Gaelic in Families with Young Children: Education and Language Choice

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Abstract

This study examines the role of Scottish Gaelic in families with young children, in Edinburgh and Barra, focusing on parents’ education choices and language socialisation of their children aged 0–5 years. The study proposed to investigate why and how families socialise their children as Gaelic speakers, and what aspirations parents have for their child’s future Gaelic use. The fieldwork for this study involved twelve months of ethnographic research between 2013–14 and included participant observation at parent-and-child groups, visits to Gaelic-medium nurseries and semi-structured interviews with parents, teachers, play leaders, and representatives from organisations who support families with children in Gaelic-medium education.

The study found that the choice of Gaelic-medium education and the language socialisation of young children are situated in specific local contexts and in individual families who differ in terms of the factors that have an influence upon them, their interests and their experiences to date. The choice of Gaelic-medium education should be viewed as a process that parents take part in and where motivations, concerns, and experiences interact. The choice of Gaelic-medium education can be viewed within a wider parental endeavour to identify a ‘good’ school. The Gaelic language socialisation of young children is highly varied, with distinctive challenges and opportunities in both locations. Overall, Gaelic language socialisation relies on parents’ taking a proactive approach to providing or accessing Gaelic opportunities for their children. Parents’ aspirations are varied and only some clearly have aspirations for future Gaelic use.
Declaration of authorship

I confirm that this thesis has been composed solely by myself, and that the work contained within it has neither previously been published nor submitted for another degree.

Kirstie M. MacLeod
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Introduction

Section 1
In this thesis, I explore the role of Scottish Gaelic in families with young children (0–5 years) in two locations, one urban, the city of Edinburgh, and one rural and traditionally Gaelic-speaking, the Isle of Barra in the Western Isles. In particular, I examine families’ education and language choices in relation to Gaelic-medium education (GME), including their involvement in informal early years provision such as parent-and-child groups and formal nursery and primary education. I investigate how families with young children become involved in GME and I trace how Gaelic appears in the lives of these children and their families through choices made about education, both formal and informal, and their children’s Gaelic language socialisation.

In this study, I set out to explore three main research questions: (i) why do parents introduce their young children to Gaelic? (ii) how do parents introduce their children to Gaelic? and (iii) what expectations do parents have for their children’s future Gaelic use? In order to explore these questions, I consider how a wide range of factors affect education choices, at early years and primary school level, and decisions and practices regarding language use and acquisition within the family. In this thesis, I argue that the choice of GME and the Gaelic language socialisation of young children are grounded in the local linguistic, political, social and education contexts within which they take place.

Parents’ decisions to enrol their child in GME have been the focus of a number of recent studies (O’Hanlon et al. 2010; Stephen et al. 2010; Goalabré 2011; Rice 2012; McLeod and O’Rourke 2015). Rather than examining education choices relating to primary or secondary-aged pupils, this study follows Stephen et al.’s review of Gaelic-medium early years provision in 2010 and examines education choice at the early years stage, before children begin primary education. Most children in Scotland begin primary education between four and a half and five and a half years old. This early years stage is a crucial point in the choice of GME because it is when parents begin their own and their child’s involvement in GME. Focusing on young families
facilitates an analysis of the choice of GME as a process and a choice for which different families in different contexts are faced with a range of considerations and influences beyond their own initial motivations.

The nature of this research, which included spending six months in each location attending parent-and-child groups, allowed me to witness parents accessing Gaelic provision for the very first time, engaging in considering GME and coming to decisions regarding formal education. Meeting the parents of children across this age range facilitated opportunities to speak to different parents at different points in their considerations, and even those who were yet to consider formal education. Both the time spent conducting the research and the age range of children, prior to formal education, allowed me to build an understanding of parents’ and children’s attendance at Gaelic provision.

In what follows, in Section 1, I introduce the historical context by giving a brief outline of the history of Gaelic, Gaelic in education in Scotland, and then the development of GME. I discuss the language shift context of Gaelic from both census data and qualitative studies of Gaelic in families, before examining recent research examining the choice of GME in Scotland. In Section 2, I introduce both research field sites – Edinburgh and Barra. I describe the methods utilised in this research and provide background information on those that participated in the study. I highlight important contextual information pertaining to both areas, including introducing the local Gaelic-medium provision available to families with young children. Finally, I give a brief outline of the structure of the remainder of the thesis.

**History of Gaelic**

Gaelic is a Goidelic language of the Celtic languages (Gillies 2008: 230). Gaelic was once spoken throughout most of modern-day Scotland and was the language of the court and church. Although the exact dates are contested, it is widely agreed that Gaelic came from Ireland to Scotland before the 6th century, at the latest (Clancy 2005: 1). Gaelic ceased to be the language of the court following the death of Malcolm III in 1093 (Ó Baoill 2010: 11). De-Gaelicisation occurred in southern and eastern Scotland from the twelfth century onwards and led to the Gaelic-speaking areas being perceived as the Gàidhealtachd. From the fourteenth century onwards
Gaels began to be viewed by Lowlanders as uncivilised (Ó Baoill 2010: 13). By the sixteenth century these views had strengthened following the Reformation as ‘new ideologies of kingship and government gave new impetus to the imposition of ‘civility’ on the Gàidhealtachd’ (McLeod 2014: 3). One of the measures taken by the government, in what McLeod (2015: 92) describes as ‘an aggressive policy of linguistic assimilation, or indeed extirpation, in relation to the Gaelic language’ was the introduction in 1609 of the Statutes of Iona, which required the heirs of chiefs and lairds to be educated in the lowlands, ‘to learn to speak, read and write English’ (Ó Baoill 2010: 12-13).

Major economic and social changes during the 17th and 18th centuries contributed to Gaelic-English language shift. The Highland Clearances of the 19th century resulted in a decrease in Gaelic speakers in the heartland areas, but also saw Gaelic speakers dispersed to larger urban areas in lowland Scotland and beyond. Language shift continued through the late 19th and 20th centuries and the decline of Gaelic has, overall, been one that has seen the language recede towards the north west of Scotland (Withers 1984; MacKinnon 1991).

Throughout the 20th century there has been significant language shift within the Gàidhealtachd with many areas now entirely English-speaking. Gaelic language shift has not occurred evenly across Scotland, with western mainland areas such as Wester Ross, mainland Argyll and most of the inner Hebridean islands experiencing language shift significantly earlier than the Western Isles (Outer Hebrides). As language shift continues, increasing proportions of the population in these areas have little or no Gaelic. For those that are bilingual, language shift has resulted in English being increasingly spoken in domains such as the home, church and social gatherings, where Gaelic would formerly have been used (MacKinnon 1991). At the same time, as a result of recent revitalisation initiatives, people now use Gaelic in new domains that would not have previously been strongly associated with its use, including in education and office environments (McEwan-Fujita 2008: 86). As Gaelic has declined in traditional Gaelic-speaking areas, the proportion of the Gaelic-speaking population now living in lowland urban areas has increased. Although the Gàidhealtachd continues to be strongly associate with Gaelic speakers, in the 2001
census, only 56% of Gaelic speakers were recorded as living in the Gàidhealtachd census and just 52% in the 2011 census (General Registrar for Scotland 2005: Table 1; Scotland’s Census 2015: 9).

The 2011 census recorded 57,602 Gaelic speakers in Scotland, approximately 1.1% of the population (Scotland’s Census 2011a). Although the national decline between 2001 and 2011 in terms of speaker numbers was just 2.2% compared with 11.1% between 1991 and 2001, many of the traditionally Gaelic-speaking areas fared considerably less well than the overall national decline. A drop of 10.4% in speaker numbers was recorded in the Western Isles (1631 speakers) and records for the islands of Tiree and Islay show a loss of a quarter of their total number of Gaelic speakers between 2001 and 2011 (Duwe 2014:1). For the first time, in 2011 the Scottish census asked about a language used in the home other than English, 24,974 people recorded Gaelic as a language other than English spoken at home (Scotland’s Census 2011b). This finding indicates that less than half of those recorded as able to speak Gaelic do so at home. Gaelic language shift has been in progress for centuries and although the overall decline has slowed, in many areas where Gaelic has until recently been strong, the decline continues apace.

**Gaelic in Education in Scotland**

The Education (Scotland) Act 1872 introduced compulsory education for all children in Scotland between 5–13 years old. The Act did not prescribe the language of this education but it was assumed to be English (O’Hanlon & Paterson 2015: 304). Gaelic had been used to a limited extent in education before and following the 1872 Act, however, and its use was formalised in the Education (Scotland) Act 1918 which placed an obligation upon educational authorities to provide for the teaching of Gaelic in Gaelic-speaking areas. These ‘Gaelic-speaking areas’ were never defined but the clause has been brought forward through subsequent education acts and is currently in the 1980 Act, which is the basic framework for education provision in Scotland (Robertson 2008). The use of Gaelic in education in Gaelic-speaking areas was limited even following the 1918 Act, especially in terms of Gaelic use as a medium of instruction. When Gaelic was taught in schools it was often the case that Gaelic language and literature were taught in English:
Gaelic was little used, then [and] for long after, as the medium of teaching in schools, even in strongly Gaelic areas. Indeed, Gaelic language and literature were usually taught through the medium of English (MacLeod 2003: 1).

The influence of the Gaelic clause in the 1918 Act appears to have been variable, with some Gaelic speakers in Gaelic-speaking areas recalling an ‘English-only’ rule being implemented in schools during the early to mid-twentieth century. Will (2012) found, from the accounts of older Gaelic speakers in her research area in Lewis, that:

Depending on the individual teacher, an English-only rule was enforced in the district school’s classrooms more or less drastically; while some residents recalled a teacher using Gaelic with new school entrants in order to facilitate their transitions to English, others remembered themselves or friends “getting the belt” and receiving other forms of physical punishment for speaking Gaelic in the classroom (and, in some cases, even the school playground) (Will 2012: 58).

When I spoke to older people in Barra about Gaelic in their education, the use of Gaelic in the primary school appears to have been minimal. An older woman who attended primary school in Barra towards the end of the 1930s described the situation she encountered. Although both the teachers and the children were Gaelic speakers, the teachers spoke in English only. The only Gaelic instruction that she got was a small Gaelic book in the senior phase (P6–7), while the teaching of Gaelic was mostly confined to those who went on to secondary education:

Ged a bha Gàidhlig agad a’ dol dhan sgoil, bhiodh na tidsearan a’ bruidhinn Beurla riut fad an t-siubhail agus cha robh iad a’ teagasg Gàidhlig idir. Bha leabhar beag Gàidhlig [againn] nuair a bha sinn sa senior class. Bhiodh tu a’ déanadh Gàidhlig aig na secondaries.

Although you had Gaelic going to school, the teachers would speak English to you all the time and they didn’t teach Gaelic at all. We had a small Gaelic book in the senior class. You would do Gaelic at the secondary [schools].

The experience of education of the older people I spoke to was almost entirely in English. Another woman who went to school in Barra in the 1940s described how
she never saw anything ever written on the blackboard in Gaelic in primary school. She did not see a teacher write in Gaelic until she went on to secondary education in Castlebay. These women did go on to secondary education, at the time many others did not. Another older Gaelic speaker, who did not attend secondary education, expressed his happiness that Gaelic is now included in education because it was not when he was in school:

Tha mi gu math toilichte mar a tha iad a’ faighinn na Gàidhlig a-nist sna sgoltean seach mar a bha. Bha iad a’ caithearn leabhraichean ann am Beurla bhon latha a chaidh thu dhan sgoil agus nach cuala tu facal Beurla math dh’fhaodte mun deach thu dhan sgoil.

I am very happy that they get Gaelic in school now compared to how it was. They would use English books from the day you went to school and you hadn’t heard a word of English, maybe, before you went to school.

The ‘English-only’ approach adopted by some schools, including in Barra, was particularly influential when school attendance in these Gaelic-speaking areas improved and education increasingly came to be viewed as the means of social mobility. In Barra, those that continued their secondary education on the mainland were held in high esteem. Full secondary education was only available on the mainland and children left aged 12 to spend each term in Lochaber or Inverness, a journey that would take a full day’s travel at that time. There were several cases in Barra of more affluent families, including some of my own relatives, who sent their children to boarding schools on the mainland in the mid 20th century for secondary education.

In considering the early impact of the 1872 Act, Will (2012) points out that the low levels of school attendance in rural areas in the first decades of compulsory education must be taken into account. By the 1970s, anthropological studies in Gaelic-speaking areas in found educational attainment to be highly valued and a clear priority for residents. Ennew (1980) found that the pursuit of educational attainment was ‘one of the strongest drivers in Hebridean family life’ (Ennew 1980: 81). Macdonald (1997: 119) noted in her study in Skye that the strong desire for educational attainment
amongst residents of her field site was associated with leaving the area and pursuing further education in English-speaking urban areas away from the island:

Education is acknowledged as a passport to a life away from the Island, and success in the educational and professional sphere almost always means success achieved through the English language (Macdonald 1997: 119).

From the middle of the twentieth century provision for Gaelic in the education system began to expand and improve. In part this reflected a wider child-centred approach that had developed in Scottish education during the first half of the 20th century but O’Hanlon and Paterson (2015) argue that by the middle of the century providing Gaelic instruction in education also began to incorporate language maintenance aims:

The emergence of such a dual role for Gaelic in education (child-centredness and Gaelic language maintenance) was acknowledged by the SED in its memoranda on primary and junior secondary education (published in 1950 and 1955 respectively). […] The aims of such provision were primarily child-centred […] However, the 1955 report also suggested a role for the school in Gaelic-language maintenance, the first SED publication to do so (O’Hanlon & Paterson 2015: 309).

The recommended use of Gaelic in education focused on Gaelic-speaking children in Gaelic-speaking areas but by the 1930s there was provision made for the teaching of Gaelic to non-native-speaking children whose parents wanted them to learn some Gaelic in parts of Argyll (An Comunn Gàidhealach 1936: 5). Provision for non-native speakers only developed gradually. In Highland schools, it continued to be argued that the competence of Gaelic speakers was ‘too high’ to allow pupils without Gaelic to study it (An Comunn Gàidhealach 1936: 5).

At secondary level the increased provision of Gaelic included the establishment of provision in urban centres outwith Gaelic-speaking areas. By 1958, Gaelic learner instruction had begun in Glasgow (in two schools), Greenock and Edinburgh (O’Hanlon & Paterson 2015: 309). Learners’ qualifications were introduced for Gaelic at O Grade and Higher level in 1962 (O’Hanlon & Paterson 2015: 311). It was not until the 1960s that the first significant steps towards teaching through the
medium of Gaelic were taken with the Inverness-shire Gaelic Education Scheme and the Western Isles Bilingual Education Project that followed.

**The Inverness-shire Gaelic Education Scheme**

A key development in Gaelic in education occurred in the 1960s with an educational project based in the Inverness-shire local authority area. The scheme was launched in the islands of Barra, Uist, Harris and Skye – all of which were in the Inverness-shire area at the time (MacLeod 2003: 1–2). The aim of the project was: ‘to give pupils a “reasonable fluency in oral expression, reading and writing [in Gaelic], at the end of the primary”’ (O’Hanlon & Paterson 2015: 310). In order to achieve this aim the scheme introduced ‘a focus on oral immersion’ at the early stage of primary school and also included the teaching of Gaelic literacy to Gaelic mother tongue speakers. Gaelic was used in teaching Gaelic as a subject but also in teaching social sciences, and other arts subjects (O’Hanlon & Paterson 2015: 310). O’Hanlon & Paterson (2015: 310) outline how delaying the introduction of English in early primary education was influenced by evidence from Welsh-language education:

Such a pedagogical approach was informed by research evidence from 1948 on the benefits of postponing the teaching of English to first-language Gaelic primary pupils, and with experience of using Welsh in the education of first-language Welsh pupils in Wales.

The Inverness-shire scheme relied on teachers’ voluntary participation and this resulted in high levels of variation in the implementation of the scheme. MacLeod (2003: 2) describes how ‘success was restricted to schools which happened to have enthusiastic teachers’ (MacLeod 2003: 2). The scheme continued until the early 1970s before the impetus was lost.

**The Western Isles Bilingual Education Project**

Following the abolition of the traditional counties and the establishment of the Western Isles Council,¹ a three-year project entitled ‘A Research and Development Project in English-Gaelic Bilingual Education in Primary Schools in Gaelic-Speaking Areas’ (Murray 1984: 1) or the Western Isles Bilingual Education Project as it was

¹ Known only as Comhairle nan Eilean Siar with no English equivalent following the passing of the
known began in September 1975. Initially 20 schools participated in the project throughout the Western Isles, including Eoligarry School in Barra (Murray 1984: 6). The first year of the project involved primary one, two and three and expanded to include primaries four and five in the second year of the project and six and seven in the third. The project aimed to ‘stimulate children to use Gaelic as a natural language for exploration and description of experience’ through utilising community involvement and the natural environment to enhance learning through the language (Murray 1984: 5). It developed teaching materials for Gaelic education and provided in-service training sessions for staff (Murray 1984: 5).

Murray (1984) recalled that the Project was not met with overwhelming enthusiasm by teaching staff who he describes as ‘cautious’: ‘the reception had rarely been hostile, rarely enthusiastic; teachers were wary and cautious’ (Murray 1984: 12). Murray (1984: 16) contextualises this reaction from teachers by outlining the prevailing belief in schools at the time that strong linguistic competence in Gaelic equated to ‘weakness in English’ and the belief that the school should remedy this ‘lack’ of competence in English. Teachers had themselves been educated in the system in which these beliefs prevailed and had only been trained to teach in English:

> [S]chools had been led to regard strength in Gaelic as weakness in English, to concentrate upon teaching English and through English from the earliest stage as a means of compensating children for an imagined “lack” in their background. Teachers in bilingual areas were themselves educated in this way; their professional training took virtually no account of the existence of bilingualism (Murray 1984: 16).

Although Gaelic was used in some schools there remained high levels of variation and strong ideological beliefs that favoured focusing on developing children’s abilities in English. Local understandings of language shift and language acquisition became evident in the development of this project, with parents and teachers expressing contrasting views of the role of education and institutions in language acquisition. MacLeod (1984: xii), who was the architect of the project, found that parents attributed the decline in their child’s Gaelic to the school, following initial
success in the early years at home. MacLeod believes that this view reflected parents’ over-reliance on the school as a mechanism for language acquisition or maintenance:

Many parents in the Western Isles are determined to bring up their children as Gaelic speakers and while they have considerable success during the child’s early years they are frustrated and perplexed by the language shift, which takes place after a few years. Parents and others tend to rely excessively on the school as a language agent and tend to blame the school when their child’s use of Gaelic declines (MacLeod 1984: xii).

Murray (1984: 11) found that teaching staff placed responsibility for children’s declining ability in Gaelic squarely on the parents and in light of parents’ contrasting views concludes that ‘the unfortunate listener is entangled in a maze where the potential for change is difficult to find’. Although parents were aware of the declining abilities and use of Gaelic by their children after entering primary education, the cause was not clear or agreed upon. Even at this early stage of bilingual education in Scotland, the inability of education alone to affect everyday language use was highlighted by MacLeod, who stated that ‘it is now generally accepted that the school by itself can do very little to affect the extent to which children use Gaelic as their everyday language’ (MacLeod 1984: xii).

From his analysis of census data, Duwe (2005) found that the Bilingual Project did initially appear to have been influential in terms of the numbers of primary-aged pupils being recorded as Gaelic speakers. Yet, the Bilingual Project faced increasing difficulties in light of Gaelic language shift, especially the declining proficiency in Gaelic of children entering education and the increase in monolingual English-speaking children. In Duwe’s analysis of the census data for Barra he acknowledges that ‘the impetus for bilingual education evaporated very fast’ and the linguistic reality of the increasing numbers ‘of monoglot English-speakers complicated the provision of bilingual education in many schools’ (Duwe 2005: 9-10).

In her discussion of the project, Will (2012: 80) concluded that ‘the fate of the bilingual education scheme was probably predictable, for demographic and ideological reasons’. Will argues that the pedagogical approach taken by the project
did not align with local beliefs about education. The role of education, she argues, was understood to be ‘for preparing children linguistically, intellectually and practically for life beyond the island’ (Will 2012: 80). Gaelic in education was a challenge to this strongly established view. Ultimately, Will (2012) is in agreement with Duwe in arguing that the project commenced when language shift in many areas of the Western Isles was already too far advanced:

The bilingual education scheme happened too late to have any significant effect on maintaining or even expanding Gaelic skills in its pupils, or in safeguarding the continued usage of the language outside the classroom (Will 2012: 80).

In what follows, I will briefly outline important examples of advances in the provision for Gaelic since the 1980s, before examining more closely the development of GME, the provision available to the families in this study.

**Gaelic-medium Education**

GME, a form of early total immersion education, began in 1985 in two units in English-medium schools, one in Inverness and the other in Glasgow. Early total immersion refers to a form of bilingual education that begins at the earliest stages of formal education, either nursery or primary one, and is entirely in the second language in the earliest stages (Baker 2011: 239). The foundations for the development of GME were laid by the grass-roots initiative in the early 1980s to establish Gaelic playgroups and parent-and-child groups in various parts of Scotland. Parental demand for Gaelic-medium primary provision soon followed. The immersion model adopted for GME took into account the challenges that were faced by the Bilingual Education Project and developments internationally:

The shift towards early total immersion emerged from local experience of the shortcomings of the bilingual education model in fostering equal competence in Gaelic and English, and from the emergence of research from Canada illustrating the effectiveness of early total immersion (O’Hanlon & Paterson 2015: 314).

GME describes an overall approach to teaching children through the medium of Gaelic, starting with an immersion phase from primary one to three, where all instruction is provided in Gaelic. The idea of this immersion phase developed over
time and was codified in 5–14 Curriculum documents (O’Hanlon & Paterson 2015: 314). Statutory guidance on GME, published in 2017, clearly states how GME should be delivered and outlines the difference in immersion approaches between the early years of primary education (P1–3) and the later years (P4–7):

GME from nursery to the end of primary school is a form of immersion education. With this form of education, Gaelic is the sole language of learning, teaching and assessment in the first three years of primary school. From P4 to P7, immersion education will continue, but at this stage, English will be introduced. From P4 onwards, following the introduction of English, Gaelic should remain the predominant language of the classroom (Bòrd na Gàidhlig 2017a: 5).

Prior to this statutory guidance, O’Hanlon (2010) found that the amount of English used within Gaelic-medium provision in upper primary (P4–7) was highly variable across settings, but with very little divergence in the early stages. In O’Hanlon’s (2010: 106–7) examination of the language models used for the delivery of instruction in Gaelic-medium primary schools, she found that schools in Comhairle nan Eilean Siar – the local authority for Barra – had the highest levels of ‘heterogeneity’ in models used for teaching of English and Maths in Gaelic-medium primary education. Four of the six schools split the medium of instruction evenly between Gaelic and English in the upper stages of GME compared to schools in the Highland Council area, which on the whole maintained Gaelic use, with 70% of the curriculum or more being taught in Gaelic in P4–7 (O’Hanlon 2010: 110). MacLeod et al. (2014) described how the strongest examples of GME are often found in urban areas rather than Gaelic-speaking rural areas and they too conveyed the variation in experiences of GME across settings:

The term ‘Gaelic medium education’ is used as an umbrella term for a range of educational experiences, which have varying levels of non-Gaelic speaking staff and children in the school. Perhaps ironically, the ‘strongest’ model of Gaelic education is found in urban areas in which Gaelic is the language of a small minority of the population (MacLeod et al. 2014: 5).

When Gaelic early years education was first established in the early 1980s, great emphasis was placed on GME being open to all, whether parents were Gaelic
speakers or not (O’Hanlon 2010: 100). The reasons for this approach are not well documented but it is plausible that purely practically it would clearly be beneficial to be open to more families and also in many urban areas, Gaelic language transmission had been unsuccessful in the parents’ generation of families from Gaelic-speaking areas. Thus many of the interested parents would not have been sufficiently fluent to ensure their children had appropriate Gaelic proficiency if restrictions on access had been made. GME continues to be open to all children. There are no obligations placed upon parents to learn Gaelic if they enrol their child in such provision, although some schools do encourage parents to learn at least some Gaelic.

Children attend GME from a wide range of linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Children from strongly Gaelic-speaking homes entering GME might be able to converse with staff in Gaelic while others from homes where Gaelic is spoken to a lesser extent might have receptive Gaelic skills but display little productive abilities. Many children enter Gaelic-medium primary education with no experience of Gaelic within or outwith education. The wide range in terms of Gaelic ability from the home, and the variety of Gaelic early years experiences of children entering GME, poses significant challenges for those involved in delivery (Cochran 2008: 30; Pollock 2010: 119; Her Majesty’s Inspectorate for Education 2011; Stephen et al. 2010).

In addition to the challenges faced by teaching staff in supporting the language acquisition of children with a wide variety of linguistic needs, Stephen et al. (2016) highlight challenges posed by the influence of English. They identified the English language environment outwith GME, the use of English between parents and GME staff within the provision and also the strongly established use of English as a peer language between children in playing and talking as important factors that make establishing Gaelic use within these GME settings particularly difficult (Stephen et al. 2016: 72-4).

Gaelic-medium primary education is currently available at 59 schools across 14 local authority areas in Scotland. A further 13 local authorities have arrangements in place to enable children to access GME in neighbouring local authority provision (O’Hanlon & Paterson 2015: 314). In 2013–14, when I conducted the fieldwork for
this study, 2,652 children were in GME at primary level – 0.7% of all children in primary education in Scotland (Galloway 2014: 3). Gaelic-medium nursery education was provided at 58 settings to 985 children in Scotland (Galloway 2014: 2). The majority of primary schools that provide GME do so alongside English-medium education within a single school in what have been conventionally termed Gaelic units or Gaelic streams. In stand-alone Gaelic schools, all children attending the school are taught through the medium of Gaelic. During the fieldwork for this thesis, there were three stand-alone Gaelic-medium primary schools in Scotland – Glasgow, Inverness, and Edinburgh. Edinburgh’s Gaelic school, Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce opened in August 2013 just as the fieldwork for this research began. A fourth standalone Gaelic school, Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar, opened in August 2015 near Fort William and a fifth, on the south side of Glasgow, opened in 2016.

Gaelic within the home, and Gaelic-medium early years provision are central means by which young children encounter Gaelic in their daily lives. GME at the early years stage takes two main forms: Cròileagan, parent-and-child sessions mainly for children 0–3 years with their parents or caregivers in attendance, and Gaelic-medium nursery education, sgoil-àraich, for 3–5 year olds that local authorities provide in the vast majority of cases. Parent-and-child group provision varies across locations in terms of structure, content, funding and resources (Stephen et al. 2010). This provision can be led by volunteers, parents or paid play leaders and can involve a number of different organisations directly or indirectly – including local authorities, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, parents’ groups and local community centres and children’s centres.

Stephen et al. (2010) outlined the ‘crucial role’ of Gaelic-medium early years provision as the initial experience of both parents and children with GME. They argue that high quality Gaelic-medium early years provision is not only a foundation for Gaelic-medium primary education but should also be a key priority of Gaelic development:

From the early 1980s onwards Gaelic early years and childcare provision has played a crucial role in the Gaelic education system and Gaelic development initiatives more generally. Attracting children and parents to the ‘Gaelic
system’ from the earliest stage is essential if the downward demographic trends affecting Gaelic are to be reversed. The great majority of children who enrol in GM primary education come up through GM playgroups and nurseries. Well-structured, well co-ordinated, well-publicised and high-quality GM early years and childcare provision, based on careful research and analysis, is therefore an important priority within Gaelic development policy (Stephen et al. 2010: 1).

Although such groups are a very important first step for many parents into GME, other families come to GME later. Some children entering Gaelic-medium primary education have had very limited exposure to Gaelic before starting primary school. Children are not obliged to complete Gaelic-medium early years before enrolling in Gaelic-medium primary education (Bòrd na Gàidhlig 2012b); entry to GME after primary one stage is rare.

GME at early years, primary, and secondary school level has grown as a result of parental demand and parents continue to play a crucial role in its expansion (Her Majesty’s Inspectorate for Education 2011: 2.1.1). GME and learning Gaelic in educational settings increasingly predominates as the means for young children to access Gaelic in urban centres such as Edinburgh and Glasgow and also in rural and traditionally Gaelic-speaking areas such as Barra. Stephen et al. (2010) commented that early years provision in Gaelic increasingly ‘constitutes an “immersion” experience rather than development of children’s “mother tongue”, although it is critical that the small minority of Gaelic-speaking children [in these settings] also benefit from excellent provision that suits their needs’ (Stephen et al. 2010: 3). In the following section, I will more closely the process of language shift and how this has affected the Gaelic language.

**Gaelic Language Shift**

Language shift, in the most basic terms, is a process whereby the acquisition and use of a language reduces in terms of speaker numbers, speaker proficiency and/or domains of language use in favour of another language (Hornberger 2010: 412). Gal (1979) notes that language shift is similar to other forms of linguistic change because it takes place over time and is influenced by many non-linguistic factors. Language shift for Gal is ‘closely linked to broad social changes’ but she stresses that it is
important that language shift research avoid attributing language shift solely to large-scale social processes (Gal 1979: 153). Gal and others who have followed (Kulick 1992; Urla 2012) have stressed the ‘crucial step’ between identifiable broad social changes and language shift:

To evoke macrosociological changes as “cause” of shift is to leave out the step of explaining how such change has come to be interpreted in a way that dramatically affects everyday language use in a community (Kulick 1992: 9).

McEwan-Fujita (2010: 30) emphasises that language shift is a locally based interactional process involving the experience of everyday ‘social interaction throughout the individual life cycle and across generations in the family, the home, the local geographically bounded community’. Language shift is therefore grounded, not only in a specific geographic area but also in families, workplaces, schools and everyday interactions. McCarty and Warhol argue that ethnography allows for the interpretation of language shift, maintenance and revitalisation efforts through the exploration of these everyday interactions (McCarty & Warhol 2011: 184).

Gaelic is in the advanced stages of language shift and intergenerational transmission of Gaelic is weak. Data from the most recent census shows that in households with all adults reporting skills in Gaelic just 37.8% of 3–4 year olds in the same situation were recorded as speaking Gaelic (Scotland’s Census 2015: 18). The 2001 census found that 69.8% of children aged 5–11 in households where both parents spoke Gaelic were recorded as able to speak Gaelic, but this figure fell to 22.1% in families where one adult can speak Gaelic but another cannot (General Register Office for Scotland 2005: Table 15).

Recent research that is not based on census data also indicates low levels of intergenerational transmission of Gaelic within the home. Following a survey of every household in Shawbost on the west side of the Isle of Lewis, a recent study concluded that the intergenerational transmission of Gaelic in that area ‘is broken’ (Munro et al. 2011: 12). This conclusion was reached despite 66% of the local adult population being fluent Gaelic speakers. When they looked specifically at families in the area, they found that most parents of children under 18 in Shawbost (62% of
parents surveyed) speak ‘mainly or only English with their children’ (Munro et al. 2011: 12). Nearly three-quarters (74%) of children speak English, only or mainly, to their parents (Munro et al. 2011: 12). Only one in five of the parents surveyed were found to speak Gaelic, mainly or exclusively, with their children (Mac an Tàilleir et al. 2010: 18). An indication of the extent of language shift is evidenced by the fact that critically low levels of Gaelic use between parents and their children were found in this area even though it was chosen for the study because it was identified as ‘one of the strongest ‘Gaelic-dominant communities in Scotland’ (Munro et al. 2011: 5).

An important finding from the study of Gaelic in Shawbost, Lewis, was that parents who were themselves brought up in strongly Gaelic-speaking households were more likely to speak Gaelic to their children and to choose GME (Mac an Tàilleir et al. 2010: 129). Parents who reported being brought up in households where both Gaelic and English were used, or English only, were more likely to choose English-medium education for their children and speak only or mainly English to their children. Such findings indicate that parents’ own upbringing and linguistic background may impact not only upon their own language use but also their choice of education.

Macdonald (1997) found that those born in her study area (in Skye) up until the mid 1950s used Gaelic in the home and in the area more generally: ‘Gaelic was ‘the natural language of the home and of the locality’ (emphasis in the original; Macdonald 1997: 220). The use of English in such circumstances would have been socially marked and would have been seen as an attempt to distinguish the speaker from other locals, resulting in the speaker being regarded as ‘posh’ (Macdonald 1997: 220). Her findings identified that those born from 1960 onwards used less Gaelic and more English (Macdonald 1997: 221). Those residents born after 1960 rarely reported starting school with no English, unlike older residents. Gaelic was no longer used socially between children in the school playground and although children had receptive skills in the language they made little use of it. Teachers assessed that ‘only about a third of children were fluent in Gaelic’ despite every child having at least one Gaelic-speaking parent (Macdonald 1997: 221). Macdonald’s findings represent the timescale for the north east of Skye and language shift to this extent would likely have occurred later for many parts of the Western Isles.
Lamb (2008: 44) sought Gaelic-speaking early years children in Uist (the islands of North Uist, South Uist and Benbecula) in 1998 and only found 20 children that could be classified as L1 Gaelic speakers. Lamb clearly states that this classification does not mean that these children were ‘necessarily monoglot’ speakers of Gaelic. In 2006, he found just 6 children aged 3–5 out of 50 ‘who spoke Gaelic at home’ in North Uist. Two of the six children were his own. In a survey conducted in the Western Isles, NicAoidh (2010: 51) found that 80% of the children were reported to speak English to each other all the time or nearly all the time.

Will’s (2012: 20) doctoral thesis examines Gaelic language socialisation on another part of the Isle of Lewis from Munro et al.’s study. Will’s research included in-depth case studies of four families with primary school aged children. One of the study’s conclusions is that ‘parenting philosophies have a sizeable influence on the development of children’s social-linguistic competence and practices’. Will’s (2012: 181) research found only a handful of families in her study who speak mainly or only Gaelic to their children. She termed these families Gaelic-socialising families. Will notes that other families living in the local area could easily identify the Gaelic-socialising families. She also found ‘puzzlement and debate’ amongst others as to how these families managed to sustain such an approach:

> Although everyone in the district seemed to know whom the Gaelic-socializing families and children were, there was a considerable amount of puzzlement and debate as to how they managed to raise Gaelic-speaking children and keep them that way (Will 2012: 185).

Socialising children as Gaelic speakers in a traditionally Gaelic-speaking area is now a marked endeavour. Finlay MacLeod commented in the 1970s that raising a child as Gaelic speaker was a ‘political act’ even then in the Western Isles:

> It has become a political act for Hebridean parents to bring up their children as Gaelic speakers, for almost every move they make has to be against the tide (MacLeod quoted in MacKay 1996: 30).

Will (2012) describes in detail how Gaelic use with children in her study area is now mostly reserved to interactions with very young children:
In most families where Gaelic was still spoken among adults (itself a declining demographic), Gaelic speech was addressed only rarely to children above the age of three, and if so, they were mostly formulaic expressions, like a ghràidh (dear), embedded in an English utterance. Children below the age of three, especially babies, had noticeably more Gaelic directed at them by their relatives and other adults who interacted with them, but this seemed to change as soon as the children were perceived to be active conversation partners (cf. Kulick 1992) and, concomitantly, to express their preference for English as the medium of their interactions with others (Will 2012: 181-2).

Smith-Christmas’s (2016: 35) study of family language policy in three generations of one family on the Isle of Skye found that the three children in the third generation made very little use of Gaelic. Additionally, the eldest child had been far more proficient in Gaelic just prior to starting primary education than either of the children that followed. The youngest child was by far the most English-dominant aged four and used very little Gaelic. Smith-Christmas demonstrates how language use practices by the second generation contributed to English use in the third generation by socialising them ‘into the norms of language shift’ (Smith-Christmas 2014: 523). Smith-Christmas argues that the father’s approach to discipline, which included using Gaelic as a last resort, contributed to a view of Gaelic as the language of authority (Smith-Christmas 2016: 90). The children in her study were also in GME and had developed an association between Gaelic and the school.

The reduction of Gaelic use in the homes of young children in areas regarded as Gaelic-speaking is evidenced in these studies. Language shift is a complex process that occurs over a significant period of time. It is possible, however, to identify points at which major changes in the socialisation of young children have occurred. For Gaelic, a significant juncture in language shift occurred when English became established as a peer language of children in Gaelic-speaking areas. Although there is little in terms of detailed research into this occurrence, the above studies suggest that English was established as the peer-language between children in most Gaelic-speaking areas by the 1980s. Wider factors such as the increased importance of secondary and further/higher education and its strong association with the English language have been identified as part of the background of increasing English
language socialisation in families in Gaelic-speaking areas. The current situation of Gaelic in families today must be set within this context of language shift. Families with young children try to maintain Gaelic or introduce Gaelic in a context where English strongly dominates even in areas traditionally thought of as Gaelic-speaking.

**Gaelic Revitalisation**

Even as the numbers of Gaelic speakers in Scotland has decreased, Gaelic has become increasingly recognised as part of Scotland’s cultural heritage. Important examples of advances in provision for Gaelic in the 1980s and early 1990s include the establishment of GME and the strengthening of Gaelic in broadcasting. Dunbar highlights that since the mid 1980s Gaelic has had ‘a range of legal and institutional measures of support’ but he describes these measures as ‘generally piecemeal in nature’ (Dunbar 2006: 1). In 1982 the Cor na Gàidhlig (State of Gaelic) report was published and led to the establishment of the national Gaelic development organisation Comunn na Gàidhlig (McLeod 2010: 3). MacLeod (2003: 6) explains that Comunn na Gàidhlig played an important role in the early years of GME by supporting parental campaigns for the establishment of local provision and by assisting parents in negotiations with local authorities.

The developments in terms of institutional support for Gaelic over the last three decades have been supported by broader factors such as the increased European-level interest in regional and minority languages since the 1980s. The European Charter for the Regional or Minority Languages was ratified by the United Kingdom in 2001 (Council of Europe 1992; Dunbar 2006). Gaelic was designated under Part III of the Charter, which imposes a range of obligations in distinct fields (Dunbar 2006: 14). Precedents from Wales have also strongly influenced initiatives in Gaelic development, from Gaelic-medium playgroups to the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 (Dunbar 2006). Dunbar describes the Gaelic Language Act as ‘the single most important piece of legislation in respect of the language’ (Dunbar 2006:17). The Act established Bòrd na Gàidhlig as a statutory body with specific powers and responsibilities in relation to the Gaelic language and required Bòrd na Gàidhlig to develop a national language plan every five years (Dunbar 2006: 18). The Bòrd can also require that public bodies produce and implement Gaelic language plans. A
further key development in provision for Gaelic has been the establishment of BBC Alba, a Gaelic TV channel, in 2008. Although these developments can be described as ‘raising the profile’ of Gaelic, McLeod (2014: 6) cautions that a ‘danger comes in assuming a direct connection between this increasing visibility of Gaelic and its actual functioning as a living language in families and communities’.

**Language Socialisation**

In addition to the education choices made by parents, in this thesis I examine the language socialisation of these young children. Ochs (1986: 2) describes language socialisation as ‘both socialisation through language and socialisation to use language’. Language socialisation sets the learning of language within the broader social and cultural learning context and is the ‘process of becoming a culturally competent member of society through language activity’ (Ochs 1992: 335; 1999: 230). Garrett (2016: 2) explains that language socialisation involves acquiring ‘the knowledge, skills, orientations, and practices that enable him or her to participate in the social life of a particular community’.

Linguistic anthropologists have examined language socialisation in studies of language shift. This examination has helped to illustrate the ways in which language socialisation can actively contribute to language shift (Kulick 1992) and also to understand more fully the effect of revitalisation efforts (Will 2012). Language socialisation research acknowledges that parental language ‘decisions and wishes’ are only one aspect of all that affects a child’s language socialisation:

What emerges very clearly from the literature in these fields is that parental decisions and wishes regarding their children’s language are only one factor of many that influence which language a child learns. Once this is fully appreciated, the issue of why a particular generation of children in a bilingual community suddenly grows up not speaking the vernacular becomes more complicated than parental wishes and more problematic than the lack of attention accorded the process in the literature would seem to indicate (Kulick 1992: 13).

Language socialisation is a life-span process involving novices and more experienced members, known as experts. Novices in the process of language
socialisation are not without agency, however. As Garrett & Baquedano-López explain, novices, including young children, can ‘renegotiate, challenge, or transcend the existing social categories’:

Children and their caregivers in these settings must therefore be regarded as agents with the potential to transform language as well as the cultural systems of meaning that it so thoroughly interpenetrates (Garrett & Baquedano-López 2002: 350).

Additionally, it is not always the case that adults are the experts and children are the novices; indeed children (or anybody) can be the experts in some situations and novices in others (Garrett & Baquedano-López 2002: 346). A frequently cited example of such a situation is when young people have more advanced skills in using new technology and are asked to provide assistance to parents or grandparents on such matters. This can be viewed as a reversal of the normal order whereby children acquire knowledge and receive guidance from parents and grandparents. Examples of this reversal of normal order can be seen in the current GME context; with the majority of children in GME coming from non-Gaelic-speaking homes, it is often the case that children are more competent in Gaelic than their parents.

Studies into language socialisation aim to take account of the many factors that can influence a child’s language acquisition in a bilingual setting. In addition to language ideologies, Lanza (2004) outlines ‘individual factors’ that play an important role in language acquisition including input, ‘parents’ consistency’ in maintaining target language use and ‘the individual personality and learning strategies of the child’ (Lanza 2004: 14). Lanza’s (2004) study of language socialisation in two bilingual families with young children in Norway identified the significant role of parents’ responses to a child’s use of the non-target language (not the language used by the parent in the interaction). Lanza explains that ‘children … will use whatever linguistic means they have in order to express what they wish to say’ and how parents react to non-target language is crucially important in fostering language use in the target language (Lanza 2004: 26). Lanza identified ‘Parental Discourse Strategies’ that describe the approaches taken by parents in such circumstances:
Adult requests clarification: *Minimal Grasp Strategy* (Ochs 1988)

Adult requests clarification: *Expressed Guess Strategy* (Ochs 1988)

Adult *Repetition* of the content of the child’s utterance, using the other language.

A *Move On Strategy*: the conversation merely continues

Adult *Code-Switches*. (Lanza 2004: 262)

The ‘minimal grasp strategy’ describes a situation where a listener demonstrates little or no understanding of a speaker’s utterance, and the speaker is then required to explicate the utterance (1988: 133). Rather than demonstrating little to no understanding in the second strategy outlined by Ochs, the ‘expressed guess strategy’, the listener makes a guess at the meaning of the utterance (Ochs 1988: 134). A significant difference between the two strategies exists in that the second requires the listener rather than the speaker to attempt to reformulate the utterance (Ochs 1988: 134).

Lanza identified these strategies when in examining bilingual parent-child interactions. Lanza explains that parents who utilise the ‘minimal grasp strategy’ and encourage a monolingual interaction are more likely to see the desired outcome of the child speaking the target language. Where parents use strategies such as ‘repetition’ or ‘a move on strategy’ they facilitate a bilingual interaction and reduce the likelihood of the child using the target language with the parent. Language socialisation research pays particular attention to wider contributing factors to understanding an individual’s language use and can also help to understand how revitalisation endeavours fit with local beliefs and practices.

**Language Ideology**

Language socialisation research foregrounds the exploration of local theories of language acquisition and also language ideologies. Language (or linguistic) ideologies have been variously defined, but the definition I will follow in this study is that put forward by Mertz (1998), who describes language ideology as ‘the conceptions that speakers hold about language and how it works’ (Mertz 1998: 150).
Language ideologies are often specific to a particular language, group of languages or language varieties. They can be found at a metalinguistic level where people articulate and reflect upon their linguistic practices, but they can also be found implicitly in the day-to-day practices of individuals, or the code or register used in specific settings or in certain company. Spolsky (2004: 14) foregrounds the shared nature of language ideologies and describes how they ‘designate a speech community’s consensus on what value to apply to each of the language variables or named language varieties’ (Spolsky 2004: 14).

It is also important to bear in mind that language ideologies are, as Errington points out, ‘situated, partial, and interested character of conceptions and uses of language’ (Errington 2001: 110) and that they are often not ‘about language alone but rather, they envision and enact ties of language to identity, to aesthetics, to morality, and to epistemology’ (Woolard 1981: 3). An important aspect of language ideologies highlighted by Garrett & Baquedano (2002) is that they are highly variable and ‘rooted in individual experiences of social order that vary with class, age, gender, etc.’ (Garrett & Baquedano 2002: 354).

Woolard (1998: 4) notes that studies of languages in contact have led a range of researchers, including linguists, anthropologists and educationalists, to examine language ideologies. Language ideologies are evident in how and why parents use a language or languages with their children. Whether or not they choose bilingual education and how they engage with opportunities for language learning outside education can be significantly influenced by language ideologies. Gaelic language shift has continued at a time when revitalisation efforts have increased the provision of Gaelic in the education system and elsewhere. The residual effect of the strongly established language ideologies and how these interact with revitalisation efforts during a time of valorisation merits consideration.

**Parental choice and GME**

Previous research into the choice of GME has highlighted a range of reasons given by parents for this choice (Roberts 1991; Stockdale et al. 2003; Stephen et al 2010; O’Hanlon et al 2010; Goalabré 2011; O’Hanlon 2012; Rice 2012; McLeod & O’Rourke 2015). The research has mainly been conducted through the use of
questionnaires distributed to parents accompanied by follow-up interviews or solely through semi-structured interviews. Johnstone et al. (1999) relied solely on questionnaires. Roberts (1991), Stockdale et al. (2003), O’Hanlon (2012), and Rice (2012) used both questionnaires and interviews. O’Hanlon (2012) used interviews and questionnaires with pupils but telephone interviews only with parents. O’Hanlon et al. (2010), Goalabré (2011), McLeod and O’Rourke (2015) used interviews only. McLeod and O’Rourke’s study focused on the parental choice of GME in Glasgow and Edinburgh. The other studies were primarily with parents living in rural areas. Most of these studies have been conducted with parents with children already attending Gaelic-medium provision. Their children were normally in primary or secondary school by the time of the research, and in the research parents reflected retrospectively on the decision made to enrol them in that provision. A distinct method of investigation was taken in research conducted by O’Hanlon & Paterson (2017), who utilised a national social attitudes survey to examine the factors that influence likelihood of considering GME for a participant’s child.

Previous research into education choice has often categorised the reasons given by parents for choosing GME for their child. O’Hanlon (2012: 54) categorised the reasons given by parents under five main headings based on her research into parental choice of GME and Welsh-medium education. The five categories identified were: (i) heritage, (ii) bilingualism, (iii) general qualities of GME, (iv) characteristics of parents and (v) continuity (continuing involvement in GME in order to ‘build upon’ prior learning) (O’Hanlon 2012: 46-58). The first two categories of heritage and the benefits of bilingualism were those cited most and O’Hanlon was able to further analyse these categories. A heritage link to Gaelic could be categorised as either a connection to a part of the family heritage, to the Highlands and Islands, or to Gaelic as part of the heritage of Scotland as a whole. With regard to the benefits of bilingualism O’Hanlon distinguishes between cognitive benefits and benefits associated with an increased ability to learn other languages (O’Hanlon 2012: 55).

Similarly, the Stephen et al. (2010) study of parents with early years children identified a heritage link to Gaelic, the benefits of bilingualism, and other instrumental factors such as small class sizes and the sense of shared enterprise with
the other parents involved in GME as reasons for choosing GME. Stephen et al. (2010: 35) additionally noted that the wide range of reasons for choosing GME reported by parents lead to varied expectations of GME and diverse understandings of what is involved in becoming fluent in a second language.

An additional theme highlighted in O’Hanlon et al.’s (2010) research is the social influence of other parents on the choice of GME, especially in areas where Gaelic is more widely spoken:

The pressure towards GME resulting from local social networks was perhaps strongest where it has become part of a more general revival of interest in the language in places where it is still spoken, as noted by a head teacher of a primary school in a Gaelic-speaking area (O’Hanlon et al. 2010: 59).

Both Stockdale et al. (2003) and Rice (2012) conducted research involving (and naming) Castlebay School in Barra. Of the three research locations in Stockdale et al. (2003) – Barra, Ullapool, and Laxdale – when parents with the same backgrounds were compared, those living in Barra were the least likely to send their children to GME. This research was conducted 15 years ago and it is possible that this may no longer be the case; as discussed below, enrolment in GME in Barra has grown significantly in the last decade. Stockdale et al.’s (2003: 28) questionnaires also asked parents of primary school children about the parents’ language use. They found that Gaelic use was ‘greatest in Castlebay, for example, 40 and 43 % speak the language in local shops and with local residents respectively, 39 % use the language at local social events and 28 % in conversations with their children’ (Stockdale et al. 2003: 28).

Comparing parents that chose GME and those that chose English-medium education in terms of their views towards Gaelic, Stockdale et al. (2003: 8) found that ‘both sets of parents displayed positive opinions regarding the Gaelic language; however, English-medium parents were more reluctant to present a definitive view’. They found that parents who were Gaelic speakers in Castlebay were positive towards GME ‘but there is also some evidence of antipathy’ from the first generation of non-
Gaelic-speakers towards GME; a finding similar to their study area in Lewis, Laxdale (Stockdale et al. 2003: 9).

Stockdale et al. tried to model education choice using the data from all three areas. The variables identified were ‘area, Gaelic, house tenure, migration, education; and opinions’ (Stockdale 2003: 37) and five factors found to influence the likelihood of choosing GME were as follows:

- the child’s parents spoke Gaelic (especially if the mother was a learner);
- the child’s maternal grandmother was a Gaelic speaker;
- the child’s parents were highly educated, and self-employed;
- the child’s parents possessed a positive opinion of both the Gaelic language and GME; and
- the household had migrated into the study areas (Stockdale 2003: 9).

Rice (2012) conducted research amongst parents of primary one children in Baile a’ Mhanaich School in Benbecula and Castlebay School in Barra. She used questionnaires (eight out of ten were returned in Barra and three out of seven in Benbecula) and then conducted a small number of follow-up interviews, three in Barra and two in Uist (Rice 2012: 32). The research was conducted between September 2011 and January 2012 and in her analysis she compared her findings to those of Roberts’ 1991 study into parental views of GME in the Western Isles. Rice found that Gaelic competence was higher in fathers than in mothers. Of the families in Barra, five fathers were fluent in Gaelic and just two mothers (Rice 2012: 34). In terms of language use, however, only one mother and one father in Barra used Gaelic every day and five fathers and 3 mothers used Gaelic sometimes (Rice 2012: 36). Rice also asked parents why they had chosen GME and found that half of all respondents chose GME because of the benefits of bilingualism and a quarter because they wanted to maintain Gaelic across generations.
In this research the views of parents in Barra with children in English-medium nursery education were also sought and will be discussed. O’Hanlon et al. (2010: 60) enquired as to why parents chose English-medium education when GME was available in the same school in their study. One main reason recorded by O’Hanlon et al. (2010: 60) for the choice of English-medium rather than GME was that parents were apprehensive about supporting their child with their homework if they were not Gaelic speakers themselves or if they were not literate in Gaelic. Some parents thought that GME was ‘divisive’ and gave this as their reason for opting for English-medium education, while other parents were unaware of Gaelic-medium provision within the school in which they had enrolled their child for primary education prior to enrolment (O’Hanlon et al. 2010: 59–61). It is likely that this second finding would be less true in Barra or other rural areas where school choice is limited and awareness of the provision high.

The field sites: Barra
Barra and Vatersay are the most southerly inhabited islands in the Western Isles. A 13-mile mostly single-track road runs around Barra and connects the two main villages and harbours of Castlebay and Northbay. Machair land and white sandy beaches coat the expansive west side while the east side of the island has an undulating rugged rocky coastline. Barra is connected to the mainland by a five-hour ferry journey to Oban or an hour plane journey to Glasgow. A small car ferry links Barra to Eriskay and facilitates travel onwards to the other islands of the Western Isles. The island is renowned for its airport landing strip at the Trà’ Mhòr with its cockle strand runway. Kisimul Castle, the seat of the Clan MacNeil, sits in the bay in Castlebay.

