitive or affective nature of the view, or changes depending on how early the view was formed.

Attitude Change Theory predicts that attitudes can change within fairly fixed latitude and that this change can be triggered by certain key events that are meaningful for the learner (Katz, 1960). Other researchers predict that changes are more likely in the cognitive dimension rather

than in the affective dimension, or that views influenced by micro factors are more open to change than views formed by the macro context. Findings in this study are consistent with most of these predictions. First, views seem to move within a finite latitude and occur appear to be incremental as the teacher engages more with her role. They are linked mostly to experiences in the classroom. Teachers do not often report a specific event that acts as catalyst for change in beliefs about how Irish should be taught, but rather that this occurs as she engages with different types of learners as suggested by Busch (2010). Attitudes belonging to the affective dimension do appear to be more enduring but aspects of role perceptions that belong to the affective dimension actually do show signs of change e.g. how a teacher feels about expectations placed on her in terms of proficiency or in promoting Irish. It is possible that affective dimensions of role perceptions are somewhat malleable because teachers are not as entrenched in these views as they may be in relation to affective dimensions of attitudes e.g. attitudes to learning Irish or views on the value of revitalising Irish, and these views are formed later in life especially when she enters initial teachers education and undertakes her professional role as teacher.

7.5.3.1 Resilience of Beliefs, Attitudes and Role Perceptions

It is hard to make firm claims regarding the resilience of certain beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions at the end point of data collection in this study. It is perhaps more accurate to speak of cycles of evolution rather than the beginning and end of a process of change. The trajectory of a teacher of Irish is presented in a somewhat linear fashion in this study i.e. the study is set out in chronological order and tracks specific beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions in that order. It may be the case, however, that the evolution of many beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions are cyclical. Practising teachers report a need to re-evaluate beliefs about how Irish should be taught when they are faced with new children. They also report an awareness of varying levels of support for Irish in different school and class contexts. Equally aspects of role perceptions e.g. the amount of English they feel should be spoken in an Irish lesson is subject to review each time the teacher is in a new context and the children's previous experience. One feature of the teaching profession is that teachers engage in teaching different pupils and/or class levels usually on an annual basis. This means that there may be a yearly cycle of beliefs, attitudes and role perceptions evolving in order to suit the particular context in which the teacher finds herself.

7.5.4 Unique Features in Becoming a Teacher of Irish

Chapter 6 compares and contrasts the profile of teachers of Irish and the initial teacher education experience for teachers of Irish with teachers of other languages, and also the experience of teachers with high proficiency in Irish. Some of the changes reported are likely influenced by

unique features in the process of becoming a teacher of Irish. First teachers of Irish are aware from the beginning of their career of a limited importance placed on learning Irish amongst the general public. Unlike other minority language teachers, the teacher of Irish is not typically an L1 speaker. There is therefore an added challenge in becoming a proficient speaker of Irish. She may not identify with the traditional target language group, despite having an above average proficiency. This proficiency, it seems, is more akin to academic language than using Irish for interpersonal communication. Second, she may not feel there is a distinctive culture associated with the Irish-speaking community as she feels it is limited to native or long established speakers of Irish, with whom she has little interaction outside of the two mandatory *Gaeltacht* placements in initial teacher education. Reference is implicitly made at times to views of the "ideal language self" and a desire to be a better second or additional language speaker of Irish but there are few opportunities available to the teacher of Irish as there are for teachers of other minority languages who are in proximity to the target language community. She may also lack clarity around what Irish Gaelic culture entails and how this differs from the culture associated with the English-speaking community in Ireland.

