

Ui Conghaile, Maire, 1998, *Gaelscoileanna: The Immersion Impetus. Rhetoric and Reality.*

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

This dissertation aims to illuminate and critically evaluate the *Gaelscoil* movement in this country which will be of enormous importance with respect to administration and policy-making in the future. It commences with an historical overview of the use of the Irish language from 1831 until the present day. From this emanates a theoretical chapter which outlines different theories of second language acquisition. This section concludes that the immersion approach to the teaching of a second language is by far the most effective.

The research paradigm adopted is an ethnographic case study approach which concentrates on a specific school - *Gaelscoil an Athar Tadhg Ó Murchú*. In the analysis, the Board of Management minutes are examined under five headings: the Department of Education and Science, Community, Parents, Teachers, and Pupils. The findings in the research questions posed in the Introduction indicate that Government planning, pre-service and in-service training, class size, resources, parental involvement and a specific syllabus for Irish-medium primary schools are all important determinants of growth and success in this unique Irish educational programme.

However, the most significant finding which permeates throughout this dissertation is that teachers, Government, parents, and society's attitude, on the one hand, is capable of energising and promoting the language while conversely attitudinal negativity is capable of inducing linguistic atrophy and demise.

The Irish Education System is presently at a watershed. The advent of the Green and White Papers, the Education Bill and the ensuing deliberation and debate has placed us on the threshold of a radical new era. If the *Gaelscoil* movement is to take its rightful place in this country, then cognisance must be taken of its unique ethos and outstanding educational value.