The 2011 Census recorded 11174 people living in Barra and a further 90 in the island of Vatersay, a small island to the south of Barra linked by a causeway (Scotland’s Census 2011c). In 1911, 2620 people were recorded in the census in Barra, by 1951 the population had fallen to 1884 and it was just 1277 by 1981 (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar 2016). The economy is traditionally based on the fishing industry, an industry that continues to employ 11.1% of the population of Barra and neighbouring Uist compared with a Scottish average of 0.2% (European Commission 2009: 3.2).
The fish and shellfish processing plant in the north of the island – Barratlantic – is the largest single private employer on the island, with an average of 40 full-time staff. Other key employers include the public sector, tourism, offshore energy production (in both the oil and renewable sectors) and the ferry company Caledonian MacBrayne. The majority of the population are Roman Catholic; 68.7% of the population of Barra and Vatersay in the 2011 Census were recorded as Roman Catholic (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar 2015: 7) – significantly higher than the 16% of the Scottish population (Scotland’s Census 2013a). 90.1% of Barra residents recorded in the 2011 census were born in Scotland, 7.7% in England and just 22 residents were born outside the UK (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar 2015: 8).

**Gaelic in Barra**

Barra and Vatersay are historically Gaelic speaking; in 1901, 91.6% of inhabitants older than three years of age were Gaelic speakers: 2331 individuals (Duwe 2005: 7). In 1971, 83.5% of residents over three years of age were Gaelic speakers, 910 people in total (Duwe 2005: 8). By the 2001 census, the number of Gaelic speakers declined to just 66.4% of the population, 778 people (Duwe 2005: 8). This figure fell further to 62% in the 2011 census, 710 individuals (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar 2015: 1). The 2011 Census also revealed that 351 residents over the age of three years (29% of the population) could not speak, read, write or understand Gaelic (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar 2015: 8). Despite the continued decline in speaker numbers, Barra has resisted language shift to a much greater extent than other areas, such as Wester Ross, although the decline is relatively consistent with other islands in the Western Isles. In an analysis of the Gaelic data from the Scottish Census 2011, the civil parish of Barra is included as one of only eight civil parishes in Scotland where 50% of the population recorded the ability to speak Gaelic (Scotland’s Census 2015: 7).
Table 1: Census Data on Gaelic speakers in Barra (Duwe 2005; Scotland’s Census 2017)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census Year</th>
<th>Gaelic speakers total number</th>
<th>Gaelic speakers as percentage of population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>2331</td>
<td>91.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>1931</td>
<td>87.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>910</td>
<td>83.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>778</td>
<td>66.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>710</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is a considerable degree of geographic variation in Gaelic-speaking across Barra and Vatersay. In the 2001 Census, the rural areas in the north and east of Barra recorded more stable Gaelic speaker numbers than Castlebay and Vatersay (Duwe 2005: 12). Analysis of the Gaelic ability residents in other ports such as Lochboisdale, Lochmaddy and Tarbert has found a lower proportion of Gaelic-speakers recorded than other areas on their respective islands in the Western Isles (MacKinnon 1977; Duwe 2006). In contrast to the 2001 census, in the 2011 census it was Nask and Kentangaval, villages that border Castlebay to the west, that had the highest percentage of Gaelic speakers, 75.8% in total. Eoligarry in the far north had the second highest percentage of Gaelic speakers with 74.8% recorded as able to speak Gaelic. Just 54.3% of those resident in Castlebay and Horve were recorded as Gaelic speakers, the second lowest, but it was the western villages of Alasadale, Grean and Cleat where the lowest percentage was recorded, just 45.3% (Scotland’s Census 2017).
Table 2 Census 2011: Percentage Gaelic speakers by output area - Barra

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Output Area</th>
<th>Percentage Gaelic Speakers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Castlebay &amp; Horve</td>
<td>53.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vatersay</td>
<td>58.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alasdale - Cleat</td>
<td>45.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nask &amp; Kentangaval</td>
<td>75.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borve &amp; Tangasdale</td>
<td>66.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gleann, Garrygall, Leideag</td>
<td>68.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brevig - Earsary</td>
<td>62.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rua Lios– Northbay</td>
<td>60.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ardmhor &amp; Ardveenish</td>
<td>72.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eoligarry</td>
<td>74.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the 2011 Census an additional question was added asking about a language other than English used in the home. In Barra 576 out of 1137 people lived in households that recorded Gaelic as a language other than English used in the home and a further 40 out of 85 in Vatersay (Scotland’s Census 2011d).

More in-depth studies in Barra throughout the 20th century also recorded declining proportions of Gaelic speakers. Studies in the first half of the century, however, recorded very high rates of Gaelic speaking in Barra. When Borgstrøm (1937) conducted his research into the Gaelic dialect of Barra in the early 1930s he found that monolingual Gaelic speakers were confined to a small number of preschool children and very elderly residents. Vallee (1954) found a similar situation some twenty years later during his anthropological study of the island conducted in 1951–2. The Census in 1951 found that 1884 people lived in Barra; just under 90% were
recorded as Gaelic speakers (Duwe 2005: 8). Vallee (1954: 21) found that 95% of the population of 2000 was bilingual in Gaelic and English to varying degrees, and only 2.5% were monolingual English speakers and 2.5% monolingual Gaelic speakers. The monolingual Gaelic-speakers, he notes were, as found by Borgstrøm, either very young children or very old people. Young children and very old people, he explains, spent most of their time in their own homes and had little contact with English because they rarely left their Gaelic-only home environment (Vallee 1954: 21).

It is no longer the case that preschool children are monolingual Gaelic speakers in Barra. The majority of young children are now monolingual English speakers, with a minority who could be described as bilingual first language speakers of Gaelic and English. Some others have a little knowledge of Gaelic before entering formal education, often only receptive skills. In the 2011 Census, of the 53 three to four year olds recorded in Barra and Vatersay, 29 were recorded as ‘speaks Gaelic’ (Scotland’s Census 2011b). In 1991, only 37.0% of three and four year olds were recorded in the census as speaking Gaelic (Duwe 2005: 13). This increase can likely be attributed to the introduction and increase in Gaelic-medium nursery provision from the mid 1990s and the recording of children in GME as ‘speaks Gaelic’.

GME was established in Barra in 1992. The numbers enrolled in the provision remained low for some time. After eight years, in 2000-01, just 28 of 137 primary-aged school children in Barra were in GME at Castlebay (Duwe 2005: 15). Many Gaelic-speaking children went to their local English-medium school while a small number attended GME in Castlebay. Gaelic provision at secondary level in Scotland is divided into two courses, one for Gaelic speakers (now mostly GME educated young people) and another for Gaelic learners (young people from English-medium education who have learned Gaelic, mainly in secondary education). Despite their English-medium education, many children from Gaelic-speaking homes in Barra went on to study Gaelic for Gaelic speakers rather than learners at secondary school. Their ability to do so indicates the proficiency reached through Gaelic language socialisation in the home. Although this was true for a small minority born in the late 1980s and early 1990s, at the time of the fieldwork for this study there was just one primary-school aged child attending English-medium education from a strongly
Gaelic-speaking home. All other children from Gaelic-speaking homes now attend GME.

**Education in Barra**

There are currently two primary schools in Barra: Eoligarry School in the north end of the island and Castlebay School in the south. Castlebay is the main village on the island. Castlebay School is a 3–18 school delivering the only nursery and secondary provision on the island. The school offers Gaelic-medium primary education as a stream within the primary department of the school. Gaelic-medium primary education has been available as a stream within the primary since 1992. By 2014–15, 53 out of 103 primary-aged children in Barra were in GME in Castlebay. Of those in English-medium education, 31 were in Castlebay primary and a further 19 pupils attended Eoligarry School. Several of the pupils attending Eoligarry School were enrolled there on the basis of placing requests and actually reside in the Castlebay School catchment area. During my fieldwork nearly half of those attending Eoligarry were from outwith the catchment area. The catchment area for Eoligarry School includes eight townships, three of which by September 2014 had no primary or early years aged children whatsoever. A fourth township only has children attending Castlebay School, nearly all of whom attend Gaelic-medium provision.

The level of choice at early years and primary level in Barra is limited. All provision at nursery level is part of Castlebay School and is located in the Barra Children’s Centre. Both Gaelic and English nursery provision is located in the centre along with the Gaelic parent-and-child group *Clann Trang*. In Barra, the Gaelic nursery provision is referred to as ‘*Cròileagan*’, and not ‘*sgoil-àraich*’ as it is known in Edinburgh and other areas. Some parents refer to the *Clann Trang* sessions as Gaelic Mums and Tots, with the weekly English sessions called just ‘Mums and Tots’. ‘Playgroup’ is the term used for the English nursery in Barra. These nursery sessions, both Gaelic and English, run concurrently five mornings a week. Before the Scottish Government-funded entitlement begins in the term following their third birthday, parents in Barra can pay for their child to attend either Gaelic or English nursery sessions aged two where capacity allows. In Edinburgh, the Gaelic nursery does not have the capacity to allow such arrangements.
In September 2014–15, there were 14 children in English-medium nursery provision in Castlebay and 13 in Gaelic-medium. This was the first year in several years that the number of children in the English nursery exceeded that in the Gaelic-medium nursery at the start of the session. This pattern continued and in 2015–16 there were 16 enrolled in the English-medium nursery and just 13 in the Gaelic-medium nursery. In the preceding years there had been many more enrolled in the Gaelic nursery than the English nursery, sometimes up to ten children more. There had been fairly even proportions in Gaelic and English at primary level in the previous five years. The previously higher levels of enrolment in Gaelic-medium nursery provision was in part a result of parents having a child in Gaelic-medium nursery provision but then opting for English-medium primary education, normally at Eoligarry School. Increasingly, parents choosing Eoligarry School are also choosing English-medium nursery provision.

Family members, mothers, fathers (often on leave from working at sea or offshore), grandparents or other kin normally provide childcare for early years children in Barra. Formal childcare provision is not widely available; just two registered childminders worked on the island when the research commenced in early 2014. For primary school pupils, there is no after-school childcare available and school transport leaves immediately following the conclusion of the school day. In the last ten years there has been an increase in the number of activities available (in Castlebay mostly) for primary-aged children. These activities are mainly sports, music, drama or dance. The Barra Children’s Centre run a youth club for school aged children on a Friday. The youth club is the only activity that provides transport for children, for all other activities parents must transport them.

**Edinburgh**

Edinburgh is the capital city of Scotland and is home to the Scottish Parliament. The population is much larger and more diverse than that of Barra. The population of the City of Edinburgh local authority area recorded in the 2011 Census was 476,626 (Scotland’s Census 2013d). Of those, 334,626 were born in Scotland, 57,725 in England, 28,264 in EU countries, and 42,787 in other countries. In total, 15.9% of
the population of Edinburgh was born outside the UK – the joint highest figure for a council area in Scotland, along with Aberdeen City (Scotland’s Census: 2013b).

**Table 3: Country of birth of Edinburgh residents (Scotland’s Census: 2013b).**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of birth</th>
<th>Number of Edinburgh residents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>334,626</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>57,725</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU Countries</td>
<td>28,264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Countries</td>
<td>42,787</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Gaelic in Edinburgh**

Gaelic speakers have lived in Edinburgh for over 1000 years. The Gaelic history of Edinburgh is evidenced in Gaelic place names such as Craigentinny, Creag an t-Sionnaich and Balerno, Baile Àirneach. Edinburgh has also been home to many eminent Gaelic poets including Donnchadh Bán Mac an t-Saoir, Somhairle MacGill-Eain, Deòrsa Mac Iain Deòrsa and the Barra-born poet and playwright Dòmhnall Mac na Ceàrdach. However, Gaelic had very little presence in the city following the de-Gaelicisation of the Scottish monarchy in the 12th century until in-migration from the Highlands began to increase from the end of the seventeenth century onwards, with Gaelic church services in Edinburgh from 1704 (Greyfriars 2017). In sharp contrast to its position in Barra, Gaelic has very much been a minority language in Edinburgh, spoken by a very small proportion of the population.

In the 2011 Census, 3,157 individuals were recorded as Gaelic speakers in the City of Edinburgh council area, just 0.7% of the population (Scotland’s Census 2013c). This figure shows a very slight increase from 2001, when 3,120 Gaelic speakers were recorded in the city (Scotland’s Census 2001). Of those recorded as having any skills in Gaelic in Scotland in the 2011 census, 6.8% were resident in Edinburgh (Scotland’s Census 2015: 8). In the 2011 Census question on language use in the home, where the adults recorded ability in Gaelic in a household in Edinburgh only
19.8% recorded Gaelic as a language used in the home (Scotland’s Census 2015: 49). McLeod’s (2005: 9) research into language usage and attitudes within the city in 2005 revealed low levels of intergenerational transmission of Gaelic. Where both parents were fluent Gaelic speakers, in 40% of cases their children were not Gaelic-speakers.

**Education in Edinburgh**

GME is only one of many options available to parents in Edinburgh in terms of education choice. At the early years stage, there are 70 local authority run nursery classes in primary schools in Edinburgh, a further 12 local authority run nursery schools not linked to primary schools, 14 early years centres, eight independent school nurseries, 91 private day nurseries, 17 playgroups and part-time nurseries and two nurseries in special schools (City of Edinburgh Council 2014a). The local authority provision includes nurseries within Roman Catholic schools and the Gaelic nursery. The independent sector provision includes nurseries providing alternative educational approaches such as Montessori and Steiner.

At primary level, there are 88 local authority-run primary schools in Edinburgh, of which 15 are Roman Catholic schools and one is a Gaelic school (City of Edinburgh Council 2014b). There are a further twelve independent schools providing primary level education from age five in Edinburgh (Scottish Council for Independent Schools 2016). At primary level in Edinburgh households will be assigned to two catchment areas, one for a non-denominational school and one for a Roman Catholic school (City of Edinburgh Council 2014c).

GME in Edinburgh began in 1988 as a primary 1–3 class with seven pupils within Tollcross Primary School (Gaelic Education in Edinburgh 2012). This development came as a result of parental demand for such provision that followed the establishment of a Gaelic parent-and-child group in 1981 and the establishment of Gaelic-medium primary provision in Glasgow and Inverness. Demand has grown significantly since its inception and following a long campaign by parents, Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce, Edinburgh’s first stand-alone Gaelic school, opened in August 2013 with 213 pupils. By the end of my fieldwork in Edinburgh March 2014, there were 96 children registered in the nursery and by the summer term the nursery had reached
its full capacity of 100 (Galloway 2014: 4). Enrolments for primary one for August 2014 were near capacity at 61 and 76 started in primary one in August 2017, by which time the school had a roll of 349 (City of Edinburgh Council 2017).

Cròileagan Dhùn Èideann runs Gaelic parent-and-child groups for early years children and their parents or caregivers. Similar to sessions in Barra, parents and caregivers remain with their children throughout the two-hour sessions. Additionally, parents in Edinburgh help in the running of the groups – whether as volunteers on the parent-led committees that support the groups in each location or by helping to staff the Cròileagan stall at local events or helping set up before and after sessions. Over 150 children attend the sessions in Edinburgh each week across three locations – Leith, Tollcross, and within Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce. The city’s Gaelic parent-and-child groups have a strong emphasis on parents and children learning and using Gaelic together. Parents who are not Gaelic speakers predominantly attend the Cròileagan groups; however, Gaelic-speaking parents do also attend. Gaelic speakers often attended Cròileagan sessions on different days or in different locations and as a result, rarely met at the same session. In Edinburgh there were a number of fathers who regularly attended the Cròileagan with their children, which was not the case in Barra. In both locations caregivers other than parents attended the Cròileagan with children, including grandparents, child-minders, nannies and au pairs.

A full range of childcare provision is available in Edinburgh. Families often utilise a mix of childcare options, from parents providing childcare themselves – often with one working part-time or having flexible working arrangements – to private nurseries, child-minders, nannies, au pairs, sharing childcare with friends or children being looked after by extended family. Wraparound childcare provision is available within Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce for nursery and primary pupils by Òganan. Òganan provides childcare before and after nursery and primary school for pupils attending the Gaelic school. Childcare provision begins with a breakfast club at 8am and after-school club caters for children till 6pm, Monday till Friday (Óganan 2013).

**Summary**

In this section I have set out the research questions explored in this study. I have introduced the previous research into GME choice and Gaelic in families with young
children and given a brief history of Gaelic in Scotland and Gaelic in education and Gaelic language shift. Finally, I introduced both field sites.

Although some variation does exist within the provision of GME, overall, the introduction of GME marked a strengthening of Gaelic provision in the primary schools in which units were established and introduced Gaelic instruction in primary education in urban areas and areas with low levels of concentrations of Gaelic speakers where it had not previously been available. Previous research into parental choice of GME has shown that this choice is influenced by a variety of identifiable factors and these can be context dependent. Outwith education, research into Gaelic in families with young children indicates that the intergenerational transmission of Gaelic within families now proves particularly challenging and only a few families, even in areas with high proportions of Gaelic speakers, are transmitting Gaelic to their child within the family.

In the following section, I will introduce the methods used in this study, provide background information on the study participants and briefly outline the structure and content of the rest of this thesis.
Section 2: Methods

The Participants
In order to examine Gaelic in families with young children I contacted families in both areas through their respective parent-and-child groups, Gaelic-medium nurseries and through personal contacts. Both nurseries distributed letters to parents informing them of my research and asking if they would be willing to take part (September 2013 in Edinburgh and March 2014 in Barra). I also made oral announcements at the parent-and-child groups in both areas on at least three occasions and contacted a small number of parents I knew personally. The semi-structured interviews I conducted with parents included background questions in addition to questions relating to GME and Gaelic language socialisation. In total, 41 families took part in the research – 26 in Edinburgh and 15 in Barra (see Appendix B).

There were significant differences in the backgrounds of the parents in Edinburgh and in Barra. In Edinburgh, only 27 of the 52 parents were brought up in Scotland (and only three in Edinburgh), as against ten in England, eight in Ireland, and seven in European countries and further afield (three in continental Europe and four outside Europe). All bar one of the parents in Barra had been brought up in Scotland; the other was brought up in England. Of those brought up in Scotland 18 of 29 were brought up in Barra or Vatersay.

Linguistic backgrounds of families

Edinburgh
Nearly half of all parents in Edinburgh who participated in this study were bilingual or multilingual. Eleven of the 52 parents were bilingual with a further ten parents speaking three or more languages fluently. Six multilingual individuals had Gaelic as one of their two or more languages. Amongst the other languages known by parents were Catalan, Dutch, French, Galician, German, Irish, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, and Turkish. No participants in Edinburgh stated that they spoke Scots.
Both parents were bilingual or multilingual in seven families; therefore 14 out of the 21 bilinguals/multilinguals were partners.

In Edinburgh, five families used a language other than English or Gaelic in the home as the main language between at least one parent and their child(ren). Amongst these families were one family where both parents used the same other language and another family where each parent used a different language other than English or Gaelic. In one of the Gaelic-speaking families, the father also used another language (other than English) with the children but mainly spoke to them in Gaelic. In terms of Gaelic use in the home in Edinburgh, three households had one fluent Gaelic-speaking parent and two households had two Gaelic-speaking parents. In total, just five families out of the 26 that took part in Edinburgh have a fluent or advanced learner Gaelic-speaking parent in the household (19 per cent).

Five parents now living in Edinburgh were brought up with Gaelic in the home, one learned Gaelic in GME and one had learned as an adult. Two of the Irish parents in Edinburgh were fluent Irish speakers; one had a good grasp of Scottish Gaelic and was capable of conversing with me quite comfortably in Scottish Gaelic. The other fluent Irish speaker had just begun attending Gaelic evening classes. The other Irish parents detailed some ability in Irish from studying the language in school.

In contrast to Irish parents, Scottish parents in Edinburgh who were not from Gaelic-speaking households or had not attended GME had not encountered the language in school. The exposure of these individuals to Gaelic before their involvement with GME as parents was often limited to Gaelic music, Gaelic in the media, Gaelic-speaking friends, relations, or neighbours, or time spent in Gaelic-speaking areas. Gaelic learner secondary provision is currently available in just 27 secondary schools in Scotland. These schools are concentrated in Argyll, the Highlands, or Western Isles (Bòrd na Gàidhlig 2016). This pattern of provision will not have changed significantly since the parents in this study were in secondary education.

In Edinburgh, twelve parents were actively learning Gaelic at the time of the research (one parent in 46 per cent of families involved). Interestingly all twelve were from different families and thus only one parent in each family was formally learning
Gaelic. Four families did report that the other parent was trying to learn Gaelic more informally. Five of the parents learning Gaelic were enrolled on ‘An Cúrsa Inntrigidh’ a distance-learning course offered by the Gaelic college Sabhal Mòr Ostaig. The other courses attended by parents included ‘Languages for All’ evening classes at Edinburgh University, Úlpan (either twice weekly classes or weekend courses) and the Gaelic Language in the Primary School teachers’ course run at Stirling University. Another parent meets with a native Gaelic speaker on a regular basis to help improve his advanced conversational skills in Gaelic.

Overall, in Edinburgh families from a wide variety of linguistic backgrounds are interested in GME. There are a small number of Gaelic-speaking families, along with monolingual English-speaking families and a number of families where other languages are spoken in the home. Although many parents have experience of language learning, other than the Gaelic-speaking parents, few have any significant experience of Gaelic either within or outwith education.

Barra
In Barra, no parents reported ability in any language other than Gaelic, English or Scots. Nine parents were fluent in Gaelic; ten had some Gaelic (reporting having learned and retained some Gaelic from education or as adults or from Gaelic being spoken at home in their childhood). Ten parents reported having no Gaelic and one parent reported speaking Scots. In Barra there were three families in which both parents were fluent in Gaelic. One of the fluent Gaelic-speaking parents, who was brought up on the mainland, had learned the language in secondary school and then university and could be described as a heritage learner because one of her parents is a fluent Gaelic speaker from Barra. In terms of Gaelic language learning, both the mother and father in one family reported learning some Gaelic as adults by enrolling on Gaelic distance learning courses and a mother in another family had also tried to learn Gaelic by attending evening classes while residing on the mainland. All three, however, were no longer attending classes and had only reached a beginner or post-beginner level in the language.

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2 Van Deusen-School (2003: 222) defines a heritage learner as people ‘who have been exposed to another language in the home and have either attained some degree of bilingual proficiency or have been raised with strong cultural links.’
Work patterns of parents

In Edinburgh, of the 26 families that took part in this study, eight mothers worked in full-time employment, ten worked part-time, and eight were stay-at-home mothers. All 26 fathers were in employment, 25 of them full-time and one freelance. Two fathers worked away from Edinburgh during the week and returned at weekends (weekly or fortnightly).

In Barra, three out of 15 mothers worked full-time, eight part-time and four were stay-at-home mothers. One father was a stay-at-home father while all others worked. Fathers working in Barra were more difficult to categorise in terms of full-time or part-time employment. Many men resident in Barra work offshore (working in the oil and gas sector or offshore renewables) or for the ferry company Calmac. Two fathers, in this study, worked offshore and two others worked at sea for the ferry company Calmac. Offshore work is often arranged through agencies and results in irregular working patterns of weeks or months away from home followed by prolonged periods at home. Fathers working at sea often work more regular shift patterns such as two-weeks-on two-weeks off – the regular Calmac shift pattern. In both locations more mothers worked part-time than were in full-time employment or looked after their children full-time.

Parental educational qualifications

Parents were asked for their highest educational qualification. A feature of many of the parents in Edinburgh who took part in this research is that they had an exceptionally high level of educational qualification. Not only were nearly all parents in Edinburgh educated to at least degree level (46 out of 48 participants for which I have data on educational qualifications), but 23 had postgraduate qualifications, including seven parents with PhDs. Three parents worked as medical doctors, one as an advocate and five in academia, four of whom are lecturers. Both females and males in Edinburgh were equally highly qualified; however, the two participants without a degree-level qualification were both male. All parents for which I have data held at least Scottish Higher qualifications (or their English/international equivalents) and no parent had no qualifications.
The 2011 Scottish Census showed that 41.4% of the adult population in Edinburgh held Level 4 (degree or equivalent) qualifications— the highest percentage of any local authority in Scotland. It also has the lowest percentage of adults with no qualifications in Scotland, at 17.1% of residents. Analysis of those recorded as Gaelic speakers living in Edinburgh found that 54.7% had degree or equivalent qualifications (Scotland’s Census 2015: 31). Although many of the parents in this study do not speak Gaelic, a clear feature of parents with young children involved with GME in the city, and who took part in this research, was their high level of qualifications.

In Barra, seven of the females were qualified to degree level, with one also having a postgraduate qualification. One male had an undergraduate degree and a postgraduate-level qualification. Four of the fathers in Barra are qualified to work offshore or at sea. Often these individuals had undergone years of training and gained qualifications in their specific fields but only had school level qualifications. Two fathers had completed trade apprenticeships and three parents (two fathers and one mother) had no qualifications.

The 2011 Census found that 30% of adult residents in the Comhairle nan Eilean Siar local authority area recorded no qualifications and 26.4% had degree level or above qualifications (Scotland’s Census 2013b). Analysis of 2011 census data revealed that Eilean Siar was the only council area where Gaelic speakers were not more likely to have degree level qualifications than non-Gaelic speakers. They were also no less likely to have no qualifications than non-Gaelic speakers (Scotland’s Census 2015: 31). It is evident that the parental qualification levels of families involved in GME in Edinburgh are very high whereas in Barra parents’ education levels revealed a greater variety, with parents with no qualifications, school level qualifications, vocational qualifications and undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. In Barra, far more mothers had degree level qualifications than fathers, seven mothers and just one father.

**Family size**

A feature of families involved in this research in Barra was that these families were often bigger, with children also born over a wider period of time than was the case in
Edinburgh; for instance, some families in Barra had a child in early years while their eldest child was in secondary education or even university at the time of the research. Such a range within one family was not found in any of the families that participated in Edinburgh. The table below shows the number of families with the number of children in both locations.

**Table 4 Number of children per family**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 child</th>
<th>2 children</th>
<th>3 children</th>
<th>4 children</th>
<th>5 children</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barra</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edinburgh</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Growing Up in Scotland longitudinal cohort study has found that families in remote rural areas (such as Barra) are often bigger than families in large urban areas (such as Edinburgh). Growing Up in Scotland (Bradshaw 2013: 29) reported that 24% of families in remote rural areas have three or more children, but the figure falls to just 16% of families in large urban areas. Family size is important when considering the influence of siblings on language socialisation but also a number of issues relating to the practicalities of different education choices.

**Lone parents**

Although no lone parents took part in the research from Edinburgh, there were a small number of lone parents who attended the Cròileagan that I knew through my attendance at sessions but who did not choose to participate in the research. Three lone parents took part in the research from Barra. Information from Growing Up in Scotland shows that parents of very young children are less likely to live with just one parent. In the study’s first birth cohort 80% of children aged ten months lived with two parents and 20% with one; the study’s second birth cohort recorded 79% of ten month olds living with two parents and 21% with one (Bradshaw 2013: 25). At three years old the number of children living in single parent households were very similar: 19% in birth cohort 1 and 21% in birth cohort 2 (Bradshaw 2015: 28). Growing Up in Scotland has also found that lone parents are more common among
mothers with no qualifications (Growing Up in Scotland 2008: 14) and are less likely than mothers in couple families to attend groups for parents and young children (Growing Up in Scotland 2008: 8). The lack of lone parents in the Edinburgh sample may be as a result of using the parent-and-child groups as a key avenue for meeting likely participants.

Field sites
This thesis is the result of one of nine PhD scholarships funded as part of the Soillse research network (www.soillse.ac.uk). The broad research topic – Gaelic and parents with children 0–5 years in two locations – was assigned as the topic for this PhD at the University of Edinburgh commencing in September 2012. Within this remit, I was permitted to choose the field sites of the research as long as one field site was in the Western Isles and the other in urban central Scotland.

Barra was chosen as the rural location because I had conducted my Masters research there – among older people who had been involved in fishing (NicLeòid 2013). Additionally, I have family connections to the island – my grandparents and other relatives live there – and I have spent time on the island throughout my life. I have no comparable experience or connections with any other island in the Western Isles.

In addition to being based at the University of Edinburgh, I also lived in the city for four of my high school years. As a result of this previous time spent in the city, I had a small number of connections with people involved in GME in Edinburgh that could help initially in contacting people currently involved. The research was also timely as Edinburgh’s first Gaelic school was due to open in August 2013. Furthermore, the parent-and-child groups in Edinburgh are particularly well attended and Edinburgh has multiple groups across different locations. Such extensive provision is uncommon for such groups, which are usually limited to one per town or city, with two groups in Glasgow.

Ethics and Consent
This research was granted Level 3 Ethical Approval by the School of Social and Political Science Ethics Committee at the University of Edinburgh and was conducted in accordance with the British Educational Research Association’s Ethical
Guidelines. I also became a member of the Disclosure Scotland Protecting Vulnerable Groups (PVG) Scheme before fieldwork commenced. Because the fieldwork involved schools and included interviewing staff, I required, and was granted, research approval from both local authorities, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and City of Edinburgh Council. Following that approval, I sought, and was granted, permission from the head teachers of both schools, Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce and Castlebay School, to undertake the research.

All participants in this study were given detailed written information about the research and the research was discussed with participants prior to seeking consent for participation. Written consent was obtained from all adults involved. Consent and information forms were made available in both Scottish Gaelic and English. All participants were advised that they were free to withdraw from participating at any time. Participants were encouraged to seek further information or clarification on any matters at any point in the research.

Both locations are named in this thesis. A number of previous anthropological studies in Gaelic-speaking areas have chosen to withhold the real name of the location (Macdonald 1997; Kohen 2002; Will 2012) while other research such as Masson’s (2009) research in Caithness names the study location. Research on GME choice and Gaelic language socialisation has often anonymised exact locations – with the exception of Stockdale et al. (2003), Roberts (1991), Rice (2012) and McLeod and O’Rourke (2015). It is often the case where authors have withheld the name of the location that the location is identifiable from the geographic, linguistic and population data presented. Given the description of many aspects of both locations including the education provision available, Gaelic-speaker numbers and basic demographic information, withholding the name of the locations would have been a futile exercise in this case.

Careful attention has been paid to matters of anonymity regarding families, especially in Barra given the small population size of the island. This situation was made clear to informants before they gave consent to participate. Throughout the thesis the exact location of participants’ residence in Barra and Vatersay will not be given and where I say Barra I am referring to both Barra and Vatersay. Some socio-
economic and family details have been omitted in some cases to protect anonymity. In a number of cases this includes referring to a child as ‘the child’ rather than by their gender. Additionally, where it is not pertinent to the topic being discussed details of siblings have also been omitted.

All participants were given the opportunity to request to be named. No such requests were made. All names given in the thesis are pseudonyms. When referring to the head teacher of each school, or to other school staff, their position is given rather than their name or a pseudonym. This practice was discussed with these individuals prior to their participation and consent given. This thesis presents direct quotes and paraphrases from interviews as well as observations from participant observation of early-years settings. Where interviews were conducted in Gaelic, the extracts will be given in Gaelic first and then my own English translation will follow. This layout will enable readers literate in Gaelic to read the original text.

**Recruiting participants**

With two field sites, the research period of 12 months was split into two six-month periods; there was a small degree of movement between the two field sites throughout the 12 months. I contacted the parent-and-child groups in both locations before the fieldwork started and made an initial visit to explain my research project in April 2013. Following this initial visit in spring 2013, I began fieldwork in September 2013 in Edinburgh and March 2014 in Barra.

The Gaelic parent-and-child groups offer a unique opportunity in education research because parents and caregivers remain with their children for the duration of the session. As a researcher, these groups allowed me to meet parents and caregivers regularly over the six-month of research period. I attended Cròileagan sessions over the course of my six months fieldwork in Edinburgh. I attended 57 sessions across four locations. I only attended the Cròileagan in Corstorphine once because the community centre in which it was held burnt down in October 2013. A Cròileagan session runs every weekday, somewhere in the city, except Thursdays and I attended as many of these sessions as I could. On Mondays there was an additional afternoon session at the Leith Cròileagan and on Friday mornings there were sessions in both Tollcross and Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce. It is mostly families with children younger
than three years old that attended the Cròileagan because children from age three to five attend nursery. The Monday afternoon sessions in Leith often had nursery-aged children in attendance after their morning nursery session.

By attending these sessions regularly, I witnessed parents joining the groups for the first time and how they were welcomed and introduced to the group. I experienced the range of activities outside normal sessions that were organised by the group, including a Christmas dinner for parents and play leaders and the Cròileagan Christmas trip. I also attended local Gaelic events such as the Gaelic Day on St Andrew’s Day 2013, the Cròileagan’s 30th birthday party, and Bothan (monthly Gaelic music events). Although I lived in Edinburgh prior to the start of the research, I had rarely attended Bothan or other Gaelic events.

Through my regular attendance at the Cròileagan, people got to know me, including some who initially did not come forward to participate in the research, but took part willingly towards the end of my time in that location. In Edinburgh, three participants who contacted me by email were academics who worked in universities in the city. These individuals may have been more willing to participate as they themselves require participants for their own research or are involved in supervising or supporting doctoral students in their own institutions. They may also be more familiar with participating in research and therefore less cautious about agreeing to participate.

In order to contact families with children 3–5 years, I also visited the Gaelic school in Edinburgh. I visited the nursery and discussed the best ways to contact parents about the research with staff. Nursery staff recommended that I gave them a letter that they would distribute to parents using each child’s pigeonhole. Parents were advised to check their child’s pigeonhole every day for information from the school and my letter would be alongside other information being distributed to parents by this means on that day. Additionally, we agreed that I would be available to meet parents to discuss the research as they dropped their children off at nursery or picked them up on two days in the following week. The letter given to parents stated the dates the following week I would be in the nursery. I returned to the nursery and helped out in sessions on these specified dates. Parents were able to contact me either
at the start and end of the sessions on the dates given, or by email or phone, details of which were on the letter. Just two parents spoke to me at the nursery visit, but a further eight contacted me by email expressing their willingness to participate over the following months of the fieldwork. Additionally, I was able to use word of mouth and my own contacts in order to meet a range of participants. In total 26 families took part in Edinburgh.

During my time in the Cròileagan, I would help with setting up the room for sessions and during the snack and craft activity I helped out just as parents help the play leader. I took part in the sessions by singing along at the circle-time and on occasion answered parents’ questions, often regarding their own Gaelic homework from a course or evening class. My regular attendance over the months of the fieldwork not only allowed me to meet and talk to parents about my research, some of whom then took part in the research interviews, but it also gave me an understanding of the appeal and function of the groups for those in attendance. I heard the wide-ranging discussions that took place and witnessed the support that parents provide for each other and that play leaders provide for them at such sessions. Over time I came to understand not only how these sessions worked and why parents attended with their young children but also how participation at the Cròileagan influenced future educational decisions.

In Barra, parents received an information letter about the research twice, with around six weeks between distributions. Enough copies of the research letter for parents of children in both Gaelic and English-medium nurseries were given to the nursery play leader. Similar to the arrangement with nursery staff in Edinburgh, the play leader in Barra agreed to distribute the letter to parents along with other correspondence given out by the school that day. Following this first distribution, a number of parents reported that they did not receive the letter and only one parent contacted me about the research. I agreed with the nursery play leader that I would supply another copy of the letter, again enough for distribution to both Gaelic and English-medium nursery parents; the nursery distributed the letter once more. Spare copies of the information letter were left on an information table just to the side of the nursery entrance and a copy was pinned to the nursery’s information board for parents. The
Barra Children’s Centre shared information about the research and how to contact me on their own Facebook page on three occasions. The Children Centre’s Facebook page was their main channel for sharing information with families in Barra.

Following discussions with the nursery staff and after offering some time each week to volunteer in the nursery, the play leader explained that assisting with the weekly swimming sessions would be the most useful way to help them. They required four parent helpers each week. The play leader also explained that I would be able to meet other parents that also assisted at the sessions. I helped out at four of such swimming sessions. My attendance at the parent-and-child sessions in Barra, the letters from the nursery and helping at swimming sessions, did not yield many willing participants and I had to rely on approaching people I already knew and asking them to take part. I also asked my cousin to make contact with parents of young children that she knew and she explained the research to them and passed on their details to me if they were willing to meet. My cousin had been brought up in Barra but no longer lived there. This method proved far more successful. Even after two distributions at the nursery, parents contacted through my cousin still reported not receiving the letter. On reflection the letters may not have reached parents because often it was grandparents, other parents or caregivers that collected children from nursery. Attendance at the parent-and-child group was low and did not afford the opportunities to meet parents with young children to the same extent, as had been the case in Edinburgh.

I believe that an important aspect of the increased success of contacting parents through my cousin was that these parents were now able to place me. Rather than someone doing research from a university, I was a relation of someone they knew who was doing research. Placing others in connection to those known to you is important in Barra. In fact, at the very first visit I made to the Gaelic parent-and-child group in April 2013 I was introduced to parents as another one of my other cousin’s cousin who was going to be doing research, rather than being introduced as a researcher.

**Interviews**

I interviewed parents using semi-structured interviews (see Appendix A). The questions were refined and developed in both areas and adjusted to reflect the
context. In most cases, I conducted the interview with just one parent but where possible I tried to interview both parents. Where this was possible, I tried to interview parents separately but on three occasions, one in Barra and two in Edinburgh, both parents were present during the interview. Interviews were conducted in homes, places of work, the Cròileagan or school and also in cafés. There was a large variation in the length of interviews as some participants expanded significantly on their answers and the interview developed and covered a wider range of topics. Most interviews lasted between 30 minutes and an hour, but some were longer – up to two hours – and some shorter, with a minimum length of 20 minutes. Most interviews were recorded using a digital recording device; however, in some cases the participants stated a preference not to be recorded or the environment (e.g. a busy café) made recording difficult. On such occasions I relied solely on my own written notes. Notes were taken throughout all interviews and proved particularly useful when loud background noise or young children interrupted recordings.

I interviewed the head teachers of both schools. In Edinburgh, I also interviewed two members of nursery staff, including the nursery teacher. I asked staff about their understanding of how parents come to choose GME, what support the school offers parents and if they thought that the reasons for involvement had changed over time. I tried to establish what support was provided for parents in the past and what support they offered now. I interviewed the manager of the Edinburgh wraparound provider, Òganan, and the manager of the Barra Children’s Centre about their provision. In Barra, I also interviewed a teacher who had taught during the Bilingual Education Project and other older islanders about Gaelic on the island and in their education.

Furthermore, I interviewed a relevant member of staff from Stòrlann (the main GME resource provider), Comhairle nan Leabhraichean (the Gaelic Books Council), the Gaelic publisher Acair (who publish a range of books for young children and translate the Bookbug\(^3\) books into Gaelic) and Comann nam Pàrant (an organisation that supports parents with children in GME). All of these organisations have been involved in Gaelic resource provision or Gaelic development for some time and respondents were keenly aware of the varied needs and circumstances of families

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\(^3\) Bookbug is run by the Scottish Books Trust and provide bags of books free to children in Scotland at different ages.
with children attending GME. These organisations all have regular contact with parents of children in GME through their work. Three of the individuals I interviewed were parents themselves of children attending or who had previously attended GME.

Early in my research I became aware that the parents in Edinburgh nearly all had a succinct answer to the question ‘why did you send your child to GME?’ The answers frequently sounded as if they had been given in some form on previous occasions. This rehearsed nature of responses suggested that the parent had been presented with the question in the past – an indication of the extent to which the choice of GME in Edinburgh is perceived as unusual or marked. As my fieldwork progressed, I heard parents being asked or recalling being asked why they had chosen GME time and again. It was therefore important to appreciate that I too was asking the same question. In reflecting on this I became aware that I sought to understand how they had come to GME; how they had come to decisions about the provision; who had supported them and what challenges they had encountered rather than merely posing the bare question of why the provision had been chosen.

**Limitations of this study**

This study is limited to the information provided by the people who responded to the invitation to take part. Those that did take part were as a consequence self-selecting, and thus what I present in this thesis are the views and responses of those who chose to take part. Ultimately parents who participated were willing and those that participated may be more interested in the topic of the research or more willing to express their views on this topic than others who chose not to participate. Those that chose not to participate may have different views or perceptions to those that did take part.

This study is limited to my experiences in time and place. The fieldwork for this study was conducted between late August 2013 and early September 2014 and was limited to two locations. The experiences of families that took part in the research reflect the context of this time and these places. Following the research, changes have occurred in provision and some of the staff involved in the study have moved on to new positions. Family circumstances have changed, families have moved or
had more children, and parents have new working or childcare arrangements. The experience of parents with young children in these settings will now differ.

Initially, I had planned to investigate Gaelic use in the home by conducting case studies with families in both areas and visiting families in their homes. It became apparent that the six-months timescale in each location was not sufficient to do the participant observation with case study families and that semi-structured interviews with parents and others involved in GME as well as regular attendance at the parent-and-child groups would have to suffice. Getting parents to participate in the semi-structured interviews required considerable time and changes in approach in Barra as compared with Edinburgh. I interviewed parents in their homes where possible and I interviewed mothers in three families in Edinburgh and one mother in Barra on two occasions during the fieldwork. The findings of this research are not based on participant-observation in homes where Gaelic is used. Where Gaelic socialisation is discussed this is through self-reported answers given by parents.

My position as a researcher

I am a Gaelic-speaking, Gaelic-medium educated student based in the Celtic and Scottish Studies department of the University of Edinburgh. My parents were not Gaelic speakers but sent my brothers and me to GME in Inverness in the 1990s. I attended a Gaelic parent-and-child group, Cròileagan and nursery before attending Gaelic-medium primary education at Central Primary School in Inverness. I then continued to secondary education at Millburn Academy in Inverness and then James Gillespie’s High School in Edinburgh. My maternal grandfather is a native Gaelic speaker from Àird Mhòr in Barra. My mother was brought up on the mainland with only a little Gaelic. If participants asked how I had learned Gaelic, as a small number did (nearly always after I had conducted the interview), then I answered honestly by explaining that I had learned Gaelic in GME and then went on to study Gaelic at university. I do have Gaelic-speaking relations in Barra and they contributed to the opportunities I have had for learning and using Gaelic.

Although I might now be associated with research by some people in Barra following the fieldwork for this study, prior to the study I would mostly have been known for playing the pipes, especially in the north end of the island where I used to play at
cèilidhs every summer. An assumption is often made in Barra that those brought up on the mainland will not speak Gaelic; however, I did do a Gaelic summer placement in the Barra Heritage Centre as an undergraduate student and then I met more people in Barra, mostly older people who are not related to me. My cousin, who introduced me to some parents, is also a Gaelic speaker and the research was clearly about Gaelic and education.

In Edinburgh, because I had come to know a number of participants through my attendance at the Cròileagan in the weeks and months before they participated in the research then what they knew about me exactly is difficult to accurately assess. My ability to speak Gaelic and willingness to do so was evident in my participation at the Cròileagan or nursery. In asking about Gaelic then, my position as a Gaelic speaker was apparent and some were aware that I had attended GME. Although I attended four years of secondary school in Edinburgh (including studying Gaelic as a subject) and continue to have family links to the city, my local connections had much less significance for the data collection process in Edinburgh than had been the case in Barra. This difference reflects the difference in contexts between a large diverse city and a small island.

**Comparison**

From the outset the purpose in researching within two field sites was to utilise the understanding gained from both locations to illuminate features of the other. The two field sites were deliberately chosen as contrasting contexts. What the two field sites do facilitate is the identification of areas of similarity and dissimilarity that lead to the further examination of the nuances and intricacies that would not have been notable or apparent without the awareness of another context. Conducting research in two field sites serves to illuminate the influence of context on GME choice and the Gaelic language socialisation of young children as well as the variations that exist in provision and the resultant effect on decision-making and involvement. Interestingly, as will be outlined in the thesis, there are a number of points where it might have been anticipated that in Edinburgh and Barra the findings would be very different but actually proved to be similar.
A qualitative approach

As outlined above, much previous research into the choice of GME has often relied on questionnaires or questionnaires and interviews. This qualitative or mixed approach has yielded many valuable insights into the choice of GME. In some cases, however, a fuller investigation of the context of choice has been limited by the methods chosen and by anonymising the research locations. By employing qualitative methods and by spending time in each location, attending the provision and meeting families on more than one occasion, where possible, I have been able to explore more fully families’ involvement in GME and in learning and using Gaelic. Overall, the approach chosen in this study allows for an investigation of the earliest stages of GME choice and language use in families within the context in which they take place.

I chose not to utilise quantitative methods for this study for several reasons. First, quantitative methods would not have provided me with the most appropriate tools for examining the research questions, given that there were only two fieldwork locations. Second, quantitative methods have already been used by previous researchers for studying of GME choice. This study took a different approach, by examining parental choices beyond identifiable motivating factors. Third, the population size in Barra meant that my sample size would have been fairly meagre for quantitative methods, from the perspective of statistical power. Finally, my own area of expertise, gained through my doctoral research training and the Scottish Training in Anthropological Research programme, was more qualitatively focussed. In all, there was a strong rationale for approaching the research from a qualitative rather than quantitative standpoint.

Describing Gaelic in families

In this thesis, families where at least one parent always or nearly always speaks Gaelic to their children are referred to as ‘Gaelic-speaking families’. The term ‘Gaelic-speaking family’ reflects the active use of Gaelic within the family rather than the ability of parents to speak Gaelic. ‘Gaelic-learning families’ are families in which at least one parent is actively learning and trying to use Gaelic with their child to some degree but use another language as the primary medium of communication.
with their child. In such families there is a proactive approach to introducing Gaelic into the home and family environment through adult language acquisition and use in addition to their children acquiring Gaelic within educational environments. The parent in these families is not yet fluent in Gaelic. A further, related term, ‘learning Gaelic as a family’ will be more fully explored in Chapter 5 and refers to families where a parent is learning Gaelic alongside the child, and the family are trying to increase the use of Gaelic of adults and children. Non-Gaelic-speaking families are those where neither parent speaks Gaelic or is learning Gaelic and neither parent is trying to use Gaelic with their child.

**Aims of this thesis**

Although there have been a number of different studies into the choice of GME in recent years there is a clear need for research that considers the choice of GME across the early years stages (the informal parent-and-child groups and the formal nursery stage) and into primary education. There is a paucity of research that goes beyond the reported motivations of parents in their choice of GME in retrospect but examines the choice as it is being made. The choice of GME may have benefits but it can have negative implications for families as well. This study not only considers the motivations and concerns of parents choosing GME but also the process of choosing GME and how this relates to wider parental beliefs about a ‘good’ school and their own role as a parent. Additionally, this thesis also goes beyond the choice of GME to look at the Gaelic language socialisation of young children and the aspirations that parents have for their child’s future Gaelic use.

I seek to contribute to the understanding of GME choice, and education choice in Scotland more generally, by examining how parents come to be involved in GME, how they consider the provision as an educational option for their child, and how young children are socialised as young Gaelic speakers today. In this thesis, I argue that the choice of GME and the Gaelic language socialisation are situated and cannot be viewed in isolation from the context in which they are taking place. Not only are they situated in a geographic location, but also in the context of Gaelic language shift, in specific families and their own, often, changing circumstances, and at specific points in time.
Chapter outline

In this chapter I have given a brief introduction to the research, the field sites and a preliminary introduction to relevant literature. I have outlined the methodology used in this research and presented background information on the research participants. In Chapter 1, I situate the research within the linguistic and educational contexts of both locations. I outline important factors that influence the choice of GME and the Gaelic language socialisation of young children in both locations. In Chapter 2, I argue that the choice of Gaelic-medium early years and primary provision should be seen as a process, with parents making formal decisions at specific points. I outline how the decision making process has key influencing factors and that decisions can be reconsidered after enrolment. In Chapter 3, I delve into the attractive features of GME, including those that have been reported as the motivating factors for parents in choosing GME in other research. I assess how these features connect to notions of a ‘good’ school and a ‘good’ education. I consider where GME and the choice of education fit within these wider notions in both areas.

In Chapter 4, I look at a number of issues associated with GME and socialising children as Gaelic speakers more generally and how the concerns held by parents illustrate important aspects of how they view their own role as parents. In Chapter 5, I move from education choice to the Gaelic language socialisation of young children both within and outwith educational settings. I argue that Gaelic language socialisation in the current context of language shift and revitalisation predominantly within education results in a heavily adult-mediated language socialisation. Children learn to speak Gaelic to some adults but English is strongly established as the peer language, even within GME settings. Parents’ efforts to socialise their children as Gaelic speakers requires considerable effort. Finally in Chapter 6, I consider the aspirations that parents have for their children’s future Gaelic use and examine how these fit with the aims of GME as a Gaelic revitalisation tool and the wider Gaelic development agenda.
Chapter 1: The Context

The decisions made by parents regarding their child’s education and language socialisation should not be viewed in isolation from the social, geographic, linguistic and education contexts within which these decisions are made. Research into GME choice has often withheld or obscured the school’s location and therefore omitted a detailed examination of the context. In this chapter, I outline wider contextual factors that influence parental language and education choices in both locations. What I present here forms a necessary backdrop to the rest of this thesis.

In Barra, the local language shift context is an important factor in, and has repercussions for, parental language and education choice. Another major factor in Barra is the local political context and the pervasive belief that Barra is not served well by the local authority, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar. One factor that connects the political context with views on education choice is the belief that parents should support their local school and a specific concern that the last remaining rural school, Eoligarry School, is under threat of closure from the local authority. This belief impacts on views regarding the location of GME in Castlebay. Additionally, the difference between GME and Gaelic as a second language in English-medium education appears to be less clear in Barra than in Edinburgh.

Compared to Barra, Gaelic is very much more socially and sociolinguistically marginal in Edinburgh. Educationally, GME is clearly distinct from other educational provision. There has not, until recently, been any Gaelic learner provision in primary schools and although Gaelic learner provision is available periodically at James Gillespie’s High School and Tynecastle High School, neither provide Gaelic for learners instruction to certificated course level. There is no comparable sense of political impact on education with no obvious linkage between GME and issues such as perceptions of the local authority or the connection between schools and local communities. Unlike in Barra, the majority of parents in Edinburgh are new to Gaelic and have no prior experience of it in their family or in education.
In Edinburgh, the Cròileagan provides for parents and children, both socially and as a Gaelic language-learning environment. For parents with very young children, these Gaelic parent-and-child groups become important social occasions in their week. For some parents, the welcoming and supportive environment is what has resulted in their continued involvement in GME, rather than a desire to be involved in the specific educational provision or to learn Gaelic. For others, their attendance reflects a desire to explore GME as an education choice more fully and to meet other parents with children in such provision. The Cròileagan groups in Edinburgh involve parents at all levels. Parents help out during the sessions and at community events, and the play leaders welcome parents’ input in supporting and developing GME in Edinburgh more generally. For example, even parents new to the groups are encouraged to attend meetings or events held by Edinburgh’s Comann nam Pàrant group.

Overall awareness of GME in Edinburgh is low. Play leaders at the Cròileagan attend local events for families and leave information cards about the groups in local libraries. These attempts make an important contribution to the awareness of GME in the city. The Cròileagan brings people to GME and affords them an opportunity to meet other parents and carers regularly. Whether parents who attend the Cròileagan are initially interested in GME or not, the Cròileagan provides a first supportive step on the road to the choice of GME if they choose to take it.

Barra: The Language Shift Context

The choice of GME in Barra is affected by factors both directly and indirectly relating to GME. A crucial factor when considering GME in Barra is that the provision is situated within the context of ongoing language shift, from Gaelic to English. The context outlined in what follows is just one moment in the language shift process in Barra. Smith-Christmas (2016: 8) notes that in the case of languages such as Gaelic in Scotland, the factors involved in language shift ‘have been in place for centuries rather than generations’. Although accumulative over decades and centuries, language shift can result in significant changes in language socialisation in relatively short periods of time. Reflecting on language shift in Barra, older speakers explained to me that they believed that the default language of socialisation for most
young children changed from Gaelic to English by the early 1970s. This change at this point in time has great significance for language shift in Barra and how current patterns of language use and language socialisation are understood.