Teachers who have high proficiency and/or identify with the Irish-speaking community do have the option of working in Irish-medium or English-medium schools. They also expect to derive greater satisfaction than their peers form teaching Irish but this is not the same as expecting the experience to be easy. Those choosing an English-medium school do not necessarily have an easier experience than their less proficient peers. Proficiency therefore cannot be explored in isolation. High proficiency in Irish linked to a greater willingness to engage, in theory, in aspects of their future role such as implementing aspects of CLIL. This higher level of initial willingness is not always matched by classroom practice. It also does not follow that teachers with higher proficiency in Irish will be better at promoting the use of Irish as a live communicative language amongst children. Teachers with higher oral proficiency upon entering initial teacher education, despite having some advantage over their peers, report similar challenges in being able to fulfil these aspects of the role in English-medium schools but a challenge still remains in overcoming children's negative attitudes even amongst the most proficient speakers. It would seem that support around nurturing positive attitudes to Irish is critical for all teachers, regardless of their own positive attitude and competence.

7.6 Becoming a Teacher of Irish: Enhancing the Process

As we saw in Chapters 4 and 5, most of the areas over which teachers identified a need for support, were in relation to successfully implementing aspects of their role. Recommendations

will now be presented to enhance this process. Finally, some areas that warrant further research will be identified.

7.6.1 Identifying the Proficiency Needs of Teachers who will teach Irish in Different Contexts

Teachers indicate that they feel a key feature of initial teacher education is to help them improve their proficiency in Irish. The differing needs in proficiency for someone who wishes to teach in an English-medium versus an Irish-medium school have not been given sufficient consideration in the current design of the B.Ed. programme. A further issue is that if a teacher does decide to work in an Irish-medium environment they may find themselves working usually with second or additional language learners in a *Gaelscoil* or working mostly with native speakers in a *Scoil Ghaeltachta*. The latter scenario would place further demands on Irish language proficiency. While very recently a postgraduate qualification was offered in one college of education in Ireland, specific training for teachers who wish to teach in Irish-medium settings is not usually available as a core module within B.Ed. programmes. The establishment of a B.Ed. programme completely through Irish has been suggested in the past (e.g. COGG, 2009). One advantage of this would be that teachers would be given sufficient time to developing proficiency and skills necessary to teach other curricular areas through Irish, and indeed in the case of other minority languages this provision is made for pre-service teachers. One potential drawback of this model is the demands on a student to opt to specialise in teaching through Irish from a very early stage in their career. For students coming from Irish-speaking homes, who have attended Irish-medium schools, or who have attended English-medium schools and have a great interest in Irish, this may be an obvious choice made early on but there are some teachers who may only make that decision as they engage in their programme. The scope of a B.Ed. for teachers wishing to work in Irish-medium schools would also have to be clearly defined i.e. would it be the exact same content as the usual B.Ed. but delivered through Irish? Or would it be a B.Ed. that focuses more on the needs of Irish-medium schools e.g. the role of immersion language teaching, supporting parents who are not proficient in Irish to be involved in their child's schooling, promoting Irish Gaelic culture, or supporting a child with SEN who is receiving his education through Irish. It would also have to be decided whether pre-service teachers on this programme would undertake school placements exclusively in Irish-medium schools or whether they would have the option of undertaking a placement in English-medium settings too.

7.6.2 Encouraging Teachers to Improve Proficiency

During interviews it is often subtly communicated to teachers that Irish is not an educational priority in many schools through the lack of designated questions focusing on Irish-language competency during the interview and the absence of high proficiency in Irish in the list of criteria when applying for jobs. This can cause a reality check for teachers who previously thought that proficiency in Irish would be an advantage in applying for jobs. It can further be a disincentive for teachers then to focus on improving their language skills. Practising teachers comment that this low priority attributed to Irish is reinforced through school prioritisation of other curriculum areas over Irish, and the lack of institutional responsiveness or support which is redolent of views presented by teachers in previous decades. Though teachers don't note that staff attitudes have affected their own general attitude to Irish, this can affect morale. It also points to a disconnect between the broader ideals of language revitalisation in which the school is a vehicle to redress language shift and to encourage bilingualism in society, and what teachers encounter in their day-to-day work and even at the very earliest stages of their career.