Identifying the major causes of language shift can be particularly difficult. Studies of language shift can be prone to place responsibility for non-transmission of a minority language on parents; Kulick (1992) is highly critical of such studies. Kulick argues that language shift may not necessarily be the result of non-transmission but may in fact be the cause of non-transmission. He highlights that ‘parental decisions and wishes’ are but one influence on language acquisition:

Throughout the literature, parents are either portrayed as having consciously and explicitly decided not to teach their children their own vernacular or, phrased more passively, reported to decide not to encourage their children to learn the vernacular, even if they continue to use it among themselves. [...] A major difficulty with such terminology and the assumptions that underlie it is that it is not in fact always clear to what extent a parental decision not to pass on their vernacular is a “direct cause” of shift, and what extent this decision is a consequence and recognition of shift already under way. It is also important to keep in mind that a child’s language acquisition is influenced by many factors other than parental decisions and wishes (Kulick 1992: 12-13).

In considering language shift it is important to view it as a process that extends beyond the family. McEwan-Fujita (2010: 30) highlights the need to extend the focus of language shift from transmission within the home to include the analysis of everyday interactions in a local area. The local level lived reality of language shift results in a cycle of reducing opportunities for the everyday use of the language. It is clear that parents’ desire for their child to learn a language is only one influencing factor on whether the child does in fact acquire the language. Language shift is a process that is far wider than individual families and parents’ own desires for their child’s language acquisition and use.

A key factor in language shift is the increasing numbers of individuals with no skills in the minority language. The 2011 Census revealed that 351 residents of Barra over the age of 3 years (29% of the population) do not have any skills in Gaelic
Gaelic use in Barra today is mostly confined to conversations between older speakers amongst themselves. Adults under 40 years old who do habitually speak Gaelic are usually involved in Gaelic education, often in a teaching role, or employed as fishermen or in other traditional occupations.⁴ Through my own lifetime there has been a marked reduction in the opportunities to use and hear Gaelic outwith personal interactions with family and friends in Barra. Fewer local events such as cèilidhs are held and where events are held there is far less Gaelic being used than had been before. Individuals involved in organising such events in the north end when I was younger are now elderly and not as active. The heritage centre in Castlebay is an exception to this overall trend because they organise a small number of cèilidhs in their centre throughout the year.

During this study it became apparent that the vast majority of parents under 30 have little to no Gaelic, with many of them describing themselves as monolingual English speakers. This finding is in line with Duwe’s (2005: 10) analysis of Gaelic language census data. The census data from 1991 for young children (today’s under-30 parents) shows a major decrease in younger age-groups speaking Gaelic and that from then on ‘only a minority of pre-school children in the Outer Hebrides were counted as Gàidhlig-speaking’; a situation that continues to this day. Duwe attributes the subsequent slowing of the decline to the introduction of GME at pre-school and primary level (Duwe 2005: 10).

In contrast to Kulick’s (1992: 12) study of the first generation of non-vernacular children in the Gapun, Papua New Guinea, in many ways, studying Gaelic today is in the most part a study of the second generation of non-vernacular children. Indeed, Will (2012) noted, in Lewis that the ‘disruption in Gaelic language transmission in the previous generation has made Gaelic language socialization at home all but impossible’ (Will 2012: 66). In Smith-Christmas’s (2012: 87) analysis of language use in the second generation of a family in Skye (the parents’ generation) she notes that ‘English was steadily replacing Gaelic as the peer group language by the time the second generation members attended school’ (Smith-Christmas 2012: 87). The oldest participant of second generation in her study would have started school in

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⁴ Will (2012: 185) also found that her two strongly Gaelic-speaking families were also involved in crofting and other traditional activities.
Lamb (2008: 46) outlined geographic variation in the use of Gaelic amongst children in Uist. He explains that Gaelic was no longer the language of the playground in rural North Uist after ‘the generation born in the late 1960s’ but that children continued to have Gaelic as a peer language in Stoneybridge School in South Uist until the 1980s. Although data on this stage of language shift in Gaelic does not provide conclusive detailed evidence, the above studies’ findings provide an indication of the extent of language shift at key points and give a rough indication of the time by which English had become the peer language between children.

Due to the context of ongoing language shift in Barra, Gaelic speakers have to maintain Gaelic use among ever-smaller circles of people and places. The impact of language shift makes socialising children as Gaelic speakers increasingly challenging. Smith-Christmas (2016: 17) writes that her study of a Gaelic-speaking family in Skye is ‘about how one family is trying to swim against the tide of the seemingly impossible force of belonging to a minority culture that speaks a highly endangered language’. The challenges faced by Gaelic-speaking families in Barra are similar to those identified in that study. These families are indeed ‘swimming against the tide’. In what follows, I will discuss the linguistic proficiency and language shift among today’s parents brought up in Barra, before examining how Gaelic language use has changed at a community level.

**Gaelic proficiency in today’s Barra parents**

Parents who took part in this study were born between the late 1970s and the early 1990s. Investigating the Gaelic language socialisation of young children in Barra highlights three important points. Firstly, today’s young children are for the most part the second generation to be mainly socialised as English speakers and to have English as their peer language. Secondly, the intergenerational transmission of Gaelic is no longer feasible for the majority of parents of young children because they are not sufficiently proficient in Gaelic. Thirdly, the small number of today’s parents who maintained Gaelic use with their own parents into adulthood are most likely to be those who use Gaelic with their children.
A clear distinction is often made in Barra amongst older parents (over 30 years old) between those that can speak Gaelic and those that cannot. Claire, a mother from Barra, characterised the situation today amongst her peers brought up in Barra: either you are a competent and confident Gaelic speaker or you have no Gaelic at all. In reality, for people brought up in Barra older than 30 years old, at the time of the fieldwork, most will have at least some Gaelic yet they often report having no Gaelic at all. These people make little use of Gaelic and from Claire’s account it appears that she would not classify such people as speaking Gaelic:

Claire: There are quite a lot [around my husband’s] age that don’t have [Gaelic]. It is what forty. There seems to be the ones that definitely have it all, that have been brought up in the household with it or ones that don’t have, like myself, anything.

An operative distinction exists that relates to the use of Gaelic rather than the ability to speak it. This distinction aligns with my experience of spoken Gaelic during my fieldwork. It must be noted, however, that on numerous occasions it appeared that adults in Barra who were not fluent in Gaelic underestimated what ability they do have in Gaelic. These individuals often appeared to compare themselves to native speakers, who make daily use of the language, rather than in comparison to other adults with no Gaelic.

Claire reported that she speaks no Gaelic while her husband is a fluent speaker. Of the 29 parents in Barra for whom I have data, 17 were brought up in Barra for the majority of their childhood (and one other for part of their childhood). Seven of these individuals maintained Gaelic use into adulthood, three others could be classified as recessive bilinguals – having spoken Gaelic at home as children but now nearly exclusively speaking English – and seven were brought up speaking English. Of the seven parents under 30 only one maintained Gaelic use into adulthood and one other could be classed as a recessive bilingual. Four others reported very little to no competence in Gaelic and one noted that she had sat Higher Gaelic Learners and had a basic knowledge of Gaelic. Of the parents over 30, there were six fluent speakers;

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5 Recessive bilingual – ‘when one language is decreasing, resulting in temporary or permanent language attrition’ (Baker 2011: 4).
three could be classified as recessive bilinguals and two with little to no Gaelic. Three other parents were brought up on the mainland with at least one Gaelic-speaking parent from Barra; all three were also over thirty and two could be classed as recessive bilinguals having been brought up with predominantly Gaelic in the home at a young age, but who no longer use the language regularly. The other parent brought up on the mainland went on to learn Gaelic in high school and then university. She now uses the language daily with her children, her Gaelic-speaking parent and other Gaelic speakers locally.

Parents who experienced reduced use of Gaelic in the home following their early years and described a switch to predominantly English use between themselves and their parents and reported low levels of Gaelic use and confidence. In this situation, confidence as well as competence can also be a contributory factor in the use of English rather than Gaelic with their own children. Ailsa was brought up in Barra with two Gaelic-speaking parents and described how after entering formal education English became increasingly used in her home. Ailsa explained that she felt that her own competence in Gaelic was insufficient to use Gaelic as the primary language between herself and her children: ‘I don’t think mine is good enough’. She views GME as a means of supporting her children’s acquisition and she actively supports their involvement in Gaelic-related activities outside school.

Parents like Alisa, evidence what MacLeod describes as ‘expressions of self-doubt’. These expressions, MacLeod (2008: 217) found, ‘were evident in narratives of Gaelic skills regardless of people’s linguistic history, caused by examination of themselves in relation to others’. Parents such as Ailsa appear to have low confidence in their own abilities in Gaelic as a result of comparing themselves to older Gaelic speakers. Among the older parents involved in the research from Barra that described themselves as having ‘no Gaelic’, it was clear that most do have some competence in the language not only as a result of the level of community use during their upbringing but also with Gaelic instruction at least during secondary education. There was no evidence in Barra, however, of adults in such a situation taking proactive steps to improve their Gaelic and change their language use patterns prior
to or during the fieldwork. On the whole, they view Gaelic as something they either never ‘had’ or no longer ‘have’.

It is often assumed by the older people I met in Barra that where two parents are Gaelic speakers then their children will also be competent Gaelic speakers. Even amongst the parental generation it appears that this assumption was incorrectly made during their childhood. Elaine, who had two Gaelic-speaking parents and was entirely brought up in Barra, recalled having difficulties during her secondary education when she was put into a class for fluent Gaelic speakers. Because both her parents were known to be competent Gaelic speakers, the school had assumed that she would also be proficient in Gaelic when she entered secondary education. Although some Gaelic was used in her home, English was the main language of her socialisation and her ability in Gaelic was insufficient to complete secondary Gaelic assessments as a fluent speaker. On starting at Sgoil Lionacleit in Uist to complete her secondary education, Elaine was allowed to transfer to the Gaelic learners class, which she believed reflected more accurately her ability in Gaelic.

Far fewer younger parents (under 30) in Barra had any Gaelic, just one father was fluent and one a recessive bilingual. Seonaidh, the recessive bilingual, was born in the late 1980s and was brought up in Barra. He attended his local primary school in 1993 rather than Gaelic-medium in Castlebay (which began in 1992). When I asked him what languages he spoke he stated that nowadays ‘English and a little bit of Gaelic’. He had been proficient in Gaelic as a child, having spoken the language in the home and with his grandparents. Describing his upbringing, he recalled that he spoke Gaelic with his parents and grandparents until he was a teenager and from then on has spoken English with these individuals and all others. English was always his peer group language. When he stopped using Gaelic at home his use of Gaelic almost entirely ended. Although he attempts to use some Gaelic with his children, he explained that, this use is mostly limited to common phrases and commands despite the elder children being in Gaelic-medium primary education and being relatively

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6 The secondary school in Benbecula. Secondary pupils from Barra finished their secondary education at Sgoil Lionacleit before the provision at Castlebay School was extended to include secondary 5 and 6 in 1994. Until 1988, young people from Barra went to the Nicolson Institute in Stornoway for S5 and S6.
proficient speakers. Seonaidh described his own and his partner’s (who had learned some Gaelic as an adult) overall ability in Gaelic. He explained that they both ‘have a bit of Gaelic’. Given Seonaidh’s early language socialisation it is likely that his ability in Gaelic is significantly greater than his partner, who had attended night classes for a short period, yet he describes their abilities as comparable.

Claire and her husband, Seonaidh, Elaine, and Ailsa all differ in their Gaelic language ability, their current language use and their experiences of early language socialisation. These parents’ experiences illustrate the range in Gaelic competence of parents in Barra. Examining Gaelic in families with young children in Barra involves understanding the variation in proficiency but overall, low levels of Gaelic use by the parents of young children predominates.

The lived reality
Language shift has changed the use of Gaelic in areas such as Barra. Languages shift changes where and how often people speak Gaelic and how many people they can speak Gaelic to. One noticeable feature is how ‘Gaelic’ events have become increasingly bilingual and less Gaelic. In what follows, I will provide a description of the current role of Gaelic in community life in Barra, beginning with the central institution, the Church.

Mass at St Barr’s Church in Northbay, the main village in the north end of the island where I was staying during my fieldwork, starts at 9.30 every Sunday. The service is generally well attended by older people and families with primary-aged or younger children. I attended the service most weeks and on one particular occasion I drove just over a mile to the church and arrived just as one of our neighbours arrived. We chatted in Gaelic on our way in and picked up a copy of the Bileag and a copy of the Scottish Catholic Observer in the narrow vestibule before we took our seats at the back of the church. The Bileag (leaflet) is the weekly information sheet with details of church services and notices on one side and that week’s readings on the other. Despite its Gaelic name, the Bileag (leaflet) is written in English.

I took a seat next to my neighbour, who then gestured to me to return to the small table I had passed on the way in and pick up a blue sheet. I slipped out of the row,
picked up the sheet and snuck back to my seat. The blue sheet contained the Gaelic responses for the Mass. I was a little surprised. How my neighbour knew the day’s Mass would be in Gaelic, I still do not know. I had only been on the island for a few weeks by this point and on all other occasions the Mass had been in English – sometimes with a Gaelic hymn or two.

The young priest had taken over from an older priest in 2012. Both priests were originally from South Uist. The young priest was not as confident in Gaelic as the older priest and I had never heard him use Gaelic during a Mass before this day. The older priest held Mass in Gaelic regularly, especially during the winter. Even with the older priest, the Mass was often in English during peak holiday times. I had been brought up attending Mass in this very church during my holidays spent in Barra and I had realised that the Mass being in Gaelic was more likely at non-holiday times while English was used almost exclusively in services at Easter or during the summer holidays. I had not attended Mass in Gaelic enough times to learn all the Gaelic responses and so I relied on the blue sheet during the Mass.

The Mass began. The priest welcomed everyone in Gaelic and then in English, before continuing in English. The congregation responded in Gaelic, and although the responses in Gaelic were slightly quieter than the responses had been in English the previous week, it was evident that a good proportion of the congregation knew the responses in Gaelic well. I looked around and only a few others were relying on the blue sheet, as I was. An older woman came down from the choir to do the readings and responsorial psalm, all of which were in Gaelic. Non-Gaelic speakers picked up their Bileag and read the English version printed, as always, on the back. The priest proceeded and read the Gospel in English; the homily was in English, as were the bidding prayers. He did, however, end the bidding prayers by indicating that the congregation should respond in Gaelic by concluding ‘A Thighearna èist rinn’ (Lord hear our prayer) to which the congregation responded in Gaelic. Other parts of the Mass were also in Gaelic, including the Hail Mary and the Our Father.

As the weeks went by I realised that Gaelic was not that regular an event; taking a note each week I could not find any pattern. I learned that when Mass was held in Gaelic it did not always contain the same amount of Gaelic either. For example,
sometimes the Hail Mary was in Gaelic and on other occasions it was in English during a ‘Gaelic’ Mass. The Gaelic Mass was more akin to a bilingual Mass with some parts in Gaelic and others in English. When Mass was in English, however, everything apart from a hymn or two would be in English. The young priest would always happily speak to parishioners in Gaelic outside church. The priest was often away and would usually be replaced at those times by a non-Gaelic speaking priest from the north of England. I was also in Barra from March until September, which included the main holiday times and this may have contributed to the low frequency of Mass being said in Gaelic.

Even with mostly older people in attendance, in the traditionally Gaelic formal domain of the church and in the north of the island (which is often associated more strongly with Gaelic), Gaelic use in church services had diminished to occasional Gaelic-English services. The effects and continuation of language shift are evident as the opportunities to hear and use Gaelic decrease. Gaelic use in church services reflects the reality of increasing number of English monolinguals in the island and the reduced competence or confidence in Gaelic of young people, like the priest. This reduction of Gaelic use during Mass further reduces the opportunities for younger Gaelic speakers to learn Gaelic responses to the Mass or for those looking to improve their Gaelic to listen to it spoken and sung. All these factors increase the challenge of continuing to use Gaelic at such services.

I came to understand that where events in Barra were supposed to be in Gaelic they nearly always contained more English than I had initially anticipated. Additionally, the amount of either Gaelic or English at events could not be predicted. I never experienced more Gaelic used than anticipated. I found that Gaelic names could often obscure the low levels of Gaelic used in an activity, group or organisation. Something having a Gaelic name often had very little to no Gaelic content. My younger cousin returned from school and told our grandparents and myself that they were getting Croitear Òg (‘Young Crofter’) sessions every week in school. He was in the Gaelic-medium stream in Castlebay School. One day I asked if Croitear Òg was in Gaelic. It was not. Despite the project’s Gaelic name and the sessions taking place during the school day and only attended by his Gaelic-medium class (at that specific
time) the sessions were led by a non-Gaelic-speaker and were in English. Although The children were learning about crofting but were doing so in English. Another example is the local newspaper, *Guth Bharraigh*, where Gaelic is mostly confined to phrases in the announcements section such as ‘Mòran taing’ (many thanks) and a half-page section of Gaelic news that appears occasionally and at irregular intervals. In many ways the case of the ‘Bileag’ was a recurring theme.

The reality of language shift in Barra is that few parents have maintained Gaelic use into adulthood. As outlined above, very few parents under 30 years old have acquired enough Gaelic in childhood to be able to transmit the language to their child in the home. The vast majority of these parents under 30 and brought up in Barra are English monolinguals or use English exclusively. Language shift has resulted in island life being increasingly English dominated, with very few spaces where Gaelic is used at a community level. Gaelic use is often confined to conversations with well-known acquaintances or family. Gaelic has become less necessary in daily life in Barra and opportunities for Gaelic use are increasingly restricted.

In what follows, I outline the wider local factors that influence education choice in Barra. I demonstrate how GME is a matter that parents are willing to support and campaign for. This willingness is set, however, against the backdrop of a pervasive belief that the needs of the island are not met by the local authority, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and that attempts to improve Gaelic provision often encounter barriers rather than support. Education and Gaelic form only two of many grounds on which adults in Barra, including parents, engage and dispute matters with the local authority.

**The political context**

Barra is remote from local governance both geographically and politically. The local authority, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (‘the Comhairle’ or ‘Stornoway’ as it is often referred to by islanders) is based over 100 miles away in Stornoway, Isle of Lewis – six islands and two ferry journeys from Barra. There is a pervasive belief among Barra residents that the Comhairle disproportionately underinvests in Barra and continues to enforce unwanted changes to services upon the island. Residents
regularly contest proposals brought forward by the council, the health board (also based in Stornoway) and other bodies.

Four councillors represent Barra, Vatersay, South Uist and Eriskay at local authority level. The only councillor resident in Barra is Cllr Donald Manford who represents the Scottish National Party. He was the councillor for Barra and Vatersay when the first past the post voting system was in place until 2007 and Barra and Vatersay had its own ward with one councillor. He is still regarded by many as Barra’s sole councillor. The ward size increased along with the number of representatives after the introduction of the Single Transferable Vote voting system in the 2007 election.

There are plans to reduce the number of representatives for the South Uist, Eriskay, Barra and Vatersay ward from four to three, a proposal that could see Barra and Vatersay having no resident representative on the Council. A majority of councillors in the local authority stand as independents and are not affiliated to a political party. 24 councillors out of 31 on Comhairle nan Eilean Siar represent wards in Lewis and Harris. These councillors often vote on matters only affecting the southern isles.

A recent example of a service cut affecting only the southern isles was the removal of the Barra to Benbecula plane service in February 2013 (*Stornoway Gazette* 2013). Despite the support to maintain the route from local residents and both the local MP and the MSP, the route between Barra and Benbecula was cut. In his reaction, MP Angus B MacNeil described the cut as ‘a retrograde step’ and raised concerns for the ability of Barra residents to access the Western Isles hospital in Stornoway. The service was popular with tourists and vital for patients from Barra attending appointments and treatment at the ‘Uist and Barra Hospital’ in Benbecula. The service between Barra and Benbecula was cut entirely and the service from Benbecula to Lewis was reduced from five days a week to three. This connection on to Lewis enabled Barra patients to access the ‘Western Isles Hospital’ in Lewis.

Patients from Barra now on the whole attend hospital appointments in Glasgow, a direct hour-long flight from Barra but some continue to make the journey by road and ferry to Lewis for medical consultations and treatment.

Local councillor Donald Manford’s inability to prevent such cuts was not only a result of the votes of the majority of councillors from Lewis and Harris but was also
a result of being outvoted by Uist representatives – some of whom are also meant to represent Barra and Vatersay:

The effective reduction of Stornoway to Benbecula air link and the complete axing of the Benbecula to Barra air link is a retrograde step.

It seems quite amazing that 6 out of 7 councillors from Uist and Barra except Donald Manford voted to cut Air Services for their communities. […] I also hope that this does not lead to a reduction in numbers using the hospital in Stornoway given the Comhairle’s transport cuts. (Angus Brendan MacNeil MP, Stornoway Gazette, February 2013)

In a 2015 BBC Naidheachdan (‘News’) article regarding the current proposal to reduce the number of councillors in the ward from four to three, Donald Manford argued that the proposal reduced the chances of individual islands having a representative living on the island. He questioned how a community could have their views truly represented in such a scenario. In summing up, he broadened his comments to describe the weak local political position of Barra and Vatersay, a position that would be further weakened by the current proposal. He explained that travelling to the local authority headquarters in Lewis takes longer than travelling to the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh, and asked ‘Dè tha ionadail mu dheidhinn sin?’ (What is local about that?) (BBC Naidheachdan 2015).

Donald Manford’s questioning reflects a widely held view in Barra that residents are remote from their local authority and decisions made at local authority level that affect the area. Before 1974, Barra was part of the Inverness-shire and some old enough to remember, including my grandfather, continue to comment that Barra would be better treated had it remained ‘under Inverness’. The overall belief is that the current situation does not serve Barra well. There is widespread scepticism at the actions of the local authority that are believed not to reflect the wishes of people resident in Barra and are not in the island’s best interests.

Issues regarding Gaelic and GME in Barra are often entwined within this broader political context. These concerns regarding the service and decision making at the local authority level influence not only the reaction of islanders to proposals and
decisions but can also strengthen their support for services seen as under threat, an example being the support for remote rural schools, in Barra’s case, Eoligarry School.

**Rural schools**

The local authority have reduced the number of primary schools in Barra and Vatersay from six primary schools in Barra and another in Vatersay to just two. As schools have closed over the second half of the 20th century and into the 21st century (Craigston School closed in summer 2008), the safeguarding of rural schools, such as Eoligarry School, has become a widely discussed local issue. School closures have affected all islands in the Western Isles and have been controversial in other islands and rural areas in Scotland (in Lewis, BBC News 2013; in Shetland, Guardian 2011). There has been a range of reasons given for closures in Barra, including the decline in the school roll of smaller rural schools and the increased ease of transportation for children to schools further away. Ensuring the survival of the remaining rural school, Eoligarry School, has become a significant concern for many – including adults without school-aged children or with school-aged children in other provision. For some this support for Eoligarry School is a priority that influences their considerations regarding school choice.

Strong support for rural schools under threat of closure from the local authority existed prior to the establishment of GME in the Western Isles and has remained an issue throughout its existence. In Roberts’s (1991) research into parental attitudes towards GME, he found that ‘some parental bitterness can be attributed to recent closures’ (Roberts 1991: 260). Parents, who took part in his study from across the Western Isles, were positive about rural schools and many had been involved in campaigns to ensure the survival of these schools.

The main factor that connects rural school closures and GME is the importance of maintaining a sufficient school roll in these schools that are under threat. When parents choose GME instead of a rural school they do not contribute to the rural school’s roll. One of the older people I spoke to in Barra explained that he did not understand how Castlebay was chosen for centralising Gaelic-medium primary provision because rural primary schools such as Eoligarry had been increasingly
including Gaelic in education and were in more strongly Gaelic-speaking areas than Castlebay. Another older person explained that she believed that GME, by only being provided in Castlebay School, had not only resulted in the concentration of pupils in Castlebay but also the concentration of Gaelic teaching and resources there too. These older people believed that following the introduction of GME, the provision of Gaelic in the remaining English-medium schools had reduced.

Considering the impact of GME on Eoligarry School’s roll, however, reveals two important factors that influence school rolls in Barra – firstly, high levels of cross-catchment school attendance, and secondly, the increasing movement of families in the north end south to Castlebay. Education choice at primary level in Barra has resulted in patterns of attendance that cross catchment boundaries in both directions, either pupils from Eoligarry’s catchment attending Gaelic-medium provision in Castlebay or children from Castlebay’s catchment attending Eoligarry School. A large percentage of Eoligarry School’s pupils travel from outwith the catchment area and are sent on the basis of placing requests – I estimated that close to half of all pupils in Eoligarry School during my fieldwork came from Castlebay School’s catchment area. Without pupils from the Castlebay catchment area (Earsary to Grian) attending Eoligarry, the school roll would be very low indeed. If only catchment-area children, including Gaelic-medium educated children, were attending Eoligarry School then the roll is unlikely to be greater than it is currently. Although GME in Castlebay can be viewed as a significant factor in the low school roll at Eoligarry School, in actuality the situation is far more complex.

The depopulation of the north end of the island is another significant contributory factor. There are currently very few children living in the north of the island. Three of the eight villages that make up the catchment area had no primary-aged children by the end of my fieldwork, and a fourth area had only children attending Castlebay School. The general pattern for families moving within the island is that they move south and nearer to Castlebay. Since I conducted the fieldwork, three families have made such a move and one other had moved from the north end to Castlebay shortly before the fieldwork began. Recently, there has been a concentration of activities in Castlebay and an increase in activities for children and young people. The number of
local activities in the north end has reduced in the last decade (old-time dancing is the only regular weekly activity during fieldwork in the north end). There is no early years provision in the north end of the island and transport is not provided for early years education.

The growing number of after-school activities based in Castlebay requires parents to transport their child in order to access the provision. For families with young and school-aged children, both formal education and other activities based in Castlebay make living in the south of the island both attractive and practical. It is a half hour journey from Eoligarry to Castlebay one way and there is very little public transport in Barra. During my fieldwork, the last bus departed Castlebay at 16.25, before many activities finished. The price of fuel in Barra is significantly more expensive than on the mainland (normally 20 pence a litre more expensive) and this increases the financial implications of living in the north end and accessing activities in Castlebay outside of school hours.

Overall, the local support for Eoligarry School is strong and this support can influence decisions regarding education choice, however, many other factors contribute to the decisions made. In what follows, I outline the proposal for ‘Gaelic school’ status to be given to Castlebay School during my fieldwork and how this proposal and the discussions that followed furthered my understanding of GME within the local political context.

‘Gaelic school’ status
During my time in Barra, the local authority announced plans to give ‘Gaelic school’
status to Castlebay School. The proposal, the consultation meeting and discussions with parents that followed gave me a greater insight into parents’ views on GME and their position on developing the provision in Barra. The proposal put forward by the local authority was to grant ‘Gaelic school’ status to ten schools in the Western Isles where more than half of all children were in the Gaelic-medium stream. The proposed ‘Gaelic schools’ would continue to teach children in an English-medium stream and others in a Gaelic-medium stream – as was already the case.

7 I have used ‘Gaelic school’ instead of Gaelic school to try and distinguish between both types of schools.
case. Dedicated Gaelic schools such as those in Glasgow, Inverness, and Edinburgh were not being proposed. The local authority clearly acknowledged following their designation of schools with English-medium streams as ‘Gaelic schools’ that this use of ‘Gaelic school’ was distinct from previous usage and that these new ‘Gaelic schools … unlike previous Gaelic School proposals, would continue to provide English Medium Education’ (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar 2014: 2.5). There are two prior examples of ‘Gaelic schools’ with English streams in the Highland local authority area, both in Skye (Bun-sgoil Stafainn and Bun-sgoil Shlèite).

In the Western Isles, there have in fact been Gaelic schools in the sense that all children in the school were taught in Gaelic and no children in the school were in English-medium education. Stoneybridge School, Eriskay School and more recently Carinish School became standalone Gaelic Schools as a result of falling school rolls and all children enrolled being educated through the medium of Gaelic. In Comhairle nan Eilean Siar’s report which presented the findings from their own research into ‘possible demand for a dedicated Gaelic School,’ in the Western Isles (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar 2009), they state that ‘Stoneybridge School became a Gaelic school, with a Gaelic medium intake only from August 2006’ (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar 2009: 4.2) and in Appendix A of the same report their Gaelic-medium provision is summarised as: ‘Comhairle nan Eilean Siar currently operates Gaelic medium units in 23 schools, and has one dedicated Gaelic school’.

All three schools – Stoneybridge, Eriskay and Carinish – have subsequently closed. The third and most recent example, Carinish School, is notable because parents requested that Carinish School become the standalone Gaelic School for North Uist with no English-medium stream. A formal request was submitted by Comann nam Pàrant Uibhist a Tuath to the local authority in 2006 (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar 2006: 10.1). The proposal was declined. The two main problems identified were that the proposal would require children from the island of Berneray, off the north coast of North Uist, to travel the 20 miles to Gaelic-medium primary in Carinish. This situation, the local authority felt, could deter parents in Berneray from choosing GME. The second issue identified was that those children in English-medium at Carinish School would have to move to Paible School, which might displease the
parents of these children (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar 2006: 10.8, 10.9). Carinish School closed in 2016, along with all other primary schools in North Uist and provision of both GME and English-medium education centralised at a new school built at Paible (STV News 2015). Now all children in North Uist and Berneray travel to Paible for nursery and primary education.

I will examine the campaign for a dedicated Gaelic school in Barra below but the reason that I have outlined this development in North Uist is to illustrate that other parents have also sought the development of GME in the Western Isles and have encountered significant barriers. I found that overall, parents in Barra were supportive of proposals to strengthen GME and many had suggestions themselves of key areas they felt require development. There was, however, a high level of scepticism towards local authority proposals for development and a level of fatigue at the barriers encountered during previous attempts to strengthen GME provision locally. I will return to the ‘Gaelic school’ meeting before examining the campaign for a dedicated Gaelic school.

In June 2014, the Comhairle organised a public meeting to present its proposal to designate Castlebay as a ‘Gaelic school’. There were fourteen people in attendance at the meeting: eleven teachers, and one parent (although some of the teachers are also parents), a councillor from another island, and myself. Barra was the last meeting in the series at the ten schools identified for this change in status. Parents had received information about the meeting from the school through Parentmail but apart from one sentence on the school’s newsletter, published in the Guth Bharraigh some three weeks prior to the meeting, there had been nothing to suggest that anyone apart from parents were invited. Despite the exceptionally low attendance and restricted distribution of information beyond parents, the meeting was recorded as a ‘community conversation’ (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar 2014: 2.3).

The responses of those in attendance mainly concerned GME and education in Barra more generally rather than the current proposal. Gaelic-medium primary teachers highlighted their need for appropriate in-service training and Gaelic-medium assessment materials. A parent described her struggle with the Speech and Language therapist, who, the parent claimed, insisted that she should stop speaking Gaelic to
her child as this is contributing to the child’s language difficulties. Concerns were also raised regarding the provision of GME at secondary level, where no subjects other than Gaelic are available in Gaelic beyond second year, despite four subjects other than Gaelic being taught in Gaelic in the first two years. One parent present took the opportunity to ask if or when Barra would get a new school built. Six new schools have been built or have received major refurbishment in the Western Isles since 2010 under the banner ‘Western Isles Schools Project (WISP)’ (Hebrides Today 2012). Barra is the only major island not to have benefited from this project – a fact that has not gone unnoticed by islanders.

It was apparent from the responses at the meeting that those present felt that the ‘Gaelic school’ status proposed would do little to address the identified needs and weaknesses in education provision in the island and would not increase support for Gaelic. Parents willingly highlighted issues that they believed needed addressed. In discussions with parents following the meeting it became apparent that the low attendance did not reflect a lack of awareness among parents of the meeting or the proposal. Often parents I met subsequent to the meeting commented on the proposal although they themselves were not in attendance. There was a despondence that the proposal was felt to be motivated by a desire to access funding rather than to support Gaelic and GME. As one parent clearly stated: ‘I don’t agree with getting Gaelic money for doing nothing for Gaelic’. Additionally, these parents felt that the council had already come to a conclusion and the views of parents would not influence the outcome of the consultation. It was felt that, as one parent put it, that the result of the consultation was a ‘foregone conclusion,’ and this situation was apparently a common feature of such public consultations.

Following the consultation process, ‘Gaelic school’ status was granted initially to six Comhairle nan Eilean Siar schools including Castlebay School in September 2014 (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar 2014). I came to understand that the low attendance was not a reflection of a lack of interest in Gaelic or strengthening Gaelic-medium provision in Barra but an indication of a lack of interest in this specific proposal coupled with a belief that the proposal would go ahead irrespective of local responses. The attendance was also affected by the fact that numerous consultation
meetings take place every year in Barra on a range of subjects including education, health and transport. Residents often prioritise their attendance at those meetings they feel most strongly about. Gaelic and GME are indeed things that some people in Barra engage with and campaign to be strengthened. This support for meaningful development was evidenced by the insightful comments and questions of those in attendance at the meeting and also in the local campaign for a standalone Gaelic school. In what follows, I will outline this campaign for a dedicated Gaelic school and a campaign for Gaelic physical education instruction.

**A campaign for a standalone Gaelic school in Barra**

Parents in Edinburgh campaigned for 15 years for a stand-alone Gaelic school in the city. Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce opened in 2013. Parents in Barra also sought the establishment of a standalone Gaelic school in 2008. They proposed that GME be based in Eoligarry School and English-medium provision centralised in Castlebay. Had GME been established at Eoligarry School such a development would have resolved the opposition between Eoligarry in the north end and Gaelic-medium provision in Castlebay for families in the north end. A significant proportion of Gaelic-medium educated children already lived within the school’s catchment area at the time of the proposal. The overall numbers in GME in Castlebay were very low and those from the north end made up proportionally more of the total GME roll than would now be the case. Shortly before this proposal, new local authority housing (mainly two and three-bedrooms homes for families) had been built opposite Eoligarry School and more were due to be added to the development.

Eoligarry’s catchment area, in the 2001 Census, was recorded as containing two out of the three most Gaelic-speaking areas on the island – Eoligarry and Bruarnais (Duwe 2005: 12). At the time, the north of the island had the highest proportion of Gaelic-speaking preschool children (Duwe 2005: 14). In 2001, Duwe found that in the Eoligarry and Craigston School catchment areas ‘language maintenance was relatively successful’ with ‘over 80% of parents knowing Gaelic’ (Duwe 2005: 15). In the Castlebay catchment area he found that, despite parental Gaelic proficiency being comparable, the proficiency rates for children of preschool and primary age were significantly lower (Duwe 2005: 15).
It was the local Comann nam Pàrant group that led the campaign for a dedicated Gaelic school in Barra, just as had been the case in North Uist and Edinburgh. One of the parents I interviewed had been involved in the Barra group and gave the following account of their campaign:

Alasdair: I arranged a conference here when I was on Comann nam Pàrant and we were fighting for a Gaelic school. I said to [another parent], I said, ‘we need to have a conference’. So we had a conference about having a Gaelic School and how important it was. And Arthur Cormack came, he came in a fishing boat because the ferry was cancelled, I think. We got an amazing woman from Glasgow. [...] We got the guy from the Glasgow school [who has family in Barra]. Arthur Cormack spoke and that [council official] volunteered to speak, he wasn’t asked to speak and he talked.

So really committed we were you know, and they’ve sapped the life, certainly out of me. They even lie now. I read, it was actually a West Highland Free Press editorial, [the council official] had said at one point ‘oh the parents aren’t interested in a Gaelic school’. Out of all the surveys they did, Barra was significantly in favour of a Gaelic school; and they completely just hid that and lied. And now they are just lying. Parents aren’t interested because parents are exhausted. There is no progressive Gaelic agenda.

This father’s account not only demonstrates the previous actions of parents in support of GME but also how no progress has been made in spite of their endeavour and strong local support for a Gaelic school. The group put forward the proposal, gathered support and organised a conference to provide an opportunity for parents in Barra to hear accounts from those involved in other similar campaigns. Alasdair concluded his account deflated, expressing his view that ‘there is no progressive Gaelic agenda’ on the part of the local authority and that parents have been left ‘exhausted’ by the lack of official support for their efforts to develop GME.

Following a discussion of the closure of Eriskay School and Stoneybridge School in South Uist with Alasdair, he described his view of the local authority’s actions in

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8 Arthur Cormack was the chairperson of Bòrd na Gàidhlig at that time.
closing more schools across the islands and their reluctance to establish dedicated Gaelic schools:

Alasdair: But [the Comhairle] know that if they celebrate ‘we’ve now got a Gaelic school,’ as you know, you can’t close it; you can’t close a Gaelic school. They have a fascist agenda to close schools. Savings are a drop in the ocean that they are making on schools. They could make redundant four senior managers in Stornoway, nobody would notice, and that could save £250,000 a year, which could more than pay for Eoligarry School.

Strong support for a dedicated Gaelic school in Barra from parents was evidenced in the local authority’s own research findings on parental demand for GME (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar 2009a). The report makes a distinction between having a local school designated a Gaelic school, such as Eoligarry School, and having GME provided in a ‘central Gaelic school’ in ‘central locations’, such as Castlebay (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar 2009a: 8.3). The study found a 'high level of return from Barra pre-school parents and the positive response both for designation as a Gaelic school and a central Gaelic school’ (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar 2009a: 8.4). The survey report summarised the Barra findings as follows (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar 2009a: Appendix B):

In the 12 Barra pre-school responses, representing 19 children;

75% indicated that they intend to enrol their children in Gaelic Medium Education;

66.7% wish to make their local school a Gaelic school; and 83.3% support a central Gaelic school.

In the 11 Barra primary school responses, representing 17 children; 90.9% wish to make their local school a Gaelic school; and

100% would be willing to transfer their children to a central Gaelic school.

The percentage of parents wanting their local school to be a Gaelic school or support central Gaelic school was higher in Barra than any other island in the Western Isles.
It was also significantly higher than the Western Isles averages where overall 52.5% for early years and 61.7% for primary wished their local school become a Gaelic school; and 54.1% and 57.5% for early years and primary respectively ‘would be willing to transfer their children to a central Gaelic school’ (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar 2009a: Appendix B).

Following the findings of this report, the local authority commissioned a further report that detailed Gaelic-medium enrolment rates in Barra for 2009/10 and 2010/11. The council recommended that the findings of this report be noted (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar 2010: 3.1). It is does not appear that any further action has been taken with regard to a dedicated Gaelic school in Barra and there was no longer an active campaign for such provision when I was in Barra for this study. The accounts from those involved suggest that momentum within the campaign had been lost. I have tried to ascertain from the local authority what action was taken on their part following the 2010 report but my enquiries have yet to yield any further information.

**Strengthening Gaelic-medium provision**

Even within the current Gaelic-medium provision, parents have requested increased use of Gaelic in the delivery at primary level. Ailsa explained that recently a group of parents had challenged Castlebay School’s use of a non-Gaelic-speaking physical education (PE) teacher for Gaelic-medium primary classes. English was also being used for the weekly swimming instruction and as a result pupils in GME received all their sport instruction in English. Ailsa recalled that following parental enquiries, the school asked parents whether they would like their child to be taught PE by a specialised teacher in English or by the class teacher in Gaelic. A majority of parents chose the option of the class teacher delivering PE in Gaelic and as a result all primary Gaelic-medium children now receive PE in Gaelic. Ailsa welcomed the increase in the amount of Gaelic-medium instruction being delivered each week to her primary-aged children and was happy that other parents had supported the request.

The account of the campaign for a Gaelic school in 2008, parents’ more recent request for the teaching of PE in Gaelic, and the areas for development identified by
parents at the meeting about the ‘Gaelic school’ proposal, demonstrate that GME and Gaelic more generally is an issue that some people are interested in supporting and developing in Barra. The poor attendance at the ‘Gaelic school’ status consultation meeting did not simply reflect an acceptance of the current situation but reflected a lack of interest in this specific proposal, a belief that the decision had already been made and a degree of consultation fatigue. Parents, like Ailsa and Alasdair, would like GME strengthened at all levels and have engaged in campaigning for such developments.

A further factor in education choice in Barra is the lack of clear distinction between the aims and methods of GME compared with Gaelic instruction in English-medium primary education. Examining the perception of GME provision in Barra more specifically, it became evident that the distinction between GME and English-medium with some Gaelic instruction has not been thoroughly established amongst the adult population.

**GME v. English-medium education**

I first became aware of the blurring of the distinction between both forms of provision – GME and some Gaelic provision in English-medium education – when I attended the Barra local mòd in 2011, before this research formally started. The mòd restarted in 2011. For most in Barra this was the first local mòd but some older people recalled previous events, possibly in the 1950s. At a mòd, children and adults compete in Gaelic singing (solo and choral), poetry recitation, story-telling and traditional musical instrument competitions. Local schools are encouraged to enter children for solo competitions and to enter a school Gaelic choir.

In mòd singing competitions there are two judges, one for music and another for Gaelic. The Gaelic judge listens for correct pronunciation and assesses whether the entrant (solo or choir) conveys the meaning of the song successfully through their performance. At some local mòd competitions, choirs with children from GME compete against choirs from English-medium schools or choirs with both GME and English-medium educated pupils. This arrangement often reflects a practical consideration; with very few choirs in total making a distinction would be impractical. In individual competitions, competitors are separated and fluent Gaelic-
speaking and Gaelic-medium educated children compete in separate competitions from Gaelic learners and children in English-medium education.

The re-established local mòd in Barra attracted a good number of entries, including choirs from schools throughout Uist, as well as a choir from both Barra primary schools. The results of the primary school choral competitions were keenly awaited in the large sports hall in Castlebay School. When the results came in Eoligarry School had been placed ahead of Castlebay School, whose choir was mostly made up of children from GME. The winning primary school choir was from Uist but in discussions that followed in the days after the event while I was still in Barra the headline result from the mòd appeared to be that Eoligarry had beaten Castlebay in the choir competition. Not only had Eoligarry been given higher marks overall but also Eoligarry had a higher mark for Gaelic. For some the result was proof that children in Eoligarry School, where children are educated in English, had ‘better’ Gaelic than the children in GME in Castlebay. Yet, the Gaelic mark given to Eoligarry’s choir reflected their performance in the competition on that day and not any child’s communicative competence in Gaelic. Following that day in 2011 and during my fieldwork in 2014 my mind returned to this event and the mixed reaction to the choir result.

The notion that someone can sing well in Gaelic and have little to no conversational ability, I thought, was a familiar one. Yet, the result and the discussions that followed not only highlighted the connection between Gaelic and wider issues such as supporting the survival of a rural school perceived as under threat, but the discussions indicated that there was not a clear understanding of GME, how it worked and the aims of the provision amongst all adults, including parents. This lack of clarity not only has implications for education choice, but also for language use of Gaelic-speaking adults with children in GME. It became clear that parents, apart from those involved in education, had little experience or understanding of how GME worked in practice. Roberts (1991: 267) noted that at the inception of GME in the Western Isles: ‘parents were not clear about the distinction between GME and mainstream bilingual education’. It appears that this lack of clarity has continued for
some parents and other adults where English-medium education is known to provide some Gaelic instruction.

For some, there appears to be a continuing difficulty in assessing the value added by Gaelic immersion education to the linguistic abilities of the children for both families with Gaelic at home and for those with little to no Gaelic. Parents often relied on other means of assessing the strength of both methods – including the views and experiences of fellow parents – rather than research or visiting the school and talking to teachers. Parents with experience of GME or who worked in the provision did not appear to greatly influence views on this topic with their own understanding and experience of the attainment in communicative competence from GME.

The lack of understanding of how immersion education could lead to proficiency in a language not spoken at home is interesting when one considers how many of those over 60 acquired their English language competencies. Older adults in the island entered an English-medium education system with only Gaelic and left primary school competent and literate in English, a system of immersion in all but name. That experience and knowledge does not appear to inform discussions or understandings of GME. For some, why Gaelic-medium primary provision would be preferable to English-medium with some Gaelic is still an unknown, as is the reality of the difference between Gaelic-medium provision and second language provision, especially in terms of linguistic outcomes.

The presence of Gaelic-speaking children in English-medium education further complicates the picture in Barra. Although small in number, there is often at least one family with children who are competent Gaelic speakers through their Gaelic language socialisation in the home and extended family who are in English-medium provision. Some parents in the island made reference to children who had been in such a situation and commented positively on their proficiency in the language in their responses. The Gaelic proficiency of these children is often reported as evidence of the ability of English-medium education to support Gaelic language acquisition.
On a number of occasions, I have been told of how particular children from Eoligarry School had better Gaelic than children in GME in Castlebay. The comparison, however, would be between a child from a Gaelic-speaking home in English-medium education with a child from an English-speaking home in GME. It is not surprising that a child using Gaelic at home with their parents and extended family was regarded as being ‘better’ at speaking Gaelic due to the wide range of opportunities to speak Gaelic that that child would access within the home and family. There appeared to be little awareness that this comparison was unfair. A comparison between children without Gaelic at home in both schools, or between children with Gaelic at home in both schools, would still be problematic but would ultimately be a fairer comparison.

An additional factor in Barra was that not all parents interested in their child learning Gaelic expressed a desire for them to become fluent in Gaelic. Indeed for some parents their child having ‘some’ Gaelic would suffice. Parents interested in ensuring their child had ‘some’ Gaelic felt they had two choices, GME in Castlebay or English-medium education in Eoligarry. In fact, one mother, Elaine, voiced concerns that if the ‘Gaelic school’ status was given to Castlebay School and this led to the strengthening of Gaelic provision in English-medium education then this could have a detrimental impact on GME enrolment in the school. She felt that some parents who currently choose GME would opt for English-medium education if the amount of Gaelic provided in English medium were to increase. For some, the difference between the two options, especially in terms of linguistic outcomes, was not as apparent as I would have anticipated.

An example of the impact of the lack of understanding of immersion education can be found in cases where parents have transferred their child from GME to English-medium education. Linda’s eldest child was initially enrolled in Gaelic-medium nursery education but she subsequently transferred him to the English-medium nursery. Linda explained that she transferred her child out of Gaelic-medium nursery provision based on a fear that the majority of children, including her own child, would not be able to understand directions given to them in Gaelic:
Linda: But then just because he went in and he was just three and my first child and I thought the class size. They were at full capacity so they were at 20 and I’d say about 17 of the children weren’t able to communicate in Gaelic. They didn’t understand what the teachers were trying to say to them and I just felt that he was a wee bit overwhelmed with everything. So I took him out and I moved him to an English class with the same amount of teachers but with only seven kids in the class, because at that point he was with a Gaelic-speaking child-minder.

Despite her child being cared for by a Gaelic-speaking child-minder and hearing Gaelic from his paternal grandmother, she was concerned about the child’s ability to follow instructions in the nursery. This issue is not confined to Barra and it is understandable that a parent may have concerns about their child’s ability to understand instructions in second language immersion education; however, the child’s ultimate transfer from GME to English-medium does highlight the consequences of a lack of clarity and understanding of immersion methods used with young children. There appears to be a failure on the part of providers and the local authority to communicate clearly immersion methods and the child’s experience in such settings in a manner that adequately informs and reassures parents.

In contrast, parents I met in Edinburgh demonstrated a good understanding of how immersion education works, especially in terms of methods used for language learning. They showed awareness of the difference between learning Gaelic in GME and learning Gaelic as an additional language in an English-medium school. Often these parents stated a clear preference for immersion education based on their experience of second-language learning in Scottish education.

Parents in Edinburgh, however, had more clearly identifiable opportunities to learn about and experience GME. Parents who had attended the Cròileagan sessions in Edinburgh had some experience of immersion through the techniques used by play leaders with young children – using only Gaelic and supporting understanding through gesture and demonstration – and experience of the child responding to these instructions. This Gaelic use not only prepared the child but also the parents for GME at nursery and primary level. The methods used in the sessions in Barra differed and were closer to what would be expected in second-language instruction
rather than immersion education. The play leader often gave both Gaelic and English terms of basic vocabulary. Attendance at the sessions in Barra was also very low. For many families in Barra, Gaelic-medium nursery education was their first experience of GME.

In Edinburgh, many parents also visited the school and were introduced to and experienced GME at nursery and primary level for themselves during such visits. There is an acute awareness among Gaelic-medium staff in Edinburgh that parents are unlikely to fully understand immersion education because they have had little to no prior experience of Gaelic. As a result a proactive approach is taken in supporting and reassuring parents and also parents take such a proactive approach themselves to access information and experience GME.

Parents in Barra did not state that they did not know how GME worked or that they wanted to find out more about the provision. Parents do not visit the school to experience or learn about GME. Parents are aware of Gaelic and may have some competence in the language and most attended Castlebay School at some point during their own education. There were no clear opportunities to learn about GME in Barra during my time there. Prior to and during the fieldwork, there had been no Gaelic open days unlike similar events at schools in Lewis and Harris, and some schools on the mainland. The need for opportunities to greater understand GME may be overlooked as a result of the level of Gaelic competence in the community and the lack of parental requests for information. Yet this lack of opportunity and understanding influenced parents’ education choices. It is understandable that introducing parents to the school and giving them a tour of the classrooms would not be suitable for most parents in Barra but allowing them to witness immersion education and to see the range of resources and support available to them is surely appropriate for all parents.

**Edinburgh**

In what follows, I will describe the experience of attending the Cròileagan in Edinburgh in detail. The aim of this description is to illustrate what a typical session involves and the place of Gaelic and GME within these sessions in order to provide an understanding of why parents attend the sessions regularly with their young
children. Following the description of the Cròileagan, I consider how the parents of young children come to attend the sessions and the social role that the sessions play for these families. I then examine how the groups support families in learning Gaelic.

**The Cròileagan**

Màiri, the play leader, greets me as I enter the Cròileagan session in Edinburgh. She hurries back and forth preparing the room for the imminent arrival of many small children and their carers. The door locks itself behind me. I take off my jacket and bag, and place them on the hooks to my right. Large windows run along the opposite wall, facing north to Fife. The familiar sound of the kettles boiling spurs me to help set up and I lift the two large silver flasks for the hot water. I fill them with the boiled water, ready for the adults’ tea and coffee at snack time.

Ten minutes later, the room is ready. The large coloured foam building blocks separate the toys for the very young children from the two tables running along the wall that are now covered with the Cròileagan’s lending libraries. The lending libraries included Gaelic children’s books, story sacks, and DVDs for children, Gaelic learning materials for adults, and CDs of Gaelic singing for adults. The sign-out folders for the resources balanced precariously on top of the overfilled table. A thin layer of artwork from the previous week covers the second table and the session sign-in sheet lies alongside a small plastic bowl with some change – ready for this week’s names and a 50p contribution from each family. In the centre of the room sit another set of small tables with small chairs, one awaiting play dough and cutters and the other table ready for this week’s craft activity. Beyond are the toys: an assortment for older children in the centre; dressing-up clothes to the right; and Gaelic children’s books in the top corner ready and waiting to be read.

Children’s and adult's belongings will soon smother my own. For the children it will be play, circle time (songs and rhymes in Gaelic), a craft activity, followed by some more time to play, snack, more free play and then another round of circle time before home time. For the adults, a moment to draw breath and catch up with other parents, circle time, craft, preparing snack, tea or coffee and biscuits (another moment to catch up with each other’s news), tidy-up time, circle time, and home.
‘Madainn mhath!’ (Good morning). Buggies and scooters parked, jackets off, a contribution to snack placed on the worktop. Time to play with the toys or play dough and relax as we all await the arrival of others. Gaelic singing plays from an iPad on the table as background to the chatter of young and old. As the parents and young children stream in, the play leader keeps an eye out for anyone new to the group. The play leader moves immediately to welcome any newcomers and after allowing them a few minutes to settle in, provides them with information about the sessions and a welcome pack containing the words for the circle-time songs, basic Gaelic vocabulary (and help with pronunciation), and further information about the group and online Gaelic resources. New parents attending for the first time are a regular occurrence in Edinburgh; especially at the sessions held in the Gaelic school.

The Cròileagan in Edinburgh was established in the early 1980s by three Gaelic-speaking mothers living in the city as a way of bringing Gaelic speakers with young children together and supporting each other. The group marked thirty years of supporting Gaelic in families with a large Cròileagan session and party in autumn 2013. From its humble beginnings, the group has developed and now runs six weekly sessions across three locations for over a hundred families. The Cròileagan receives support from the local authority’s Gaelic development officer. Each location has its own Cròileagan parent committee. These committees enable parents to participate in the running and development of the groups. Parents help out during the session by preparing the snack or cleaning up afterwards, helping with craft or returning all the resources to the cupboards at the end of the session. The groups’ play leaders take a leading role in the development of the sessions and choose the weekly topics with Gaelic appropriate for use with young children. Since my fieldwork ended the group has added a blog to its online presence and makes vocabulary, songs and other information available online following each week’s sessions.

The structure in each Cròileagan location in Edinburgh is almost identical and parents attend other locations with little noticeable difference. Most of the play leaders are parents with children in GME and attended the Cròileagan as parents with their own children. During my time there, a number of new play leaders were appointed, all had attended sessions regularly as parents. The parents’ own
attendance could be described as an unofficial apprenticeship for leading the group. Creating a workforce through the parents attending the sessions not only leads to a high level of consistency and continuity across locations but also over time helps to meet a key challenge of GME at all levels, staffing. Play leaders spent time developing new resources, such as the story sacks and ordering the latest books and CDs. In the next section, I consider why parents attend these sessions with their young children.

**A meeting place**

I sat with Sarah and her young child on the soft cushioned mats in the corner of a Cròileagan playroom in Edinburgh. Her child played quietly with the toys spread around us. Sarah recalled first hearing of GME on a television evening news report. Children from GME had been trained as Gaelic tour guides in a project with Historic Scotland at Edinburgh Castle. Sarah was brought up in the Republic of Ireland; she knew about Irish-medium education in Ireland but was unaware of GME in Scotland until this point. Some time later, while looking for a suitable parent-and-child group in her area, Sarah spotted information about the Cròileagan in a booklet that contained details of local groups that had been given to her by her health visitor. A suitable parent-and-child group for Sarah and her young child needed to be within walking distance of their home and on a day and at a time that was suitable – the Cròileagan fitted her requirements.

Sarah explained that although she had studied Irish in school and had further instruction at university level, she was not attracted to the Cròileagan, in the first instance, because of an interest in the Gaelic language. Gaelic was not a decisive factor either in her continued attendance, Sarah explained. Being made welcome at the Cròileagan was a crucial factor. The Cròileagan was the first parent-and-child group Sarah visited and she continued to attend most weeks. Sarah spoke warmly of the welcome she received on her initial visit to the Cròileagan, both from fellow parents and the group’s play leader. In contrast, Sarah recounted the experience of a friend who attended other parent-and-child groups in the area. Her friend felt unwelcome on her first visit to one of these groups and the other parents showed
little interest in conversing with her. Had this been the case on her first visit to the Cròileagan, Sarah stated, she would not have returned.

Sarah was yet to consider nursery or primary education – her child was still under a year old. Based upon her newfound awareness of Gaelic-medium provision, her continued positive experience at the Cròileagan, and her visits to the school by attending Cròileagan sessions within the school, Sarah confirmed that she would actively consider GME for her child, amongst other options. Sarah, however, added that GME would not be considered if they moved a significant distance away from the school; she would not want her child undertaking lengthy bus journeys to and from school each day.

The Cròileagan is an important entry point to GME in Edinburgh. It provides a meeting place for parents, enabling them and others looking after small children to form friendships with people who have children of a similar age and to meet other adults regularly. Parents share their knowledge and give advice to others on a range of matters, mostly, but not exclusively, infant and child-related. Parents establish relationships with other parents, caregivers and the play leaders through their regular attendance. Although there are six sessions per week in Edinburgh, most families attend the same session each week in the same location. There were a few cases where a family attends two sessions a week and on occasion some families attend another session if they are unable to attend their normal weekly session. Some parents had attended their local Cròileagan group for a number of years, initially with an older child and continue to attend or returned with a younger child.

The Cròileagan provides a meeting place not only for Gaelic speakers but a whole range of parents and caregivers in Edinburgh. Just under half of my informants in Edinburgh were not from Scotland and only three were originally from the city. Parents in Edinburgh often only knew the other parents through their involvement in the Gaelic-medium provision and as parents. The play leader encouraged parents to attend ‘Bothan’, a monthly Gaelic singing evening in a city centre pub. A group of parents and the play leaders from different groups attend this social evening regularly. The Cròileagan also organised an annual Christmas dinner for adults who attended all the sessions throughout the city to come together. Rather than purely to
support young children, it became clear that those involved in running the Cròileagan understood its role in supporting parents and this included, but was not confined to, supporting them in learning and using Gaelic.

Learning Gaelic together
In addition to being a meeting place, the Cròileagan sessions provide an opportunity for initial Gaelic language learning for both children and caregivers. Parents take part in the circle-time sessions, singing simple Gaelic children songs, and are taught key phrases and vocabulary relating to the week’s craft topic. A ‘phrase of the week’ taken from the Gaelic4parents website is distributed to all the adults and practised at circle-time. Parents are encouraged to use the phrase at home in the coming week. In addition to a range of language learning materials available in the Cròileagan’s learning libraries, play leaders make announcements about Gaelic classes for adults at sessions and provide information about family learning events such as the Family Week at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig.

Play leaders’ support parents in using Gaelic in the sessions and encourage Gaelic use outwith the sessions. Parents involved in learning Gaelic themselves outline the merits and challenges of the courses during discussions with other adults in attendance. Such discussions introduce others to the range of opportunities available and parents’ own endeavours act as an example to those considering learning Gaelic. Parents involved in learning Gaelic also sought advice from more proficient speakers, or those ahead of them in language learning, at sessions to support their own use. Parents, with the support of play leaders, become examples to each other of Gaelic learning and Gaelic use.

Most parents in Barra know of the other parents with children of a similar age. Fellow parents might also be former school friends, relations, neighbours, or work colleagues. The parent-and-child group does not function as a means of meeting fellow parents with young children in Barra as it does in Edinburgh. Learning Gaelic along with their children rarely featured in Barra and the Gaelic parent-and-child sessions focused on children learning Gaelic. Just two families had parents who had begun learning some Gaelic as adults. In both families, neither parents was enrolled in any courses at the time of the research and they did not mention any plans for
recommencing language learning. Formal opportunities through classes to learn Gaelic beyond the beginners’ stage were not available in Barra. I never encountered any encouragement or support for parents to learn or improve their Gaelic.

Conclusion
The decisions made by parents regarding their child’s education and language socialisation cannot be seen in isolation from the contexts within which these decisions are being made. In this chapter I have outlined a number of important wider contextual factors that influence education choice and language socialisation in both locations.

In Barra, the lived reality of language shift has resulted in today’s children being the second generation of non-vernacular Gaelic-speakers. Their parents’ generation had English as their peer language and the majority of parents under 30 years are monolingual English speakers. The local political context, especially the island’s relationship with the local authority and other organisations based in Stornoway is one that can be best described as strained. Residents engage in campaigning on a whole range of issues including, health, education, and transport. When proposals are seen as having little impact and to be a ‘foregone conclusion’ then engagement with such proposals can be low. Parents have sought the strengthening of GME provision through their proposal for a dedicated school and the parental request for PE in Gaelic.

In Edinburgh, the Cròileagan provides a welcoming social setting for parents with young children. The sessions have a clear structure and parents and caregivers from over a hundred families attend regularly with their children. The sessions support parents in learning and using Gaelic and these parents then become examples to others. Parents with older children in GME play an important role in sharing their experiences and concerns with parents who attend to learn about Gaelic. Other parents simply attend because the group is welcoming and within walking distance of their home. To understand the parents’ involvement in GME it is important to understand the breadth of support that groups like the Cròileagan provide for parents and their young children.
Chapter 2: Choice as a Process

In this and the following two chapters, I will examine in detail the choice of GME in both Edinburgh and Barra. In this chapter, I explore this choice as a process, considered over time, and influenced by a variety of factors. In Chapter 3, I examine how GME in both locations is situated in relation to notions of ‘a good school’ or ‘a good education’ and ‘good parenting’. In Chapter 4, I investigate the influence of parental concerns on education choice and outline the negative consequences of involvement in GME that form an important part of parents’ considerations.

Liam and his wife, Catherine, live in Edinburgh with their two young children. Neither come from Scotland. They speak two languages other than English or Gaelic in the home. Liam speaks the majority language of his country of birth with their two young children (both pre-school age) while Catherine uses the majority language of her own country of birth with their children. They converse with each other in Catherine’s native language. I met Liam in a busy café near his work and some time later I spoke to Catherine at the Cròileagan about their involvement in GME. Catherine regularly attended the sessions with their youngest child. Liam explained that following the birth of their eldest child; they began researching the educational options available to them in Edinburgh. Neither parent had any prior experience of school provision in Scotland. Liam explained that his preferred option for his children’s education would be some form of bilingual or multilingual education, while Catherine had concerns about the local educational provision.

Through a friend in Glasgow, Liam became aware of GME; his friend’s own child attended Sgoil Ghàidhlig Ghlaschu – the Glasgow Gaelic School. A quick online search provided Liam with information about Gaelic-medium provision in Edinburgh. He arranged to visit the Edinburgh school where he and Catherine met the head teacher who gave them a tour of the school and provided them with further information about both the school and GME. The head teacher encouraged Liam and Catherine to attend the Cròileagan with their young children and provided them with the information necessary to do so.
Following the head teacher’s recommendation, Catherine began attending Cròileagan sessions with their children and she continued to attend with their second child after the elder child entered the Gaelic-medium nursery at Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce. Liam explained that the Cròileagan was ‘definitely helpful’ in allaying a number of Catherine’s concerns regarding GME. Liam stated that ‘[the Cròileagan] is how I managed to convince her too’. Catherine’s account confirmed the important role played by the Cròileagan in allaying her initial concerns regarding GME:

Catherine: At the beginning we had no idea and honestly for me it was a bit [of a] strange idea. For my husband he was always sure about this, I wasn’t. When I joined the Cròileagan, when I met other people, it helped. […] I think because of Cròileagan I was sure about this.

The Cròileagan groups can also prove crucial in supporting a family’s active consideration of GME at nursery and primary level. Liam and Catherine were actively considering education choice and their route to the Cròileagan was paved by encouragement and information from the head teacher.

As outlined in Chapter 1, Sarah clearly sought a welcoming parent-and-child group for herself and her young child and unlike Liam and Catherine had no initial interest in the language component of the groups. The social support provided by the Cròileagan groups can be important in a family’s continued involvement, whether parents attend to consider GME or not. In both Liam’s and also Sarah’s accounts, we see that Gaelic may not be an initial motivating factor for involvement in GME. Sarah’s interest was predominantly social in nature, while Liam’s main interest was some form of bilingual education (although he was interested in Celtic languages) and Catherine believed that other educational options should be considered because their local schools were not ‘good’. In his family, Liam was the main instigator of involvement in GME while Catherine needed to be convinced.

In this chapter, I will set out how parents engage in a process of considering and choosing GME over time. Whilst researching GME, parents reflect upon their own and others’ views and concerns. They encounter and overcome challenges and new considerations arise. Viewing the choice of GME as a process not only introduces a diachronic perspective, not evidenced in previous research, but also allows us to
explore the many ways in which their choice can be and often is influenced by the context in which it is made, by the people encountered, and by the views aired. Building on previous research that has identified and categorised the reasons given by parents for choosing GME, in this chapter I argue that the choice of GME should be viewed as a process and not a decision made at one point in time based on identifiable motivational factors. Throughout this chapter, I outline this process of choice in both field sites and identify key local factors that contribute to specific aspects of the process.

The initial stage of education choice pertains to the identification of options based on an overall awareness of choice. The two key factors that parents must be aware of in order to consider GME are that parents can choose a school other than their local non-denominational primary school and that GME exists locally. Parents can then identify options for consideration and may include GME as an option. The second stage in the process of choice involves a period of engagement with identified options. During this stage, the experiences of the school and the support received from staff and the experiences of other parents make a notable contribution to parents’ views on the appropriateness of the provision for their family. The third stage of the process involves parents making decisions to formally enrol their child in GME or another form of education. This decision-making process involves negotiation between parents and thereafter reflecting on the views expressed by extended family, friends and other acquaintances. Finally, the process of education choice continues beyond enrolment or attendance at such provision. One stage might be used for the active consideration of another, while new considerations and challenges can result in parents reconsidering their choice. In some instances parents remove their child from the education provision initially chosen including from GME and transfer them to English-medium education within the same school or in another school. Before examining the choice of GME in more detail, I will first outline the context of choice in Scottish education.

**Choice in Scottish education**

Parents in Scotland have the right to request a place for their child in a school other than their designated catchment school(s) and the local authority must inform them
of this right when they are due to enrol their child for primary or secondary education (Scottish Government 2010: Part 2, Section 1). If parents in either Edinburgh or Barra would like to enrol their child in another school outwith their catchment area then they must make a formal request to their local authority to enrol their child in a non-catchment school (Scottish Government 2010: Part 2, Section 1). Parents can express a desire for their child to attend a non-designated school right up until the school leaving age. As previously outlined, City of Edinburgh Council assigns addresses in the capital two local catchment schools for both primary and secondary – one non-denominational school and one Roman Catholic (City of Edinburgh Council 2016a). Parents of children living in the City of Edinburgh, East Lothian, West Lothian and Midlothian local authority areas may enrol their child in GME, currently provided at Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce (City of Edinburgh Council 2016b).

In Barra, all children have Castlebay School as their catchment school for both English-medium and GME apart from those resident in the eight townships that make up the catchment area for Eoligarry School – Bolnabodach, Bruernish, Bogach, Northbay, Bayherivagh, Ardveenish, Ardmhor and Eoligarry. Children resident in these townships have Eoligarry School as their catchment school for English-medium primary education and Castlebay School for Gaelic (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar 2015). There are no denominational local authority schools in the Western Isles.

The parental right to request a place in a non-catchment school and the resultant requirements placed upon local authorities were introduced in the Education (Scotland) Act 1981. The development of choice for parents within local authority provision in Scotland can be traced to the Education (Scotland) Act 1945 (O’Hanlon & Paterson 2015: 313). Parents made decisions regarding their child’s education before the 1981 Act and local authorities generally allowed children to be enrolled in a non-catchment school if the placement did not require extra staffing or space (Adler et al. 1989: 17). The 1981 legislation, however, did have significant consequences for local authorities as Alder et al. (1989) point out. The legislation restricted the local authority’s ability to ‘manage school enrolment’ (Adler et al. 1989: 23). The parental right to request a place in a non-catchment school was introduced by the Conservative government in a move that Adler et al. (1989: 31)
describe as political in motive and that did not reflect a parental desire for such a development:

The Conservatives’ adoption of parental choice was not a direct response to complaints or demands from parents. Nor was it the product of the activities of pressure groups. Nor, at least initially, was it seen as a remedy for declining standards in education. Instead it was a skilful exploitation of many concerns that would draw support to parental choice and the Conservative Party (Adler et al. 1989: 31).

The Education (Scotland) Act 1981 followed the Education Act 1980 in England and Wales but the legislation for Scotland was not identical, in fact, it was ‘in a somewhat different and rather stronger form’ (Adler et al. 1989: 3). The political context of this development did not impede the widespread acceptance of parental choice in Scottish education:

Parental choice rapidly became an accepted principle throughout Scottish education (despite the origins of the policy with the increasingly unpopular Conservative government) (O’Hanlon & Paterson 2015: 313).

In addition to the provisions for parental choice that were strengthened in the 1980 Act, the act also brought forward the duty placed upon education authorities to make ‘adequate provision’ for ‘the teaching of Gaelic in Gaelic-speaking areas’ from the 1945 Act (O’Hanlon & Paterson 2015: 313). Another important aspect of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 for the development of Gaelic-medium education was Section 28, which stated that as a general principle ‘pupils to be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents’. Parents have been able to utilise this general principle as leverage in campaigns for the establishment of local Gaelic-medium provision.

Parents who choose GME are making a choice within the wider context of education choice in Scotland. All parents in Scotland must choose and formally register their child in education or register their child as being home-schooled. Some parents choose GME, which is available as an education choice at the nursery and primary education stage in both areas. In what follows, I will assess the process of education choice and formally registering a child in GME provision.
The Stages of Choice

The starting point of the process of education choice varies for different families. For some parents considering their child’s education begins before the child is born, for others it occurs following the birth of their first child, and for others it commences nearer the enrolment deadline for nursery or primary education. When parents move from one location to another, then this process could begin afresh or considerations already taken into account transferred to the new location. In the case of GME some parents reported awareness of its existence before starting their consideration of education choice while others have considered other forms of provision first, even enrolling their child in that provision, before becoming aware of GME.

The process of choosing GME begins with parents becoming aware of its provision in their area and identifying GME as one of the educational options they will consider. In Edinburgh, parents are often unaware of GME until after the birth of their first child. During discussions with parents and other adults in Barra, it became evident that there is widespread awareness of the existence of GME at nursery and primary level amongst all adults. Parents in Barra struggled to recall becoming aware of GME locally or in Scotland more generally. This was not the case in Edinburgh, where many parents clearly recalled when and how they learned about GME provision in the city.

Sources of awareness

Key sources of initial awareness of GME in Edinburgh were other parents, local events and coverage of GME in the media. Previous studies into GME choice have identified ‘word of mouth’ as the main source of awareness of GME (Stephen et al. 2010: 54; McLeod and O’Rourke 2015: 14; Young 2016: 23). Parents cited neighbours, family, friends, and work colleagues who provided them with information initially. In some cases, parents know that GME is available at one stage – often primary – but are not fully aware of the range of provision available across educational stages, especially informal provision such as Cròileagan. Other parents play a central role in promoting Gaelic-medium education to fellow parents. Parents of children already attending GME were a key source of initial awareness. Parents direct other parents to a range of provision, resources and support, and can provide
the information required to access the provision. Awareness of GME through signage or media coverage led some parents to further investigate Gaelic-medium provision locally but was insufficient in providing the necessary detail required to engage with GME.

Martin, an Irish-speaking parent in Edinburgh, explained that he learned about the Cròileagan through another parent who led the National Childbirth Trust (NCT) antenatal classes he attended. He already had some awareness of GME at primary level because he lived near Tollcross Primary School (Bun-sgoil Crois na Cìse) and had spotted their Gaelic sign:

Martin: I think I was vaguely aware of its existence because we lived locally and saw the fact that the Bun-sgoil Crois na Cìse was there and had signs bilingually so that made me aware of it. Finding out about the Cròileagan then was from talking to a parent who, when we were going to NCT classes, the women who gave the NCT classes had kids going to Bun-Sgoil Crois na Cìse.

The recommendation of other parents not only increases awareness of the Cròileagan and the existence of GME more generally, but it also provides encouragement to other parents to consider GME and highlights the positive reputation of the provision. Another parent in Edinburgh, Sophie, recalled finding out about the Cròileagan through a recommendation from another parent. The Gaelic nature of the group was not an attractive feature, initially, for Sophie. Her friend had even reassured her not to ‘worry’ about the Gaelic content of the sessions:

Sophie: Somebody said there is a fab Gaelic playgroup and you must come to it but don’t worry it is in Gaelic because there isn’t that much Gaelic so it is all fine. And we started coming along when my eldest was a baby and he is now five and he is about to start GME at [Taobh na Pàirce].

Following her attendance at the group, Sophie began learning Gaelic through a distance-learning course and, as indicated above, enrolled her child for Gaelic-medium primary education. Recommendations from other parents give those new to GME encouragement but also confidence that involvement can be a positive experience for their family also.
Another source of initial information for parents in Edinburgh came from the Cròileagan’s presence at local events popular with families. The Cròileagan held stalls at community events such as the Leith Festival Gala day and the Meadows Festival. At their stall, play leaders and parents distribute information about the groups and GME provision in the city, providing parents new to GME with an opportunity to meet other families already involved. Small information cards about the Cròileagan groups are also available in local libraries near session locations. Two parents I spoke to had learned about the Cròileagan and GME at local festivals and two others through the small information cards in their local libraries.

Some parents became aware of GME quite late on in their considerations of their child’s early education, including following their child’s enrolment in an English-medium nursery or primary school. As a consequence, children may be enrolled in and attending English-medium nursery or primary school education before their parents begin to consider or reach a decision about GME. Other parents were aware of GME before their child started nursery education but enrolled their child in English-medium nursery provision while they continued to consider GME for primary alongside another English-medium option. Entry into GME post primary one is rare. In some cases, parents take a considerable amount of time considering GME after becoming aware of its existence and there had recently been cases in Edinburgh of children repeating primary one in GME having completed primary one in English-medium education following a late decision. This type of situation was uncommon.

When parents decide to introduce their eldest child to Gaelic they most often also introduce all of their younger children at the same point. For example, Aileen, a mother in Edinburgh, learned of GME while her eldest child was in nursery. When space became available in the nursery at Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce, she moved her child to the nursery and began attending Cròileagan with her younger children. Another mother in Edinburgh, Aileen, explained that they only became aware of the Gaelic-medium provision through another family with a child in her daughter’s English-medium nursery; this child was enrolled in GME for primary education but would attend nursery in an English-medium setting. On hearing about the provision, Aileen and her partner then decided to consider GME for their own daughter. While
researching GME at primary level they came across information about the Cròileagan. After some consideration, their eldest child was enrolled in Gaelic-medium provision at primary level, while Aileen and her youngest child started attending the Cròileagan regularly. The youngest child then entered Gaelic-medium nursery education following her third birthday. Aileen’s younger child would attend two years of Gaelic-medium nursery provision while her elder child entered GME primary education from English-medium nursery.

Parents display a high degree of continuity in education choice across their children. Subsequent children nearly always followed the choice made for an older child whether that was an initial choice or a change that resulted in a transfer from one provision to another for the older child. Relatively late decision-making or changes in education choice can contribute significantly to differences in involvement in GME and Gaelic language socialisation across siblings.

When parents have identified GME as an option they are going to consider in more depth then in Edinburgh, they are actively encouraged to take up Gaelic educational opportunities and given information on where to access these opportunities. The head teacher actively encourages parents who enrol their child in Gaelic-medium primary education but who were currently attending English-medium nursery provision to move to sessions in the Gaelic-medium nursery, where capacity allows:

Ceannard, Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce: Bidh sinn a’ feuchainn ri grèim fhaighinn orra aig ire a’ Chròileagan no ire na Sgoil-Àraich. Ach nuair a bhios iad a’ clàradh sòn clas a h-aon anns an t-Samhain, mur eil iad anns an Sgoil-Àraich, bidh mise ag ràdh riutha, ma bhios beàrnan ann, ‘carson nach tig sibh airson seiseanan dhan Sgoil-Àraich cuideachd?’ oir tha sin cudromach. Tha sin cudromach ann an iomadh dòigh. Tha e cudromach a thaobh cànan ach cuideachd tha e a’ ciallachadh gu bheil a’ chlann eòlach air daoine eile nuair a thòisicheas iad ann an clas a h-aon.

Head teacher, Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce: We try and get a hold of them at the Cròileagan stage or nursery stage but when they register for primary one in November, if they aren’t in the nursery then we say to [the parents] if spaces become available ‘why don’t they come to the [Gaelic-medium] nursery as well?’ because it is important. It is
important in many ways. It is important in terms of language but also it also means that children get to know other people before they start in primary one.

The result of parents learning about GME when their child is close to entering primary education or when parents take a significant amount of time to consider the provision is that children are introduced to Gaelic at a range of different points in their own development. This difference contributes to the variation in exposure that young children have to Gaelic before entering primary education and also to the variation in parents’ experience of GME and their awareness of the support and resources available.

In contrast to the situation in Edinburgh, all parents and people living in Barra appeared to know that GME exists and that the provision in Barra is located in Castlebay School. With only two primary schools in Barra the education options are not only much reduced but are also more visible than in Edinburgh. The local Gaelic parent-and-child sessions, Clann Trang, are advertised regularly in the local paper and on the Barra Children’s Centre Facebook page – a page followed by and frequently consulted by parents of young children on the island. Overall, awareness of Gaelic-medium nursery and primary being available alongside English-medium provision at Castlebay School is high and no parents reported only finding out about the provision when their child was of nursery age.

In Edinburgh, the way in which parents learn about GME often serves as a means of facilitating access to relevant information and provides opportunities for meeting other parents with children in GME. Although parents are aware of Gaelic-medium provision in Barra, parents had few identifiable opportunities to meet and discuss how GME works or to access resources or information about the support available to parents. The one occasion I spotted information on GME being available at a stall was as part of information tables at the Barra local mòd in the years before the fieldwork. Elaine, explained that similar stalls with information had been set up in the school on the day that she attended to enrol her youngest child for English-medium education primary education. A representative from Stòrlann gave her information on the resources available to parents with children in GME and it was at this point that she learned of their Gaelic4Parents site.
Additionally, parents in Barra would be unlikely to consider arranging a visit to the school to meet staff and familiarise themselves with the school. 19 out of 29 parents in this research attended Castlebay School themselves, at least at secondary level. Community events also take place in the school throughout the year including weddings and cèilidhs. The school staff are well known in the community and by other parents. As outlined in Chapter 1, one reason that the Cròileagan in Edinburgh differs from the Clann Trang group in Barra was because parents already know other parents; the parent-and-child group did not play a social role for adults to the same extent in Barra as it did in Edinburgh. Although awareness of the existence of GME in Barra was high, the opportunities to gain a greater understanding of how GME works in terms of the methods used in immersion education along with the support and resources available for families appeared to be lacking.

**Researching choice**

Once parents have identified options for nursery and or primary education choice then they may spend a considerable amount of time researching and experiencing these options. For many parents during this time they engage with the provision by visiting the school, attending school events and actively seeking opportunities to meet other parents with children already in the school. Parents may also read academic literature and other written information about GME. This period of consideration allows parents time to familiarise themselves with provision at different stages and identify the positive and negative implications of the choice for their family. Over time, this proactive engagement forms a knowledge base from which parents can make decisions about their child’s education and their involvement in GME.

For many parents in Edinburgh this research period began with a visit to the school, as it did for Liam and Catherine. A positive experience of the school and of the head teacher can confirm the identification of the school as an option for further deliberation and be the first step in parents’ consideration of involvement in GME. I should point out, however, that I spoke mainly with families who were considering GME in this research. I am therefore not suggesting that all parents who visit the school or begin to research GME decide to enrol their child in GME but all the
accounts I heard of a school visit in Edinburgh were positive. The views represented in this study, especially in Edinburgh, on the whole came from parents who have had a positive initial experience of the school and GME.

Just as other parents play a crucial role in increasing awareness of Gaelic-medium provision, fellow parents and GME staff play a vital role in parents’ continued consideration of GME, especially in allaying fears and providing support and information. In Edinburgh, the head teacher, nursery staff, and the Cròileagan play leaders maintain an approachable channel for questions and concerns regarding GME. Some parents emphasised, however, that rather than rely solely on information from staff employed in GME, information available online or on academic research, speaking to other parents about their first hand experiences of GME would play a primary role in their considerations.

Moira, a mother in Edinburgh, clearly explained that she attended the Cròileagan to meet other parents before deciding on GME for her own children. Moira had visited the school and met the head teacher early on in her consideration of GME. Although the visit was a positive experience, she explained that the visit was insufficient in itself. Moira wanted to speak to other parents with children in GME about their experiences. The head teacher informed her about the Cròileagan and explained that this would afford her the opportunity to meet other parents and find out about their experiences of GME. Following her discussions with other parents, her experience of the school and the Cròileagan, and her own research, she enrolled her eldest child in GME and continued to attend the Cròileagan with her younger children.

Play leaders and other parents with older children attending formal Gaelic-medium provision regularly answered a range of questions from parents new to GME during Cròileagan sessions. Inquiries from parents often focused on practical aspects of involvement such as transport, the structure of the school day, and questions relating to education, such as class sizes and the use of composite classes. Questions were relatively simple and most play leaders and parents with older children in GME were well placed to answer them. Cròileagan play leaders and other parents answered questions openly and highlighted both positive and negative aspects of involvement in GME. On the whole their experiences had been positive; however, difficulties and
concerns had risen and were shared, often alongside the means by which parents overcame these or details of the support received. Parents new to GME expressed their appreciation of this openness and the rounded picture provided by parents and play leaders with older children already involved in GME. The experiences of other families can have a pivotal role in the considerations of parents regarding their own child’s education.

In terms of awareness of research, the most-cited research in parents’ discussions was O’Hanlon et al. (2010) ‘GME in Scotland: choice and attainment at the primary and early secondary school stages’. This research, especially the findings regarding attainment in GME, appears to be fairly well known amongst parents in Edinburgh who were involved in or considering GME. Parents informed other parents about the research in discussions regarding the provision. It was often unclear as to whether or not parents had read the research themselves or had just become aware of it through discussions with other parents. Additionally, at the invitation of the head teacher, Dr Fiona O’Hanlon gave a short presentation on her research to the parents of all children entering primary one at Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce in Edinburgh in August 2013. In Barra, there was also some knowledge of such research; one family in particular were well informed and mentioned this specific research. In other families where one parent worked in GME, an awareness of research into attainment in GME was also demonstrated.

The way in which parents become aware of GME can influence their ability to access further information and experience the provision. The mechanisms for distributing research findings and supporting parents in considering Gaelic-medium provision were less defined in Barra. The Cròileagan sessions in Barra differed markedly from those in Edinburgh and were not utilised as a means of discussing GME options with other parents who had more experience. During my fieldwork, there were only a small number of children who regularly attended the sessions in Barra and on some occasions the majority were there under the care of an adult other than their parent. Parents who were in attendance often either had no older children in formal education or had children attending English-medium nursery or primary education. The play leader was not a parent, although had attended GME as a child.
sessions in Barra introduced children – and parents to a lesser extent – to basic
Gaelic and Gaelic songs for children rather than GME. Although the sessions in
Edinburgh also focused on learning and singing Gaelic with young children
discussions about GME between adults present seemed to be a natural by-product of
the experiences of parents in attendance and the reasons for some for attending. As
far as I could establish, parents were not directed to the parent-and-child group for
information on GME. Parents did not attend with the purpose of learning more about
GME or to meet other parents with children in GME. It appeared that they primarily
attended a playgroup that had some Gaelic spoken and sung.

In this study, in many ways parents in Edinburgh appeared more proactive in
researching education options. They had more identifiable opportunities to learn
about GME. These parents began this process with less awareness of GME on the
whole and therefore their need to research and access support was more apparent.
The social context in Barra differs; parents are familiar not only with the existence of
GME provision but also with the school buildings and staff and would be unlikely to
arrange a visit to see the school. The need to research the educational options and the
support for doing so in Barra was not as apparent as was the case in Edinburgh. This
finding has implications for parents’ lasting understanding of the methods and
outcomes of GME and the resources and support available to them. Not only can this
situation impact upon their initial education choice but also whether the choice made
is reconsidered in the future.

**Decision-making**

Like a whole range of other decisions made by parents about a child’s life, the choice
of GME requires a level of agreement between a child’s parents (where both are
involved in decision-making). Following the initial identification of GME as an
option, a period of negotiation may ensue between parents in order to achieve a
suitable level of agreement. It is also often the case that others – extended family,
friends, and even fleeting acquaintances – query the options being considered. In the
following section, I examine how the choice of GME is negotiated between a child’s
parents and how the views and concerns raised by extended family, friends and
others influence GME choice.
Parents must decide which nursery or school they would like their child to attend and formally apply for a place at that nursery or school, unless their child is being homeschooled. To register for a place at a nursery run by a local authority in Scotland, parents must complete a form and return it to the chosen nursery following their child’s second birthday. In most cases, children in Scotland begin nursery at the start of the school term that follows their third birthday at one of the three entry points (August, January and April). At primary level, parents are required to go to their chosen school and enrol their child on specific dates in the academic year before their child is due to start primary education. All parents wanting their child to attend local authority-run provision must act at these specific junctures and therefore come to a formal decision about where to enrol their child. A level of agreement is necessary for parents to act and enrol their children in a nursery or school.

Eilidh outlined her experience of coming to a decision regarding primary school enrolment. Eilidh had been living in Edinburgh for over 10 years when we met. She had a small amount of Gaelic from her childhood holidays spent with Gaelic-speaking relations in the Western Isles. Brought up in Argyll, Eilidh learned Gaelic songs at primary school and had sung with the school choir at the local mòd. Her friend’s children attended GME and that family’s positive experience along with her own Gaelic heritage prompted her initial interest in GME. Eilidh and her son had only attended a few Cròileagan sessions in Corstorphine but they did not attend regularly. Eilidh and her husband enrolled their child for Gaelic-medium nursery before the child’s third birthday.

Although Eilidh’s 4-year-old son was in his second year of Gaelic-medium nursery education when I spoke to her, she explained that his enrolment in the nursery did not reflect a definite decision to send him to Taobh na Pàirce for primary education. Instead, his attendance at Gaelic-medium nursery provided herself, her husband, and their child, with an opportunity to experience GME and consider it as an option for primary education. Eilidh conveyed that both her husband and herself continued to have reservations regarding GME at primary level. Her concerns primarily regarded her son’s ability to understand instructions in Gaelic in primary education – especially during the early stages of immersion education. Her son’s experience of
Gaelic-medium instruction in nursery eased some of Eilidh’s concerns in this regard. Eilidh now felt that she had definitely decided that GME would be her choice for her son’s primary education:

Eilidh: Probably after the first year of nursery I decided definitely. I thought that he probably would before that but after he had been in a year and I [had] seen how much he was picking it up. Aye, I’d say aye after a year at nursery I’d made a definite decision.

Eilidh described her understanding of her husband’s views on GME. He was originally from the east coast of Scotland and did not have any family connections to Gaelic speakers or Gaelic-speaking areas. He had little interest in or experience of the Gaelic language or GME. Eilidh contrasted her present certain position on primary education with her husband’s continued but lessening uncertainty. She believed that her husband was becoming more inclined to support her view because their son had started using some Gaelic at home:

Eilidh: I’m 100% on it but [my husband] is probably about 75% on it to be honest. […] But I would say in the last two months [he] has come, he was only 50% at the start of this term but in the last months he has definitely gone up a lot because [our son] has started to speak Gaelic in the home as well and tell his dad in books, Gaelic books what things say. I think he is seeing the benefits of it already and he is not even in school yet. He is just in nursery.

Parents like Eilidh and her husband utilise the nursery experience to support their ongoing consideration of Gaelic medium for primary education. The process of choice does not necessarily proceed at an equal pace for both parents and both parents are not always interested in the GME to the same extent. Despite the fact that Eilidh and the child’s father would soon enrol their child for primary education, and ultimately enrolled their son in Gaelic-medium primary education, she was aware that her husband was still not fully convinced that GME was the most suitable option for their child.

Engaging in researching and experiencing GME for themselves enables parents to progress individually in their considerations. Different aspects of their experience
incline parents towards or away from GME. For Eilidh, the Cròileagan was not as influential in her involvement in GME as it had been for Liam’s wife Catherine, for instance. Catherine foregrounded the importance of meeting other parents at the Cròileagan and maintained regular attendance at the sessions as a consequence. For Eilidh, her child’s experience of the nursery proved influential, especially when he demonstrated productive abilities in Gaelic at home. Other parents in both Barra and Edinburgh looked to their child to produce Gaelic at home as a supporting factor in their consideration of GME. Seeking evidence of spoken Gaelic from a child, as part of considerations of GME often gave little consideration to the little amount of input the child had received in Gaelic to date (this issue will be further examined in Chapter 4).

Another mother in Edinburgh, Maria clearly outlined that she had started learning Gaelic at evening classes because her son, who was in nursery at the time, was increasingly using Gaelic words that she did not know at home (she was a fluent Irish speaker). Her son was due to enter Gaelic-medium primary education the following summer and Maria wanted to be able to support him with homework and had become increasingly aware that her knowledge of Irish would not suffice:

Maria: But I’ve signed up mainly because, I’ve kind of come to the stage where [my son] is coming home with loads and loads of new words and I can figure out some of it to a certain extent but then there are other words I can’t because they are just too different from Irish. It is not really of an issue while he is in nursery but once he starts primary school I’d like to be able to help him with his homework.

Both Eilidh and Maria’s accounts highlight a shift in parents’ concerns from nursery to primary education. Parents have increased concerns regarding attainment in primary school education compared to nursery education. Parents’ concerns for nursery often focused on their child being ‘happy and settled’ but their concerns developed to incorporate academic concerns at primary level.

The decision made by parents to enrol in one stage of GME can be seen as part of a broader process of engagement before considering GME at the next stage. Parents’ experiences and considerations are tied to their reservations and their desire to be
able to support their child. Although a decision regarding enrolment in formal education must be made, the process of choice can and often does continue beyond this point.

**Choice as contested**

Educational choices, and specifically the choice of GME, are not immune from the comment or scrutiny that other parental choices can receive. Nearly all parents in Edinburgh and some parents in Barra recalled instances where others had questioned their consideration or involvement in GME. Parents in Edinburgh gave a variety of examples of such instances, from discussions with close family members to passing encounters with taxi-drivers. The degree to which the choice of GME is contested varies depending on the context in which parents make the decision and parents’ level of Gaelic. Parents that reported their involvement being contested least were Gaelic speakers and it was mostly parents in Edinburgh that reported receiving negative comments.

When parents are faced with concerns, questions and comments from close family members, it was often the case that they proactively provided information and attempted to allay fears. Parents provide detailed information about GME and explained their specific reasons for involvement if such individuals raised concerns. Parents’ accounts of their responses to acquaintances or people met in passing encounters were less proactive in nature, often avoiding discussions entirely by anticipating a negative reaction and not mentioning GME or agreeing to hold differing views. Responding to concerns raised by others forms part of the process of choosing GME, especially for parents in Edinburgh and most parents could clearly recall such incidents.

The ways in which parents’ engagement is contested can be viewed under three broad categories. The first category of concerns can be summarised as expressions of concern for the child. Most often this involves concern for the child’s educational attainment or their acquisition of English. The additional language in GME is perceived as an added ‘burden’ unduly placed upon the child. The second set of comments involve questioning the utility of Gaelic, as opposed to a majority language such as French, German, or Mandarin, with Gaelic viewed as a ‘dying
language’. This view clearly articulates a belief that some languages are more useful than others. The third overarching theme that can be identified is the connection of GME provision with other local educational issues. Thus suggesting that GME is either contributing to local issues such as school closures or lack of school places, or is a distraction from dealing with local educational issues. Parents in both Edinburgh and Barra described instances that could be categorised under these three overarching themes.

Gaining approval from grandparents for the education choice made for their grandchild was an important consideration for some parents. In order to alleviate the concerns of grandparents and other family members, parents utilise their own recently gained experience and knowledge of GME. For some grandparents, their initial concerns were overcome with a little time spent considering GME, as Anna, a mother in Edinburgh indicated: ‘Mum had to go away and think about it and then was really excited’. For others, like Lucy in Barra, informing grandparents of the research and information she had acquired was sufficient in allaying her mother’s initial concerns: ‘I know [that my mother] was just worried about their progress in English so I just had to tell her all the statistics’.

Grandparents and other family or friends noted a concern for attainment, specifically in the English language. Families in Edinburgh who use a language other than English or Gaelic in the home noted concern from others for their child’s acquisition of English. Maria recalls her own mother’s concern for her child’s acquisition of English because Maria’s family use a language other than English or Gaelic in the home. The secretary at her work also raised concerns for the child, knowing that the child already speaks two languages:

Maria: I remember, like saying it to my mother and she, she was saying like ‘oh so does that mean that he won’t have any English because of the fact that we speak [another language] at home. […] She sometimes is a bit concerned that even though she knows the way the system works in Ireland, but she says things like ‘well you know so will he be doing maths in Gaelic’. And then a few other people at [work], I remember the secretary last year when I told her was sending [my child] to the Gaelic school, she was saying ‘oh the poor
child is going to be totally confused’ because we speak [another language] at home.

This view presents GME as an additional burden on children and other parents recalled such a concern in the comments they had received. As will be outlined below, the underlying perception of Gaelic as a burden surfaces again in parents’ accounts of removing their children from GME.

Similar to the views expressed by Maria’s mother and the secretary at work, Martin, a father, highlighted that the concerns of grandparents are often similar to those expressed by other adults – mainly, in his experience, concern for the overall education provided – but such concerns were not raised by ‘lots of people’:

Martin: Concern from his grandparents that he will get a decent education that is the first thing. That would be the first question that people would ask you, but not lots of people.

In their study of Irish parents who chose GME in Glasgow and Edinburgh, McLeod and O’Rourke (2015: 27) found that some parents recalled differing views on the ‘usefulness of Gaelic’. Other parents in this study similarly reported ‘mixed’ reactions from family and friends to their involvement in GME, with some thinking that it is ‘really cool’ and others ‘totally baffled’. Eilidh was among those in Edinburgh who reported mixed reactions to her child’s involvement in GME. Included in her account of reactions received were people who questioned the value of learning Gaelic because it is ‘a dying language’ and who expressed their view that her son learning Gaelic would be a ‘waste of time’. Reflecting upon the reactions of some of her friends rather than family, Eilidh concluded that they ‘just don’t really get it’.

Other parents also recalled comments that included questioning of the value of learning Gaelic and outlined their reflections on comments received. Sophie, a mother in Edinburgh, noted a change in the reaction of others as her family became increasingly involved in GME and learning Gaelic, with strong views on the utility of Gaelic now being expressed:

Sophie: Now that [my child] is registered to start GME and I am registered to start formally learning Gaelic people are like
‘but it’s a dead language, what is your problem? Why are you bothering? What is the point?’ And then when you explain, it’s a mixture of people thinking ‘oh fine, you’re a mad linguist anyway, do what you like,’ and ‘oh it’s cause the school has more funding,’ neither of which are true. I just think that it is the right route for our family.

Questioning the utility of Gaelic and GME was also noted in responses to parents’ with children in the provision in Barra. Although Ruth, a mother from Barra, reported that such views were not commonplace, she reported that responses from parents who can speak Gaelic in Barra sometimes included questioning the benefits of knowing Gaelic:

Ruth: Most people agree with it, there are some people that are negative but then they’ve not, they’ve not given me a valid reason not to.

KM: So why do some people not agree with it?

Ruth: A lot of people think it is a waste of time and it didn’t benefit them having Gaelic so why would it benefit their children.

Questioning the utility of Gaelic is clearly not confined to non-Gaelic-speakers. One clear distinguishing factor between parents in Edinburgh and in Barra is that parents in Barra often have experience of Gaelic, either having experienced Gaelic in the home or having had some Gaelic instruction during their education. These parents in Barra can draw on these experiences as well as languages ideologies about Gaelic in their considerations of GME.

Some parents, especially in Edinburgh, expressed a level of fatigue having encountered questioning and negative comments about their involvement in GME on numerous occasions. This was particularly prevalent when parents felt that they are continually asked to defend themselves, GME, and support for the Gaelic language more generally. Susan, a mother in Edinburgh, clearly outlined the range of views encountered from others who had learned of her family’s involvement in GME. The usefulness of Gaelic rather than Mandarin was questioned and a connection made
Susan: Where would you like me to start? A lot of people think it is a bit of an odd thing to do, they think it’s going to inhibit their learning of English. I’ve had a very specific complaint from somebody that resources going into the Gaelic-medium school are taking resources away from other schools and when there is so much pressure on primary one places, particularly just now, I think people are feeling aggrieved. Although that argument doesn’t make any sense at all because there are people going to the Gaelic school and are not taking up places in other schools so surely that works out but, anyway. I’m informed actually that no more money is spent on Gaelic medium pupils than any other pupils anyway, so it is a bit of a non-argument, I don’t really understand.

Also a lot of people say like, bilingualism great but why Gaelic, you know, ‘if it was a Mandarin school I would consider it’ they say. Well there isn’t a Mandarin school but there is a Gaelic school, so then again, where is the argument. […] It is a bit strange. But people are oddly upset about it. But I think, I think it is one of these things where, there is a whole Mummy thing that parents, not compete exactly, but if you do something different from what they are doing it is almost seen as a criticism of what they are doing.

Not only does Susan’s account illustrates the range of comments received by some parents but also demonstrates her own knowledge of research into GME. Additionally Susan, like other parents, reflects on this scrutiny of her involvement. Her final reflection on the reason why others contest the choice of GME proposes a rationalisation for the views aired in response to her family’s involvement in GME: ‘if you do something different from what they are doing it is almost seen as a criticism of what they are doing’. Susan feels that parents react to her family’s involvement as if the choice of GME is in some way questioning their own education choice rather than reflecting the respondents’ views on Gaelic or GME. GME choice is uncommon in Edinburgh and parents, therefore, make a marked decision by choosing the provision. This decision can attract scrutiny from a wide range of sources and parents respond to this in the way they see fit.
The example given in Susan’s summary of a lack of primary one places in local authority-run primary schools in Edinburgh highlights how local educational issues can be brought into discussions regarding Gaelic-medium provision. As Susan explains, the current issues around capacity at primary level in the city could be interpreted as a reason to support Gaelic-medium provision because children in GME are not taking their place in their local catchment area school (either non-denominational or Roman Catholic). Establishing the Gaelic school in the city with increased capacity compared to the unit at Tollcross involved opening a recently closed primary school. This development created additional primary one capacity in the city not only in the new school but also by vacating Tollcross Primary School and significantly increasing the capacity for English-medium provision in that school. The pressure on primary one places in primary schools across the city is a well-known local educational issue, yet it is clear that GME does not contribute to this pressure.

Connecting GME choice and other local educational issues was also evident in Barra. The choice of GME at primary level in Castlebay by parents living in Eoligarry School’s catchment area proved contentious for one family. Ailsa’s family received criticism from others in the local area for not supporting the Eoligarry School because her children attended Gaelic-medium primary in Castlebay. The family had supported the campaign to establish GME provision within Eoligarry School but without the option of GME at Eoligarry they prioritised GME over sending their children to English-medium provision at Eoligarry School. Now living in the Castlebay School catchment area, Ailsa reported that she had not received any comments following their youngest child’s enrolment in GME in contrast to when her older children were enrolled in Castlebay for primary education. By no longer living within the Eoligarry catchment area her decision to choose GME no longer proved contentious.

Parents are not passive recipients of concerns about GME; they engage in a process of negotiation with partners and might be required to explain or even defend their involvement to a range of people. This scrutiny can lead parents to reflect on their choices and experiences to date. Parents may also consider wider issues relating to
GME as a system and the political support for Gaelic more generally. Parents who choose or consider GME are doing so in a context that can be challenging, with their decisions contested. This questioning forms part of most parents’ experience of GME involvement in Edinburgh. For parents, dealing with such views forms part of the process of choosing and continuing involvement in GME. In what follows, I will turn my attention to examine how education choices can be reconsidered and changed both within and between educational stages.

Re-evaluating choice
The process of GME choice does not end when parents enrol their child in GME or the child attends for their first day or even year. Many parents continue to have reservations despite their child attending GME. As with any other form of education, new concerns and challenges can arise during and between educational stages. Parents may reconsider their choice of GME as a result of a range of issues, including changes in their own personal circumstances, in response to concerns about their child’s attainment, or difficulties they have encountered in supporting their child themselves or accessing support for their child.

Continuity
O’Hanlon et al. (2010: 55) categorised the reasons given for the choice of GME into five categories, the fifth of which was continuity. In O’Hanlon et al. (2010) and O’Hanlon (2012) a strong desire is evident from both parents and school children to continue GME across educational stages. They found that the continuation of GME choice from primary into secondary education reflected both a ‘general desire for continuity’ both linguistically – to continue to use and study Gaelic – and also socially – to maintain the close social ties between Gaelic-medium primary pupils into secondary education (O’Hanlon et al. 2010: 63). O’Hanlon (2012: 202) found both these factors in the responses of pupils in GME at secondary level in Scotland and by pupils in Welsh-medium education in Wales. Overall, the desire to continue the choice of GME across educational stages reflects a sense that attainment in GME at primary level should be ‘built upon’ and not lost (O’Hanlon et al. 2010: 64-65).

In this study, a strong desire to continue involvement in GME across education stages was evident in parents’ accounts. When a family relocated to an area with
GME provision, the parents in this research maintained their choice of GME across geographic locations. Two families moved away from Edinburgh during the research and continued their involvement in GME in their new location. A family in Barra returned to the island from the mainland just before the fieldwork began and just before their child entered nursery education. The mother explained that had they remained on the mainland then the child would have entered Gaelic-medium nursery education there but was now enrolled in Gaelic-medium nursery in Barra.

This evidence of geographic continuity extends to two families who had moved from Ireland to Scotland. McLeod and O’Rourke (2015: 22–24) found mixed views among Irish parents who had chosen GME in Scotland as to whether or not they would have enrolled their child in Irish-medium education in Ireland. Where parents had chosen or would have chosen Irish-medium education in Ireland, in the two cases in this research, these parents transferred this decision to GME in Scotland. On relocating to Edinburgh, Alice explained that after becoming aware of GME in Scotland they transferred the decision already reached in Ireland:

Alice: We were going to send [my child] to an Irish language school. So then when we moved we found out about [Gaelic-medium] [...]. We knew it was there so we checked it out because we knew we were going to do Irish language.

Maria explained that had they been living in Ireland then their child would have attended Irish-medium education. Their child’s enrolment in GME was a continuation of this desire, albeit within Scotland:

Maria: I suppose when we moved over, like if I was living in Ireland I would have sent [my child] to a Gaelscoil [Irish-medium school].

Although there was a general desire for continuity following an initial choice of GME, in Barra, especially amongst those in the Eoligarry catchment area, there was a clear distinction made between choice in nursery and primary. Parents living within that catchment area often responded that following the choice of GME at nursery level; another decision was made for primary choice. Catriona, a Gaelic-speaking parent with a child in Gaelic-medium nursery, described how they ultimately chose
Gaelic-medium in Castlebay but did consider Eoligarry School for primary education. In contrast, another mother, Mairead, explained that following her child’s attendance at Gaelic-medium nursery education, she had enrolled her child for primary education in Eoligarry School. For Mairead, with older children in Eoligarry School, she felt that the decision to be made for her youngest child was between Gaelic-medium and English-medium nursery provision, the primary-stage education choice was one already established. Mairead’s example also demonstrates an important feature with regard to continuity in education choice and that is that experience and decisions made for older siblings contribute significantly to the education choice of younger siblings.

Continuity in education choice can be found across locations, educational stages or the decisions made for other family members. Continuity is a feature of GME choice, with parents identifying social, linguistic and educational factors that support a desire for continuity of involvement across stages. The permanency of the choice of GME varies both between and within educational stages. Decisions made can be, and sometimes are, reconsidered and changed. In what follows, I examine instances where parents have transferred children out of their initial choice of educational provision without geographic relocation of the family or other significant changes in family circumstances.

**Permanency**

Of the families in Barra who took part in this research, four families changed their child’s form of education within the same educational stage – three during primary education and one during nursery. These families did not transfer their child to another form of education provision as the result of relocation or significant change in family circumstances. Three out of the four families (two primary and one nursery) removed their child from GME and enrolled them in English-medium provision within the same school or nursery; the other family transferred their child from one English-medium setting to the other. For all three families who changed educational provision during a child’s primary education, parents reported that the reconsideration of choice was initially triggered by concerns regarding academic attainment of one of their children. Specifically, the reconsideration of choice often
followed the child being identified as possibly requiring additional educational support. In all cases, siblings either transferred at the same time or followed their sibling into the newly chosen provision on entering that stage of education. There are cases in Barra, as in Edinburgh, where a requirement for additional support for learning has been identified and the parents have not removed their child from GME. I did not directly experience cases of transfer out from GME to English-medium education in Edinburgh. Such transfers have occurred at both nursery and primary level but I had no examples in my sample.

Parents in Barra appear to utilise movement between streams or schools as a means of addressing issues regarding the educational provision at the school. One family who moved their children during primary education from Gaelic to English stated that their child no longer needed extra support as they were now in English-medium education. Another parent explained that she was now sufficiently reassured that the new arrangement met her child’s learning needs to a greater extent. This parent had transferred her child from English primary education in one school to English provision in another. The mother in a third family acknowledged that she understood that in school support for her child would not increase in English-medium education but she believed that her own ability to support the child at home would increase. Neither the mother nor her partner speak or read Gaelic and they felt that they could not support their child in GME with the challenges he was facing, specifically with reading. The mother from the third family continued to request increased additional support from the school for her child’s needs. Both families in Barra who removed children from GME at primary level also implied that they had relieved an additional burden, of learning both Gaelic and English, from their child.