Formal opportunities to improve proficiency in Irish are concentrated into pre-service education. With the exception of some summer courses that are run for teachers, and a small number of teachers who may engage in further study in Irish, there is a likelihood that while the level of proficiency may be maintained, there is little opportunity for this level to be improved. If teachers are not attending in-service courses in Irish there is also the chance that they are not being exposed to new teaching methods for Irish. There is a risk therefore, that teachers' approaches to teaching Irish will become inflexible and that the teacher will stay within her relative comfort zone. A situation however, where teachers could meet in clusters in local education centres to discuss issues in teaching Irish and to receive targeted input into the type of Irish that they need on a daily basis, could increase confidence in speaking and teaching Irish.

7.6.3 Access to Irish-speaking networks

Increasing the time frame of the *Gaeltacht* placement has been suggested by The Teaching Council (2011) but this is not necessarily the solution as there are several systemic issued that prevent teachers fully immersing themselves in this new environment. This behoves teacher educators and course designers to reconsider the structure of the *Gaeltacht* placement and the limited opportunities to engage in Irish-speaking communities. More flexibility in times when teachers travel, staying in smaller numbers in local accommodation, and being distributed across a greater range of placements would help. The low incidence of teachers reporting that they view themselves as a speaker of Irish is quite worrying. One suggestion is that teachers could avail of

subsidised trips to the *Gaeltacht* midyear or during the holidays to increase their exposure to the language and Gaelic culture. Other Irish-speaking networks outside of the *Gaeltacht* could be utilised too for example in areas where there is a high concentration of Irish-medium schools, staff and community could meet regularly to speak in Irish (Harris, 2006). Although teachers may not be in physical proximity to Irish-speaking networks, a virtual learning or communication environment could be created e.g. an Irish-language facebook page where people communicate through Irish or the creation of a virtual space through software such as Second Life where teachers can use avatars to communicate through Irish.

7.6.4 Encouraging a more Communicative Approach to the use of Informal Irish

Another means of increasing exposure to the Irish language during the school day is in the form of informal Irish. The type of informal Irish used at present though has limited success in encouraging children to speak Irish spontaneously, and it is not frequently focused on allowing the children to speak to each other but rather to the teacher, someone in a position of authority. They are mostly passive while the teacher employs this use of informal Irish e.g. giving an instruction to put on coats. Apart from asking permission to use the toilet, the examples of children's informal Irish rarely feature their own use of questions so Irish may be presented as a language in which they can respond but not necessarily express themselves. The full potential of using informal Irish is therefore not being harnessed. Use of informal Irish does not serve a particular communicative function. While children may hear informal Irish in the form of classroom instructions, it is unlikely that they will need to use this type of Irish in their own conversations. More input to teachers on how to use informal Irish to encourage communication would maximise the output of children perhaps using the model of recent initiatives such as the *Gaelbhratach*, or Irish Flag, presented to schools in which certain teachers assume responsibility for encouraging children to speak Irish or *Gleo*, wherein children are encouraged to speak as much Irish as possible during the school day. Other resources such as *Speag an Ghaeilge le Spraoi*, a package that provides practical tips on how to encourage children to play games through Irish, published by COGG could provide useful exemplars.

Written forms of informal Irish could bolster these efforts. Signage displayed in Irish in classrooms should therefore be examined and critiqued. Instructions in Irish (e.g. Múch na soilse/ Turn off the lights) which remain in sight throughout the year can be successful in introducing a select few phrases that children passively engage with. Key exemplars that are useful to children in interacting with peers, not just language that is specific to the school environment and speaking to an adult, could be better utilised e.g. signs to show how to ask someone what they

have for lunch or inviting someone to play with them in the yard, could be displayed on a rotational basis and linked to the children's need. These kinds of informal Irish in a print-rich environment would encourage a better communicative approach to using Irish.