In all cases I encountered it was the parents themselves that suggested and instigated such a move. It does not appear that the school in Barra suggests movement to English-medium education. In fact, the two families who transferred children at primary level explained how the school encouraged them to keep their children in GME. Both mothers commended their child’s class teacher on the support provided to their child and to them as parents throughout their experience of GME.
Transferring a child from the chosen provision to another is a feature of education choice including bilingual education choice. Wesely (2010) conducted a review of the literature on transfer out of traditional foreign language programmes (or student attrition as she terms it) and from immersion programmes. She found that decisions regarding continuing within or leaving such programmes are affected by ‘external cultural factors’ such as ‘the widespread assumption that learning a second language […] is more difficult for everyone with a learning disability’ (Wesely 2010: 806). Overall her review of the literature found that attrition between educational stages was not strongly influenced by concerns regarding educational attainment but educational attainment was an important factor in students’ leaving immersion education during an educational stage. Ultimately, when a decision is made to leave immersion education concerns regarding attainment will be just one factor amongst others that have influence this final decision (Wesely 2010: 814).

In research into transfer out of French immersion primary education in Canada, Bruck (1985a) found that not all children with equally low attainment transfer out of immersion education and identified ‘affective, attitudinal, and motivational characteristics’ in addition to low attainment that could predict transfer out of French immersion education (Bruck 1985a: 59). The parents in this study that transferred their children out of GME did not appear to consider that there might be negative consequences for attainment in transferring their child from instruction in one language to another. Bruck’s (1985b) research into transfer out of French immersion in Canada identified negative consequences, both educationally and socially, of transfer out of French immersion education in the early years of primary education (Bruck 1985b).

I am not aware of any English-medium nursery to Gaelic-medium movement at nursery level in Barra, except in instances in previous years where the Gaelic-medium nursery was full and parents had to enrol their child in the English-medium provision and await a place in the Gaelic nursery. The only English to Gaelic-medium movement that I am aware of in Barra occurred the year before my fieldwork commenced when a child moved from Eoligarry School to Gaelic-medium in Castlebay School at the start of primary three. In Edinburgh, however, there were
many cases of transfer to GME from English, during nursery education and between nursery and primary education.

In Edinburgh, the choice of GME at nursery level appears to be a strong indicator of progression to GME at primary level. Staff at Taobh na Pàirce noted that every year only a small number of children attending the Gaelic-medium nursery do not continue to Gaelic-medium primary. Only three children in their preschool year at the nursery during my fieldwork were not going to attend Taobh na Pàirce for their primary education. Over half of the 96 children registered in the nursery were in their preschool year (aged four) rather than their ante-preschool year (aged three):

Nearch-obraich Sgoil-Áraich: Mar as trice bidh a’ mhòr-chuid a’ dol a-steach gu clas a h-aon. An-uiridh, chanainn gun deach còignear is dòcha gu sgoil eile. Am-bliadhna tha triùir, tha iad a’ dol gu sgoil eile.

Nursery staff member: Normally, the majority go on to primary one. Last year, I’d say that five maybe went to another school. This year three are going to another school.

In Edinburgh, there were many more examples of parents choosing to change from English-medium to GME than in Barra. This transfer was often the result, as highlighted previously, of either only recently learning about Gaelic-medium provision, or having been engaged in a process of considering GME overtime and they had only recently reached a decision.

When movement occurs in Barra, it is usually unidirectional from Gaelic to English-medium education or from one form of English-medium provision to another. There have, however, been previous cases in Barra where children have been in GME initially, moved to English-medium education for a time and then returned to GME. In Barra, the transfer of children from one form of education to another appears to be connected to concerns about the educational provision and their child’s attainment and transfer is utilised as a method of addressing concerns.

**Conclusion**

The process of choice outlined throughout this chapter conveys a more dynamic situation than has emerged in previous research. Considering educational choice as a
process illustrates important wider influencing factors on this choice in both locations and highlights differences in provision and support available for parents. Examining the choice of GME as a process more accurately reflects the experience of parents and provides a better understanding of how families come to be involved in GME and reach decisions about enrolment. This more nuanced understanding of choice can help to inform those involved in encouraging and supporting parents and families in becoming and remaining involved in GME.

The process of choice, as outlined throughout this chapter, reveals that in order to choose GME parents must be aware that GME is a choice available in their area. Although all parents in Barra know that GME is provided in Castlebay School, in Edinburgh many parents only learn of GME after the birth of their eldest child. Before enrolling a child for nursery or primary education, parents will often consider a small number of identified options. Parents considering GME will often take time to explore this option fully by visiting the school, seeking the views of parents already involved in GME and reading academic literature on GME or immersion education. Parents may use the experience of one educational stage to support the consideration of the next stage of provision.

Parents, as individuals, and in partnership, may engage in the process of education choice to differing degrees and progress at different paces in their considerations. In some cases parents do not reach a point where both wholeheartedly agree on the education choice made. The choice of GME also attracts attention from others (family, friends and passing acquaintances). Parents must decide how to respond to this scrutiny and the views raised on a range of issues including concern for the child and hostility towards GME and the support for Gaelic more generally. Finally, challenges can arise following a child’s enrolment in GME and parents may reconsider their original decision and remove their child from GME.
Chapter 3: A ‘Good’ School

My understanding of GME choice differs from previous accounts in three key ways: firstly, I understand education choice to be made over time and in many cases is an ongoing process of consideration (as outlined in Chapter 2); secondly, the choice is a result of the interplay of multiple factors both positive and negative (as will be evident from this chapter and Chapter 4); and thirdly, parents’ own interests and experiences have an important influence on education choice.

Previous research into GME choice has had a tendency to categorise parental motivations. This propensity can be attributed in part to the questionnaire-based methods used – a method that inherently tends to direct and categorise responses (O’Hanlon et al. 2010: 46–58; Stephen et al. 2010: 33). These categorisations, although helpful in delineating different types of influences, obscure somewhat the interaction of both positive and negative influences on education choice, the process of choice and the important wider local factors affecting choice.

In this study I found that it is often the case that the same family can be attracted to all the factors previously identified or at least a combination of them. Different family members can take particular interest or be apprehensive about different aspects. Additionally, some factors can become attractive or of concern at different points in a family’s involvement in GME. It is, therefore, not the case that some families are interested in ‘the benefits of early bilingualism’ while others are ‘attracted by other types of social and educational advantages’. The reality is far more complex. In the Welsh context, Hodges’ (2012) work on parental choice in the Rhymni Valley acknowledges that parental education choice arises from a ‘complex combination of reasons’ (Hodges 2012: 8). In this and the following chapter, I will outline the ‘complex combination of reasons’ described by parents in both field sites.

A combination of factors

During my fieldwork it became apparent that no family’s educational choice was based squarely on one factor. Parents continually outlined how they weighed up a range of factors in considering educational provision. Some of these factors attract
them to a particular school or nursery and others detract from the appeal of that form of education or particular school. Some parents find a feature of a school attractive while others can be apprehensive about that very same feature and others do not consider it at all. Parents can choose one form of education for their child but comment positively on another. What parents find attractive can change over time and what may not have influenced their initial decision may now be important in their continuing involvement. Parents emphasised that they assessed GME as they would English-medium education. It is important to remember that in both research locations parents are not choosing between GME in one school and GME in another – parents are choosing between GME in one school and English-medium education in another (or within the same school in the case of Castlebay School in Barra).

Other factors influencing education choice that I will outline in this chapter include the prominence of comparison between a limited number of schools, rather than all possible options, and the wider context of a parent’s desire for a ‘good’ school. On further examination, it appears that ‘good’ schools do not necessarily have to be the best school but they have a reputation amongst parents for being better than other viable options. The attractive features of ‘good’ schools identified by parents often align with parents’ own interests and practical considerations. Finally, despite the attractiveness of a ‘good’ school, parents do not always choose their identified ‘good’ school. In what follows, I will examine this notion of a ‘good’ school in order to understand more fully the attraction of GME in Edinburgh and the attraction to different forms of provision in Barra.

A ‘good’ school

Parents’ considerations of GME were often framed within the wider context of finding a ‘good’ school. Defining a ‘good’ school is not straightforward because it is not automatically a school with high levels of educational attainment. Previous research has found that parents are not preoccupied by ‘academic quality’ in their considerations of school choice despite prioritising a ‘good education’. Echols and Wilms (1995: 154) found that:

The majority (70%) of the parents believed that a good education was extremely important, and their vision of an
ideal school included parental involvement and good teachers. [...] We thought issues of academic quality would dominate reasons for rejecting and choosing a school. Generally this was not the case.

In this research, parents clearly identified some schools as ‘good’ schools, as a result it is important to consider what makes a school a ‘good’ school from the standpoint of parents and how this influences parental education choice, including the choice of GME.

Anna was amongst the parents in Edinburgh who described the Gaelic School in such terms. When I met Anna in her Edinburgh home, she explained to me how she initially heard about GME from friends who were considering the provision for their own child. Anna then ‘started looking into it’ and added that ‘schools around here weren’t great really’. She believed Taobh na Pàirce to be ‘the best school in the area’. By area, Anna, is referring to the specific area of Edinburgh in which she lives rather than the city as a whole. Like many other parents, Anna recalled that there were ‘a whole range of reasons’ for considering and ultimately sending her child to Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce. She emphasised the influence of her own visit to the school and described how the strength of her belief in her decision to enrol her child in GME has increased over time:

I liked the feeling of the place and I liked [the head teacher], the more I thought about it the more it appealed to me. [My child] having another language at a young age seemed like a great opportunity.

Anna’s partner Mark was also very positive about their experience of Taobh na Pàirce to date. When I spoke to him some months later, Mark explained that he highly valued language learning and stated his belief that learning ‘a second language is a great asset’. He regularly works with Gaelic speakers and views them very positively: ‘the Gaelic community [is] something I think is fantastic’. His child learning Gaelic, Mark felt, would mean that the child ‘would be cultured’ and added that he was ‘so proud of [his child] to be learning and be able to speak Gaelic’. Reflecting on his own unfavourable experience of school, he commented ‘I am delighted he is not in mainstream’.

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Anna believed that sending their child to GME was culturally important. Anna and Mark have a keen interest in Scottish music and culture. They view Gaelic as part of Scottish people’s heritage, as Anna explained: ‘my partner is Scottish, I’m Scottish, [my child] is Scottish, it is part of our heritage’. Additionally, it is important to Anna that her child could play a part in ‘keeping [Gaelic] alive’. Overall, Anna could not pinpoint one reason for choosing GME for her child but many factors contributed to their choice, including the poor reputation of neighbouring schools, which instigated their wider consideration of education options. Following the consideration of GME, their positive experience of the Gaelic school and the head teacher on their visit; their interest in Gaelic culture and traditional music and the father’s own poor experience of English-medium education, Anna concluded that their choice of GME was the result of ‘no one reason really, we thought of all these things.’

This coming together of multiple reasons for an education choice was expressed time and again by parents in both locations, including those in Barra who chose English-medium education. Parental choice in GME is especially interesting because very few parents have attended GME themselves. GME may be structurally and linguistically different to their own experience but there are features and characteristics of the provision that may align, or in Mark’s case contrast, with parents’ own experience. Anna and Mark’s account demonstrates the ‘complex combination’ of factors in education choice. It highlights the role of comparison, the importance of Gaelic language and culture in parental interest, and reflections on parents’ own experiences of school.

**Comparison**

In most cases, parents in both locations confined their considerations to a small number of schools. Adler et al. (1989) found that when parents did look into exercising school choice they often limited their considerations to one other school. In Barra, parents often only discussed two out of the three options available to them at the primary stage: GME in Castlebay or English-medium at Eoligarry School, Gaelic or English-medium in Castlebay School, and English-medium provision in Castlebay and Eoligarry School. In Edinburgh, again, parents commented on their local school (either non-denominational or Roman Catholic) and GME rather than
the range of schools in the area. This comparison between a small numbers of options is in line with Adler et al.’s findings.

Comparison appears to be a central tenet in the identification of a ‘good’ school and in education choice more generally. In their study of educational choice among the middle class at secondary level in England, Power et al. (2003: 27) found that ‘avoiding “unsatisfactory” schools appeared to have been at least as influential as positive preference’. Indeed, like Anna and Mark, a few families in Edinburgh recalled that their initial interest in Gaelic-medium provision was prompted by a belief that their local school was unsatisfactory. Another key finding from Adler et al.’s (1989) study was that parents utilised placing requests to find a satisfactory alternative rather than ‘an optimum choice’ (Adler et al.1989: 113). The limited number of schools considered by parents suggests this desire for a satisfactory alternative. At primary level, Adler et al. found that the vast majority of parents making or considering a placing request were only choosing between one alternative to their local school, with just under a fifth considering two or more alternatives.

It was a matter of finding a satisfactory alternative to the district school rather than making an optimum choice from a large range of possible schools. […] At primary level this tendency was even more marked: of the 183 requesting and considering parents, 144 (79 per cent) considered only one alternative and a further 32 (17 per cent) only two alternatives. The picture is very much one of choice between one or, at most, two alternatives rather than extensive comparison (Adler et al. 1989: 113).

A ‘good’ school is not the best school available in the whole city but a ‘good’ school in the local area. Parents never referred to Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce as the best school in the city, but some referred to it as the best school in the local area or just a ‘good’ school.

**Reputation**

If school choice is often instigated by a desire to avoid a school that has been identified as ‘not great’ in preference for one identified as ‘good’ then it is necessary to give due consideration to this identification process. It is clear that parents rely on different sources of information in considering school choice and identifying options.
It also appears that parents utilise different sources at different points in their considerations. Adler et al. (1989) asked parents how they had acquired information about the different schools they were considering. Using an open-ended question, initially, responses revealed that information from other parents and adults in the area form the basis of parents’ ‘common sense understanding’ of which local schools are ‘good’ schools and which are not:

Emerging clearly from the open-ended responses was the importance of the local network, both specific individuals who acted as informants and the more abstract grapevine, the pool of information which accumulates over time from a variety of non-specific sources and provides the ‘stock of knowledge’ on which parents base their common-sense understanding (Adler et al. 1989: 115).

Although reputation is important, parents do not appear to base their decisions on reputation or the ‘grapevine’ alone. Following a ranking question in which parents had to rank 11 sources of information and identify their three most important sources, Adler et al. (1989: 117) concluded that the influence of the ‘grapevine’ was mediated by parental experience of the school, school staff and by information from written sources about the school:

What at first appeared to be the overwhelming influence of the grapevine among the local population may be modified by the information communicated through visits to the schools, both through observation and through discussion with teachers, and through the pages of the information booklets.

‘The grapevine’ appears influential initially in identifying a school, or two, for consideration. Visiting the school, meeting staff, and gathering written information may follow the identification of a school for further consideration. These first-hand experiences of place and people contribute to parents’ views of a particular school and their identification of it as a ‘good’ school. These experiences influence parents’ views on whether the school will be suitable for their own child. In addition to reputation in identifying a ‘good school’, a school can become increasingly viewed as a ‘good’ school through parents’ own experiences and research. Adler et al.’s work also highlights the difference in findings that result from different methods of
elicitation, with the responses from an open question revealing distinct influences to those answers given in the ranking.

In this research, parents’ responses on the whole focused on a local reputation rather than a national reputation for GME, but parents mentioned research into GME that was conducted nationally. This finding is in line with Adler et al.’s (1989) finding regarding parents’ established ‘common sense understanding’ of local school reputations. Gaelic-medium primary education in Edinburgh does appear to have developed a reputation as a good form of education, whether located at Tollcross or Taobh na Pàirce. It could be that this reputation was associated with the Gaelic stream at Tollcross and has now been extended to the new Gaelic School at Taobh na Pàirce, or it could be associated with a national-level view of Gaelic-medium schools being ‘good’ schools. The latter explanation appears to be less likely. Parents like Anna expressed the view that the Gaelic School was a ‘good’ school before investigating it as an option and whilst having very little knowledge of GME nationally. Other than that GME is provided in many areas across Scotland, parents in Edinburgh who had just become involved in GME showed little awareness of any reputation GME might have nationally. In what follows, I will examine the use of written material and inspections before considering factors such as location, class size and community that were identified by parents as influencing factors on their school choice.

Research into GME does influence some parents’ continued consideration of GME but was not referenced in the identification of a ‘good’ school. The O’Hanlon et al. (2010) research on attainment in GME, and especially the findings on attainment in English, did contribute to continued involvement for some parents rather than initial identification, as Catherine’s account outlined. In addition to her experiences of the Cròileagan and Liam’s interest in language, Catherine’s willingness to consider other education options was influenced by a belief that there were no ‘good’ schools locally. She outlined how the people she met, both parents and teachers at the school, played an important role in supporting her family’s continued involvement. Catherine additionally highlighted the importance of the reassurance provided by awareness of research regarding attainment in English in GME:
Catherine: We really want a good education for them and honestly, our honest reason at the beginning because we are living, we are living, in our area we don’t have a good school, [a] good council school and we started to think about how we can find a good school. […] For me honestly, the people are very important and the people are really nice and you know I think, and we learn[ed] that in this school their English is better than in the other school at the end.

An awareness of the research on attainment by O’Hanlon et al. (2010) allayed concerns regarding English literacy. Research can influence education choice, especially where parents have specific concerns about attainment in specific areas of the curriculum, but its role in identifying Gaelic-medium primary schools as ‘good’ schools is less clear. Additionally, not all parents feared for their child’s attainment in English, some were clearly confident that their child would attain well in English.

A limited amount of written material is available online for parents about each primary school or nursery. Every local authority-run school has a school handbook, downloadable from the school’s website. The handbook contains basic practical information about the school including: the timetable, staffing, uniform, and specific school policies. Schools update these handbooks annually. School inspection reports are available on Education Scotland’s website, alongside other basic information about each school (Education Scotland 2016). The use of written sources such as school handbooks or websites did not feature in the accounts of parents other than to find contact details for the head teacher to arrange an initial visit to the school.

The role of inspection reports in the identification of a ‘good’ school appears to be rather more complex. Schools in Scotland are inspected by Education Scotland (formerly Her Majesty’s Inspectorate for Schools). The Care Commission also inspects nursery provision. The categorisation used by Education Scotland to summarise a school’s performance in an inspection is on a six-point scale:

- Excellent means outstanding, sector leading
- Very good means major strengths
- Good means important strengths with some areas for improvement
- Satisfactory means strengths just outweigh weaknesses
- Weak means important weaknesses
unsatisfactory means major weaknesses (Education Scotland 2010: 9)

Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce’s reputation as a ‘good’ school and possibly ‘the best school in the area’ is not based on an inspection report of that school or on a long history of success. No inspection reports are available for Taobh na Pàirce because it has yet to be inspected and only opened in August 2013, when my fieldwork began. Previously, the Gaelic stream had been inspected as part of an inspection of Tollcross Primary School as a whole in 2010; specific references were made to the Gaelic-medium primary stream throughout the report (Education Scotland 2010). There had only been a Gaelic-medium nursery at Tollcross and therefore the inspection of the nursery only pertained to Gaelic-medium provision.

The latest inspection report available for Tollcross was published in September 2010 and could be regarded as a good inspection report. For the assessment of primary provision, which included the English-medium stream as well as the Gaelic, the school was rated ‘very good’ for ‘improvements to performance’ and ‘meeting learners needs’ and ‘good’ for ‘learners’ experiences’. The nursery received a ‘very good’ rating for all three indicators. Both primary and nursery received ‘good’ for both ‘the curriculum’ and ‘improvement through self-evaluation’ (Education Scotland 2010: 8). Overall, the inspection of Tollcross Primary provides a strong indication of a good level of education being provided. No parents mentioned this inspection report in this study and the impact of this inspection on the reputation of the school in Edinburgh appears to be low.

In Barra, the school identified as the ‘good’ school is the smaller school in the north end of the island, Eoligarry School. The school is praised on the island for being a small school with caring staff where children are well behaved and get a wide range of opportunities, especially for outdoor learning. Despite this robust positive rhetoric, an inspection of Eoligarry School carried out in September 2013 evaluated the school as ‘satisfactory’ in four categories (‘improvements in performance,’ ‘meeting learning needs,’ ‘the curriculum,’ and ‘improvement through self-evaluation’) and gave the school a ‘good’ rating for ‘learners’ experiences’ (Education Scotland 2013a: 3). This inspection is on the same scale as that used for Tollcross Primary’s
inspection where satisfactory is the fourth category out of six and means ‘strengths just outweigh weaknesses’ (Education Scotland 2010: 9). The inspectors raised a number of areas for improvement, most relate to education and attainment:

- Continue to raise children’s attainment in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Ensure lessons are set at the correct level of difficulty to meet children’s learning needs.
- Improve strategic leadership of the development of the curriculum.
- Improve further self-evaluation, including tracking children’s learning and achievement to help them to make the best possible progress (Education Scotland 2013a: 3).

Reading the school’s inspection report, I was surprised at the inspector’s findings. I read it towards the end of my fieldwork in Barra and the concerns recently raised about the school by the inspector were not mentioned by anyone. I was continually given examples of how good the school, the staff and the pupils were. Interestingly, the areas identified as strengths in the inspection echoed the positive features noted by parents and others about the school – the warm and caring atmosphere, parents being allowed and encouraged to support the school and the wide range of opportunities for active learning. The areas identified in the inspection report as strengths were as follows:

- Polite and respectful children who love their school.
- The warm, positive and caring ethos.
- The wide range of active learning experiences.
- Support for children as they move from nursery to P1 and P7 to secondary school.
- The support and involvement of parents and the community in children’s learning (Education Scotland 2013a: 3).

This focus on the atmosphere of the school and how children are cared for was central to the identification of Eoligarry School as a ‘good’ school. As Echols and
Wilms (1995: 152) found, parents place great emphasis on factors such as ‘parental involvement’ and do not always focus on attainment in identifying ‘good’ schools.

Eoligarry School passed their inspection and in so doing compared well with Castlebay School, whose previous inspection in 2008 was not successful. Inspections and concerns regarding educational attainment do appear to impact upon the reputation of a school when the inspection is failed. Castlebay’s failed inspection was widely covered in the media. The inspection, follow-up inspections and official and media reports on the school continued through to 2011 and 2012 (Stornoway Gazette 2008, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar 2009b, Education Scotland 2011, Education Scotland 2012, Hebrides News 2010a).

Castlebay School’s inspection report and continued concerns regarding attainment in Castlebay School’s secondary department remain recurrent topics of conversation among parents and other residents in Barra. The weaknesses identified in the original inspection of Castlebay School, focused on the secondary department, and the inspectors highlighted as one of four key strengths of the school were: ‘[t]he quality of relationships between and among teachers and pupils in the primary department’ (Education Scotland 2008: 1). Interestingly, this key strength echoes what parents identified as a distinguishing strength of Eoligarry School.

Parents involved in this research in Barra did not cite Eoligarry’s very recent inspection report in their comments about the school. The school’s inspection may not have a significant influence on the identification of Eoligarry School as a ‘good’ school. The school has had a strong reputation at least for a number of years prior to the inspection. When considering Castlebay School, however, it appears that the impact of a failed inspection is significant, at least in its lasting effect on the reputation of the school. The overall impact even of a failed inspection, however, appears to be mitigated by other factors. It is the case that despite Castlebay’s failed inspection and it not being identified as a ‘good’ school, most parents in Barra do send their children to the school for their primary education including parents who speak very highly of Eoligarry School. Meanwhile, Eoligarry School’s roll has been falling. The small school roll might not be surprising considering that most children live within the Castlebay catchment area but with cross-catchment placements.
common and support for Eoligarry School high, it is important to remember that parents do actively choose Castlebay School.

The influence of the inspection reports on parental choice appears to be lower than may at first be anticipated. This finding is less surprising when considered in the context of low levels of parental interest in academic attainment in identifying a ‘good school’. In considering the role of inspections, we see clearly that parents’ interest often lies in a school that provides a welcoming, supportive environment for both their child and for them as parents. A failed inspection can affect parents’ trust in the school but the difference between a modest pass and a good pass appears to be less influential. Overall the influence of inspections on early years and primary education choice is very limited indeed. Other factors identified by parents that positively influence education choice include the location of the school, the belief that the school has its own community or is part of a wider community, and for Eoligarry School in Barra the small school size and class sizes. These factors will now be examined in turn.

**Location**
Growing Up in Scotland’s longitudinal research (Growing Up in Scotland 2012: 3.3) found that the most frequently cited reason for choosing a particular school (34% of parents) was the distance from home to the school. For many parents who choose GME, the provision is further away from their house than their catchment area English-medium school. In Edinburgh, some children travel for over three-quarters of an hour across the city to Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce when they could walk to their local English-medium school. There are also some parents in both Edinburgh and Barra for whom the school that provides GME is their closest school and they would have to pass GME to attend an English-medium school. In Edinburgh, Gaelic-medium provision has recently moved from the southwest of the city centre at Tollcross, north to Bonnington in Leith. A number of parents new to considering Gaelic-medium preschool and primary provision were from the area around the new school. They learned of GME as a result of the opening of the new Gaelic school in their local area. Other families had been closer to Gaelic-medium provision at
Tollcross, while for others, the new location in Bonnington is closer. For others still, neither location is particularly close to their family home.

The location of the school is amongst a range of practical implications of education choice that parents consider but for some it features to a greater extent than for others. Moira, a mother in Edinburgh who lived in Leith, clearly explained that had the provision remained at Tollcross she would not have chosen to enrol her child in GME despite her positive visit to the Gaelic stream at Tollcross. She believed that the distance would have been too great from their Leith home and as a result GME would not have been considered a viable option for her family. Sarah had similar concerns, explaining that if they were to move house and their new home was outwith the area around the school then GME would no longer be considered. For some parents, their child travelling a significant distance to Gaelic-medium provision was not a viable option for them. For other parents the distance between the home and school was clearly not a decisive factor. Different parents have different priorities and value certain aspects or hold concerns that other parents would not consider.

In Barra, most children live in the Castlebay catchment area because this catchment area covers most of the island and the neighbouring island of Vatersay. Proximity to the school, however, remains a consideration for some in Barra as well as parents in Edinburgh. The location of a school is important but that does not necessitate that the school be the closest. The location of the school can be important because of its proximity not to the family home but to a parent’s place of work, preschool provision, or childcare providers. In Barra, Castlebay is the main village and near all services: shops, doctors, bank, petrol station, and post office. Older siblings in secondary or younger siblings in nursery attend education provision in Castlebay. Parents often work in Castlebay and most of the afterschool activities are based there. As a result, even for parents in the north end of the island, Castlebay School can be attractive for practical reasons as a result of its location.

Catriona, a Gaelic-speaking mother in Barra, explained that although they had given Eoligarry School some consideration for primary education, the fact that she worked in Castlebay contributed to their decision to send their child to GME in Castlebay.
School. Linda, another mother in Barra, outlined the combination of factors that influenced her choice for her child’s primary education. The location, the small class sizes, and a personal connection to the school were important factors in her decision to enrol their child in Eoligarry School for primary education. Proximity to home, work, or childcare can all be included in parents’ considerations of school choice.

**Class sizes and school size**

Another factor considered by some parents is the size of the school or the classes. The scale of Eoligarry School appears to attract positive comment in Barra. There is a clear belief that smaller schools, like Eoligarry, are better placed to provide a good education. The reasons for this align with those identified as pertaining to a ‘good’ school. Some believe that in small schools the teachers will know the children better than in a larger school. It is also believed that with smaller numbers of children in front of them, teachers in small schools are better placed to meet the needs of each individual child. These views on small schools are expressed within a context where Castlebay School is viewed as a large school despite having less than a hundred pupils in the primary department. Even in small towns in Scotland, a large primary school would be one with at least two classes at each stage and over 250 pupils. One aspect of the issue of class sizes that was not raised by parents pertains to the challenges of teaching composite classes, where one teacher teaches a class that includes children over a significant range of school years – often three or four school years in one class. In their positive comments on class sizes, parents focused on the small number in their child’s year rather than the total for the composite class.

Class sizes were previously noted as an attractive feature of GME in comparison to English-medium education (O’Hanlon et al. 2010: 54). O’Hanlon et al. (2010) found that the advantages associated with smaller class sizes were ‘independent of medium of education’ and this appears to be the case in this study with small class sizes associated with English-medium provision in Eoligarry at primary level and with English-medium nursery provision in Castlebay. In Barra, the largest classes are now in GME.

Parents did not mention class sizes, as a positive feature or a concern, in Edinburgh. Although there is a stubborn myth that small class sizes in urban areas are an
an attractive feature of GME. In reality, classes are often at capacity and no parents in this study identified small class sizes as an attractive feature of Gaelic-medium provision in the city. At Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce, forty children attend the morning nursery session and a further forty in the afternoon. As with many schools in Edinburgh, there are multiple classes for most school years and composite classes over more than two stages are not required. Smaller class sizes appear to be more salient when schools contrast in size, as is the case in Barra, but also in combination with other factors that support a view of the school as a place where children are well cared for and families welcomed. The view of a desirable school as one that is part of a close and caring community was not confined to parents in Barra.

School community

Parents commented positively on both schools identified as ‘good’ schools in this study for having a sense of community around them. Susan in Edinburgh foregrounded the importance of her child being ‘happy’ at primary school and then spoke of the Gaelic school as having ‘a sense of community’. She compared the Gaelic school with other schools and believes that this ‘sense of community’ is not found in these other schools:

Susan: Yeah, first and foremost, I think about primary school particularly is that they spend so much time there, I wanted to send her somewhere that she would be happy. There is that kind of sense of community that you have in the Gaelic school that you don’t get in the other schools.

Fiona, who had herself attended GME, commented on a sense of community that she had experienced during her time in GME. She associated GME more generally with this sense of community and this included GME in Edinburgh and not just the location of her own experience:

Fiona: I think because [GME] is a community, a proper community, you know. It is not just like going to school and there are thousands of people at school and you don’t know half of them. [My child] will probably get on with the other wee people more. And I went to Gaelic school and I think it, it kind of shaped, a bit of who I am.
Not only does she reflect on her own experience in terms of ‘community’ but also her belief that her experience of GME has played a role in who she has become as an adult; GME ‘shaped, a bit of who I am’. The scale of GME provision, allowing people to get to know each other, is important to Fiona and despite the scale now being much greater than during her own time, this association between GME and a ‘proper community’ remains. Some parents in Edinburgh greatly valued knowing other parents and families with children in the same school. Parents also identified knowing other families with children in the same school as a positive feature of Eoligarry School in Barra.

Another mother in Edinburgh, Beth, felt that only after her child started in the Gaelic-medium nursery did she begin to ‘feel a bit more part of the ‘Gaelic community’. Beth had attended the Cròileagan on a few occasions but felt that it was through her child’s regular attendance at the nursery that she gradually felt part of a community. It is also noteworthy that for some the school community is viewed as being synonymous with the Gaelic community. For others, this is seen as the school community or the community of the Gaelic school. Whether the ‘Gaelic community’ is seen as greater than the school community or one and the same is not clear in these instances. For others in Edinburgh not involved in the school, however, the Gaelic community would be used to refer to Gaelic speakers in the city, especially those that organise or attend Gaelic events. Those that hold this view would be unlikely to include non-Gaelic-speaking parents in their view of the Gaelic community in the city unless they attended Gaelic events unrelated to the school.

In Barra, parents commented positively on Eoligarry School’s strong links with the local community. Parents with children in GME in Castlebay were among those who spoke positively about Eoligarry School. They highlighted the school’s efforts in organising community-level activities and welcoming others to events, including families with children in Castlebay School. Holding events in the church hall was commented upon positively and contributed to the view that the school made an effort to be part of the community. The school also sought to invite extended family into the school for events or to events at the church hall. Using the church hall was
also a practical solution. It is more centrally located within the catchment area than the school and has a stage for performances.

It was not the case in Barra that a sense of community around the school was associated with English-medium education rather than Gaelic-medium provision but rather that it was associated with Eoligarry School and not Castlebay School. Overall, the parents being welcomed into the school and the school being seen as part of something greater, whether that is the school community, the local community or the ‘Gaelic’ community, is important for some parents. Schools that are seen to involve parents and be part of a community in this study have been identified as ‘good’ schools.

Many of the features that have been recorded as attractive features of Taobh na Pàirce in Edinburgh (GME) or Eoligarry School in Barra (English-medium education) are the same. Parents want their child to be happy at school. They want the school staff to be welcoming to them as parents and caring towards their children. They would like the school to have a nice feel about it and for parents to be welcomed to support the school. Parents also give due consideration to the practicalities of education choice, including the distance between their home or work and the school. There are, however, specific aspects of GME that are not found in English-medium education or are found to a lesser extent. In the next section, I will examine these factors – broadly language, culture, and a sense of belonging – in order to ascertain how such features influence parental education choice in both locations and what part they play in a ‘good’ education.

**GME and a ‘good’ school**

The specific contribution of GME to the identification of a good school, like education choice more generally, is far from straightforward. Despite Eoligarry School being identified as a good school, the vast majority of primary children in Barra attend Castlebay School, with more than 50% of them in GME. Location may be in Castlebay’s favour for most families but there are clearly other factors at play. Being a ‘good’ school is insufficient for the vast majority of parents to choose Eoligarry School.
In Barra, the attraction of GME appears to be specifically about increasing Gaelic language skills, rather than a more general interest in bilingualism and language learning or an interest in accessing Gaelic cultural opportunities. This specific attraction is in part due to the fact that children can and do access Gaelic cultural activities in English-medium education and interest in bilingualism more generally and future language learning are very low. Culture and exposure to different aspects of Gaelic culture, particularly opportunities in music, were highlighted as attractive features for some parents in Edinburgh. In Barra, there are very rarely local activities for Gaelic-medium pupils only. Children enter and compete at the local and national mòd and attend the Fèis, Highland dancing, and traditional music instruction whether or not they attend GME. Children in Edinburgh could also access such events outwith GME but the Gaelic school is strongly associated with such cultural opportunities.

GME in Barra is very much viewed as a means of learning or supporting the acquisition of Gaelic, whether parents are Gaelic speakers or not. Most of the parents in Barra had some connection to Gaelic through their own experience of learning the language, either at home or in education. Nobody I spoke to in Barra spoke a non-Scottish language fluently and parents did not note an attraction to bilingualism more generally or a preference for immersion education in another European language rather than Gaelic, as occurred in Edinburgh. Despite some lack of clarity regarding the methods, goals and outcomes of immersion education, I found an overall understanding amongst parents that Gaelic-medium is the strongest form of Gaelic provision available and it provides children with a range of skills in the language. A small number of parents view Gaelic instruction in English-medium education at Eoligarry School as an alternative route to a sufficient level of competence.

For Gaelic-speaking families in Barra, despite Gaelic being spoken in the home, GME is now seen as a central supporting mechanism for Gaelic language transmission. Although to date Gaelic-speaking parents have sent their children to English-medium education in Barra as well as GME, during my research all Gaelic-speaking families with young children sent their children to GME. Marsaili, a Gaelic-speaking mother in Barra, succinctly explained that her reason for sending her
child to Gaelic-medium primary provision was that she was trying to ensure that they kept what Gaelic they had acquired in the home: ‘A’ feuchainn ris a’ Ghàidhlig aca a chumail’ (trying to keep their Gaelic). Oighrig, also from Barra, made a similar point, she wanted her children to have Gaelic (‘Tha mi airson Gàidhlig a bhith aca’) and enrolment in GME is seen as central to this endeavour.

For non-Gaelic-speaking parents in Barra, including Claire, proficiency in Gaelic is a means of accessing culture and facilitating everyday interactions with local Gaelic speakers. Claire believes that ability in Gaelic is required to access local culture:

Claire: Because they are going to miss out on their culture if they are not [Gaelic speakers]. Even when somebody translates it to English it is not the same. And also it is something to be proud of as well.

Rather than performance aspects of culture (traditional musical instruments or singing in a Gaelic choir) that were identified by some parents in Edinburgh, Claire focuses on the culture in terms of understanding people and place in Barra.

All bar one of the parents in Barra expressed a desire for their child to learn Gaelic, including those who sent their children to English-medium education. Mairead enrolled her child in Gaelic-medium nursery provision before they attended English-medium education at primary level in Eoligarry School. She explained her motivations for that choice:

Mairead: I kind of knew that I wanted them to go to Eoligarry School, being aware that it is not a Gaelic school, although Gaelic is spoken in it. I wanted them to have that bit of a kind of background in Gaelic and then it would hopefully give me the incentive to speak it more as well.

Viewing education choice as two distinct decisions at nursery and then primary was not uncommon in Barra, even for parents who ultimately chose the same form of provision. There is no nursery provision at Eoligarry School, so as a result parents like Mairead who are certain about their primary school education choice may still choose between nursery provisions at Castlebay. For Mairead, Gaelic-medium nursery provision had a dual purpose; firstly, she hoped it would give her child a ‘background’ in Gaelic and secondly, she hoped that it would encourage her, a
recessive bilingual, to use Gaelic more often in the home with her children. Similar to parents who speak Gaelic at home, Mairead’s choice of GME at nursery level can be seen as a means of supporting language use within the home, albeit in a bid to increase her own use of the language rather than support already established practices.

Understanding that the Gaelic-medium nursery can provide an introduction to Gaelic gives a clear indication that Gaelic is accessed at the nursery stage in the Gaelic nursery and not the English nursery. This may at first appear self-evident but at primary level the distinction in Barra is for some adults less clear. This lack of clarity is in part a result of the teachers in Eoligarry being well known as Gaelic speakers and also the history of Gaelic-speaking children attending the school. Mairead does want her children to access the Gaelic language but has chosen English-medium education at primary level rather than GME.

Eoligarry School’s own promotion of its Gaelic provision further contributes to the view that it is a viable alternative to GME for parents interested in their child acquiring some Gaelic. In an advert for the school open day printed in the *Guth Bharraigh* the school noted ‘Discover how Gaelic is used within the school’ as one of eight ‘highlights’ of the school’s open day (*Guth Bharraigh* 2014). Other ‘highlights’ on the open day included; ‘meet the teachers,’ ‘view the resources’ and the ‘garden and poly tunnel’. The school has a Gaelic choir and children from the school regularly enter competitions in the learners’ categories of the local mòd in Barra and Uist. The need to promote the Gaelic provision as a positive feature of the school at their open day is an acknowledgement of the interest of parents in Gaelic and their desire that their child learns at least some Gaelic. Within a context in which opportunities to learn about GME are few, it is clear that Eoligarry’s promotion of their own Gaelic provision can in fact blur the distinction between the two forms of education and their linguistic outcomes especially where parents’ interest lies in their child having an introduction to Gaelic in education or ‘some’ Gaelic rather than becoming fluent in the language.

Families in Barra with children in English-medium education that took part in this study clearly stated their wish that Gaelic instruction be provided in English-medium
education and more encouragement given to families with children in English-medium education to access Gaelic opportunities that are open to all. Will (2012: Footnote 22) found disquiet regarding the Gaelic provision for English-medium educated primary pupils in Lewis:

Parents who chose to send their children to the English medium-stream often complained to me about the spotty and incomplete provision of Gaelic lessons for these children. A number of these parents wished for their children to have high quality Gaelic lessons, and resented having to make a choice between ‘all Gaelic’ education or virtually no Gaelic instruction at all.

Parents in Barra who had transferred their children out of GME often appeared to overestimate the ability in Gaelic that their child would have acquired in their short time in GME and would retain following this period of exposure. Ruth, a mother in Barra who transferred her children from Gaelic-medium primary education to English-medium primary education, explained her belief that her children would maintain the ‘basics’ in Gaelic that they had learned in GME despite transferring them to English-medium provision during after just one and two years of primary education:

Ruth: And they’ve got the basics; they are not going to lose the basics. [My son] and [daughter] will still say ‘madainn mhath’ in the morning and [one of my children] was doing their homework the other night and counted in Gaelic instead of English.

Ultimately, not all parents aim for their child to become fluent in Gaelic. These parents, on the whole, appeared satisfied that their child had learned some Gaelic and felt that the amount acquired was sufficient. Parents’ linguistic aims for their children have to be taken into account when considering GME choice. It is evident that parents are interested in Gaelic, in their child learning or maintaining Gaelic and in the cultural opportunities that can be provided in GME. In what follows I will examine the more general notion of the benefits of bilingualism.
The benefits of bilingualism

GME with Gaelic and English as the two languages in question is the only form of early total immersion education currently available in either research location at primary level or indeed in Scotland as a whole. The benefits of bilingualism are often cited in promotional information about GME, such as Bòrd na Gàidhlig’s information pack on GME for parents ‘Fios is Freagairt’. ‘Buannachdan bho dhà-chànanas / the advantages of bilingualism’ is the first section of information after an introductory page (Bòrd na Gàidhlig 2015: 4):

Some of the potential advantages of bilingualism and bilingual education currently publicised are:

Communication advantages
1. Wider communication (extended family, community, international links, employment)
2. Literacy in two languages

Cultural advantages
3. Broader enculturation, a deeper multiculturalism, and two ‘language worlds’ of experience
4. Greater tolerance and less racism

Cognitive advantages
5. Thinking benefits (creativity, sensitivity to communication)

Character Advantages
6. Raised self-esteem
7. Security in identity

Curriculum Advantages
8. Increased curriculum achievement
9. Easier to learn a third language

Cash Advantages
10. Economic and employment benefits.

Education Scotland’s information page on GME focuses initially on levels of attainment in GME but makes a general statement about ‘all the benefits of bilingualism’:

There are many sound educational benefits of learning Gaelic. Gaelic Medium Education is recognised for successful and high quality achievement in which young
people gain all the benefits of bilingualism (Education Scotland 2016).

Previous research into GME choice has evidenced the influence of the knowledge of the benefits of bilingualism in the choice of GME. With regard to the benefits of bilingualism, O’Hanlon distinguishes between cognitive benefits and benefits associated with an increased ability to learn other languages (O’Hanlon 2012: 55). More widely, Jaffe (2007) cautions against a focus on the benefits of bilingualism in advocating for minority languages because she argues that this approach is not guaranteed to lead to support for the minority language:

> Finally, the shift of focus, in the advocacy of minority language education, towards the general benefits of bilingualism may or may not create long-term support for minority language bilingualism. This is because this discourse represents all bilingualisms as equal, whereas everyone knows that they are not (Jaffe 2007: 68).

In this section, I examine the perceived benefits of bilingualism or bilingual education as described by parents in this study. I then examine how parents frame the benefits of bilingual education, starting with immersion as the method, a parental interest in future language learning, and a belief that early language acquisition is the most efficient second language learning route. Many of the attractive features identified by parents regarding bilingualism are in fact specific to bilingual education rather than about a broader notion of bilingualism. Parents often focus on what this specific form of education can offer their child as a benefit rather than focusing on the ability to communicate in two languages. The extent to which a more general notion of bilingualism attracts parents to GME appears to differ within families, between families and between Barra and Edinburgh. For most parents, bilingualism and benefits associated with it were included as just one of many factors in their considerations.

For parents who are not themselves bilingual but are interested in their child being bilingual, then GME can be the means of achieving this goal. In Edinburgh, Lauren clearly states that her and her partner had a strong preference for bilingual education, because they would like their child to be bilingual. This preference was not specific
to Gaelic; in fact, she would have initially preferred Spanish or German as the immersion language:

Lauren: We didn’t know that there was any bilingual education in Edinburgh at the time so that [the Cròileagan] was a really good introduction to it. So we knew, we knew we wanted the children to be bilingual. Gaelic wasn’t our first choice to be honest, if there was a Spanish school or a German school we probably would have gone for that, but we wanted bilingual regardless.

Aileen, also in Edinburgh, identified benefits of bilingualism: ‘improved vocabulary’ and an increased ‘understanding of grammar’. She clearly explains that her initial interest also lay in wanting her child to be bilingual. Additionally, she has a personal interest in music and believes that GME can ‘foster…musical talent’:

Aileen: I think that it’s about the language. Learning different languages is really good for their development and improved vocabulary as well and understanding grammar. To have two languages is a big advantage. Gaelic itself, to me, like initially, it was just another language that I wanted. But I do really like some of the Gaelic language that I have heard. […] Also, I hope to foster the musical talent that can grow in this environment.

Although Gaelic did not attract Aileen to GME initially, through experience her interest in Gaelic language and culture has increased. A preference for a majority European language and a more general interest in bilingualism was not evident among parents in Barra and even in Edinburgh only three parents noted an initial preference for another form of bilingual education. The linguistic interest of parents in both locations was primarily in the Gaelic-English combination of GME.

Rather than cognitive benefits, when parents did mention ‘the benefits of bilingualism’ they primarily focused on an increased ability to learn subsequent languages, access another culture or more fully access their own culture, or were attracted by research into educational attainment in bilingual education. Sophie, a mother in Edinburgh, however, did describe cognitive benefits of bilingualism. She noted that being bilingual would enable the child to: ‘activat[e] bits of your brain which a monolingual doesn’t’. This advantage, together with the perceived greater
educational opportunities available, attracted her to GME. Finally, Sophie noted that GME ‘feels like the right fit to me’:

Sophie: I think a multilingual education is very important and you know activating bits of your brain, which a monolingual doesn’t. I think that educational opportunities available are greater and it just feels like the right fit to me.

Sophie’s response again highlights the coming together of a range of factors in education choice. Not only is research evidence a factor but additional opportunities also have prominence alongside how this form of education ‘feels’ and ‘fits’ with the family. Factors important in education choice and in the identification of a school as a ‘good’ school clearly include the additional opportunities available at a school, whether these opportunities are in language, music, sport, or outdoor learning.

O’Hanlon et al. (2010: 51) found that parents often focused more specifically on an increased ability to learn other languages as a benefit of bilingual education rather than other identified benefits of bilingualism. Indeed, an increased ability to learn other languages was cited by a number of parents in Edinburgh and was mentioned by one parent in Barra. For some parents, learning Gaelic may not be an end in itself and can be viewed as part of a wider language-learning endeavour. For some, additional languages already form part of their child’s language socialisation because they speak languages other than English and Gaelic at home, while for others future language learning is viewed as a potential opportunity. As with all factors identified, this increased ability in other languages may be given more or less prominence depending on parents’ own interest in multilingualism.

Olivia, a mother who had recently started attending the Cròileagan and considering GME in Edinburgh, clearly states the importance of additional language learning in her attraction to GME. In her account of her involvement, Olivia highlighted both the opportunities associated with bilingualism, namely to live and work elsewhere in Europe and she also recognises the challenge posed by high levels of English monolingualism in this country. Additionally, Olivia highlights how Gaelic is in her son’s ‘heritage’ and her belief that GME ‘is a good education’:
Olivia: I think, we like the idea of him being able to speak another language and hope that that would make it easier for him to be able to speak other languages in the future. Now in the EU people can go anywhere to work and I think one of the biggest challenges with that is that we generally can only speak English. So I think if he is more responsive to other languages he can go anywhere really. And it is part of his heritage and I do quite like that and again it is a good education too.

Although Annabel, another mother in Edinburgh, was interested in Gaelic music and culture she pointed out that her child’s father’s family were ‘business-driven’. She believed that highlighting an increased ability to learn other languages could gain support from the extended family for their involvement in GME:

Annabel: [The child’s father’s] family are all kind of business-driven and world domination is their next step so if [my child] wanted to go into business then being able to pick up languages would be very, a key thing I would imagine, things like Chinese and Spanish and all that kind of stuff.

Annabel regularly attended the Cròileagan in Edinburgh. She understood that her child’s father’s family did not share her interest in Gaelic language and culture. For them, Annabel could highlight an increased ability to acquire subsequent languages as an attractive feature of GME.

In Barra, parents’ focus on the whole remained on Gaelic rather than other languages and wider language learning was only mentioned once. Alasdair mentioned learning another language when discussing his aspirations for his children’s future Gaelic use:

Alasdair: They will certainly not have a choice about continuing with Gaelic right through secondary school with another language if possible.

Alasdair clearly states that he will ensure his children continue to study Gaelic in secondary school and that another language should be learned ‘if possible’. Learning Gaelic in order to learn more languages is not a key consideration in education choice in Barra and other benefits of non-Gaelic specific bilingualism were rarely mentioned.
Immersion as the method

A factor highly regarded by parents who chose GME was the immersion method used by the provision. Parents viewed learning a language in an immersion setting as a more enjoyable experience of language learning and one that would also lead to greater confidence and proficiency in the additional language. Parents often compared the perceived benefits of immersion to their own experience of secondary school language learning, especially those with experience of secondary education in Scotland. Some parents commented critically on their own ability in languages that they had studied at school or university. They hoped that their child’s positive experience of Gaelic language learning would in turn foster an appetite for further language learning and give them confidence to use the languages they acquire. Alice, a mother in Edinburgh who had studied German at university, contrasted her own experience of learning German with her daughter’s openness to learning other languages which Alice attributes to her daughter’s experience of learning Gaelic in GME:

Alice: One lovely thing was, we were talking about Chinese food and Chinese for Chinese New Year and [my child] said ‘when will I learn Chinese?’ so there is just no barrier to language. Whereas I did German at university and I still cringe and go ‘I’m rubbish at languages’. So my aspirations or my expectations are that they’ll just expect that learning languages is something that you just do.

There was a strong belief among some Edinburgh parents that learning an additional language from the start of formal education would be ‘a lot easier’ than studying a language in secondary education. The outcome of early language learning will, they believe, result in greater second language proficiency than second language learning in English-medium schools and this is identified as a very positive feature of GME:

Annabel: For me it is about the fact that she will be learning a language when it is a lot easier to learn a language. Cause obviously if they just go into a regular school then it’s French or German and things like that and it takes a lot longer for them before they start picking [it up]. Total immersion obviously means that they genuinely going to be learning it rather than kind of just kind of picking up odd phrases on a weekly basis.
Annabel clearly believes that language learning is ‘easier’ the earlier a child starts. She makes a distinction between language learning in an immersion setting, ‘genuinely…learning’ Gaelic, and the experience of those learning a second language in English-medium education who will be ‘picking up odd phrases on a weekly experience’.

Aileen also lives in Edinburgh and her father was a languages teacher. She strongly believed that he would support her choice of immersion education. Her father firmly believed in the advantages of early immersion compared to high school second language learning:

Aileen: Well, my father is a languages teacher and so he was very pro [GME] because he struggles with having to teach children who are much older and they don’t catch on to languages when they are in high school. So getting that language stuff at primary school, at a very young age is the best. So he was a big advocate for it.

Immersion education as a method appears to be attractive for two key reasons. Firstly, some parents believe that there is a critical, or at least a most efficient, time period for language learning. Secondly, some believe that learning a language through immersion education leads to increased confidence in language use in comparison with conventional second language learning in education in Scotland. One of the main attractive features of immersion education appears to be its perceived ability to produce confident and proficient speakers, rather than speakers with just some knowledge of the language or who understand but are reluctant to speak a second language. Parents, like Alice, reflected upon their own lack of confidence in using other languages and their difficulties in learning subsequent languages. For these parents, GME provides an opportunity to help their child avoid such challenges.

Parents’ experiences of bilingualism
Parents often reflected on their own experiences in their comments on education choice. Just like parents who have experience of language learning, parents who were brought up bilingual reflected upon their own experiences when considering the benefits of bilingualism for their child. Martin, a father in Edinburgh, gave a clear
statement of his own positive experience of growing up as a bilingual Irish-English speaker:

Martin: Well because I grew up in a bilingual way, I never found that to be anything other than a benefit to me. So I’d like him to have that benefit.

GME only started in Barra in 1992, and as a result relatively few parents know of the experiences of others who attended the provision. Seonaidh described the achievements of Gaelic-medium educated pupils from his own time at school. He attended English-medium provision and believes that his peers in GME went on to do particularly well academically:

Seonaidh: I think it is better for them in their long-term education for them to be brought up speaking two languages. I think it has been scientifically proven that it is better for them, for their education, academic studies. And I’ve seen it first hand with children who went to the Gaelic-medium in Barra that have gone on to do well at university and stuff like that compared to other students who didn’t follow that route. I think it is good to have the cultural aspect of the historical side of what I used to speak and what his grandparents and great-grandparents used to speak, making sure that the language doesn’t die out.

Seonaidh strongly believes that the education provided in Gaelic-medium provision proved advantageous to his peers who accessed it. Reflecting on the experiences of others his own age contributed to Seonaidh’s preference for GME for his own child. Seonaidh also conveys how Gaelic language acquisition, through GME, can be a means of connecting with his child’s extended family and heritage.

Not everyone reflects on his or her experience of bilingualism in such a positive way. As previously mentioned, Ruth, a mother in Barra, explained that some parents’ negative attitudes towards GME came from their belief that their own knowledge of Gaelic had not been beneficial to them in their lives. Another mother in Barra, clearly described how despite being told that learning subsequent languages should be easier because she was bilingual, she did not experience this herself, in fact she ‘was terrible at French’. When parents are bilingual, it is clear that they can reflect on
this experience and can identify where their own experiences align or contrast with the reported benefits of bilingualism.

For some young children in Edinburgh, GME provides an opportunity to be multilingual, with Gaelic as a third or fourth language. For parents of these children, knowing additional languages fluently was strongly believed to be advantageous. As Liam, a father in Edinburgh whose children speak two languages other than English at home, put it: ‘to know four languages at a native level is a great advantage’. In another such family the father, Roddy, spoke of the benefits of Gaelic being a language historically different to that of the language used at home (a Romance language) and English:

Roddy: I know he is going to learn English anyway, so you know I’m not worried about that, so what is the other language that you could learn here. […] It is just because it is another language and because it is quite different as well from [a Romance language] and English. So you know, it’s, cause [a Romance language] and English are similar but Gaelic is quite different, so it is good.

Parents like Roddy have a strong belief that the child’s acquisition of English is guaranteed and expressed no concerns in this respect. The advantage of Gaelic being linguistically distinct from the two other languages that the child speaks illustrates the different types of benefits that parents might value. Parents who themselves speak multiple languages can draw on their own experiences of language learning and understanding of language acquisition to support their choice of immersion education.

**Gaelic and Heritage**

A connection between Gaelic and heritage has been identified as an important reason for the choice of GME in previous research (O’Hanlon et al. 2010, Stephen et al. 2010, Goalabré 2011). O’Hanlon et al. (2010) further suggests that the types of heritage connection identified by parents can be a ‘Family heritage’, ‘General Cultural Heritage’, ‘Heritage of the Highlands and Islands’ and ‘Scottish Heritage’ (O’Hanlon et al. 2010: 46-49). All of these types of connection were found in this
research, and again, individual parents often cited a heritage connection to Gaelic in combination with other factors.

Parents, by virtue of a heritage link to Gaelic through Gaelic-speaking family, often had a level of interest in the language or experience of it. A significant component in the choice of GME is a level of parental interest in Gaelic language and/or culture. This interest is not only through family heritage; different parents were interested in different subjects or activities related to Gaelic including the language, hillwalking, Scotland/specific areas of Scotland, the Celts, history and music. For some without a direct family link to Gaelic, the parents’ interest and any subsequent involvement in Gaelic provision leads to a feeling of connection – rather than building on an existing connection, a connection is being created.

In Barra, families often have a long family history on the island. A contributory factor in Gaelic language transmission is the attempt to create connections to people in the past and also the parent’s upbringing. Catriona recalled how her grandmother would tell her traditional Gaelic stories as a child. She now tells these stories to her own child, maintaining a connection to both her grandmother and her own experiences as a child.

**Creating belonging**

Parents who are Gaelic speakers themselves, or those with living Gaelic-speaking relations, may be motivated by a desire to enable their child to speak Gaelic to these Gaelic-speaking relations. Where intergenerational transmission is not occurring, GME can be seen as the mechanism for ensuring that the child is capable of communicating in Gaelic with grandparents or neighbours even if neither parent can actually speak Gaelic. For others, the heritage link to Gaelic is through more distant relations in previous generations who may now be deceased or with whom they have very little contact. For these parents, their child learning Gaelic might not arise from a desire for them to speak Gaelic to close relations but can be to help build a connection with their family heritage more generally. In such cases, a parents’ desire for their child to speak Gaelic is not associated with speaking the language to a specific individual but to create a connection by having the same skill.
Gaelic-speaking parents’ involvement in Gaelic-medium provision can reflect various factors, just as is the case for non-Gaelic-speaking parents. Gaelic-speaking parents outlined a desire for their child to access education in the language of their home and viewed GME as an important support mechanism for their family’s efforts to maintain Gaelic use in the home. Like other parents, their attraction to this form of education and to learning Gaelic can encapsulate a range of other factors in addition to language acquisition. Cailean, a Gaelic-speaking parent in Edinburgh, explained that his daughter was enrolled in GME because speaking Gaelic was important for understanding her own history, her own family and the places where her parents had been brought up. He added that the fact the Gaelic school was a good school was important and he believed that, for parents without Gaelic, the good education provided by the school would be particularly attractive:

Cailean: Uill, son is gum biodh Gàidhlig aice agus gum biodh direach, tuigidh i an eachdraidh aice fhèin. Gum biodh ceangal aice leis an eachdraidh aice, aig an teaghlach aice. Agus cuideachd tha rudan eile ann. Can a thaobh foghlan Gàidhlig, tha direach tacs a thoir dhailbh, direach uill cha déanann e direach son sin. Tha mi toilichte an cuideachadh agus rudeigin mar sin a chumail a’ dol. Agus barrachd air sin is e deagh sgoil, is deagh sgoileadh a tha ann. Agus tha mi smaoiintinn gu e sin an reusan a bhios aig tòrr nach eil Gàidhlig aca, gum bi iad a’ déanadh nas fheàrr sa sgoil.

Cailean: Well, so that she has Gaelic and just that she will understand her own history, she will have a link to her own history. And also there are other things, say in terms of Gaelic education, just to support [GME], well, I wouldn’t do it just for that. I am happy to help them and things to keep it going. Moreover, it is a good school and a good education. And I think a reason that many without Gaelic have is that they do better in school.

It is clear that for Cailean GME supports language maintenance in the home, but also helps to maintain ties to extended family and support an understanding of the place(s) where his child’s parents were brought up and extended family live. In Cailean’s case, Gaelic is viewed as part of creating belonging to and understanding of another place rather than belonging to the place where they currently live.
In other instances, parents identify creating belonging through GME as a means of helping to create belonging to their current place of residence rather than extended family located elsewhere. Learning Gaelic can be viewed as a means of creating ties to a place and providing a child with a connection when their parents are not from that place. In Masson’s (2009: 23) study of a Caithness fishing village, she highlighted the active role of children as ‘a bridge between old and new for the incomer parent’. Creating belonging through language and education emerged as a positive feature of GME for parents not from Barra (in Barra) or not from Scotland (in Edinburgh).

Parents in Edinburgh who had moved to Scotland spoke of Gaelic as being part of their child’s culture and heritage because their child was born in Scotland. This American parent, Lauren, explains that because both herself and her partner are American and their children are ‘legally’ American, learning Gaelic through attending GME will ‘help cement their Scottish identity’:

Lauren: I think, even though, legally they are American and myself and my partner are American, their identity is Scottish and I think that would help in a lot of ways. [Speaking Gaelic] would help cement their Scottish identity and not only were they born here but they speak the native language. And I think it’s kind of cool, I actually kind of think it is cooler to speak a language that fewer people speak rather than something that anyone can speak.

Language learning is seen to have the potential to create links to places and to people, between people and their family or country’s history, and between parents and their child through shared experiences.

Martin, from Ireland, felt that learning Scottish Gaelic would help create belonging to Scotland for his child because neither of his child’s parents were from Scotland, one was Irish and one English. He reflected upon his own experience of having parents from outwith the location in which he was brought up in Ireland and described his own child’s situation:

Martin: He is always going to be a little bit of a ['stranger'] in Scotland because he has dual nationality, or triple nationality, cause he is Scottish, he is English and he is Irish. […] So in
terms of like sort of helping him to get an identity with the place he lives, I think Gaelic would help him with that and also help him to get an identity with the place that I come from. And it will also help me to get an identity with the place that I have chosen to live with him. So those are all the kind of, also I think the more languages you speak the better for everybody. People who grow up only speaking English are actually in a minority in the world.

It is clear from Martin’s account that GME can have a dual role of connecting his child to ‘here’ (Scotland) and ‘there’ (Ireland). It is also evident from Martin and others’ responses that GME can have a dual role in connecting children to both people and to place. Martin also describes his belief that being bilingual has wider social benefits.

Additionally the linguistic similarity between Irish and Scottish Gaelic gave Martin a further reason to choose GME. When I met Martin, he was actively learning Gaelic and could converse well with me in Gaelic. Martin’s child was speaking and understanding Irish and English well and had also acquired some Gaelic at Cròileagan session and from his father. Living outside Ireland, however, Martin questioned his ability to ensure the successful transmission of Irish to his child. He was the only person providing Irish language input regularly and understood the limitations of this situation:

Martin: I suppose other reasons are, because I would like the possibility that he would be able to converse with me in Gaeilge [Irish] and the likelihood of that where it is just me speaking in Gaeilge to him, is very slim – that he would continue to speak Gaeilge. But if he is within a Gaelic-speaking community then he will learn Gaelic and if he learns Gaelic then he has a chance to be able to speak Gaeilge as well.

Martin hopes that his child will become part of a Gaelic community in Scotland. For him, his child learning Gaelic might support his attempts at Irish language transmission and if this attempt at transmission proves unsuccessful then he hopes that his son’s ability in Gaelic might aid reacquisition of Irish in the future. Parallels can be drawn here between Irish-speaking parents and Gaelic-speaking parents who speak Gaelic at home and view Gaelic-medium as an important contributor to their
attempts to transmit the language and to connect with family who speak the language.

Parents from both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland had children attending GME in Edinburgh. Six of the families I spoke to had one parent from Ireland and one other commented on links to Ireland through extended family. Two of the Irish parents were fluent Irish speakers and the others had varying abilities in the language, from learning in school and other settings. Fiona explained that although brought up in Scotland herself: ‘my family is from Ireland so [Gaelic] is the next best thing to being able to learn Irish’. As we have seen in Chapter 2, the choice of GME by some Irish parents can represent a degree of continuity, as those that had chosen or would have chosen Irish-medium education in Ireland chose GME in Scotland. Maria explains that the main reason GME was attractive was ‘because of the link with Irish’:

Maria: I kind of decided, or we decided, that it would be a good idea to send him to Tollcross and it is mainly because of the link with Irish.

Sarah commented on how she believed that linguistic ability in Gaelic could ease access for her daughter to her Irish heritage. Like other Irish parents, Sarah made clear that she understood that Gaelic ‘is not Irish’ but nevertheless felt that her child learning Gaelic would enable links to be made to her own heritage as an Irish person and also to her Irish-speaking extended family. The choice of GME and a child learning Gaelic is seen as having the potential to create both linguistic and cultural links with Ireland both through Scotland and Scottish Gaelic.

One of the families with an Irish parent, however, encountered some difficulties because their child resisted Irish being spoken or hearing it on the radio after starting in Gaelic-medium nursery provision, as his mother Maria, a fluent Irish speaker, described:

Maria: From when he is at the Sgoil-Àraich, we’d have, well I suppose I’d speak a bit of Irish with him though he kind of resists that and says that it is not Gaelic and then he tries to teach me the words in Gaelic.
Roddy, the child’s father, was trying to learn Irish, he also commented upon his son’s preference for Gaelic:

Roddy: Like for example, before he was in the nursery I was listening to Irish in the car and he would like [it], but like now do you know every time I put Irish on in the car or in the house when I put Raidió na Gaeltachta or something like that he is like ‘no, that is Irish, I don’t want to listen to Irish’.

Irish parents outlined their hope that learning Gaelic would enable their children to access Irish culture or support their acquisition of the Irish language. It is clear from Roddy and Maria’s experience, however, that this might not be without some challenges.

Although some parents did view the choice of GME as a continuation of language and education choice from Ireland, the different political context made the choice of GME a choice that had quite different associations in the Scottish context than was felt to be the case by some in Ireland. McLeod and O’Rourke (2015: 10) found in their study of Irish parents who had chosen GME that ‘all of the northern respondents […] explicitly referred to the political connotations linked to [Irish in Northern Ireland]’. One mother from Northern Ireland in this study explained that she felt that she was able to make a choice of GME in Scotland that would have been more difficult had she been in Northern Ireland. Her father and grandfather were linguists and fluent Irish speakers and her father used Irish with her as a child while her mother used English. Her parents had decided not to send her to an Irish school as this might have been interpreted as a political statement in Northern Ireland. Now living in Scotland, she regularly attends the Cròileagan with her young child and is actively learning Gaelic. The different political context in Scotland means that she does not feel like she would need to make the same considerations as her parents. The choice of immersion education is being made in a different context and therefore some of the wider influencing factors considered will inevitably differ.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have examined the positive attributes of schools identified as ‘good’ schools in educational choice, and parents’ reflections on how they have come to be
involved in GME or English-medium education. GME is compared with English-medium education and a ‘good’ school can be a school that teaches in either language. Parents often framed their education choice within a desire for a ‘good’ school or ‘good’ education and wanted their young child be happy in their chosen establishment. By examining what makes a school a ‘good’ school, the complex contribution of multiple factors influencing education choice can be identified and the choice of GME can be set within the broader context within which parents are making decisions. Certain factors come to the fore at different points in parents’ considerations or involvement and parents’ own and other’s experience influence their understanding of the positive aspects of involvement in GME. Positive features of ‘good’ schools identified by parents include the staff, other families encountered, the overall ‘feeling of the school’, a belief that there was a community around the school, and additional cultural opportunities available to pupils of this school compared to other schools.

Parents reflect on their own experiences of education in their considerations for their child and positive features identified by parents often align with their own interests. Some parents’ initial interest stems from a wider desire to enable their child to be bilingual while many focused specifically on Gaelic language acquisition. The potential of language, and GME specifically, to create belonging or connections between people and places attract a range of parents to GME, from Gaelic speakers to non-Gaelic-speaking Scottish parents, Irish parents and parents from elsewhere. Overall each family has a unique combination of factors that have influenced their involvement in GME and they identify different benefits that reflect their own interests and circumstances. It is the ‘complex combination’ of both positive and negative factors along the process of choosing GME that ultimately lead to its choice and sustains a family’s involvement. In the next chapter I will look at the concerns parents have and how they seek to mitigate identified negative consequences of involvement in GME.
Chapter 4: The Concerns of Parents

The practical implications of choosing GME vary across families and field sites. In this, the final chapter focusing on education choice, I examine the reservations of parents regarding GME. Just as the context, the process and the attractive features of GME are all integral to its consideration and selection, the concerns parents have and the challenges they face also form a central part of the process of GME choice. In what follows, I explore the reservations held by parents and how these can change and often abate over time, while new challenges may arise. I consider how local contexts influence the concerns held and support received. I also assess the mechanisms utilised by parents to mediate their concerns and I consider how parents’ own understanding of their role affects education choice. Finally, I examine the difficulties encountered by Gaelic-speaking families with children in GME.

Parents of children in GME often initially framed their concerns as the same as ‘any other parent’ and stated that they wanted their child to have a good education, as outlined in Chapter 3. Concerns specific to GME were also identified. Parents’ accounts included anxieties around being able to assess their child’s progress not only in their Gaelic language learning but also across the curriculum, including their child’s attainment in English. For many parents who choose GME their initial concerns abate after they receive information or reassurance from other parents and school staff or through their own experiences with their eldest child. Those parents who recalled this support often noted that they would not have continued their involvement, if such information and reassurance had not been given.

Rather than practical in nature, concerns were often raised regarding the social consequences of the geographic spread of children attending the Gaelic school in Edinburgh. Gaelic-speaking families have specific worries about GME that differ from those families who do not speak Gaelic at home. These concerns often relate to Gaelic language acquisition and the Gaelic language environment of Gaelic-medium provision, which can be less strongly Gaelic than Gaelic-speaking parents anticipated.


Parental Involvement

In Scotland, the Scottish Government encourages parental involvement in education and parents in this study commented on their strong desire to be involved in their child’s learning and in the school’s community. The ‘Guidance on the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006’ states that the Act aims to support parents ‘to be involved with their child’s education and learning’ and to ensure that they are ‘welcomed as active participants in the life of the school’ (Scottish Executive 2006).

In the previous chapter, the importance of parents feeling part of a community at the school was highlighted as a positive feature in the identification of a ‘good’ school. This desire for involvement in the school was found amongst parents in both locations, as well as a specific desire to be involved in supporting their child’s education.

Immersion education poses challenges to parental involvement. These challenges differ not only depending on parents’ language ability but also depending on the role that parents believe they have in supporting their child’s education. All parents in Barra and nearly all parents in Edinburgh did not attend GME themselves and therefore their child would be taught in an education setting of which they had little to no personal experience. The majority of parents are not Gaelic speakers and even parents who can speak Gaelic might not always be literate in the language or confident in their ability to support their child.

Parents’ own lack of proficiency in Gaelic is an obvious hurdle to involvement in their child’s education through Gaelic. A non-Gaelic-speaking mother cited in O’Hanlon et al. (2010: 60) had chosen English-medium education because she saw Gaelic as a barrier to involvement in her child’s education. The mother felt that ‘Gaelic medium would prevent her being as involved with her child’s education as she would have hoped’ (O’Hanlon et al. 2010: 60). Like other concerns, both parents who had chosen GME and those who had chosen English-medium education mentioned barriers to parental involvement.

Kavanagh (2013) commented, in the Irish context, that what issues arise around parental involvement depend on parents’ own understanding of their role and any barriers to fulfilment have ‘enormous implications for [parents’] sense of efficacy in
their role’ (Kavanagh 2013: 257). Kavanagh found that parents struggled in particular with Irish-medium education, especially if they viewed their own role as a ‘mini-teacher’:

Feelings of uncertainty, isolation and frustration resulting from an inability to speak the language through which their children are learning were reported by a number of parents, whose construction of the role of supportive parents seemed to require that they act as ‘mini-teacher’ through the language of the school (Kavanagh 2013: 248).

Some parents in this study felt strongly about supporting their child themselves with homework rather than seeking advice or support from others. Viewing their own role as a ‘mini-teacher’ could explain why these parents expressed strongly a desire to support their child themselves. Kavanagh and Hickey (2013: 445) argue that parents of children in Irish-medium education ‘often [seek] to be involved in the same ways as they would with a child in English-medium education’. Kavanagh and Hickey (2013: 445) conclude that such a desire can be ‘problematic’ for parents who are not competent Irish speakers. They suggest that parents of children in immersion education should be supported in developing ‘alternative ways […] to be active partners in their children’s education’ (Kavanagh and Hickey 2013: 448).

**Homework**

Some of the parents considering Gaelic-medium primary education expressed initial trepidations about supporting their child at the primary school stage. Homework was identified as an example of where parents wanted to help their child with their education and parents often feared that difficulties might arise with homework if their child was in GME. Parents sought to be involved in supporting their child with homework, specifically at the primary stage but concerns regarding homework often surfaced much earlier. Parents considered the possible implications of their child attending GME beyond their current stage of involvement. The level of apprehension parents held about supporting their children with homework varied greatly. Some were confident in their ability to support their child while others were not. Parents of children with identified additional support needs commented on concerns regarding their own ability to provide additional help at home to their child.
Parents’ concerns about helping their child with homework were not confined to parents who had no Gaelic at all but included recessive bilinguals and others with differing levels of proficiency in Gaelic. A lack of literacy skills in Gaelic among some Gaelic speakers added to concerns held by more proficient speakers. O’Hanlon et al. (2010: 60) and Kavanagh (2013: 248-9) found that parental concerns are not confined to those with no Gaelic or no Irish at all, but are also held by parents who are Gaelic or Irish speakers.

Linda, in Barra, explained that despite her husband being a Gaelic-speaker she had significant reservations about supporting her children with homework because he works away. Her mother-in-law would have been able to help with Gaelic homework but had recently passed away:

Linda: I think as parents we would have struggled with any Gaelic homework. Because I don’t speak Gaelic and my husband works away most of the time, his Mum would have helped out a lot but she passed away. That might have swayed my decision slightly.

As outlined in Chapter 1, following a short spell in Gaelic-medium nursery, Linda transferred her eldest child to English-medium education. Her other children enter English-medium formal education directly.

Although some parents believed that they had the ability to support their child themselves, they raised concerns for the challenges other parents may face. In Barra, recessive bilinguals who can have limited literacy in Gaelic raised concerns regarding homework support. Seonaidh, along with his partner, discussed supporting their children with homework in GME. He believed that he had sufficient Gaelic to provide support but feared for other parents considering Gaelic-medium primary education without any Gaelic. Based on his experience to-date with his older children in primary education, Seonaidh believes that parents without Gaelic would face a real challenge in supporting their children with homework:

Seonaidh: Both of us have a bit of Gaelic so we aren’t too bad but if you are wanting to send your kids to Gaelic when you’ve got no Gaelic and you are getting given all this stuff [homework], you are going to struggle, really struggle.
The issues relating to supporting a child in GME seemed, for some, to increase over time while for others they decreased. Seonaidh’s partner, Katie, identified the low levels of support for parents, particularly in Barra, as contributing to the continuing or increasing concerns of some parents. Katie had previous experience of preschool Gaelic-medium provision on the mainland:

Katie: Well then what they say to you, […] it is different on the mainland and their approach to you, they assume that you have absolutely no Gaelic and so are much more supportive.

Seonaidh: I suppose there are a lot of assumptions made here.

Katie: Whereas here you’ve got Gaelic or you know somebody that has it.

Ruth commented on the perceived differences in support for parents and more generally for children in GME on the mainland:

Ruth: I think as parents in Castlebay school once the school closes at 3 o’clock that is the school closed until it reopens. Lots of people say that in Glasgow they manage fine, but they have after school activities in Gaelic and youth club in Gaelic.

Although many parents in Barra had neighbours or relatives with Gaelic, it was not always the case that these people were literate in Gaelic or that parents felt comfortable in seeking assistance regularly. Even when one parent is proficient in Gaelic, it can be the case that homework remains a concern because it is the other parent that is mostly involved in homework support, as would have been the case for Linda. Additionally, it is clear that some parents in Barra feel that parents in other locations are better supported if they enrol their child in GME.

The support available for parents

Parents’ concerns regarded supporting their child with homework at the primary stage. Parents of preschool children were often unaware of the full extent of support available to them and their child. Crucially, it is at this point that many parents are considering enrolment. Parents of primary-aged children reported that the support
provided by the school, individual staff, as well as other parents proved invaluable in their continued involvement in GME. The support available to parents in helping their child with homework and the awareness of this support varied. In both areas, the support available to parents is most fully evident when children are in primary education and not when parents consider enrolment in early years’ provision. Parents with older children in GME or who know other parents with older children can often be more aware of the support available. Parents with older children may also have acquired the skills necessary to support their child themselves over time or that their child may not require as much support with homework. Parents with children in the later years of Gaelic-medium primary education did not report concerns regarding homework.

The staff working in Gaelic-medium provision were acutely aware of their important role in providing advice and guidance for parents. Staff were especially mindful of their role in helping parents to understand their child’s progress, especially in terms of Gaelic language acquisition but also more generally in their education. One aspect that can be particularly difficult, as noted by the head teacher in Barra, was the struggle that parents can have in assessing how well their child is progressing in GME. The majority of parents are not Gaelic speakers and most have no experience of this form of education, although a small proportion of parents work in GME. This difficulty in assessing their child’s progress can result in heightened concerns.

The Gaelic-medium nursery staff in Edinburgh acknowledged their own role in supporting and reassuring parents, helping them to understand the progress their child was making within the nursery setting. An experienced member of the nursery staff commented that some parents require ‘reassurance, reassurance, reassurance’, especially when parents have concerns about their child’s Gaelic language acquisition. Parents frequently raised concerns to the staff that their child did not speak Gaelic at home following only a short time in the Gaelic-medium nursery. The staff reassured parents that, although they may not be productive Gaelic speakers at home, the child was able to take part fully in the nursery sessions, to follow instructions communicated in Gaelic within the sessions, and to use some Gaelic in the nursery. GME staff play a vital role in supporting parents considering and
involved in GME. Parents with children already in school showed a greater awareness of the support available and often shared their knowledge with others. Parents with primary-aged children had a clear route to support: the child’s class teacher.

Fiona, a parent who herself had attended Gaelic-medium in the late 1980s, described how teachers supported her own parents who were not Gaelic speakers:

Fiona: We had some really good teachers. They used to put our homework in phonetics so that Mum and Dad could help us learn to read it, even though they didn’t have a clue what it was saying.

Parents in this study with older children outlined how classroom teachers continue to provide support to parents. This type of support is informal, however, and can vary depending on the willingness of the teacher and the level of support needed by the parent. During my fieldwork in Edinburgh, Newbattle Abbey College ran Gaelic classes for parents in the Gaelic school. These classes were not solely focused on supporting parents with homework but focused more generally on language use with children but did provide another avenue for attending parents to seek support.

Support available for parents with children in GME is wide-ranging and comprehensive. This provision is in itself an acknowledgement of, and response to, homework being a concern of parents and the influence of this concern on GME choice. Those working in preschool and primary provision that I met were well aware of the concerns of parents in supporting their child in primary education. These staff understood that homework was a central concern of parents considering and involved in GME and were active in their response to such concerns.

In addition to the support provided by schools, Gaelic-medium resource provider Stòrlann has developed a range of support facilities for parents and other caregivers. Stòrlann provide online homework support from 5–7pm on weekday evenings, where Gaelic speakers are available on a messaging service to answer questions parents have about homework (Gaelic4Parents 2016). Most Gaelic-medium primary schools, including those in Edinburgh and Barra, use the Storyworlds reading scheme for teaching Gaelic reading. Recordings of these books are available online to download.
from the Gaelic4Parents site. CDs are available for those who are unable to afford internet access or live in rural areas where there is no internet access or access is of poor quality. The BBC also provides online support through their ‘Fàilte gu Fuaim’ site that complements the ‘Facal is Fuaim’ scheme used in the first years of primary education to introduce Gaelic phonics. The mathematics homework books used by Castlebay School at primary level has Gaelic on the right hand page and an English translation on the left page. Children are instructed to complete the Gaelic page, with parents and other caregivers able to refer to the English translation to ensure that the task is being completed correctly.

Formal support with homework was also available or becoming available in both field sites. Òganan, the Gaelic-medium wrap-around provider based in the Gaelic school in Edinburgh, allows children to complete their homework within the provision with support from Gaelic-speaking staff. Parents requested this support, which would not be available in similar English-medium after-school provision in Edinburgh.

Just before I left Barra, the school, along with a newly appointed part-time Gaelic development worker, notified parents that Gaelic homework help sessions would be held on a Tuesday after school for Gaelic-medium primary pupils. The information provided stated that the children would be supervised whilst doing their homework. It is unclear whether this provision developed as a result of parental demand and how high the demand for the provision would be. The after-school provision in Barra would be open to all children in GME, unlike in Edinburgh where it was just available to those already attending after-school wraparound care. Both of these forms of provision support the child with homework but do not facilitate parental involvement in supporting the child with homework.

Despite the extensive support available, the actual level of parental awareness of this support varied. Opportunities to learn about the resources and support available differed not only by location but also from year to year. The Cròileagan in Edinburgh provided support for parents and introduced them to the resources available to families. For those unable to attend, or for parents in Barra, the means by which they could increase their awareness of support is less clear. In Barra, a parent with a poor
internet connection commented that they struggled to access the resources available online, including the recordings of the reading scheme books. This parent was not aware that they could request CDs of the recordings of the Gaelic reading scheme books.

**Mediating concerns**

For concerns regarding homework, there were three identifiable means by which parents overcame difficulties: parents learn Gaelic themselves (at least enough to help with homework), they seek support from others, or they learn from their own experience with older children. Over time, many parents had utilised two or all three of these approaches. Claire, a mother from Barra, found that through experience with her older children she was better placed to help with homework. She also received support from a Gaelic-speaking neighbour:

> Claire: I used to call on the neighbour next door and a few times I’ve stuck stuff on Facebook, just a picture of it ‘can anybody translate?’ At first I struggled a lot before I realised about doing that. I used to sit with a dictionary and struggle a lot if you can’t translate it. And now that the older kids have already gone through it I find it easier to help the other kids or the older ones will help the younger ones.

Utilising a range of methods of support was common for parents with older children in Gaelic-medium primary education. Informal support mechanisms were often the main source of awareness of the resources and support available to parents. Parents frequently commented that initially they would turn to people they knew – friends, relatives, teachers – for support, rather than other sources of information such as websites like Gaelic4Parents. In some cases, parents sought assistance from older siblings with homework. One parent expressed strongly her view that this was not appropriate because she did not want to burden an older child with helping a younger child with homework. Other parents had experienced an older child or cousin supporting a younger child with homework as a positive experience for all involved.

Other parents also described how they became more capable of helping with Gaelic homework as their child progressed through primary or as subsequent children entered GME. Katie, in Barra, had learned some Gaelic and explained how parents
had been encouraged by the school to learn alongside their child. Doing so, she explained, enables parents to support their child themselves and increases the parents’ ability to read Gaelic over time (although they might not understanding what they are reading):

Katie: But the thing is they do say to you when you first get the books home, sit with your child every single day. You might know the words, they might be dead easy, it might be repetitive, but the books are going to get harder and the idea was for you to learn with your child and it worked for me because I couldn’t really read Gaelic until we started doing the books and now I might not know what I am saying but I can read the words.

These examples convey how parents become better placed to support their child with homework as they progress through their Gaelic-medium primary education. Kavanagh and Hickey (2013: 442) also point out that as children get older they are also less likely to seek help from parents with their homework. Parents with children in the last three to four years of Gaelic-medium primary education did not raise concerns about homework in this study. It is clear that they may be both more capable of supporting their child and their child might require less support by this stage.

Learning Gaelic is an obvious means of mediating concerns about supporting a child in GME with homework but this endeavour requires commitment, both financial and in terms of time. Some of the parents in this research were learning Gaelic with the explicit goal of helping their child with homework. Other parents saw learning Gaelic as a mechanism for introducing the language in the home and being able to support their child’s Gaelic use outwith the school. These parents aimed to acquire a greater level of proficiency in the language than would be necessary merely to support with homework. Others began learning Gaelic to help with homework but continued to learn more Gaelic than initially planned. Learning Gaelic can pose challenges; in addition to the time and expense, some parents voiced fears that their child would learn Gaelic faster than they could. Some parents deemed such a situation disheartening while others embraced it. Parents also encountered challenges in using the Gaelic they had learned with their children. I examine more fully parents
learning Gaelic and the challenges they faced in Chapter 5. Overall, helping with homework is clearly a concern and parents mediate this by learning Gaelic at classes, getting support from others (older children, neighbours, a class or nursery teacher), and learning through experience with older children.

**Attainment in English**

Parents appear uncompromising in their desire for attainment in English literacy to be unaffected in the medium and long term by their child’s education through the medium of Gaelic. A concern for attainment in English appeared in both locations, especially from parents who had little to no experience of immersion education before starting to consider Gaelic-medium provision. The head teacher in Edinburgh explained that some parents express surprise initially that in GME English literacy is not introduced until the end of primary 3 or the start of primary 4, when pupils are 7 or 8 years old:

> Ceannard Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce: Bidh cuid draghail mu dheidhinn dè cho làidir ’s a bhios na sgilean Beurla aca. Agus gu h-àraidh nuair a bhios iad a’ cluinntinn nach bi iad a’ tôiseachadh air Beurla gu deireadh clas a tri.

Head teacher, Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce: Some [parents] worry about how strong their English language skills will be. And especially when they hear that they won’t start English until the end of primary 3.

For some parents, knowledge of research findings appeared to reassure them about attainment in English in GME, while others found comfort in the experiences of fellow parents with older children in GME or support from school staff. Both Johnstone et al. (1999: 33-34) and O’Hanlon et al. (2010: 20-36) found that GME does not detrimentally impact upon attainment in English. Pupils in Gaelic-medium primary education in some cases outperformed pupils in English-medium education in English reading and writing (O’Hanlon et al 2010: 20). Parents cited O’Hanlon et al.’s (2010) research on attainment in English in GME on a number of occasions, especially in Edinburgh. This research also covered attainment in mathematics and science but parents in this current study did not refer to these findings and confined their comments to the findings on attainment in English.
O’Hanlon et al.’s (2010: 20) research evidenced that children in GME were behind their English-medium counterparts in English reading and writing in primary three, but not in listening or talking. Such a difference at this early stage is not unexpected in a total immersion education setting given that English reading and writing is generally not introduced until the end of primary three, start of primary four (O’Hanlon et al. 2010: 20). By primary five, Gaelic-medium pupils were no longer behind and indeed many of the Gaelic-medium primary children outperformed their English-medium counterparts at this stage and continued to be ahead at primary seven (O’Hanlon et al. 2010: 25).

In Roberts’ (1991: 262) study, although recording positive attitudes towards bilingualism, he found that parents in the Western Isles were concerned that Gaelic provision ‘should not be achieved at the expense of other curricular areas, particularly English’. Concerns regarding the acquisition of English language proficiency featured in the reasons given by parents for moving their child from Gaelic-medium provision to English and for choosing English-medium education at primary level. This concern for attainment in English in Barra appears to have historical routes and a contemporary influence. A lack of proficiency in English has been a barrier to accessing further education and employment for people from Barra in living memory. Older adults recall the struggle that some islanders had in gaining a pass at Higher English and how this prevented them from becoming teachers. These well known experiences in previous generations coupled with contemporary concerns for attainment in the secondary school form part of the background to parents’ anxieties on this subject.

In Ó hIfearnáin’s (2010: 45) study in the Múscraí Gaeltacht in Ireland he found that concerns regarding English language acquisition were held by ‘younger parents and the most strongly Irish-speaking families’. In Barra, those that noted a concern for English acquisition included young parents but interestingly not parents from the most strongly Gaelic-speaking families. Interestingly, rather than a concern for their child’s English acquisition, for Gaelic-speaking parents in this study, it was concern for the child’s acquisition of Gaelic that was most frequently raised. In terms of concern for English acquisition, it was in fact, two parents in families that spoke
English at home that raised concerns regarding attainment in English if their child attended GME. These parents were brought up in Barra but were socialised, at least after entering formal education, predominantly as English-speakers within the home by Gaelic-speaking parents. It is possible that today’s parents’ concern for English acquisition has been influenced by their own parents (today’s grandparents) prioritisation of English acquisition during their own upbringing. The parents in this study who held concerns about English acquisitions often only had very limited ability in Gaelic or in Linda’s case her husband could speak Gaelic but worked away from the island. Linda was brought up speaking English in Barra and expressed strong views on the necessity of English in education. Although she also described how she would like her children to learn Gaelic, her overarching preference for English as the main language of education is evident:

Linda: The main language [in English-medium] is English and you know to be educated in any other language would have done them a disservice.

An additional factor in concerns regarding English attainment pertains to secondary education in Barra. As previously outlined, Castlebay School failed an inspection conducted in September 2007 and the report that followed, published in January 2008, heavily criticised the secondary department of the school (Education Scotland 2008). The initial report stated that attainment in both English and mathematics was adequate while attainment in Gaelic was weak (Education Scotland 2008: 4-5). Despite changes in management and other school staff following the inspection, difficulties continued. Interestingly, I have never heard any mention of the concerns raised about Gaelic in the secondary school; discussions and concerns have overwhelming focused on attainment in English.

In 2010, a former pupil began legal proceedings against the council when only two out of eleven pupils passed the Higher English exam (Hebrides News 2010b), with a third passing the exam on appeal. More recently an English teacher in the school was dismissed by the local authority and later struck off by the General Teaching Council for Scotland (BBC 2014). Attainment in English in particular, continues to be discussed in conversations regarding the school.
In Edinburgh, there was no evidence of concern about the quality of English provision; secondary level provision for Gaelic-medium pupils is currently in a sought-after school with high attainment levels across subjects. Unlike in Edinburgh, the wider educational context in Barra includes this heightened concern for attainment in English.

A related view that has surfaced in Barra is that educating a child through the medium of Gaelic poses a particular risk if the young child has not shown linguistic aptitude. Some parents in Barra believed that GME was only viable if their children had demonstrated some level of linguistic aptitude in the early years – either a general aptitude for language or more specifically by the child speaking Gaelic. This assessment was in addition to parents reflecting on their own (or other parents’) linguistic abilities in being able to provide support to their child if they were in GME. Lucy, a mother from Barra, outlined the views on this topic that she had heard from other parents in Barra:

Lucy: I know from having spoken to other parents that it does relate to how, whether you feel that your kid is particularly linguistic or showing that they might be.

Demonstrated linguistic ability as a prerequisite to GME implies a view of bilingualism and bilingual education that requires additional aptitude. The belief that a child must be ‘particularly linguistic’ to enter GME is interesting indeed in such a context where bilingualism in Barra amongst older adults is widespread and not confined to those who are particularly adept at language learning. Furthermore, how exactly a young child might demonstrate such an aptitude was often unclear. Parents in Barra appear to make additional considerations in deciding upon the suitability of GME for their child in comparison with parents in Edinburgh.

Professional advice

A third contributing factor to concerns in Barra is the professional advice given to parents of young children regarding language acquisition and education. This professional advice and the experiences of other parents both contributed to parental reservations regarding GME and a desire for the child to demonstrate linguistic aptitude prior to entry into GME, even at nursery level. One family recalled being
told by the Speech and Language therapist that they should not continue to actively use Gaelic as a home language and another family received advice that they should not consider GME because of their child’s possible hearing problems. The Gaelic-speaking child was not assessed in Gaelic and only an English assessment was used to indicate language delay. The professional advice being given to parents in Barra would appear to contravene the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapy guidance on bilingualism (RCSLT 2007) and new guidelines for professionals working with children in bilingual settings including GME specifically (RCLST 2015). Although parents in Edinburgh did not comment upon this sort of advice in relation to children brought up speaking Gaelic at home, one mother who is a health professional outlined that she had overheard professionals advise parents from other European countries not to use a language other than English with their children in Edinburgh. This mother clearly conveyed that she understood that such advice was ill informed.

De Houwer (2009: 315) explains that families bringing their children up bilingually in other contexts frequently attest to advice such as that given to these families. Such misinformation coming from professionals, who parents believe are well placed to give such advice, can have negative consequences for language use in families who were previously using both languages without notable difficulties:

> It is important to point out that even in families where children are quite happily becoming bilingual, interference from outside the family may cause unnecessary problems, leading to non-harmonious bilingual development. Preschool teachers, medical personnel or speech therapists often advise parents in bilingual families to stop using the minority language at home, even for children who fluently speak two languages (this advice is most likely based on the unwarranted overt belief that early bilingualism is bad for children). Parents often take this advice, since they want to do what is best for their children and believe that teachers, doctors, nurses and language professionals know best. The results of this can be negative (De Houwer 2009: 315).

In Barra, the advice given to parents locally by professionals contributes to a more widely held view of bilingualism as an additional challenge and GME as an option primarily for those who face no other identifiable challenges in Barra.
The experiences of others

Not only do parents learn about the existence of GME from other parents, but they also become aware of other parents’ experiences – both positive and negative. Some parents in Barra outlined the negative experiences of others. A young mother in Barra, Louise, recalled the experience of her mother’s friend who had enrolled her child in GME at primary level in Barra. The friend ultimately transferred their child to English-medium education. The experience of Louise’s mother’s friend appears to have heightened Louise’s concerns about supporting her own child if she were to enrol her in GME:

Louise: Well I think things like, I know one parent, my Mum’s friend. She, when she put her kids in [to Gaelic-medium nursery provision], I think they all went. All her family are fluent Gaelic speakers, they speak it, all of them, her Mum, the aunties. The kids don’t speak it. They went to [Gaelic-medium] primary school and then they found it, they couldn’t do the homework. They came home and the homework was difficult. Even though they are fluent Gaelic speakers they found it difficult. They struggled so she took them out of [Gaelic-medium] primary. So that is my worry.

Although considering GME for her young child, Louise was left anxious by this other mother’s experience. As a result, she wanted to ensure that she was linguistically capable of supporting her child in GME if she chose the provision. Louise had studied Higher Learners Gaelic but believed that before enrolling her child she would have to improve her Gaelic by attending Gaelic classes. As well as improving her own Gaelic, her comments indicate a perceived requirement for the child to show ability in the language before attending nursery. Louise also makes a distinction between her views on education choice for nursery and for primary level. Even if she were to improve her Gaelic she would still be unsure about GME at primary level primarily due to concerns regarding homework:

Louise: So maybe by that time maybe yeah I would [have learnt more Gaelic]. [My child’s father] can have a conversation in Gaelic but I can’t. I think we would need to have Gaelic at home to put them into like [Gaelic-medium nursery] or wherever. […] I don’t know about primary. If she can speak it herself and I’m successful and if we can speak it
here then yes, cause I know the homework is a bit of a difficulty.

Looking to a child to demonstrate spoken ability in Gaelic was similar in some regards to the position of Eilidh, the mother in Edinburgh who reported increased certainty in her choice of Gaelic-medium for primary when the child progressed through Gaelic-medium nursery and began to produce Gaelic at home. A significant difference exists here, however; Louise would both like her child to use Gaelic and sets herself the challenge of becoming more proficient in Gaelic before considering GME even at nursery level. In Edinburgh, Eilidh did not learn any Gaelic but enrolled her child in the nursery provision before being reassured by her child’s acquisition of Gaelic. Her son had an opportunity to learn Gaelic and demonstrate his ability as a result of attendance at the nursery for nearly two years. Furthermore, Eilidh did not set herself any goals for language learning and reported very little use of Gaelic resources at home. In Barra, it is unclear where Louise’s child would receive the necessary input in Gaelic in order to produce Gaelic before attending Gaelic-medium nursery provision and there were no Gaelic classes available in Barra for adults with prior knowledge of Gaelic, at the time of the research. All classes were aimed at beginners.

There is no reported requirement for parents to attain any level of proficiency in Gaelic before enrolling their child in Gaelic-medium provision. Parents in Edinburgh did not mention the linguistic ability of the child in their decisions regarding GME. In Edinburgh, parents who were actively learning Gaelic were doing so alongside their child and did set a target of learning Gaelic to a specific degree of fluency before considering GME.

**GME as exclusive**

A wider discourse that became evident in Barra is that some parents view GME as exclusionary. Rather than by being their own view, three parents included comments in their responses on this being the view held by others. They recalled that on the rare occasion that events are aimed at just Gaelic-medium pupils or Gaelic-speaking children or even if such events were suggested, then comments were made about such opportunities being exclusive. English events are not seen as exclusive. The
views held by some parents that a child must have a certain level of linguistic aptitude to enter GME reinforces a sense of exclusivity around GME. O’Hanlon et al. (2010: 61) also reported views about GME being perceived as divisive by parents who had chosen English-medium education.

In reality, however, GME is open to all children. At the early years stage, the Gaelic-speaking parent-and-child groups in both areas attract a range of parents including those definitely intending to send their children to English-medium education. In Barra, children regularly enrolled in Eoligarry School for primary education after attending Gaelic-medium nursery provision. At primary level, Gaelic groups and events are open to children in GME and English-medium education. The Gaelic drama group for primary children and Castlebay School’s mòd club is open to all children. Indeed, parents with children in English-medium education commented positively on these Gaelic opportunities for their children and had children who attended.

GME was also associated by two respondents in Barra to benefit from more opportunities and resources compared with English-medium education. Mairead outlined how she believes that the Gaelic stream of the nursery in Castlebay is better catered for in terms of resources and opportunities:

Mairead: Sometimes I feel a wee bit, […] there is a lot for kids that do Gaelic, book-wise and just visual things, […] which is fantastic but you don’t get a lot on the [English] side.

In Edinburgh, the overwhelming view from parents involved in GME was that the provision was very inclusive. It was only in Barra, however, that I spoke to families who chose English-medium education, apart from one family in Edinburgh who attended the Cròileagan. Thus I cannot comment on the extent to which GME is seen in Edinburgh as exclusive by parents who choose English-medium education and have had no involvement in GME. On the whole, those involved in GME celebrated the Gaelic school in Edinburgh for the diverse backgrounds of the families who attend. The reactions from others in Edinburgh reported by parents who become involved in Gaelic-medium provision suggest that some with little to no knowledge
or experience of Gaelic-medium see the provision as exclusive, while those involved view it as inclusive. There are, therefore, clear parallels here with the situation in Barra. This view of GME as exclusive was only mentioned on a few occasions and no parent included such a comment in their reasoning for choosing Gaelic or English-medium education.

In what follows, I examine how a family’s involvement in a school can be constrained by the location of the school and how this can be of concern to parents. I then examine how parents comment on their role in supporting their child’s social network, whether by encouraging them to play with local children or not fully removing them from English-medium nursery provision because of established friendships. Similar to the concerns outlined above surrounding parental involvement, anxieties around location appear to relate mainly to primary education despite the practical implications of a significant geographic distance between home and school being greatest in the early years when transport is not provided.

**Location**

At a practical level, attending preschool provision requires much more from parents than at primary level. In order to attend Cròileagan sessions, parents must be free themselves to take their child and remain with them for the duration of the sessions or make arrangements with a caregiver to attend such sessions with their child. Work commitments prevented many families from attending such sessions. Of the parents who were in attendance, some worked part-time, others worked shifts, and others took the morning off work to attend and made up their hours later in the day. Children also attended with grandparents, child-minders, au pairs and other caregivers. All sessions in Barra are held on weekday mornings and in Edinburgh, four out of the five weekly sessions were held on weekday mornings with the fifth on a Monday afternoon. A small number of families in Edinburgh attended more than one session a week. Some attended in different locations but most attended the same session in the same location each week.

At nursery level, parents must transport their child to and from sessions, or make other suitable arrangements, but do not remain with their child during the session. Most children do, however, attend five sessions a week. At the time of my fieldwork
in Edinburgh, there was a level of flexibility regarding sessions and children could attend a combination of morning and afternoon sessions. In Barra, the five sessions of nursery provided are only available in the morning. If the family lives more than two miles from the school, at primary level, the local authority provides transport for children to and from school, normally by bus. Parents of primary-aged children or parents considering the primary stage were conscious of the likely occasions where they would need to travel to and from the school for parent meetings, school events and other occasions.

Parents of preschool children in Edinburgh raised concerns about the distance to the school and about their child travelling by bus to school. Eilidh was concerned about this aspect but informed me after her child started in primary one that he thoroughly enjoyed travelling to school on the bus. Because the bus picked him up locally, she no longer needed to drive across the city as she had done when he was in nursery and this had been beneficial to her own day. The reality for Eilidh was not as feared and in fact a number of positives of school bus travel were now apparent for both her child and herself that she had not previously considered.

A second, yet related, component of parents’ concern about the distance between home and GME appears to be the social implications of attending a school outwith their local area. Fiona spoke fondly of the welcoming, inclusive environment provided by the Cròileagan but she remained mindful of the difficulties regarding location that she had encountered as a child attending GME. Fiona also reflected on her sister’s current opposition to GME following their own experience. She noted that the distance between the family home and the Gaelic-medium school or unit is an important factor in her sister’s feelings today:

Fiona: I think because it is so different from when we went. Because when we went to Gaelic school it was about like 20 miles from where we lived. We had to get the bus ridiculously early. We didn’t have any friends at home because you know all our friends were at school but we didn’t live near any of our friends at school. So it, you know, it polarises your, you know, you can’t go and play with the kids on your street at the weekend because you don’t know them really, you’re not in school with them.
As identified by Fiona’s own experience, the distance travelled daily to and from school can pose significant practical challenges for families but can also have social implications for a child attending a school outwith their local area. As Fiona described, this can cause difficulties in establishing friendships with children in the local area. The local school is often a meeting place and a point of shared experience for local children. Other parents in Edinburgh raised the social aspect of distance from GME as a reservation. Alice, had reservations regarding the practicalities of the distance of the Gaelic school from their home and especially the social consequences of their children attending a school outwith their local area:

Alice: We’ve had our concerns because you are taking them out of their local environment. I think that is my biggest reservation about GME because they are not going to school with the children that they are living beside. And then the distance to travel is pretty difficult.

Cailean, a father in Edinburgh, acknowledged that others had raised similar concerns. Although not currently an issue, Cailean was mindful that this might prove to be an issue in the future:

Cailean: Bidh feadhainn ag ràdh, uill, chan eil e cho math dhaibh nach eil caraidean aca a’ fuireach faisg. Tha mi a’ smaointinn nach eil a sin a’ dèanamh mòran diofar; tha caraidean [mo phàiste] a tha a’ fuireach faisg [air mo phàiste] nach eil a’ dol don aon sgoil. Is dòcha gum biodh duilgheadas ann an sin shios an rathad ach chan eil sin a’ cur dragh ormsa an-dràst’.

Cailean: Some say, well, it isn’t too good for them that they don’t have friends living nearby. I don’t think it makes much difference. I don’t think it makes much difference as [my child] has friends that live nearby that don’t go to the same school. Maybe this will be a difficulty down the road but it doesn’t worry me just now.

Not only is Cailean aware of the concerns of others, but he is also mindful that reservations can change over time. While some parents were anxious about their child not knowing other children locally, others highlighted social benefits of their child being in GME, because their child made friends with children that lived nearby and also had other friends at school.
The social aspect of the challenges posed by location, and the wide area from which children come to attend GME in Edinburgh, can for some parents extend beyond the individual child’s friendship to include concerns regarding how parents and children feel part of a community around the school. Alice’s children attend Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce and she felt that there were challenges in creating a sense of community around the school because children attend GME from all over the city and also because the school had only recently opened:

Alice: Again the distance, I think there is, it is harder to, and it is a new school and so I think it has been quite hard for the school community to develop. I think that is because people are coming in from everywhere and it is not local people going to a local school. I think it is quite difficult to make it into a community. And for the kids to realise that there can be a school community, a Gaelic community. They are my reservations and I still have them but we are still here.

Alice believes that the lack of geographic concentration of pupils in a specific area of the city, as is the case with a local school, coupled with the fact that the school is new, means that a sense of community is lacking around the school. The difficulty of creating and maintaining this sense of community, Alice highlights, was a significant reservation that continues to be held about her family’s involvement in GME.

Parental involvement and the community around a school can feature strongly in parents’ on-going considerations. Social concerns for parents may not be confined to who their child will play with in their local area but can include concerns about this ‘sense of community’ around the school and the involvement of the whole family in this community. One factor that was not found in this study but was noted in the Irish context was that parents found language to be a barrier to involvement with the school (Kavanagh and Hickey 2013: 439). Not being able to speak Gaelic was not raised as a concern in relation to involvement with the school in either location in this study. This is likely to be the result of Gaelic-medium schools not having rules or high expectations for parents to use Gaelic in communicating with the school.

In Barra, location was only very rarely identified as a concern at a practical level and did not appear in relation to social considerations. Parents did not mention any social challenges from attending a school other than the closest school. Children at both
schools on the island attend the same after-school activities. The annual sports day and swimming gala involve both schools, with children competing in mixed teams using Castlebay School’s houses system. All other local events attract children from both schools. It is understandable in such a context that the social considerations identified in Edinburgh would be unlikely to emerge in Barra.

Parents in Edinburgh explained that they mediate their concerns regarding location by moving closer to the school if they are looking to move house and/or by encouraging their child to play with local children and attend local events and groups. A concern regarding the practical or social implications of involvement in GME does not appear to instigate relocation but rather the school becomes one of many factors considered when a family decides to move. Fiona had not considered catchment areas and school choice in prior house moves but it is clear that such a consideration will feature going forward:

Fiona: We have spoken about it already, because we will move house before he is at school, because we need a bigger [house] and that’s come up in the consideration because the next house we have, you know like the catchment areas and all the rest of it and what school and all this kind of stuff.

In order to mediate what may be regarded as a level of social exclusion caused by attending a school outwith their local area, three parents in Edinburgh explained that they made a conscious effort to ensure that their child had opportunities to meet children in the local area. These efforts included enrolling their child in extra-curricular activities locally rather than near the school and attending family events in their area.