7.6.5 Supporting the Implementation of Content and Language Integrated Learning

Content and Integrated Language Learning is another area over which teachers are supportive in principle, especially teachers who report high proficiency in Irish. The actual implementation of this is very low. At pre-service level, teachers have virtually no experience of this approach on school placement and this is possibly linked to their reluctance to introduce CLIL while in in-service practice. In the small number of teachers who have implemented aspects of CLIL they do not follow a prescribed curriculum and it is approached in a rather ad hoc manner. This points to the need for suitable resources to be devised for use in English-medium schools. It is recommended first that support needs to be provided for pre-service teachers to allow them to become more familiar with this approach. It is recommended further, that a selection of subjects be targeted and that pre-service teachers receive input into how to teach these subjects through Irish while also gaining informal experience in doing so while on placement. PE and some subjects in the arts have been the most popular subject areas selected by teachers who are in favour of using CLIL. Very natural links could be made with the Gaelic Athletic Association, *Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann* so that teachers could have support from people with expertise in these fields and who are also positively disposed to the Irish language and Gaelic culture. In terms of promoting drama, links with Cumann na Scoildrámaíochta, The School Drama Society, could be fruitful building on the tradition of teachers' large involvement in the writing and production of dramas for children since the 1930s. Although bilingual teaching resources are often available in different subjects e.g. resources for Discover Primary Science etc. these are geared towards teachers who will be teaching in Irish-medium schools. Several supports need to be in place before CLIL can be implemented effectively in English-medium schools. A small working group in local education centres, in consultation with practising teachers, could devise worksheets and lesson plans suited to the language needs of the children in the local schools while making links to the local environment etc. as has been done for some subjects in the past (Harris and Mac Giollabhuí, 1988).

In translating or adapting materials for use in an Irish-language context, attention needs to be given to the resources within the language. For example, Irish language literature has a very rich variety of mythical figures and role models, particularly females, such as 'An Cailleach', the witch or hag who played a key role as a healer in the community in listening to people problems

and helping them to heal through her use of story. Similarly, if we look to other folkloric Irish tales, we see many examples of strong female characters who were described in terms of their character and strength (e.g. Gráinne Mhaol who commandeered an army, Fionnuala in The Children of Lir, who cared for her younger siblings, the female warriors that Fionn Mac Cumhail visited in order to perfect his skills of combat), and who are often responsible for choosing their own partner (e.g. Deirdre who foresees the physical attributes of Naoise, in the Fate of Clann Uisnigh). Yet, unfortunately, in making fairy and folk tales available to an Irish-speaking audience, often the 'Disney' version is selected with very rigid gender roles which serve to essentially reduce the female character to merely her physical appearance, which must conform to impossible standards of beauty, and the very rich repertoire of Irish-language female characters are ignored (see Dunne 2014 for a greater discussion). It is suggested here that stories and use of stimuli are that are anchored in the Irish tradition are needed in the design of resources for the teaching of Irish, and for Irish-medium education more generally, and that translation of English-language stories is not sufficient. Games too may need to be adapted to the Irish-medium context and children's capacity to ask questions, seek clarification on new concepts needs to be developed. Suggestions made for key exemplars in informal written Irish displayed in the classroom also apply here.

7.6.6 Strengthening the support for teachers in promoting Irish

Teachers identify that they wish to have a role in the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish. This is almost likely not the only reason they become a teacher as the vast majority speak about making the decision very early on, the enjoyment they get on placement and in early in-service practice from working with children, and from teaching other subjects, along with general working conditions. Their awareness of the role they play in promoting Irish becomes heightened as they gain more experience. As mentioned earlier, greater partnership could exist between local organisations e.g. the Gaelic Athletic Association and *Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann* or indeed subject specialist teachers in Irish at secondary school and generalist teachers of Irish at primary level so that children's exposure to language and culture is not confined to the school day. Teachers are aware of the challenges associated with their role in promoting Irish from a very early stage. Their disillusionment regarding their ability to enact change in the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish is exacerbated by structural changes in responsibility for Irish which diminished teachers' capacity to be part of a co-ordinated effort to promote Irish.