Parents’ endeavours to maintain or establish friendships for their children were also revealed by how some parents maintained their child’s attendance at English-medium education at nursery level when they had decided to enrol them in Gaelic-medium primary provision. Some parents in Edinburgh whose child had begun nursery education in an English-medium setting appeared reluctant to move their child to Gaelic-medium nursery full-time even when space became available. This was the case in three families in this study including Anna and Mark’s family. Anna explained that their child attended the Gaelic-medium nursery for one full day a
week but continued to attend their English-medium nursery for their three other sessions because the child had ‘his wee friends there’. Another family had enrolled their child for Gaelic-medium primary education but had maintained the child’s attendance full-time at another nursery citing the same reason. Another family whose child attended both GME and English-medium nursery cited practical reasons for continuing their child’s attendance at an English-medium nursery and not taking up their child’s full five-session allowance in GME. The private nursery provider of their English-medium sessions gave them more flexibility in timings than the local authority-run Gaelic-medium nursery.

Maintaining and developing social relations is an influencing factor on the amount of Gaelic-medium early years provision accessed. Stephen et al. (2010: 1) report that the ‘great majority’ of children in Gaelic-medium at primary level have attended some form of Gaelic-medium early years provision. This appeared to be the case in both locations in which I conducted fieldwork. For those who have accessed some Gaelic-medium early years provision there is significant variation in the amount of early years provision accessed. Some children attend Cròileagan provision and then two years of Gaelic-medium nursery education while others attend a limited number of nursery sessions a week in the final year of nursery. It is clear that both practical and social considerations contribute to the amount of GME accessed in the early years.

In what follows I turn to examine the concerns of Gaelic-speaking families involved in GME. Although they can share reservations with other parents there were a number of specific concerns that arose only amongst Gaelic-speaking families.

**Gaelic-speaking children in GME**

In this research, Gaelic-speaking families had specific concerns about GME that differed from those raised by non-Gaelic-speaking families. These concerns were mostly linguistic and pedagogical in nature. The need for awareness of the minority of children and families for whom GME is a form of heritage education has been acknowledged in previous research:
The question of appropriate provision for the very small number of children who are already fluent in Gaelic when they begin attending nursery requires attention. These children might be expected to flourish in a linguistically rich environment but it is not clear whether their language development needs are well-catered for in provision aimed principally at learners of the language, and recent work in Wales (Hickey and Lewis 2009) and Ireland (Mhic Mhathúna and Mac Con Iomaire in press) indicates that this group of learners need further consideration (Stephen et al. 2012: 27-28).

In this study, Gaelic-speaking parents identified a range of issues that had arisen in their early involvement in GME. Concerns regarding the ability of GME to meet the needs of children that enter the provision able to speak Gaelic often arose early in their involvement due to the child’s noticeable progress in English rather than Gaelic on entering and attending Gaelic-medium nursery education. Parents often also held concerns regarding the errors that their child may acquire from the other children who are only starting to learn Gaelic. Additionally, some parents in Edinburgh had reservations regarding the Gaelic proficiency of staff employed in GME; this did not feature in responses in Barra.

In this study, all the Gaelic-speaking parents raised concerns regarding the needs of the Gaelic-speaking children in GME. Oighrig, a mother in Barra, commented on the pedagogical challenges for the nursery staff and argued that staff should be given support and guidance on how to meet the needs of the children with Gaelic on entering Gaelic-medium nursery:

Oighrig: Tha draghan ann, bha dùil ’am gum biodh, nach biodh na h-uiread a Bheurla [anns an sgoil-àraich] agus a tha. Chan eil mi a’ faireachdainn gu bheil clann aig a bheil Gàidhlig a-staigh a’ faighinn taic aig [an sgoil-àraich]. Chan eil mi idir a’ cur coire air an fheadhainn a tha a’ coimhead as an dèidh. Tha mi a’ smaointinn nach eil iadsan a’ faighinn an taic airson cuideachadh a thoir don fheadhainn aig a bheil Gàidhlig.

Oighrig: There are worries, I was expecting that, that there wouldn’t be as much English in the nursery as there is. I don’t feel that the children who have Gaelic at home are getting support at the nursery. I don’t blame those that look
after them at all. I don’t think that they get the support to help those with Gaelic.

Oighrig and other parents highlighted that awareness of the needs of Gaelic-speaking children to be supported to develop their Gaelic language skills are often overlooked. Hickey et al. (2014) argue strongly from their research in Ireland and Wales that awareness must be raised of the development needs of those in immersion settings for whom the education is in their home language, especially when that language is a minority or endangered one:

Children who are native speakers of a minority or endangered language have significant language needs, even if they appear fluent in the language (compared to L2 learners at least), and they need to be offered input at an appropriate language level to help them to develop their accuracy and vocabulary. (Hickey et al 2014: 231)

Hickey et al. (2014) identified a variety of ways in which the needs of these speakers could be better supported in immersion education. Such children could be supported by using ‘enrichment language activities’ with these children, grouping these children together ‘to promote the habit of speaking the language to each other,’ and ensuring that the teacher or play leader provides language ‘input … at the level they require to build vocabulary and accuracy’ (Hickey et al. 2014: 230).

The Gaelic school in Edinburgh acknowledged the need to provide support for primary-aged children from Gaelic-speaking families. The head teacher outlined how the school has utilised voluntary staff to support such children once a week:

Ceannard Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce: Uill, le, ma bhios clann a’ nochdadh a tha fileanta sa Ghàidhlig tha sin a’ toirt dúbh lain dhuinn a thaobh cânain. Ach air an láimh eile tha iad aig an aon ire a thaobh sgilean litearachd agus maths, rudan mar sin agus sgilean söisealta agus rudan eile a bhios sinn ag obair air ann an clas a h-aon. Ach bidh sinn a’ feuchainn ri rudan a chur air dòigh le bhith a’ cleachdadh luchd-taic saor-thòileach, tha sinn a’ dèanamh sin an-dràsta, tha cuideigin a’ tighinn a-staigh a h-uile Diardaoin gu saor-thòileach agus tha ise ag obair cómhla riuthasan. Agus dh’haodadh sinn luchd-taic, dh’haodadh sinn tidsear taic-ionnsachaidh a chleachdadh cuideachd ach direach, tha sinn cho trang agus mar a tha na h-aireamhan tha e doirbh sin a
dhèanamh uaireannan ach feumaidh sinn a bhith cruthachail mu dheidhinn suidheachaidhean mar sin.

Head teacher Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce: Well, if children come who are fluent in Gaelic that poses a challenge for us in terms of language, but on the other hand, they are at the same level in terms of literacy skills and maths and things like that, and social skills and other things that we work on in primary one. But we try to arrange things with voluntary assistants. That is what we are doing just now, someone comes in every Thursday voluntarily and she works with them. And we could use assistants, we could use the Additional Support teacher also, but we are so busy and with the numbers as they are it is difficult to do that sometimes but we need to be creative about situations like that.

Although the school had identified the distinct needs of children who enter GME from Gaelic-speaking homes at the primary stage in Edinburgh, the school’s strategy for addressing this problem is reliant on a volunteer Gaelic speaker and is also only available at the primary stage. These families clearly require support and appropriate provision throughout GME.

Both in Edinburgh and in Barra there were only a small number of children entering Gaelic-medium at nursery level who were already competent Gaelic speakers. The number in Edinburgh was just 3 out of 96 children registered in the nursery and was just 4 out of 20 in Barra. Although the proportion is significantly higher in Barra, in terms of language use, even this proportion is sufficiently low to ensure the dominance of English between children. Gaelic-speaking children attending Gaelic-medium nursery use English to communicate with other children; very few of their peers are capable of conversing in Gaelic with them. Gaelic-speaking parents find that this English-speaking peer environment contributes to their child’s English language development but fear that the environment does not adequately support their child’s emerging proficiency in Gaelic. Hickey (2001) described a similar situation for Irish-speaking children entering Irish-medium preschools in Ireland. These children, Hickey argues are being ‘unofficially’ immersed in English:

In effect, these L1 speakers of the minority language may experience both official and unofficial immersion: official immersion in the target language used consistently by the
Parents associated an increased use of English by Gaelic-speaking children on entering GME with the lack of Gaelic-speaking peers for Gaelic-speaking children. Increasing competence in English and an increasing desire to use English can impact upon parents’ efforts regarding Gaelic language socialisation in the home. In Edinburgh, Cailean described how there are only three or four children in total in his daughter’s class that are from Gaelic-speaking homes and it appears to be her English rather than Gaelic that is improving most in school. His daughter now wants to speak English all the time and she now replies in English to her mother. He, however, continues to speak Gaelic to their daughter and the daughter responds in Gaelic. Cailean is unsure why his daughter now has a preference for English:

Cailean: Well one thing we have noticed, not many go to the school that have Gaelic. There was only, maybe, three or four, and the thing that improves most is her English. And she wants to speak English all the time, for whatever reason. But my wife isn’t as fluent as I am and [his daughter], she mostly speaks in English to my wife and, but she knows I won’t answer her in English so it is Gaelic that she uses with me all the time.

Catriona, a mother in Barra, noted that her child returned from Gaelic-medium nursery with new English phrases but the child rarely returned with any new Gaelic words or expressions. So far, however, no issues had arisen in terms of her child seeking to use more English at home.

Not only did parents in this study express concern at the development of their child’s English rather than their Gaelic in GME settings, but they also considered the
detrimental effect of the majority Gaelic-learner environment on the Gaelic of already Gaelic-speaking children. Marsaili, in Barra, reflected on her experience with her eldest child who had attended Gaelic-medium nursery and primary education. From experience with this older child, Marsaili worried that the learners in the class would influence her younger children’s Gaelic. She feared that her Gaelic-speaking children would begin to speak Gaelic like a child from an English-speaking home who acquired the language predominantly in school. Her younger child, like her eldest child, might start speaking ‘Gaelic like English’:

Marsaili: Bidh iad a’ togail rudeigin ceàrr bhon a’ chlann eile. Thachair e leis a’ [phàiste] as sine. Tha sin rud beag na dhragh orm. Bidh iad a’ tìghinn dhachaigh a’ feuchainn ri Gàidhlig a bhruiddhinn mar Bheurla.

Marsaili: They pick up incorrect things from other children. This happened with the eldest child. That concerns me a bit. They come home trying to speak Gaelic like English.

Dòmhnall in Edinburgh had similar concerns. He reflected on the situation of Gaelic-speaking children in GME and considered the situation if it were English they were learning in school and his child was already proficient in English but surrounded by a large majority of children with no English at all. He feels that considering a child’s English language acquisition in such a scenario makes him question the ability of GME to help his child’s Gaelic acquisition:

Dòmhnall: Ma bha thu a’ dol a chur balach a bha fileanta anns an sgoil far nach eil ach còig no sia clann eile a tha fileanta anns a’ Bheurla bhon toiseach bhiodh tu a’ smaoineachadh, oh murt, am biodh sin actually feumail don Bheurla.

Dòmhnall: If you were going to put a boy who was fluent into a school where there were only five or six other children who were fluent in English from the start then you would think, oh my, is that actually going to be helpful for their English?

Many of the key challenges facing GME were apparent to Gaelic-speaking parents in both Edinburgh and Barra. Gaelic-speaking parents are also in a position, as a result of their Gaelic ability, to assess to a degree the language competencies of their child,
other children and staff. Non-Gaelic-speaking parents or parents who have only managed to learn Gaelic to a relatively low level lack this ability. Mòrag, in Edinburgh, expressed concerns about the competency in Gaelic of some of the staff involved in GME:

Mòrag: Is e an aon teagamh eile a th’ agam mun an sgoil, tha fhíos ’am gu bheil e duilich uaireannan a lorg gu leòr tidsearan a tha fileanta iad fhèin. Agus an uair sin tha mi a’ creids’, tha ceistean ann mu dheidhinn dé cho math is tha a’ chlann a’ dol a dh’ionnsachadh mur nach eil na tidsearan fhèin fileanta.

Mòrag: The one other concern I have about the school, I know that it is difficult sometimes to get enough teachers that are fluent themselves. Then, I think there are questions about how well the children are going to learn if the teachers themselves are not fluent.

Mòrag explained that although she did not know any specific teachers in the school, she was aware that getting proficient Gaelic speakers was a problem facing GME. Mòrag concluded that ultimately she is concerned that the Gaelic they are taught might not be correct: ‘A bheil a’ Ghàidhlig a thèid a theagasg dhaibh, a bheil e gu bhith ceart?’ (Will the Gaelic they are taught, will it be correct?). Dòmhnall recalled instances when he was in the school and saw mistakes in the Gaelic in materials on display. He was particularly concerned that teachers had not identified these errors:

Dòmhnall: Ach uaireannan, bidh mi a’ faicinn mearachdan air a’ bhalla anns an sgoil agus bidh thu a’ smaoineachadh gu bheil sin a’ tighinn bho na tidsearan. Tha sinne a’ faicinn gu bheil sin ceàrr agus chan eil na tidsearan.

Dòmhnall: But sometimes, I see mistakes on the wall in the school and you think, this is coming from the teachers. We can see that that is wrong but the teachers can’t.

Parents’ concerns were not only confined to formal GME. The appropriateness of the Cròileagan groups for parents who are Gaelic speakers was also challenged. With the focus of groups on basic Gaelic vocabulary and with predominantly non-Gaelic-speaking adults and children in attendance, two of the Gaelic-speaking families in Edinburgh explained that they only attended one Cròileagan session. The lack of
Gaelic speaking opportunities for them and their child was a key factor in their decision not to return. Mòrag does continue to attend the Cròileagan but outlined clearly the limited linguistic benefit of the groups for her children. She did highlight, however, social benefits of attendance:

Mòrag: Tha e a’ còrdadh rinn direach airson is gun e cothrom math a th’ ann coinneachadh ri tòrr daoine, gu h-àraid daoine a bhios, a’ chllann a bhios an aon aois ri [mo phàiste] nuair a thèid i dhan an sgoil-àraich. Tha e a’ còrdadh rium gu bheil mi, tha tòrr community ann tron an sin chanainn. Direach tha thu an-còmhnaidh a’ coinneachadh ri daoine ùra agus daoine bho diofar, diofar backgrounds. Cha chanainn gu bheil e a’ dèanamh mòran feum dhan a’ chllann a thaobh na Gàidhlig airson tha e gu math basic.

Mòrag: We enjoy it just because it is a good opportunity to meet lots of people, especially people that will be the same age as my child when they go to nursery. I enjoy the fact that there is a lot of community through it, I’d say. Just that you are always meeting new people, and people from lots of different backgrounds. I wouldn’t say that it is of much good for the children in terms of Gaelic because it is very basic.

Mòrag also believes that her children enjoy attending the groups but in terms of the linguistic environment, there is more English spoken at sessions than Gaelic. She had recently heard that a new group may be established for Gaelic speakers or advanced learners. She concludes that such a project could be more appropriate for herself and her children: ‘is mathaid gum biodh sin na b’fheumaile’ (maybe that could be more useful).

Concerns about the amount of Gaelic in Gaelic-medium nursery provision and the lack of support and guidance for early-years staff trying to meet the language needs of a small percentage of children who are coming from a Gaelic-speaking home have been noted previously (Stephen et al. 2010). Although some of the challenges faced by Gaelic-speaking parents have been highlighted within the literature from a linguistic and pedagogical perspective it is important also to consider these challenges within parental considerations regarding education choice.
Conclusion

The choice of GME at both early years and primary stages is not a choice made with complete confidence and certainty; parents continue to hold reservations even after enrolling their child in GME. These concerns are not confined to non-Gaelic-speaking parents. Parents with a range of abilities in Gaelic hold concerns, from the social and practical implications of the location of the school to helping with homework and parents being involved in the school. By examining the concerns and reservations of parents and how parents attempt to mediate these in this chapter, it has become apparent that GME can present important challenges to parents in fulfilling their own role as parents and that families in different circumstances and locations face different challenges. Parents’ concerns can be heightened by the negative experiences of others involved in GME and also by poor professional advice. Parents in both areas expressed a strong desire to ensure that their child’s acquisition of English was not negatively affected by attending GME but the historical and contemporary context in Barra regarding attainment in English at secondary level confounds these concerns.

Gaelic-speaking parents identified specific challenges of their child’s involvement in GME. These families identified the pedagogical challenges of meeting the needs of range of Gaelic abilities of children in GME, especially meeting Gaelic-speaking children’s needs in terms of appropriate opportunities to develop their Gaelic language skills. Gaelic-speaking parents also identified the challenges facing GME in terms of recruiting suitably fluent staff and held concerns about the impact of the vast majority of children who are not proficient in Gaelic on entering GME on their child’s Gaelic. This examination further demonstrates the differences in understanding of Gaelic-medium provision and the impact of local contextual factors that exist in both Barra and Edinburgh on educational choices parents make.

This chapter marks the end of the three chapters in which I examine the choice of GME by parents. Rather than a choice made at a point in the past that reflects an attractive feature of GME, in these chapters I have demonstrated that the choice is an ongoing process of researching, considering, and experiencing GME. The choice reflects both positive and negative features and is heavily influenced by the local
context and local concerns. In the next chapter, I turn my attention to how these young children experience Gaelic and how they are socialised to speak Gaelic in both locations.
Chapter 5: Language Socialisation

Parents outlined highly divergent approaches to the Gaelic language socialisation of their children in both locations. The predominantly English language environment of both areas limits the Gaelic language socialisation of young children. The advanced stages of language shift currently occurring in the Gaelic context, coupled with the simultaneous revival endeavour, has resulted in a complex, educationally based language socialisation scenario that is adult-input centred with Gaelic use between children extremely limited. Where Gaelic language socialisation does take place, adults often mediate this socialisation by providing or accessing opportunities for their children to acquire or use Gaelic. Although the need for such a proactive approach may be apparent in families without a Gaelic-speaking parent or families living in a Lowland urban context, Gaelic language socialisation in Gaelic-speaking families and in Gaelic-speaking areas may also now require such an approach.

Children’s use of Gaelic, for the most part, is confined to use with adult Gaelic speakers, both in education and outwith it. In the case of older children, then, structured activities such as Sràadan, Gaelic afterschool clubs for Gaelic-medium primary pupils or groups like mòd club provide limited opportunities for Gaelic use outwith education. Opportunities for Gaelic use between children are often limited to use between siblings or with a very small number of other children from other Gaelic-speaking families.

In what follows, I examine in more detail the proactive approach towards Gaelic language socialisation taken by some parents, both in Gaelic-speaking families and in families where a parent is learning Gaelic. I explore the impact of changing circumstances on languages socialisation over time and identify some of the challenges families face in this endeavour. A discussion of the Gaelic language socialisation of children in Gaelic-medium nursery education will follow, before I review the use of Gaelic resources (human, digital, and print) in families with young children and their contribution to Gaelic language socialisation.

Morris and Jones (2008) highlight that research on language socialisation in minority languages in Europe can offer a distinct perspective on the intergenerational
transmission of these languages (Morris & Jones 2008: 127). The concept of
language socialisation has been fruitful within linguistic anthropology in the
exploration of language shift contexts and has helped to illustrate the ways in which
language socialisation can actively contribute to language shift (Kulick 1992).

Language socialisation refers to the ‘process of becoming a culturally competent
member of society through language activity’ and thus sets the learning of language
within the broader social and cultural learning context (Ochs 1992: 335; 1999: 230).
Ochs (1986: 2) describes language socialisation as ‘both socialisation through
language and socialisation to use language’. Schieffelin (2003: 155) expands further
on this description, stating, ‘language socializes not only through its symbolic
content, but also through its use, i.e. through speaking as a socially and culturally
situated activity’. Ochs & Schieffelin (2012: 1) recognise that language socialisation
research, rather than being confined to parent and child interaction, examines ‘the
range of adult and child communicative partners with whom a child or other novice
routinely engages’.

Language socialisation research has also foregrounded the exploration of local
theories of child development (physical, social and linguistic) (Schieffelin 1990).
Such theories of child development can be made explicit; however, more often these
theories are evidenced implicitly through daily routines and interactions (Kulick
1992; Paugh 2005; Ochs and Schieffelin 2012). Theories of child development can
become explicit in how children are socialised not to behave, not to do or feel certain
things (Fader 2006; Kulick & Schieffelin 2004; Paugh 2005). Indeed, interactions
with children and other novices can provide some of the few occasions where
explicit explanations may be given for rules or beliefs most often left implicit (Garret

Language socialisation research recognises the importance of children socialising
one another (Goodwin & Kratis 2012: 365). Paugh’s research into language shift in
Dominica (2005: 66) demonstrates that children can be active agents in socialising
other children when adults are not transmitting a language. Children may in fact
socialise other children to use rather than not use a minority language. Siblings have
also been found to be agents of language socialisation in families where the language
of the home differs from that of the school (Obeid 2009: 718-19). Additionally, children within the same family can have markedly different language socialisation experiences – often as a result of changes in family circumstances, education choice, or continued language shift over time.

The process of Gaelic language socialisation varies significantly from family to family. Not only do families have differences in their own and their extended families’ linguistic abilities, along with differences in access to and use of Gaelic language resources, but they also hold differing language ideologies and beliefs about childhood, parenting and what language learning entails. De Houwer (2009), writing about bilingual first language acquisition, explains that not all parents understand their important role in language acquisition and the significant role of input. Some parents believe that ‘children pick up languages “like that!”’ which is not in fact the case,’ as she outlines, ‘[l]anguage learning … is hard work and requires a lot of time’ (De Houwer 2009: 93). Parents who do demonstrate an understanding of the vital role that they can play in their child’s language learning hold what De Houwer (1999: 83) terms ‘impact belief’, that is ‘the parental belief that parents can exercise some sort of control over their children’s linguistic functioning’.

Impact beliefs can range from ‘weak’ to ‘strong’. An example of a weak impact belief would be a parent who believes that a child acquires a ‘language from the environment’. A parent with a strong impact belief might focus on their own language use in supporting their child’s acquisition or might think that they can influence their child’s language choice ‘by punishing or praising the child to use a particular linguistic form’:

An impact belief can be very strong, and may include the notion that the parent has an important exemplary function to fulfil, and that thus the parent’s own language use has a direct influence on what the child will learn to say. A strong impact belief may in addition include the conviction that children’s language use can be influenced by telling the child to use a particular linguistic form, or by punishing or praising the child to use a particular linguistic form. An impact belief can be fairly weak as well, and may consist of just the loosely held conviction that in general children will pick up language from the environment (De Houwer 1999: 83-84).
De Houwer (2009: 95-6) argues that parents who hold an impact belief have a better chance of their children speaking two languages. She believes that this impact belief is the foundation to a proactive approach ‘to foster their children’s language development’:

That is because parents with an impact belief will undertake specific steps to foster their children’s language development. Even though their decisions here may not be very conscious, they may seek out opportunities for their children to hear more of a particular language (De Houwer 2009: 95-96).

Language socialisation research in language shift contexts has found a lack of impact belief among adults who assume that the local language will continue to be acquired by children and future generations, as it has previously. In fact, the children’s language socialisation context and experience may now be quite different from that of previous generations (Garret & Ba quedano-López 2002: 354). De Houwer (2009) explains that even input in terms of hearing a language is not sufficient; children must also have the opportunities to speak the language:

Learning to understand a language requires that you have had opportunities to hear it. Learning to speak a language implies that you have had opportunities to speak it. These opportunities are vital. Unfortunately, some parents in bilingual settings do not realize this. (De Houwer 2009: 95)

Researchers have utilised theories of language socialisation in recent research on Gaelic. Smith-Christmas’s (2012) found in her study of code switching across three generations of a Gaelic/English bilingual family on the Isle of Skye that the youngest member of the third generation (aged three) demonstrated an ‘association between code and context’ in her use of Gaelic (Smith-Christmas 2012: 230). This youngest family member mainly used Gaelic as a ‘strategy of gain’ that was often deployed when setting up oppositionary stances towards her caregivers (Smith-Christmas 2012: 230). The second generation in her study, the parents and the father’s siblings, were found to use Gaelic most often in child-directed speech rather than in speaking to each other (Smith-Christmas 2012: 169). Smith-Christmas not only found that the second-generation speakers used Gaelic to ‘contextualise child-centred talk, but that
the children themselves understand that the use of Gaelic signals a child-centred context’ (Smith-Christmas 2012: 175).

Will’s (2012) study in the Isle of Lewis is based on ethnographic research conducted within a Gaelic-medium primary school and the homes of four families with children in the Gaelic-medium stream of the local primary school. Will found that Gaelic was rarely used outwith school between children and adults (2012: 2). She concluded that children socialised in GME lack the ‘semiotic tools necessary for interacting with adults’ in Gaelic and that GME ‘imparts to its pupils a specific conception of Gaelic speakerhood that is at odds with that held by many older Gaelic speakers’ (Will 2012: 3). Will (2012) concludes that the few Gaelic-speaking families in her study display quite variant approaches. One family, she views as an example of Gaelic revitalisation and the other, an example of a family who have yet to experience language shift fully (Will 2012: 221).

In what follows, I examine Gaelic language socialisation in Gaelic-speaking families in this study, before considering families where a parent is learning Gaelic and then the influence of others outside the family, the Gaelic-medium nursery and Gaelic resources.

**Gaelic-speaking families**

A very small number of families in this research use Gaelic in the home. Where parents had continued to speak Gaelic with their own parents into adulthood, use of the language with their own children was common. In addition to those brought up speaking Gaelic, one mother in Barra had learned Gaelic at school and then university. A father in Edinburgh had learned Gaelic as an adult to a level sufficient for use as the primary language between himself and his child. Although there are proportionally more Gaelic speakers in Barra than in Edinburgh, language shift has meant that establishing and maintaining Gaelic use in families poses significant challenges in both areas. Ó hIfearnáin (2013: 350) notes, in the Irish context, that parents speaking Irish and living in a community where Irish is spoken is not sufficient for successful Irish language acquisition by children and highlights that families from a wide range of linguistic backgrounds require support to enable children to acquire proficiency in Irish:
It is thus salient to ask what mechanisms can be created to help parents who have the linguistic competence to pass Irish effectively on to their children, but who live in a context where simply speaking Irish as a parent and living in a community where Irish is one of the community languages will not suffice to produce children competent in Irish. If this is the scenario facing parents of the highest linguistic ability, strategies and support for mixed language families and for the large numbers who may be less competent in Irish are also the concern of language promotion policies (Ó hIfearnáin 2013: 350).

In a language shift context or where parents are attempting to transmit a minority language then there is a clear need to support minority language use and socialisation. The challenges facing parents in Edinburgh, an urban area with little Gaelic, may be more immediately obvious. But Gaelic-speaking parents in both areas are a small minority and encounter challenges in maintaining Gaelic use with their children and socialising their children as Gaelic speakers. Currently this endeavour receives no specific local or national support.

A feature of the Gaelic use in three of the families where both parents can speak Gaelic was that the parents did not speak Gaelic to each other before their child was born. Although some described attempts to speak Gaelic in front of their child, English continues to be the main language used between the parents:

Cailean: Cha bhi mi fhìn agus mo bhean a’ bruidhinn Gàidhlig ri chèile idir ach direach is dòcha nuair a bhios [an nighean] mun cuairt. A chionn agus uill, nuair a thachair sinn ri chèile cha robh sinn ann an suidheadadh far am biodh duine a’ bruidhinn na Gàidhlig mar as tric agus ehm, uill chan eil ise cho fileanta agus bhiodh e, uill, faireachdainn caran false a’ bruidhinn ann an Gàidhlig ri chèile.

Cailean: My wife and I don’t speak Gaelic to each other at all, but only maybe when [the daughter] is around. Because, and well, when we met we weren’t in a situation where people are usually speaking Gaelic. Well she isn’t that fluent and it would, well feel kind of false to speak in Gaelic to each other.

Parents in two families in Barra were in a similar position; they described how they met their partners in an English-speaking environment and used English with each
other, despite being competent in Gaelic. This lack of Gaelic use with their partners in these two families did not reflect a lack of competence on one person’s part but reflected an established language use practice. These parents often had strongly established Gaelic use patterns with their own parents and other older Gaelic speakers but had English firmly established as their peer language, including with their siblings and partners. A participant in Dunmore’s (2015: 175) study also outlined a similar situation. Despite trying to socialise their young child in Gaelic, the respondent described her practice of speaking English to her Gaelic-speaking partner.

One of the mothers in Barra, Catriona, outlined the concerted effort to speak Gaelic that she makes when her child is present. Catriona explained that although she speaks Gaelic to her mother and her son’s paternal grandparents, with family of her own generation, including her sister, she would normally use English. In front of her son, however, they all try to maintain Gaelic use:

Catriona: Nuair a tha esan mun cuairt bidh sinn uile a’ feuchainn gu mòr Gàidhlig a chleachdadh air a bheulaibh.

Catriona: When he [her son] is around we all try hard to speak Gaelic in front of him.

This language use practice on the part of the adults in this child’s life could be described as creating ‘an association between code and context,’ with Gaelic use signalling a ‘child-centred context’ (Smith-Christmas 2012: 230).

Extended family can also play an important role in children’s Gaelic language socialisation. Will (2012) found that in the two Gaelic-speaking families in her study, the extended family and especially maternal grandparents, contributed significantly to the language socialisation of the children:

Children from both families received a sizeable amount of care from their maternal grandmothers, who lived close by, and spoke Gaelic to them as a matter of course, as they had done decades earlier with their daughters and other children. Through their grandmothers’ extended social networks, the children encountered many other Gaelic speakers, who also
Gaelic-speaking parents who have maintained Gaelic use into adulthood or who have learned the language to fluency often know a range of Gaelic speakers who could contribute to their child’s Gaelic language socialisation. The children of these adults are socialised to speak Gaelic with immediate family members and other adult speakers and in a range of contexts in these locations. This socialisation contrasts significantly with children with no Gaelic-speaking immediate or extended family.

A feature of the Gaelic-speaking families involved in this research, whether they lived in Barra or Edinburgh, was their strong connection to their Gaelic-speaking extended family and traditional cultural activities. For the Gaelic-speaking families in Barra, Gaelic-speaking grandparents played an important role in the childcare of the children. The Gaelic-speaking families in Edinburgh that took part in this research all made trips in most holidays to their Gaelic-speaking relations in the Western Isles and thus maintained strong social and linguistic ties to these areas. This connection with Gaelic-speaking areas is not confined to Gaelic-speaking parents because new speakers, heritage learners and non-Gaelic-speaking parents can have strong connections with Gaelic speakers in such locations. Mìcheal, who had learned Gaelic as an adult in Edinburgh, went to the Western Isles to help out on a croft and practise his Gaelic during holidays. He hoped that when his child was older he would be able to take him also. The connection and support from Gaelic-speaking relations or friends and spending time in these areas can play an important role in children’s Gaelic language socialisation.

Changing family circumstances can also influence the language use patterns of parents in families. One family in Edinburgh had been living abroad. The father, Dòmhnall, outlined the family language use situation while abroad and following their return to Scotland. Although they initially both used Gaelic exclusively with their eldest child when it became a possibility that they would remain in that country for the long term, the mother maintained Gaelic use with the eldest child, while Dòmhnall used English. They wanted to ensure that the child learned English along with Gaelic and the majority language of the country. On their return to Scotland,
Dòmhnall began using Gaelic with their younger children but the eldest child, their son, had been socialised to speak English with his father abroad and insisted on this pattern of language use on their return to Scotland:

Dòmhnall: Nuair a thàinig sinn air ais a dh’Alba […] thòisich mi a’ bruidhinn Gàidhlig [ri mo nighean] aig an àm sin agus bha sin furast’ gu leòr. Ach cha robh [mo mhac] deònach idir a’ bruidhinn Gàidhlig riums’ agus bidh esan fhathast direach a’ bruidhinn Beurla riums’ agus Gàidhlig ri [a mhàthair]. Bidh esan fhathast a’ cleachdadh OPOL [one parent one language; as discussed below] ach leis a’ chlann eile bidh sinn direach a’ cleachdadh Gàidhlig. So bidh sinn a’ cleachdadh dà shiostam aig an aon àm, OPOL còmhla ri [mo mhac] agus Gàidhlig fad an t-siubhail [leis a’ chloinn eile].

Dòmhnall: When we came back to Scotland, I started speaking Gaelic to [my daughter] then and it was easy enough. But [my son] wasn’t at all willing to speak Gaelic to me and he still just speaks English to me and Gaelic to [his mother]. He still uses OPOL but with the other children we just speak Gaelic. So we use two systems as the same time. OPOL with my son and Gaelic all the time [with the other children].

All Gaelic-speaking families in this study explained that the Gaelic-speaking parent or both Gaelic-speaking parents mainly used Gaelic with their children, at least when the child was very young. Cailean outlined how his wife no longer speaks Gaelic to their daughter but when their daughter was younger his wife did speak Gaelic to her almost all the time. This language use, he explained, was crucial to the child’s Gaelic language socialisation. His wife was her primary caregiver and he worked full-time. In other families where only one parent could speak Gaelic or in some of the multilingual families parents used a one parent one language approach (OPOL). OPOL or 1P/1L describes the language use method adopted by some parents bringing up their children bilingually. Baker (2011: 99) states that parental language use can be described as OPOL when:

Parents have different languages, one of which is often the dominant language of the community. The parents each speak their own language to the child from birth, but tend to speak one language to each other.
De Houwer (2009: 107) describes how OPOL is in fact ‘an ideal’ rather than the reality of language practice in many families that ascribe to the strategy despite ‘parents often see[ing] themselves as adhering to it in a very strict fashion’. Both Baker (2011) and De Houwer (2009) caution the promotion of OPOL as the most likely parental language use strategy to ensure a child becomes a speaker of both languages. Baker (2011: 99) highlights that such a simplified view fails to acknowledge the ‘community influences’ on language acquisition. De Houwer (2009: 99) warns that when such an approach is unsuccessful ‘it is the non-societal language that loses out’.

**One Gaelic-speaking parent**

Gaelic use between parent and child can be even more difficult to establish where the Gaelic-speaking parent has limited contact with the child. Claire recalls her partner’s strongly established patterns of Gaelic use not only with his own parents but with other adults in the area. She describes, however, the difficulties they have faced in establishing Gaelic use in the home. Despite their children attending GME and her active encouragement, English is strongly established as the language used between the children and both their mother and their father:

> Claire: I do encourage them to speak Gaelic with one another in the house, but it’s [difficult], even with their Dad. In the house if I keep at it and say speak to them in Gaelic, he will but it just falls away because obviously I’ve not got any really. I think it is automatic now that he will speak English. Whereas before when I went into his parent’s house or when he was in anybody else’s house it was all Gaelic.

Where just one parent speaks Gaelic, how much time that parent spends with the child can contribute to difficulties in establishing Gaelic language use. In the above instance, the mother looks after the children full-time while the Gaelic-speaking father works full-time. Although the father could speak Gaelic to his children, in fact he speaks English to his children, thus compounding the problem. In Rice’s (2012: 34) research amongst parents of primary one children in Barra, she found that in four families the father was fluent in Gaelic and the mother had little to no Gaelic. Only one family had a fluent Gaelic speaking mother when the father had little or no Gaelic and one other family had two Gaelic-speaking parents. In this study, the
families in Barra that speak Gaelic at home are those families in which all adults are Gaelic-speaking.

Families in both Edinburgh and Barra had fathers who worked away – living and working in another location (another town/city, at sea or offshore) and returning when not working. In terms of Gaelic language socialisation, there are obvious consequences for Gaelic language use in the family if the father is the only Gaelic speaker and is absent or if the father does not speak Gaelic and is present for prolonged periods of time. On the other hand, if the mother is the Gaelic speaker and the father is not, then the father’s absence may assist the establishment of Gaelic use between mother and child, although this is not without its challenges.

In Edinburgh, Sìne looked after her children full-time and her husband worked away for a fortnight at a time. Sìne was a native Gaelic speaker and was brought up in the Western Isles. She used Gaelic with her children and was supported by her parents and siblings’ use of Gaelic with her children. The extended family maintained regular contact with the children on the phone, on Skype, by visiting Edinburgh and the children spent holidays with their Gaelic-speaking grandparents in the Western Isles.

On the father’s return from work, however, Sìne outlined how speaking Gaelic to the children in his presence proved challenging. At an activity, such as going swimming, she explained that if she were to give instructions in Gaelic, the father would ask for a translation. In such circumstances, she often ends up speaking English to their children because then she does not have to repeat in English everything she said in Gaelic. Sìne is frustrated by her own use of English in such instances:

Sìne: Bidh an duine agam a’ cantainn ‘what are they saying?’ nuair a bhios sinn a’ dol gu àit’. No chan eil fhios agams’ gum bi sinn a’ dol a’ snàmh agus gum bi mise a’ cantainn ri[s a’ phàiste] ‘feuch gun dèan thu seo’ agus bidh e [an duine agam] a’ cantainn ‘what are they saying? What are you saying to [the child]?’ Gu math tric, you know, bidh mi a’ faicinn gum bi mi fhin a’ bruidhinn riutha ann am Beurla son is gun tuig a h-uile duine, gus nach tig agam air a chantainn a-rìthist. Agus an uair sin bidh mi a’ smaintinn ‘och carson a tha thu a’ bruidhinn Beurla?’
Sìne: My husband says ‘what are you saying?’ when we go to some place or I don’t know, when we go swimming and I say to [the child] ‘try and do this [in Gaelic]’ and he says ‘what are they saying? What are you saying to [the child]?’ Very often, you know, I see that I speak English to them so that everyone understands, so that I don’t have to say it again and then I think ‘och why are you speaking English?’

Kavanagh and Hickey (2013: 442) found that highly competent Irish-speaking parents, especially in their survey responses, indicated a ‘reluctance to use Irish for fear of excluding less proficient family members’. Although Sìne was not reluctant to use Gaelic in front of her non-Gaelic-speaking husband, the practical consequences of his lack of proficiency and his desire to understand her instructions, lead her to change her normal medium of interaction with her children during the activity. Even for Gaelic speakers who have established Gaelic use with their children and in their home, there are moments where the use of English intrudes and the established pattern of language use falters. Re-establishing Gaelic use can take effort and determination from the one parent who provides most of the Gaelic interaction.

The effort required to continue to use Gaelic can be difficult for parents to maintain. One of Roberts’ (1991: 256) respondents described how being the sole person maintaining Gaelic use with his children due to the ‘changing social conditions’ in his area in the Western Isles had left him considering how much longer he would ‘continue with this lonely exercise’ of speaking Gaelic to his children. Although it too is not without its challenges, GME does provide support for these families in their Gaelic language socialisation endeavour.

The challenges faced by Gaelic-speaking parents trying to bring their children up bilingually are similar to those highlighted by Okita’s study of Japanese mothers in England. Okita (2002: 226) strongly argues that researchers should be interested in the ‘difficulties’ and everyday challenges faced by parents attempting to bring up their children bilingually. Okita’s study demonstrates the challenges faced by parents with the competing demands of bilingual-child rearing. Okita foregrounds the need to understand the ‘simultaneous accommodation’ that is necessary to balance the demands placed upon the mothers:
Without grasping the importance of simultaneous accommodation, it is impossible to understand the child-rearing and language use in these families. Mothers had to juggle demands of providing an environment for minority language acquisition, ensuring that the majority language competence of their children did not create a problem at school, that children were exposed to appropriate extracurricular activities but that they also had enough time to relax and be children and family-related work, and of course any independent aspirations they might have had for themselves, for their husband or to maintain their marriage (Okita 2002: 226-7).

Being a highly proficient speaker of a minority language does not guarantee successful language transmission. All parents must balance a wide range of priorities and competing interests. Bilingual child rearing is, as Okita terms it, ‘emotionally demanding’ work (Okita 2002: 226).

**Parents learning Gaelic**

Parents who are actively learning Gaelic also note a number of frustrations in trying to maintain and extend their use of Gaelic with their children. Although 12 of the families in Edinburgh had one parent actively learning Gaelic at the time of the research, the other parent in these families was neither formally learning nor knew Gaelic. Three of the parents learning Gaelic were fathers and nine mothers. Some of these parents reported difficulty in using more than a limited range of ‘stock parent phrases’ with their young children. These limited phrases were basic child-orientated phrases often taught to parents at the Cròileagan. Parents commented on how language learning outwith the Cròileagan setting and beyond these basic phrases was often more difficult to convert into use with their child. Lisa, who had been attending Gaelic classes for some time, explained that her Gaelic use was limited to such phrases, mostly everyday commands, but even so she wished she could recall more of these phrases:

Lisa: Well, not as much Gaelic as we should. I wish that I could remember to use more of the sort of stock parent phrases. I should make myself do that. Just ‘cuir ort do bhrògan’ [‘put on your shoes’], if I remember things like that, you know.
Even limited use of Gaelic in the home can prove difficult to maintain. Another mother in Edinburgh, Susan, explained that in terms of Gaelic use in the home they had ‘fallen off the wagon a wee bit’ and ‘need to get back on board’. She was learning Gaelic using a distance-learning course at the time of the study. Again, her Gaelic use was based upon frequently used parental commands or questions:

Susan: I’ve fallen off the wagon a wee bit but we were doing like a new Gaelic phrase every week. Maybe not something I specifically learnt but something I’d decided to use like ‘put your coat on’ ‘where are your shoes?’ ‘what do you want to drink?’ that kind of thing. Stuff like I say that you use a lot of times during the day, so and we have, I’ve got bits of Gaelic stuck on the fridge and on the wall, on the back door and stuff like that – stuff that we might use. We need to get back on board with doing that.

It is evident from Susan’s response that a concerted effort is required on her part to maintain regular use of basic Gaelic phrases, commands and questions. It is understandable that given the competing demands of parenting young children that parents may struggle to maintain even just basic Gaelic use long term, despite a clear desire to do so.

Where parents are actively learning Gaelic, their children may not welcome their attempts to use Gaelic and in so doing, change established patterns of language use. Liam and Catherine encountered such challenges when Liam tried to use the Gaelic he learned at evening classes with their elder child. Liam described how despite wanting to use the Gaelic he had learned at night classes, his son would request he spoke to him in the language he normally uses at home, rather than in Gaelic. Catherine understood that it was changing a language use norm that the child resisted rather than Gaelic. She outlined how this child reacted to Liam’s Gaelic use in a similar manner to when she changes from the language she normally uses to the language Liam normally uses with their children. Catherine described how despite her husband’s persistence in trying to use and practise Gaelic at home, their child does not react positively to him speaking Gaelic but she explains that their child (then aged 4 years 3 months) does not like it when either parent changes their normal language use with him:
K: And do you or your husband ever try to speak Gaelic to them at home?

Catherine: Yes always, but [our son] hates it. [Liam] always tries. He always tries to practise with [him] but [he] doesn’t like it, but [Liam] usually tries, all the time.

K: Yeah. And do you know why [the child] doesn’t like it?

Catherine: Yes, if somebody switches the language [he] doesn’t like it. If I speak [the language Liam speaks] with him he doesn’t like it as well. But [Liam] tried to learn Gaelic but he thinks that [our child’s] Gaelic is better than his for pronunciation so he always asks [him] some questions. Sometimes he answers but sometimes he says ‘don’t say it like that’ but [Liam] always tries.

Liam made a concerted effort to use the Gaelic he has learned with his son. It is apparent, however, that his son resists Liam’s attempts because it changes the language use patterns with which he is accustomed. Anna commented similarly on her child’s reaction to her practising the Gaelic she had learned at classes with her son at home. She normally speaks English to him and she explained how, in addition to watching Gaelic TV, she encourages her son to use Gaelic at home. The child did not react positively to these efforts and she felt that he might think of Gaelic as his own language or something that was distinct to the nursery.

Kavanagh and Hickey (2013: 441) found that children in Irish-medium education did not always react positively to parents’ attempts to speak Irish. In fact, children often ‘rebuffed’ parents’ attempts and parents described how trying to use Irish with their children ‘became problematic or fraught, particularly with older children’. Changing language use patterns with young children may cause an added, and unexpected, challenge for parents learning Gaelic and trying to use Gaelic at home with their child. Another factor that may contribute to this challenge is that when children have been attending Gaelic-medium preschool education for a limited amount of time it is foreseeable that their competence in Gaelic may not be as advanced as parents may anticipate. Thus, their ability to be competent practice partners may be overestimated.
Gaelic language socialisation outwith the family

Not only do some parents learn Gaelic but they may also proactively encourage their children to speak Gaelic to older Gaelic speakers. This proactive approach includes ensuring that older Gaelic speakers are aware of the child’s competence in Gaelic and also that the parents would welcome them speaking Gaelic to the child. In Barra, Alasdair explained that he works alongside fluent Gaelic speakers and encourages his children and these Gaelic speakers to use Gaelic whenever they meet. He feels he should support and encourage his children to speak Gaelic. He is conscious of the lack of confidence in Gaelic use of some adult Gaelic speakers in Barra. Overall, Alasdair demonstrates a strong parental impact belief:

Alasdair: So since she has been in [Gaelic-medium nursery] I’ve had her talking to the women in the office anytime, I’ll encourage her. I know they are quite shy and there is a natural shyness in a second language in kids but I think it is even exaggerated up here. Because adults are shy about speaking Gaelic when they are not fully fluent. I picked up on that.

Alasdair clearly believes that he can play a role in supporting and encouraging his children to use Gaelic, which he in turn hopes will increase their confidence in using the language. Alasdair also outlined how Gaelic TV is promoted within the household and they also listen to Radio nan Gaidheal daily. Additionally, he has acquired a range of Gaelic resources from Stòrlann and has visited the Gaelic Books Council in Glasgow to purchase Gaelic children’s books.

Music instruction was seen as part of their Gaelic language socialisation and he expressed a desire to take them to other féisean in other areas in addition to their attendance at the Barra Féis. His children take part in events such as the local mòd and visit a local Gaelic singer regularly to prepare for competitions. This proactive and mixed-method approach to Gaelic socialisation was not common amongst parents, especially in Barra.

Older speakers of Gaelic in Barra can provide an opportunity for children to use Gaelic outwith the school. Establishing Gaelic use between a child and older speaker is not without its challenges, however. Unless an older Gaelic speaker knows a
family well, they do not know if children attend the Gaelic stream within the school or the English stream (there are no distinctive features in uniform). Additionally, because take-up of GME has been relatively low until recently in Barra, adults are not experienced at judging the language competence of Gaelic-medium children. Unlike Alasdair, most parents did not describe instances where they gave such encouragement to other Gaelic speakers to speak Gaelic to their children. On the whole, children thus mostly speak Gaelic to and are spoken to in Gaelic by older people they know well or GME staff.

Older people reported difficulties in knowing who could speak Gaelic and who could not amongst children and young people that were not related or well known to them. One of the older people in Barra explained that he now asks young people if they speak Gaelic because he had recently had many occasions where he spoke Gaelic to teenagers but they responded that they did not have any Gaelic:

Feumaidh mise faighneachd dhaibh an seo, an fheadhainn, canaidh sinn an fheadhainn mu sia no seachd bliadh’n’ deug no mar sin, feumaidh mise faighneachd dhaibhsan dè chànan a th’ aca. Air tàillich tha mi iomadach triop bruidhinn ris an aois a tha sin agus canaidh iad ‘I haven’t got Gaelic.’ I kind of take it for granted [that they do have Gaelic].

I need to ask people here, the ones, let’s say the ones that are about 16 and 17 years old or about that, I need to ask them what language they have. Because I have spoken to that age many times and they say ‘I haven’t got Gaelic.’ I kind of take it for granted [that they do have Gaelic].

It is often the case that when someone is from Barra with parents from Barra that an assumption is made that they will speak Gaelic. Although English is now established as the default language of interaction with young people, it can often remain the case that competence in Gaelic is assumed in some cases. As the above respondent indicates, this is changing and now it is most often the case that it is assumed that younger people do not speak Gaelic, irrespective of their Gaelic-speaking family. Claire explained that in her area people know her children and will speak Gaelic to them but sometimes, older people try to speak Gaelic to other children and encounter the situation outlined above:
Claire: The older people, [the local area] is quite close knit in some ways and anyone that has Gaelic there kind of knows the kids usually they’ll speak to them in Gaelic and if they don’t respond they will ask have you then got Gaelic, so.

Older people in Barra can no longer assume that children and young people can speak Gaelic. These older speakers can either ask which language they should use, speak Gaelic and or just speak English. As a result, older people are learning to use Gaelic with only the young people they know for certain can speak Gaelic. This finding in Barra is related to Will’s (2012) analysis of the relationship between older speakers and younger speakers in her study area in Lewis. Will highlights that a disconnect exists between the generations. She found that ‘most older community members had trouble placing children socially because they were not as connected to them through social ties that used to be maintained through regular interactions at ceilidhs etc’ (Will 2012: 69). I believe this is an important point that contributes to the reduction of Gaelic language use between generations in Barra. Older speakers rarely interact regularly with children who are not related to them or children outwith their own area and cannot assume on meeting them that they can speak Gaelic. I did not, however, find evidence to support Will’s overall finding that:

The kinds of linguistic and social input children receive when they experience the majority of their Gaelic language socialisation in GME classroom leaves them without the semiotic tools that are necessary for interacting with adult Gaelic speakers and for performing a range of socio-linguistic tasks outside the context of the school…GME imparts to its pupils a specific conception of Gaelic speakerhood that is at odds with that held by many older Gaelic speakers (Will 2012: 3).

During interviews with older speakers some commented on the reduced proficiency of children or young adult Gaelic speakers and some were surprised at some of the mistakes that can be heard (for instance using third person prepositional pronouns for a male when talking about a female). Others commented with surprise at the proficiency of children in GME, especially when it was widely known that they came from homes without a Gaelic-speaking parent. Additionally, most of these older people showed great willingness to speak to young people in Gaelic, especially when they knew they went to GME. A lack of understanding of the linguistic methods,
aims and outcomes amongst residents in Barra more generally appears to contribute to a situation where older speakers are not sure of the language competence of children from non-Gaelic-speaking homes in GME. Overall, older people struggle to identify if they can speak Gaelic to young people and children or not. Where parents, like Alasdair, make explicit requests for them to speak Gaelic to his children then such intergenerational interactions in Gaelic are facilitated.

Where it is well known that children do speak Gaelic then older speakers that I knew were often keen to use Gaelic with them, whether the children were living in Barra or on the island for holidays. When other adults converse with a child in Gaelic, this indicates to other speakers that the child is capable of speaking Gaelic and other speakers’ responses demonstrate a willingness to support families who are clearly trying to maintain Gaelic use. For instance, when I would go to the shops and speak Gaelic to my younger cousin the older people in the shop would often join in by speaking Gaelic to him as well. Although sometimes they did not know me, they showed willingness to use Gaelic with my cousin because my use of Gaelic had clearly linguistically defined the situation.

Opportunities for children to converse in Gaelic with a range of speakers are mostly confined to adults that are well known to their family. Being located in Edinburgh and not having Gaelic-speaking relations does not, however, mean that there children do not encounter Gaelic speakers in their daily lives. A number of parents in Edinburgh explained that they know Gaelic speakers that live nearby, at work or at their church. Susan explained that some of the older people at the church they attend are Gaelic speakers as are some other children who attend. She described how the older Gaelic speakers enjoy speaking to her children in Gaelic:

Susan: We have some friends at church actually who speak Gaelic, older people. They love speaking to the children and having them reply. Some of the other children at the school go to our church as well.

Despite not having Gaelic-speaking relations, Susan’s children have the opportunity to speak in Gaelic every week with older people at their church.
Parents, often as a result of their own language-learning endeavour, had contact with Gaelic speakers that they had met or who supported them in their own learning. These individuals may also speak Gaelic to their children. Micheal had achieved a good degree of fluency in the language and used the language all day with his son. His friend, a native speaker, supports Micheal in his own language learning and visits him regularly. When he does visit he also speaks to his young son in Gaelic:

Micheal: Uill, bidh mise a’ bruidhinn, mise a’ bruidhinn ri [mo mhac] fad an latha, o mhoch gu dubh, ann an Gàidhlig. Feuchaidh mi co-dhiù. […] Tha caraid dhomh agus bidh esan a’ bruidhinn ris ann an Gàidhlig, agus is ann à Uibhist a tha e agus tha esan gam chuideachadh leis mo Ghàidhlig.