Considerations in undertaking this role expand beyond the concrete day-to-day support from other stakeholders and include the subconscious dimension. In particular, there are also other types of support that are needed to address post-colonial mind sets. The historical trauma

of language loss can affect subsequent generations and teachers (and the general public) may have latent post-colonial attitudes to the Irish language. This is all the more complex for teachers who find themselves working at the intersection of language loss and revival, in the very institutions that were for almost a century the instrument through which Irish was eroded, and then were assigned the reverse role as a vehicle for change in language shift. In many ways teachers are assigned an unwarranted responsibility in promoting Irish because of a tradition of concentrating language revitalisation and maintenance efforts on the school. Post-colonial legacies have been examined in the context of inherited shame surrounding the speaking of Irish e.g. CILAR (1975) but it seems that another version of post-colonial attitudes emerges for teachers in terms of the type of Irish that they desire, specifically a "pure" version that contains little or no influence from English, despite the fact that this ideal language type is the exception and not the rule in most Irish-speaking communities. The anti-English language position may hark back to cultural memory of resentment of the suppression of the Irish language during colonialism. Exploring views of language loss and its implications for the contemporary situation would be worthwhile to understand more fully what impacts on views on the importance of promoting Irish and indeed the type of Irish that is envisioned.

7.7 Areas for Further Research

This study goes someway in describing the process of becoming a teacher of Irish. It also raises some questions that call for further research.

7.7.1 EAL learners and Children with SEN

Some voices in particular have been marginalised in the discussion on the teaching of Irish; English as additional language learners and children with special educational needs have not been represented. Diversity in children's profiles is an integral part of contemporary classrooms given the changes in demographics and statutory requirements on schools to meet the needs of diverse learners. Granting automatic exemptions from Irish reveals a lot about teachers' views on the inherent difficulty of Irish and teaching Irish, particularly to children with lower levels of interest and proficiency. These views are challenged when confronted in particular with EAL learners who lack the emotional baggage and post-colonial hang ups regarding Irish, but also display very positive attitudes to leaning Irish. Equally through working with children with SEN they are aware of the opportunities to adapt content to the needs of learners. There is a need to systematically question the granting of exemptions from Irish simply on the grounds that a child has a home language other than English or Irish, or because a child has special education needs. More acknowledgement needs to be given to the advantages of the Irish lesson as (1) an inclusive

environment in that it provides a "level playing field" for children who tend to come to school with the same proficiency in and experience of Irish (2) a means to challenge some children, as was its original aim in 1878. This would, in the short-term, ensure that several different profiles of learners have access to learning Irish. It is critically important for the teaching profession in the long-term too as we know that high proficiency in Irish is an entry requirement (a C3 in honours level – equivalent to B2 under the CEF - compared to C3 in ordinary level English or a D3 in higher level English, and a D3 in ordinary or higher level mathematics) to colleges of education and by depriving children the opportunity to learn Irish in schools, we are also depriving them the opportunity to enter the teaching profession so a greater diversity can be reflected in the profile of primary teachers.

7.7.2 The Role of English in the Teaching of Irish

One major finding is that teachers identify a valid though limited role for English in the teaching of Irish. This challenges previous descriptions of Irish being taught primarily through Irish and yet there are very early signs that this is difficult for teaches as shown in INTO research in 1936, and the White Paper on Education (1980). Despite these early identifications, research into the benefits of teachers using selected code switching between English and Irish has not been explored because of a desire to promote a pure form of the language, related to post-colonial attitudes mentioned earlier. There is also an implicit comparison to a native speaker ideal which overlooks the new speakers of Irish, and presents codeswitching as an inauthentic language variety. This mirrors trends in children's publishing where there is a reluctance to allow incursions from English in the textbooks and stories children are exposed to.

Teachers in this study who work in English-medium schools report a need for English in the teaching of Irish. Despite this perceived need, they are still reticent to suggest that it is the most effective way to teach Irish. More guidance is needed in terms of situations where it is appropriate to use English when teaching Irish in English-medium schools. Some suggestions have been made in the case of Irish-medium schools that conventions could be "relaxed" somewhat and children allowed to speak in their mother tongue to discuss content before reporting back to the class in Irish. More guidance however is needed for teachers in English-medium schools. Classroom observation targeting the types of English used and the instances in which teachers employ English would greatly contribute to this discussion.

7.7.3 The Role of Culture in the Teaching of Irish

There is still some confusion amongst teachers as to what Irish "culture" entails. There is a tendency to focus on traditional art forms, standalone events or to use translated contemporary

works. The benefit of including cultural elements in teaching Irish needs to be understood more. Specific cultural standards in the teaching of other minority languages could be consulted in developing a cultural programme for primary schools. Some efforts by Irish-language publishers are relevant here. The work by the company An tSnáthaid Mhór shows an effort to make available traditional Irish folklore in an innovative way through creative retellings and design of books. Also, efforts to include traditional poetry styles such as an tAgallamh Beirte or a poetic disputation that has no real parallel in English, highlight and celebrate rich Irish-language art forms. This list is not exhaustive but rather provides examples of resources available to teachers to allow for the promotion of both language and culture in the teaching of Irish, as is the case with most other languages. More dialogue concerning what Irish culture involves and the issues for someone who is not from that target language community is needed. One potential weakness of the current teaching of Irish is the emphasis on teaching the language over the culture. It has been pointed out that Irish-language events in the community, however, often focus on aspects of cultural awareness e.g. literature, games, song and dance. Collaboration between the two parties would provide a very natural relationship and could not only aid in developing pupils' views of Irish as a live communicative language, but also expose children to aspects of traditional and contemporary Irish Gaelic culture that is at the moment quite peripheral in the teaching of Irish.

7.7.4 Maintenance of Positive Attitudes

Teachers of Irish are usually second or additional speakers of Irish, operating also in the more generalist role as primary teacher, and typically working in relative isolation in promoting the language. There are initially very high levels of optimism associated with being a primary teacher, and also as a teacher of Irish. There is a preliminary nod to a decline in positive attitude and whether these generally high levels of optimism can be maintained is questionable given the limited scope for social interaction through Irish because of issues in the *Gaeltacht* placement structures, and the low level of interest in Irish they later witness expressed by interview panels, colleagues and children. Given the decline in satisfaction that has been reported amongst teachers in teaching Irish, and reports of teaching being less than satisfactory amongst almost a quarter of teachers, more research is needed into how teachers can be supported and positive attitudes maintained. If these positive attitudes could be translated into giving teachers the opportunities to enact change in the way Irish is taught e.g. designing resources for CLIL and informal Irish, as was the tradition in the 1930s of teachers contributing meaningfully to the design of high quality children's literature, or taking part in initiatives such as *Gleo* or the *Gaelbhratach*, they may feel more empowered in their roles and this may sustain them in their work.

7.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, a number of beliefs and role perceptions are reported to change throughout initial teacher education and early in-service practice. Changes occur in the areas in which the teacher gains experience and so they begin to change after first school placement and continue to evolve throughout her career. Though the number of changes is small, these can make substantial changes in the way a teacher will engage in her role. Some of these changes are positive e.g. in relation to expectations of children and also in adapting to the needs of children in their class. Other changes point to a need for more guidance e.g. in relation to the potential role that English has in the teaching of Irish and how teachers can be supported by other members in the community in promoting Irish. Attitudes appear more immutable however. One change that does not seem to occur though is that of Irish learner to Irish speaker and member of an Irish-speaking network. Teachers' knowledge and use of Irish is confined to their professional identity and this may impact on other aspects of their role perceptions e.g. their role in the revitalisation and maintenance initiative. Reflecting on the process of becoming a teacher of Irish helps us to explore the evolution of views in a particular sociolinguistic context. Teachers of Irish share some traits with teachers of other languages but there is a need for further support in implementing aspects of their role. Critical reflection is therefore needed at key junctures to better understand what is involved in becoming a teacher of Irish.

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**All appendices are available on the accompanying cd.*