Micheal: Well, I speak, I speak to [my son] all day long in Gaelic. I try anyway. […] I have a friend, and he speaks Gaelic to him. He is from Uist and he helps me with my Gaelic.

Although the proportion of Gaelic speakers in Edinburgh is much lower, parents can facilitate and encourage the use of Gaelic between another, non-family adult and their child. Facilitating this contact does require acquaintance with Gaelic speakers and regular contact with them. Both of the above examples highlight that when such contact is part of an established routine – such as meeting at church or regular visits from a friend – then Gaelic use with the child can be included as part of that routine.

Knowing Gaelic speakers does not mean in all circumstances that this will result in Gaelic use between that Gaelic-speaking person and a young child. Another mother in Edinburgh, Alice, related that despite knowing a Gaelic speaker who wants to speak Gaelic to her children she has yet to arrange such a meeting. She does, however, meet with a friend in Glasgow whose children attend GME there and this does enable some Gaelic use between the children:

Alice: There is a woman in our street who grew up speaking Gaelic and she wants to come and speak to the children, one of Mum’s friends, but we haven’t done that yet but we will. We also have a friend who goes to the Glasgow school and when we meet up it is just lovely that they just fall into speaking Gaelic. He is only in primary two, so [her daughter]
Children speaking Gaelic to children

Parents in this study reported limited use of Gaelic between children in the home and outwith educational settings. Parents recalled examples of rare occasions where their child conversed in Gaelic with children, other than siblings. Even within families where Gaelic is spoken by both parents, parents reported both English and Gaelic being spoken between siblings.

Catriona, a Gaelic-speaking mother in Barra, recalled fondly an occasion where herself and her son were travelling on the ferry with another Gaelic-speaking family. The two children, one from each family, conversed in Gaelic with each other for the entire ferry journey to the mainland. Playing with an unrelated child in Gaelic with no other non-Gaelic-speaking children around was an opportunity, Catriona explained, that was rare even for families living in Barra. Catriona’s main concern about Gaelic and GME is the lack of opportunities for her child to use Gaelic with his peers. She recounted how her mother was taught in English in school in Barra that it was Gaelic that the pupils used with each other in the playground and it is Gaelic that her mother continues to use with her peers. Catriona fears the impact of low levels of peer Gaelic use on her child’s Gaelic language acquisition, despite her own efforts in speaking to her child at home in Gaelic and him attending GME.
Dòmhnall, in Edinburgh, described how his young children did not know any other children that speak Gaelic to each other and therefore did not have any examples to follow: ‘Chan eil iad eòlach air clann sam bith eile a bhios a’ bruidhinn Gàidhlig ri cheòile agus chan eil iad le eisimpleirean sam bith mar sin’. Mòrag explained that having returned from living abroad it is mainly English that their children speak to each other. This practice was not of concern to her and she is happy to allow them to speak whatever is ‘most natural’ for them:

Mòrag: Bho thill sinn a seo is e Beurla as motha a th’ aca ri cheòile, a th’ aig a chlann ri cheòile agus bidh mi a’ leigeil leotha. Sin as cofhurtail dhaibh fhèin, dhaibhsan ’s e sin an ñànan as ñàdarra.

Mòrag: Since we returned here it is English that they mostly speak to each other, that the children mostly speak to each other and I let them. That is what is most comfortable for them, for them that is the most natural language.

Cailean, a Gaelic-speaking father in Edinburgh, also outlined the limited occasions in which his daughter can use Gaelic with other children. They do visit another Gaelic-speaking family with children of a similar age and his daughter’s cousins also speak Gaelic:


Cailean: She sometimes plays with friends that have Gaelic. She has a friend and his brother is younger. They are about the same age. We visit them and they speak Gaelic to each other, just naturally. And she has cousins in Edinburgh that have Gaelic. Well, they are in the school as well but they are older than [my daughter]. They don’t see much of each other in school but they speak Gaelic together, [she has] cousins in
Even where children speak Gaelic in the home to at least one parent and use Gaelic regularly outwith education, parents are aware that opportunities for Gaelic use with a range of speakers are limited. Within Gaelic-medium education, parents commented upon how their child’s Gaelic language socialisation can be more restricted than they had expected.

**Early years education and Gaelic language socialisation**

Stephen et al. (2016: 60) consider the ‘pedagogical challenges’ of Gaelic-medium nursery education as GME tries to both follow the curriculum for 3–18 years and to contribute to the Gaelic-language revitalisation endeavour. Their study included observations within three case study nursery settings and they identified several challenges to establishing and sustaining total immersion in Gaelic-medium nurseries. They found that the strongly English language environment outside the playroom posed a significant challenge because children were most proficient in English and they used English for playing and talking to each other in the nursery. Parents also enter the nursery and speak in English to staff:

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Communication with parents is usually in English, and, outside the playroom, children spend most of their time each day in an English speaking environment and make use of their more extensive English vocabulary and sophisticated understanding of that language as they play and talk together in their preschool setting. Although each of the settings said that they aimed to offer total immersion in Gaelic, it was clear that English intruded (Stephen et al. 2016: 72).
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Stephen et al.’s recorded observations revealed that English was indeed the language used between children in playing and talking (Stephen et al. 2016: 74). Children spoke more English than Gaelic in all three nurseries: ‘In each of these settings children spoke in English much more often than they spoke in Gaelic’ and when children did use Gaelic, this use was confined to ‘adult-led’ activities such as singing (Stephen et al 2016: 73).
It is important to acknowledge the limitations of Gaelic language socialisation occurring in Gaelic-medium nursery education. Whether in Barra with 20 children and 2 staff or Edinburgh with 40 children and 4 members of staff in each session, the Gaelic language use in such settings is mostly confined to interactions between staff and children or just between staff. Scottish nursery education provision allows for a considerable amount of free play and child-led activities. As a result, children play alone or with other children for a considerable amount of their time at nursery.

In Edinburgh, it can be the case that a child from a Gaelic-speaking home is the only child present in their session who could use Gaelic to interact with others. Other Gaelic-speaking children may attend other sessions or they may just have very little interaction with the only other Gaelic-speaking children present. Gaelic-speaking children establish English as the language of communication with the majority of children in the nursery. Indeed, in Edinburgh, where a number of children who attend nursery use a language other than English or Gaelic as the main language at home, some parents noted that English acquisition advanced in the Gaelic nursery through English being the established language used between children.

The exposure to Gaelic and opportunities for language learning in the Gaelic-medium nursery setting vary from nursery to nursery but are, on the whole, limited (Stephen et al. 2010). Within this context, and considering that a child might attend the Gaelic-medium nursery for just two sessions a week, then they are unlikely to have acquired a high level of proficiency in Gaelic with such limited exposure to the language. Despite this situation, some parents appear to assume high levels of Gaelic ability from their child, while others are more reticent about the language-learning environment of the Gaelic-medium nursery. Hannah, who had attended the Cròileagan in Edinburgh with her son for over a year before he started Gaelic-medium nursery, reported that she was concerned that her son did not use any more Gaelic at home than he had done before starting nursery, six months previously. The limited Gaelic vocabulary he used at home consisted of words and phrases that they had both learned at the Cròileagan. Hannah was hopeful that with time the benefit of attending the Gaelic-medium nursery would become apparent and the child would evidence a wider Gaelic vocabulary at home.
Changing socialisation over time

Language socialisation is not a static process but is fluid and ever-changing. Family circumstances change and this often has repercussions for Gaelic language socialisation. Even within families with young children there were multiple examples of families whose circumstances had changed dramatically. Some families lived abroad initially and moved or returned to Scotland. Other families had changes in parental employment that impacted upon the care and language socialisation of the child. Changes in circumstances cannot only be evidenced in the language socialisation of one child over time, but also between siblings, as was also found in Smith-Christmas’s study of a Gaelic-speaking family in Skye (Smith-Christmas 2016).

Linda’s family in Barra exemplified how family circumstances can change and children can experience quite different language socialisation from their siblings. Linda and her husband are both from Barra. Her husband spoke Gaelic at home as a child while Linda mainly spoke English. Linda’s father was a Gaelic speaker but worked away as a fisherman. Her mother had less Gaelic and used English in the home with her and her siblings as children. Linda works full-time in Barra and the father works away for sustained periods.

The eldest child after nursery was looked after by a Gaelic-speaking child-minder and also spent time with his paternal grandmother, a retired Gaelic primary school teacher. Linda transferred him from Gaelic to English-medium nursery, as outlined in Chapter 1. He continued to hear Gaelic from his child-minder and his grandmother.

When I interviewed Linda her eldest child was in school; her younger two children were in English-medium nursery and were looked after by an English-speaking child-minder. The Gaelic-speaking child-minder no longer works as a child-minder. The paternal grandmother has passed away and the children now had very little Gaelic language input:

Linda: Unfortunately the child-minder couldn’t take three and actually isn’t doing it anymore. Again they don’t have as many words or as good a comprehension as [my eldest child] did, whether that’s to do with the child-minder or his Grannie not being here who did converse with him all the time in
Gaelic. He’ll still, he still has names in Gaelic and things. Whereas the younger two don’t really have that good an understanding of it, certainly not as good as he did. Which is quite sad really, isn’t it? The generations go and the language goes with it.

Whereas the eldest child was able to acquire some level of Gaelic through input outwith the home, although only for a short period in education, the younger children who followed the eldest into English-medium nursery education had little to no access Gaelic and the input received was sufficient to acquire a comparable degree of competence in Gaelic. The language shift situation of Gaelic in the island is acknowledged as she laments: ‘The generations go and the language goes with it’.

In Edinburgh, amongst the families new to Gaelic, it was often the case that younger siblings had more exposure to Gaelic than older siblings. Susan explained that she noticed that her younger child used Gaelic more often and had more Gaelic vocabulary than their elder child. Susan attributed this difference to the fact that they had only become involved in GME with the elder child when they were of nursery age. The younger child had been exposed to Gaelic from an earlier age. The elder child had only attended one year of Gaelic-medium nursery provision before entering Taobh na Pàirce for primary one. Susan’s younger child was two years younger and had attended the Cròileagan and was now in the Gaelic-medium nursery and continued to attend the Cròileagan once a week.

The use of Gaelic resources
Gaelic media – television programmes (live, recorded, online or DVDs), radio, online resources – and print materials, mainly books, contribute to the Gaelic language socialisation of young children. Whether parents are Gaelic speakers, learners or non-Gaelic-speakers, it appears that most families make at least some use of Gaelic resources outwith Cròileagan groups, nursery or primary GME, albeit to differing extents. For some, the use of Gaelic resources outwith such provision is limited to occasionally viewing Gaelic children’s television. Other families reported more frequent use of a range of Gaelic materials and resources. As with Gaelic language socialisation more generally, families in both locations varied extensively in their use of resources.
Although resources do exist in Gaelic for parents with young children it was often the case that parents were not aware of the full range available and where to source such items. Kavanagh and Hickey (2013: 443) found a similar difficulty in Ireland where, although the supply of resources has increased, parents face challenges both in terms of ‘awareness and access’ which they attribute to these Irish-language materials could only be purchased ‘in special outlets and online’. Parents in this study often underestimated the range of resources available in Gaelic for use with young children, especially books. Parents who attended the Cròileagan in Edinburgh benefited from the ‘awareness and access’ to such resources the group’s lending libraries provided.

Sophie outlined her mixed-method approach to using Gaelic resources with her young children. She makes use of media, print materials, music, people and events:

Sophie: They hear Gaelic in music at home and in the car and playgroups, when we hang out with [a Cròileagan play leader] and when we go to events at [Bun-sgoil] Taobh na Pàirce. We have, we use Gaelic apps on the iPad and iPhone and we watch DVDs and things in Gaelic as much as possible.

Her friendship with a Cròileagan play leader provides her children with an opportunity to spend time with a Gaelic speaker. Sophie is also aware of Gaelic digital resources such as apps and DVDs that enable her to access Gaelic ‘as much as possible’. Additionally, as a regular Cròileagan attendee, Sophie benefits from the support and availability of resources through the Cròileagan’s lending libraries. The Cròileagan provides both awareness and access to Gaelic resources appropriate for young children and Gaelic-learning parents. This proactive approach is shared with a number of other parents who took part in this research, but it was by no means ubiquitous.

At nursery level in Edinburgh, Gaelic books can also be borrowed with an accompanying CD of the story being read. Maria made use of this provision and outlined how books borrowed from the school were just one of a range of resources used regularly in their home. Maria was learning Gaelic and played Gaelic CDs in
the car and put Gaelic programmes on for the child from the internet despite the family not having a television:

Maria: We have CDs in Gaelic so like my sister gave me a course book and then a CD in Gaelic so [her partner] plays that in the car, so [the child] listens to that. Then [a member of staff at the nursery] has CDs that she has done up for stories, that he listens, that we put on for him at home. And he has, we put on the, the Gaelic television as well for him. We don’t have a television but we watch it on the internet.

KM: Where would you go to find out about resources or anything like that, if you…

Maria: Well I’d check the internet a bit and I suppose I’ve asked the teachers at school as well, you know.

It is evident that the nursery, the Cròileagan and other people can support access to Gaelic resources for families. Parents’ own endeavour through researching resources online, asking the school or taking up support from the school or Cròileagan can greatly increase a child’s Gaelic language socialisation outwith these educational settings. The nursery staff member who recorded the stories being read and made them available to families to borrow enabled families without Gaelic-speaking parents to use a Gaelic children’s book at home. Edinburgh Council have supported parents who are not capable of reading Gaelic books by publishing a series of books for young children where the text appears in Gaelic and a version showing the pronunciation according to English phonetics. Alasdair, from Barra, outlined how he made use of these books with his children when they were younger:

Alasdair: We were very committed to Gaelic for the kids from when we arrived. We used to read the Gaelic; we got the Edinburgh schoolbooks, I got them online. The Gaelic, English and the phonetic, I used to read them to the kids and we had the Gaelic dictionary. I remember vividly reading it to [the child] on the Calmac ferry. We were and are quite committed to them becoming bilingual.

Despite the support provided for parents by the Cròileagan, nursery and others, some parents do not take such a proactive approach and utilise resources outwith Cròileagan or nursery to a much lesser extent. Lisa was learning Gaelic through her
work and attending Cròileagan sessions regularly but admitted that other than ‘the odd phrases’, use of Gaelic in the home was very limited and did not include Gaelic media consumption:

Lisa: [My child] comes to Cròileagan, and to be honest apart from the odd phrases over the weekend it is not like we are watching BBC Alba or anything like that so no, there is not a huge amount at home.

This account demonstrates that even resources such as BBC ALBA, which are highly valued by Gaelic development organisations for introducing Gaelic into the home, are not appealing to all families. Another mother in Edinburgh, Olivia, had only recently begun attending the Cròileagan and considering GME but she had started putting Gaelic television programmes on for her child: ‘I have started some BBC ALBA stuff at home but that would be all’. Other than attending the Cròileagan the occasional viewing of Gaelic programmes was the limit of her child’s Gaelic language socialisation to date but this situation could change in the coming months and years because the family was just new to Gaelic and GME.

In Barra, families had no access to Gaelic lending libraries such as those available at the Cròileagan in Edinburgh. In Claire’s family, however, her aunt supported Gaelic resource use by buying books both in Gaelic and English for her children:

Claire: Oh there’s plenty of books in the house and stuff. We got them as gifts from my auntie, who is a teacher, as well in the Gaelic school. We do get English ones and Gaelic ones from her. She gets them quite a lot of stuff. She knows that they enjoy the books. Even although they can’t read properly, they enjoy the books, the pictures and interaction.

The range of resources used by families in Barra was less and mainly consisted of books and some families commented on limited viewing of Gaelic television. Among the Gaelic-speaking families, Marsaili explained that they only had a limited number of Gaelic resources, primarily books (‘beagan, chan eil an t-uabhas’ – a little not a lot). She could not recall ever needing any assistance in accessing resources. Oighrig, a Gaelic-speaking mother in Barra, noted having a small number of books and she identifies Gaelic television as a possible resource:
The Gaelic language socialisation of these children is predominantly within the home and with Gaelic-speaking relations, including grandparents who often provide childcare and resource usage appears to feature to a much lesser extent. Catrìona did report using a range of resources and also the practice of reading English books in Gaelic:

Catrìona: Tha, leabhraichean gu leòr. BBC iPlayer, Peppa Pig, iarraidh e air a shon. [An Gruffalo] oidhcheannan is oidhcheannan ga choimhead; dh’fhàs e searbh dheth. Ma thaghas e leabhar Beurla bidh mi ga leughadh ann an Gàidhlig. Bidh mi cuideachd ag innse dha sgeulachdan a thog mi fhèin om sheanmhair.

Catrìona: Yes, many books. BBC iPlayer, Peppa Pig, he asks for that. [The Gruffalo] night after night he watched it; he got sick of it. If he chooses a book in English then I read it in Gaelic. I also tell him [Gaelic] stories I learned from my grandmother.

Using Gaelic television to support a child’s Gaelic language socialisation is not without its challenges. BBC Alba is only available from 5pm on weekdays and 4pm at weekends. Children’s programmes are available from 5-7pm most days and are more limited at weekends. These restricted hours contrast with English-language channels where dedicated children’s channels can be accessed all day. In some families, even young children were capable of accessing English children’s TV channels by themselves. Yet with Gaelic television, the reduced programming and the timing – during dinnertime – makes it more difficult for children to access, especially without adult intervention. Mairead in Barra acknowledged that she was unsure when Gaelic television was on:

Mairead: They are not big on telly. Gaelic telly, I think that is on at different times. I don’t know when that is on.
Lauren in Edinburgh outlined how she tries to put the children’s programme Peppa Pig in Gaelic on for her young children:

Lauren: Yes, I try to put BBC Alba on at least once each day. I try to catch the 4 or 5 o clock hour where they have Peppa Muc [Peppa Pig] or things like that. Just to have it on, just to listen to the cadence of the language.

Claire highlighted the attraction of dedicated English-language channels for children. She also underlined the use of Gaelic media as part of the everyday lives of islanders, even of those who do not use Gaelic in the home. For families in Barra, watching BBC Alba or listening to Radio nan Gaidheal is often not a child-orientated activity:

Claire: They do watch, if we are watching in the evening on BBC Alba they will watch if it is something that is of interest to them. Now they are at that stage they’d rather sit and watch Nickelodeon or Disney channel. If we are watching something they will want to come up and watch it, usually if they hear the music more, if they hear the chanter or the bagpipes or the fiddle.

Using both broadcast media (TV especially) and print resources to support Gaelic language socialisation is not without its challenges for families with young children. Challenges include the limited availability and timing of children’s programmes on live television, the parental involvement required as a result of the length of programmes and the limitations in terms of content. The restricted hours of BBC Alba and often the need to record programmes mean that parents must facilitate the viewing and for some this was frustrating. A specific difficulty of recorded or online television is the need for parents to start the next programme. Because programmes for young children often only last between 5–10 minutes, viewing even for half an hour required multiple points of adult intervention. In Barra, a further challenge for some families is the lack of reliable internet access, which can inhibit the use of online resources for streaming programmes online and utilising support such as book recordings on Gaelic4Parents.

Although Gaelic media does require more parental input in terms of knowing when and how to access it, Cailean acknowledges the support for Gaelic language
socialisation that Gaelic television can provide, especially with the prominence of English not only in the media but also in daily life:

Cailean: Tha an nighean, bidh i a’ chluinntinn Beurla fad an t-siubhail; is ann an Dùn Èideann a tha sinn a’ fuireach. Agus tha a h-uile sion air an telebhisean, uill chan eil a h-uile sion, tha tòrr de na prògraman, tha iad ann am Beurla ach gu math tric bidh sinn a’ coimhead air BBC Alba cuideachd. Tha mi a’ smaointinn gu bheil sin a’ dèanamh feum mòr gu bheil prògraman Gàidhlig ann […] tha iad a’ còrdadh rithe cuideachd.

Cailean: Our daughter, she hears English all the time; we live in Edinburgh. Everything on television, well not everything, lots of the programmes are in English but we often watch BBC Alba as well. I think that it really helps that there are Gaelic programmes […] She enjoys them also.

A number of parents in Barra who were undecided about GME were yet to consider preschool education or who have put older children to English-medium did have some Gaelic books; where they got these from appears to be difficult to recall. As far as I could ascertain these books were from Gaelic Bookbug packs distributed by health visitors as part of the Scottish Book Trust’s Bookbug programme:

Linda: I’m sure we’ve some Spot books lying about somewhere. I think did we get a kind of Gaelic bookstart bag?

KM: Yeah, you might have done, from the health visitor?

Linda: Possibly. Yeah, a few Gaelic colour books and things.

KM: And do you have any Gaelic books?

Niamh: I don’t.

Iain: Do you not have some? You asked for some?

Niamh: Aye we do, Bookbug.
KM: And do you have any Gaelic books or anything like that?

Louise: Yes we do, we have a few. Wherever they have come from…

KM: And did you get a Bookbug pack from the health visitor?

Louise: Yeah.

KM: Did you get Gaelic books in that?

Louise: Yes, that is where I got a few of them.

The three above cases demonstrate that providing Gaelic resources without any follow-up support will not necessarily encourage their use. These parents did not know that there are audio versions of these books available on the Gaelic4Parents website, despite information about this being included in the packs. In other cases Gaelic-speaking families did not receive their Gaelic Bookbug packs.

In terms of print materials, access to such materials, awareness of availability and the content have all been noted as challenges. Parents in both locations noted the appeal of similar English-language resources. To utilise Gaelic media or access online or print resource parents need to be proactive and diligent. Some Gaelic-speaking parents, Gaelic-learning parents and non-Gaelic learning parents were proactive as regards using language resources and attending local events – others do not appear to be so diligent. Personal circumstances, being a Gaelic-speaker, having Gaelic-speaking relations or neighbours, accessing Gaelic childcare and being in a financial position to purchase a range of resources increase parents’ ability to support opportunities for Gaelic language socialisation before and outwith formal education. Ultimately this parental endeavour requires effort and benefits from support; for some parents the effort required can be unsustainable.
Conclusion

Gaelic language socialisation in families with young children takes a variety of forms and changes over time. The use of Gaelic with young children is limited, even in the very few families that are Gaelic-speaking in Barra and Edinburgh. Where parents establish and maintain Gaelic use between parent and child it is often the case that they have not established Gaelic use between each other. The Gaelic language socialisation of young children outwith education consists of predominantly Gaelic use with parents or other adults known to the child, but these encounters can often only be occasional. Only a few instances were recalled when Gaelic-speaking children were speaking Gaelic to each other and this was a concern for some, but not all, Gaelic-speaking parents. Young children’s Gaelic language socialisation in families can be supported by regular contact with Gaelic-speaking relatives, friends and acquaintances.

Within education there is again an adult-child centred use of Gaelic with children using English between each other. The curricular demands on GME at the nursery level pose significant challenges for supporting the Gaelic language socialisation of young children from a range of linguistic backgrounds. The challenges faced by parents using Gaelic resources to support Gaelic language socialisation of their children often place a greater burden on adult intervention than English equivalents and as a consequence reinforce the adult-mediated nature of Gaelic language socialisation. The high level of parental input required for the Gaelic language socialisation of young children today may be difficult for families to sustain.
Chapter 6: Aspiration

Gaelic revitalisation endeavours have placed great importance on GME producing adult Gaelic speakers. Recent research into Gaelic-medium educated adults who attended GME (Dunmore 2015) and research from other international immersion education settings have challenged the presumption that Gaelic-medium educated children will become adults who regularly use Gaelic.

In this chapter, I will show that not all parents enrolling their children in GME have the clearly articulated aspiration that their children should speak Gaelic as an adult. Instead of aiming for their children’s use of Gaelic in adulthood, parents’ aspirations were often wider and less linguistically focused. Their aspirations included hopes that through GME their child will have a positive educational experience and that they will gain a greater cultural understanding of Scotland. Parents rarely indicated that they themselves could or would want to influence continued Gaelic use. Many parents wanted to state clearly their child’s agency and autonomy in future Gaelic use, and in decisions about their future more generally. Just as education choice is influenced by a combination of factors, parents’ aspirations often included a variety of considerations.

Some parents did outline general aspirations for language acquisition and future language use as a result of their child’s education through the medium of Gaelic, as will be outlined. These responses also varied significantly and ranged from those that felt it would be ‘nice’ if their child continued to speak Gaelic after leaving school, but with the clear caveat that they as parents would ‘leave it up to them’, to those that wanted their child to continue studying Gaelic throughout secondary school and hoped that they would contribute to the survival of the Gaelic language, possibly gaining Gaelic employment as adults. Parents who considered Gaelic employment options for their child following their education through the medium of Gaelic mainly focused upon roles in Gaelic teaching or media. In contrast to their imprecise aspirations, there were parents who clearly stated that they expect their child to be fluent in Gaelic on completion of GME while others’ comments aligned more with official information that describes fluency in Gaelic through GME as an aim or opportunity. Such limited aspirations for future Gaelic use, coupled with parents’
Reticence in explicitly supporting future Gaelic use suggests that despite official Gaelic development strategy’s aim for GME to produce the next generation of Gaelic speakers, all parties involved in GME might not share this aspiration.

Clear parallels can be drawn between the aspirations outlined by parents in this study and the findings of Dunmore’s (2015) research amongst Gaelic-medium educated adults. In his research, Dunmore identified five ‘discursive themes’ in participants’ responses and he argues that these themes ‘have a role in rationalising and explaining their current language practices’ (Dunmore 2015: 167-88). The first discursive theme identified by Dunmore pertains to an expressed ‘desire to use Gaelic differently’. He found that ‘ideologies of regret and guilt’ were apparent in participants’ responses regarding their current Gaelic use. Importantly, Dunmore points out that these expressions of regret were often ‘mild’ in nature and consequently insufficient in inspiring the respondent to alter their current language use patterns (Dunmore 2015: 168). The second theme identified by Dunmore concerns the intergenerational transmission of Gaelic (Dunmore 2015: 171-5). He explains that those interviewed expressed a view that they should attempt the intergenerational transmission of Gaelic despite their own current low levels of Gaelic use (Dunmore 2015: 175). The third discursive theme relates to ‘perceptions of judgemental attitudes and linguistic “snobbery” inside the Gaelic community’ (Dunmore 2015: 175). The fourth pertains to ideologies of use and loss (Dunmore 2015: 167). Dunmore explains that responses broadly fell within two categories of language ideologies with this regard – language attrition through the lack of Gaelic use, and for some the mere fact of having learned Gaelic and therefore ‘having Gaelic’, whether they used it in their daily lives or not, was important (Dunmore 2015: 179).

The final discursive theme identified by Dunmore relates to the ‘complementary ideologies of opportunity and choice’ apparent in participants responses (Dunmore 2015: 184). Dunmore states that ‘questions of choice and opportunity are therefore central to the ideologies of Gaelic language use that interviewees express while explaining and rationalising their current language practices’ (Dunmore 2015: 188). Dunmore concludes ‘that each of the ideological themes […] concerning Gaelic use tend to reinforce rationales pertaining to speakers’ limited use of Gaelic, and to
militate against more meaningful engagements with the language in day-to-day life’ (Dunmore 2015: 188). The main aspects of the discursive themes identified by Dunmore that were found in this study include the idea that Gaelic is something that is ‘nice to have’, that being able to speak Gaelic is a ‘distinguishing factor’ and that choosing to speak Gaelic in the future or not should be an individual’s choice (Dunmore 2015: 182-5).

**Being or appearing prescriptive**

Research into language shift situations has found that parents can be perplexed by their child’s non-use or non-acquisition of a minority language, often foregrounding their child’s preference for another language. During Macdonald’s (1997) fieldwork in Skye she found that parents would describe their child as not ‘tak[ing] to Gaelic’ or not bothering with it (Macdonald 1997: 223-4). Macdonald argues that parents who describe their child’s language acquisition in such a way suggest a view of their child ‘as an autonomous agent, not as a product of cultural work by its parents’ (Macdonald 1997: 224). Such an approach by parents does not evidence what De Houwer (2009) describes as an ‘impact belief’. A child’s agency was often cited in parents’ comments in this study on current patterns of language use but also in their hopes for their child’s future Gaelic use. Foregrounding a child’s agency in choices regarding future Gaelic use appears connected to a more general resistance amongst parents to be or appear to be in any way prescriptive about their child’s future.

Before considering parents’ aspirations specifically regarding Gaelic use, it was clear that in their responses parents often demonstrated a level of unease with being, or appearing to be, prescriptive about their child’s future. Seonaidh, in Barra, expressed the most strongly held views on this point. Seonaidh clearly articulated his belief that parents should not have ‘too many expectations’ for their children. He feels having expectations can be ‘dangerous’, especially if parents let them get ‘too high’. Seonaidh believes that children should be left to ‘get on with it’;

Seonaidh: I think that it is dangerous to have too many expectations. I think that you should just let them get on with it and see what happens. I think if you build them up, I think if your expectations get too high or whatever it is best to let them get on with it.
Although other parents did not express such strong views on this point, as will become evident from their responses throughout this chapter, other parents included caveats in their comments on their aspirations that indicate a degree of reluctance to appear prescriptive about their child’s future. Although parents seek to ensure that their child receives a ‘good education’ and has access to other opportunities, it does not appear to be the case that all parents are comfortable with holding specific aspirations for their children. It appears that having clear aspirations for their child’s future might not be included in what some parents understand to be their own role as a parent.

Most parents appear particularly reticent about having expectations for future Gaelic use. Lisa, a mother in Edinburgh, explained that she does not want to be prescriptive about her child’s future Gaelic use. She states clearly that ‘certainly won’t be making’ her children speak Gaelic on leaving GME. Lisa clearly states her hope that by the end of GME her children will be fluent in Gaelic:

Lisa: Well just that they’ll both, by the time they finish their education that they’ll be fluent but if they want to leave it at that then I’m fine with that. It will be lovely if they wanted to continue but they’d have to want to do it for themselves we certainly won’t be making them.

Lisa’s unease about appearing in any way prescriptive regarding future Gaelic use is evident in her response. Lisa makes a distinction between what she would like to happen, describing a situation where her child continued to use Gaelic as ‘lovely’, and if this were not to be the case then she would be ‘fine with it’. Future Gaelic use would be entirely her child’s choice. Parents who hold such views present a distinction between future Gaelic use as their child’s own choice and GME as their choice as a parent. How much parents think they can or should influence future use also varies.

Some parents do have a clear desire for their child to speak Gaelic in the future but the strength of this desire can vary. Anna in Edinburgh clearly hopes that her child will indeed enjoy and continue to use Gaelic:
Anna: I would hope that as time goes on that he keeps the language, that he enjoys the language and continues to use it throughout his life.

Iain, in Barra, also felt that his child’s future Gaelic use would be dependent upon the child’s own enjoyment of Gaelic and although hopeful that she would use Gaelic in the future, he concluded that ‘it depends what she likes in school I suppose’.

It is understandable that parents do not know with certainty what their children will do in the future especially when they are under five but Marsaili, a mother in Barra, clearly hopes that her children will use Gaelic:

Marsaili: Bhithinn an dòchas gun cleachdadh. Chan eil fhios ’m.

Marsaili: I would hope they would use [Gaelic]. I don’t know.

An important feature of responses given by parents regarding their views on their child’s future Gaelic use was that many wanted to state clearly their child’s agency and autonomy in decisions about their future in general. Parents who foregrounded their child’s agency often gave no consideration of how they could possibly support or influence their child’s future Gaelic use. Foregrounding their child’s agency and choice is again similar to the views aired by Gaelic-medium educated adults in Dunmore’s study (2015) who framed using or not using Gaelic as a choice. Overall, however, most parents clearly hoped their child would continue to use Gaelic.

Another of the ideological themes identified by Dunmore (2015) ‘viewing Gaelic as a skill’ was also evident in some responses; specifically, that Gaelic can be an extra skill in the job market. Gaelic can be viewed as a skill that has been acquired but does not necessarily need to be used.

**Gaelic as a skill**

Some parents placed aspirations for future Gaelic use within the context of European-level opportunities for minority language speakers. Sophie believes that knowing a minority language such as Gaelic is a ‘skill’ that is no different from knowing a majority language like French or German. Sophie suggests a level of
uncertainty in terms of the utility of Gaelic in the future as she frames her ‘hopes’ that Gaelic will prove to be ‘a useful skill’:

Sophie: I’d hope that they [would] always be able to use it in some context. I view it no differently to learning French or German, it is another language, it is a skill. With the minority languages protection that the EU is putting in place then hopefully it will be a useful skill just as Manx or Welsh or Catalan is.

Unlike other parents, Sophie included aspirations for her own language acquisition and use:

Sophie: My expectation, my hope is that this will become our secondary home language. My husband won’t be able to acquire Gaelic to conversational levels simply through time so my hope is that when I am with the children I will be able to converse in Gaelic as much as possible.

Similar to many families in Edinburgh where an adult is learning Gaelic, Sophie’s husband is not currently learning Gaelic and as she clearly states is very unlikely to do so in the future. Sophie’s aspirations, as outlined above, were exceptional in that they included her own language learning alongside her children and a desire to change home language use practices overtime. Other parents did have clear hopes for their child to use Gaelic in the future but did not include themselves in these aspirations.

A level of reticence regarding aspirations for their child’s future Gaelic use was also evident amongst parents who have only recently become involved in GME. Olivia highlights that Gaelic is a distinguishing factor and is ‘quite a unique thing’ but also made clear that her response was limited by her brief experience:

Olivia: I suppose I don’t know enough about it to be honest. Again it would be nice for him to go anywhere and it is quite a unique thing to be able to do and it is certainly something I can’t do and I like him being able to do something independent of us.
**Fluency as expected**

Another factor that became apparent from parents’ responses was that they often held distinct views on their child’s Gaelic language acquisition and their future Gaelic use. In terms of language acquisition, some parents appeared confident that their child would acquire Gaelic to fluency by the end of their education. From that point, their aspirations varied for language use, if they included language use amongst their aspirations at all. Other parents were less certain in their views on future proficiency and described their hopes for fluency rather than expectations or that they believed their child would acquire a ‘good grasp’ of the language.

Although some parents did clearly state that they expected their child to be fluent as a result of their education through the medium of Gaelic, formal information describing the aims of GME aligns more closely with the parents who view fluency as an aspiration rather than an expectation. The recently published statutory guidance on GME describes how GME aims to enable young people ‘to operate confidently and fluently in two languages as they progress from early years through primary education and into secondary education’ (Bòrd na Gàidhlig 2017a: 5). Parity between a child’s fluency in Gaelic and English is only mentioned in the guidance as ‘the purpose’ in relation to the ‘best Gaelic medium and immersion practice’:

> With the best Gaelic medium and immersion practice, the purpose is to ensure that children achieve equal fluency and literacy in both Gaelic and English, whilst reaching expected attainment levels in all other areas of the curriculum through Gaelic (Bòrd na Gàidhlig 2017a: 5).

Bòrd na Gàidhlig describe the aims of GME as a form of immersion education in which children ‘will gain the necessary and appropriate language skills – both in Gaelic and English’ (Bòrd na Gàidhlig 2017b). Education Scotland describe GME as providing ‘children and young people [with] an opportunity to become fluent in Gaelic’ (Education Scotland 2017).

These descriptions do not state that all children will be fluent on completion of GME, as is the understanding of some parents; they describe the ‘opportunity’ GME provides for fluency and that fluency is an ‘aim’ rather than a guaranteed outcome. It is not unforeseen that such documentation does not state that fluency is guaranteed
by attendance at GME. It is, however, interesting that some parents do clearly believe fluency to be a more certain outcome than other parents and than official information suggests.

Parents were often far clearer and stronger in their views regarding fluency than language use. Despite only recently becoming involved in GME, Karen set out how she expects her children to be fluent in Gaelic following their education through the medium of Gaelic and views this language acquisition as a means to access Gaelic and Scottish culture:

Karen: Well it is very early days; it is hard to say. I’m expecting them to be fluent. And I’m expecting them to, to through Gaelic gain access to, to their Gaelic, or Scottish roots or the culture, so that side because they have both, they’ve got [another European language] as well. It is nice I think, I’m hoping that they will find some routes through the culture and the language.

Maria outlined that her expectations for fluency were based on her son’s acquisition of Gaelic to date. She described his ‘huge progress’ in Gaelic-medium nursery, and with primary education being full-time rather than his current part-time nursery provision, she expects him to become ‘a very fluent speaker’ as a result of his attendance at GME:

Maria: Well like from the little time that he has been there, he has made huge progress like and things. So like I would expect him to become you know really fluent. Because if he has reached this stage already in such little time. When he is going to be there full-time at school, I think, you know, that he will become a very fluent speaker through Gaelic medium.

Maria’s son’s experience of GME plays a crucial role in her consideration of linguistic outcomes. Some parents hold high expectations for fluency but others appeared more cautious. Rather than focusing on continuing to use Gaelic after her child’s education through the medium of Gaelic, Ailsa outlined her belief that her children would need to have acquired Gaelic to a sufficient level to ensure that it is a skill they can access in the future:
Ailsa: We just want them to have it. Whether they choose to do anything with it is up to them. In terms of career it is an extra option, more importantly is they always have the language, if you take it up to a good standard.

Both the expectations and the aspirations that parents hold are important facets of the choice of GME. For some, their child’s attendance at GME is viewed as an assured path to fluency, for others their child’s progress to date forms the basis of their expectations, while other parents are more cautious in their expectations for their child’s fluency in Gaelic.

**Opportunities to use Gaelic**

Amongst the parents who expressed clear aspirations for future Gaelic use were some who clearly identified opportunities for use, often in employment, and others that raised concerns regarding future Gaelic use and what opportunities may be available. The opportunities for future Gaelic use identified by parents focused mainly on employment (specifically in teaching or the media) or use in cultural activities such as singing. Eilidh hoped that her son would continue with Gaelic, in employment – possibly as a Gaelic teacher – and if not through employment, that he would use Gaelic in activities such as singing. Similar to other parents, Eilidh too conveyed slight unease with appearing in any way prescriptive by mentioning a specific career:

Eilidh: I would like to think that he would maybe become a, I know this is me picking a career, but if he did Gaelic teaching or something, just keeping the language alive. Just something, even if he didn’t [choose teaching] that he would use it somehow. If he went down a completely different path, I’d like to think that he would maybe, like I don’t know, use it maybe singing Gaelic songs. Just keeping it alive, I think just to keep it alive, cause it is a traditional language, it is a good thing. I think that if he is brought up with it and immersed in it I think that that will kind of happen anyway.

Eilidh hoped that her son could contribute to the future of the Gaelic language as a result of his education through the medium of Gaelic and continued use of the language. Interestingly, although Eilidh has clear linguistic aspirations, she thinks that her child’s experience in GME in itself will lead to future Gaelic use. Eilidh does
not appear to consider that any action would be required on her part to support or encourage future use. Eilidh raises no concerns for future opportunities for use, having identified employment and hobbies as possible options.

The main Gaelic careers identified by parents were Gaelic teaching and employment in Gaelic media. Beth, another mother in Edinburgh, explained that with regard to future language use she hoped that her child would continue to speak Gaelic in adulthood with friends and maybe in a career in teaching or the media. Beth clarified that these would merely be possible career options for her children and she added: ‘I don’t know whether they will [choose a Gaelic career] but it would be nice if they did’. Similar to views on future Gaelic use, Gaelic employment does appear to be something that parents would welcome but may not actively encourage.

Claire considered her aspirations for future Gaelic use and contemplated the purpose of learning Gaelic without a career in the future that required Gaelic. She ultimately concluded that ‘it is not all about the job’:

Claire: I would love them to get a career in something that does involve Gaelic cause otherwise you think what was the point? But they will still have it, so there is a point. It is not all about just a job. I would like them to use it. I do encourage them to speak Gaelic with one another in the house, but it’s difficult. Even with their Dad, […] if I keep at it and say speak to them in Gaelic, he will but it just falls away.

Claire speaks of the importance of ‘having’ Gaelic as a skill that has been acquired but also wants her children to use Gaelic and actively encourages such practices. Claire views herself as having a role in supporting and encouraging Gaelic use but currently, despite this encouragement, her children and their Gaelic-speaking father mainly speak to each other in English.

In Edinburgh, Maria outlines how her child’s future Gaelic use would be dependent upon living in Scotland and having established a network of Gaelic-speaking friends. If her child remains in Scotland and has friends to speak Gaelic to, then he might continue to speak Gaelic:
Maria: Yeah I suppose, if he ends up living in Scotland and you know, probably, you know because he already has lots of friends in Gaelic medium, so I’d presume he’d keep in contact with those people and create his own kind of network of friends.

In contrast to parents in Edinburgh none of the parents in Barra suggested in their responses that their child might not live in Scotland. Parents who included using Gaelic in their aspirations mentioned careers in Gaelic or even hobbies (singing) or using Gaelic with friends but no mention was made of children being adults who would use Gaelic in the home and with their own children.

**Cultural understanding**

Parents, especially in Edinburgh, conveyed a belief that GME could provide their child with an increased cultural understanding of Scotland than would be available in English-medium education in Scotland. Similar to fluency, parents often expected this increased cultural understanding to be achieved in full from attendance at GME rather than from continued Gaelic use or contact with Gaelic speakers and culture outside education and throughout their life. In these hopes, parents often reflected on what they felt had been barriers to their own understanding of Scotland. Alice described how she hoped her children’s GME would result in a future openness to language learning and would help them to understand a ‘part of Scotland’ that she felt she was unable to access because she had no Gaelic:

Alice: So my aspirations or my expectations are that they’ll just expect that learning languages is something that you just do. And that they will also discover part of Scotland that maybe I didn’t access when I was a kid because they have the language and gives an insight to the country.

Another mother in Edinburgh, Natalie, reflected on her own experiences and hoped that her child’s GME would allow them to ‘embrace’ the culture in Gaelic-speaking areas of Scotland that she had visited. Natalie’s partner, James, supported this view of Gaelic providing an understanding of culture and hoped that their children would ‘get the bigger picture of it’ through their knowledge of Gaelic and their GME experience. In terms of fluency, Natalie describes her hopes that her child would
achieve ‘a good grasp of the language’ and that they would take certificated Gaelic courses in their secondary education:

Natalie: I’d like to think that they’ll get a good grasp of the language and that they’ll [...] hopefully do their Higher. But I think as well, [...] you know, it will be nice to go back to the islands, you know, and you can embrace them with the culture.

Although a few parents outlined a view of their child contributing to the future of the Gaelic language as a positive possible outcome, Fiona stated that her aspirations for her child’s future Gaelic use were not part of a wider desire that her child contributes to the future of the Gaelic language. Having attended GME herself, Fiona reflects positively on her experience. Despite not using Gaelic regularly after leaving school, Fiona believes that her ability in Gaelic has helped her in learning another language:

Fiona: So even though Gaelic didn’t prove that useful after school, it is, I think it gave me an ear to learning other languages that I might not have otherwise done. And it is just nice, and I would like to think that [my child] would have the same kind of, I think that it’s a broader education, kind of thing. But it is not anything like ‘oh I think we need to stop it dying out,’ you know it is not any of that. I think it is just, it did good for me.

Some parents would like their children to contribute to the future of the Gaelic language but for others this is clearly not the case. On the whole, parents rarely mentioned their child contributing to the future of the Gaelic language more broadly when considering their choice of GME or their aspirations for the future.

Like other parents, Fiona frames the choice of GME as primarily an education choice stating, ‘I think it is a broader education’. An example of this type of response came from Susan, a mother in Edinburgh; she focused in her response primarily upon the school experience and hoped that her daughter ‘will enjoy going to school’. Such education-focused responses align with original priorities of many parents that surfaced in connection with their desire for their child to attend a school in which they would be happy. Many parents’ aspirations remain focused on their child having a positive experience of education.
Parents’ views on language use were markedly less certain than language acquisition, either because of their own reticence to be prescriptive or also because the means through which their child might continue to use Gaelic after GME may be less clear. On the whole, parents identified three main areas of opportunity for future Gaelic use. Some focused on education and hoped that their child would continue with Gaelic as a subject in secondary education. Others focused on employment and the opportunities that might be available for their child to pursue a career in Gaelic teaching or media, while others looked to friendships for opportunities to use Gaelic in the future. Although some parents did identify opportunities, others struggled to identify future opportunities for using Gaelic upon leaving GME or raised concerns about what challenges might arise, as I outline in what follows.

**Concerns for future language use**

Parents appear to utilise their own experiences and the experiences of others to inform their aspirations for their children in terms of future language use. Lauren explained that her experiences of Gaelic language use, or in fact its non-use, by Gaelic-medium children in Edinburgh within the school premises had already resulted in her tempering her aspirations for future Gaelic use. Her current concerns have arisen as a result of widespread English use outside the classroom by children in Gaelic-medium primary education. To date she has consistently heard English used between children in the Gaelic school’s playground in Edinburgh, something that has ‘surprised’ her. Lauren aired concerns regarding such practices with fellow parents and was told that the reason behind the lack of Gaelic use amongst children attending the school was that the children did ‘not think of [Gaelic] as a useable language outside the classroom’. Lauren appears to have accepted this explanation and in addition to her desire for her children to become fluent in Gaelic, Lauren ‘would really like’ her children to understand that Gaelic can be used outside the classroom:

Lauren: I would like them to be fluent. The one thing, I would want it to not just be a language that they use at school. Something that surprised me when I started [my child] at Cròileagan, or at sgoil-àraich, we walk pass the playground every day and I was really surprised to hear that all the children speak to each other in English in the
playground. And I’ve spoken to a couple of people about that and they said that that is because they don’t think, it is almost like they are not thinking of it as a usable language. It is just a language for the classroom. I would really like it if my children didn’t think it was just a language for the classroom.

In Lauren’s case, her experiences of language use and discussions with fellow parents have resulted in an added dimension to her aspiration that was not initially apparent. In Edinburgh, Maria’s husband Roddy also held reservations regarding future Gaelic use. Through friends that had been educated through the medium of Irish, Roddy understood that his son’s education through the medium of Gaelic would not guarantee adult Gaelic use. He reflected on the experiences of adults he knew who had attended immersion education in Ireland and no longer speak Irish. Roddy hopes that his son will continue to use Gaelic and believes that because his son speaks three languages this is a distinguishing factor between his son and these other Irish-medium educated adults:

KM: And do you think [your child] will speak Gaelic when he is older?

Roddy: It is hard, well, I don’t know, it is hard to tell, but I hope he will. I have a few friends, who went to Gaelic, well not Gaelic but Irish school, like all in Irish and they don’t speak it anymore. Do you know, they don’t feel the need or anything. And one of them has told me actually he kind of misses it, but I wonder if it is because it is ideology or is it lack of effort, I don’t know. I just hope that, I think it depends on your character really. The thing is I think that [my child] will probably [speak Gaelic in the future] because Gaelic is not the only language he speaks. I think that people who speak more languages tend to speak more languages generally and they keep using them. So I am hoping.

Although some of the families in Edinburgh spoke another language in addition to English and Gaelic, the majority of children in this study have Gaelic in addition to just English and are therefore more similar to Roddy’s friends rather than his son in that regard. Similar to Lauren’s consideration of the reasons behind children not using Gaelic in the school playground, Roddy ponders the reasons why his friends who went to Irish-medium education no longer speak Irish, and wonders whether it is because of ‘ideology’ or ‘lack of effort’.
Interestingly, Roddy does not mention any difficulties in finding opportunities for Irish use as a possible reason for his friends’ low Irish use after education – it could be that Roddy knows that opportunities for Irish use are readily available to these adults and he has no grounds to consider a lack opportunity as a barrier to Irish use. In the Scottish context, however, Dunmore’s (2015: 184-5) study amongst GME adults in Scotland found that there was at least a perceived lack of opportunity to use Gaelic that was used to explain participants’ low levels of Gaelic use.

Rather than considering opportunities for use, Liam (also in Edinburgh) considered broader issues of language and identity in the context of urban immersion education. Liam explained that he hopes that at secondary level his children would not ‘leave that path’ and would continue studying Gaelic but he also considered wider issues when thinking about their future Gaelic use. He wondered ‘what type of identity is coming out of [GME]?’ and what the results would be in terms of identity for his own children. Liam explained that it would be good if his children were to ‘become part of the Gaelic-speaking community’. He wondered whether as a result of GME children becoming GME teachers and staying in urban areas away from Gaelic-speaking communities, there would be an ‘internal dynamic’ that would create an ‘urban artificial identity’ rather than a Gaelic-medium educated person having an identity that was authentic as a Gaelic speaker. Liam was the only parent who commented on GME and identity in this way.

The variety of experiences outlined in this study not only in terms of language socialisation but also the variety of factors influencing the choice of GME and the aspirations parents hold reveals that creating the future generation of Gaelic speakers is not a priority for all families involved in GME. GME is obviously an attractive form of education, a form of education choice available to parents to choose. The aspirations outlined by parents demonstrate that parents have made an educational choice that provided their child with a language learning opportunity and an opportunity to gain additional cultural experiences. If their child continued to speak Gaelic in the future then that is undoubtedly something that these parents would welcome but very few parents view themselves as having an influential role in creating such an outcome.
Education in Gaelic language revitalisation

In examining Gaelic in families with young children in Barra and Edinburgh it is apparent that despite GME and other efforts to support the language, Gaelic use is declining at a community level and only a very small number of families socialise their children as Gaelic speakers in the home. The aspirations of parents with children in GME did not include that their child could intergenerationally transmit Gaelic in the future and on the whole only some outlined clear aspirations for future Gaelic use. These views then indicate a mismatch between national language planning goals and their understanding of the role of GME in the future of Gaelic and the role that the provision plays for families involved.

Ó hIfearnáin explains that mismatches can be identified between the national level language development agenda and the desires of minority language speakers. He states ‘that the aims and linguistic desires of the national collective do not necessarily coincide’ with the remaining speakers of a minority language (Ó hIfearnáin 2010: 38). These ‘subtle mismatches’ can result in measures that were taken to support the language ‘contribut[ing] to its decline’ (Ó hIfearnáin 2010: 38). Ó hIfearnáin (2010: 41) argues that:

[I]n order to undertake successful language management from the institutional point of view, such as an official national language plan, it is first important to understand the linguistic beliefs and practices of the speech community so as to be able to steer them towards productive measures. Language planning for marginalised languages has too often been undertaken within the context of a particular language ideology that has national goals, which may not be appropriate to the smaller residual speech community.

It can also be argued that in order for national level language management to utilise successfully the opportunities that GME affords then due consideration must be given to the role of such provision not only for language planners but for the parents who choose the provision and the children who attend. The reasons for choosing and remaining involved in such provision and parents’ aspirations for their child’s future Gaelic use should play a significant role in understanding the current and potential contribution of GME to the future of Gaelic.
The use of minority language education as a primary mechanism for the revitalisation of a language undergoing language shift has been widely called into question. Fishman (1991: 395) is a strong proponent of focussing on supporting intergenerational transmission of minority languages within the ‘home-family-neighbourhood’ in revitalisation endeavours – Stage 6 on his ‘Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale’ (GIDS). Fishman distinguishes between intergenerational transmission and language maintenance:

Without intergenerational mother tongue transmission (or the transmission of a written or spoken second language, if that should be the societal goal) no language maintenance is possible. That which is not transmitted cannot be maintained. On the other hand, without language maintenance (which is a post-transmission process) the pool from which successive intergenerational transmission efforts can draw must become continually smaller. If fewer and fewer will maintain Xish, fewer and fewer will be available to transmit it to their offspring (Fishman 1991: 113).

Intergenerational transmission of Gaelic in the home and community is now very weak even in the traditionally Gaelic-speaking areas in Scotland, yet national focus remains on education as the means of creating the next generation of Gaelic speakers. Currently for families where a parent can speak Gaelic, there are no examples of national level efforts to support or even promote specifically the intergenerational transmission of Gaelic within the home. Even if an education system were to produce Gaelic speakers then it is clear that mechanisms for maintaining Gaelic would be required to then enable individuals to be in a position to transmit the language intergenerationally as adults.

GME being invoked as the solution to Gaelic language shift can be seen following the release of the Scottish Census figures for 2011. A quote from the then Chief Executive of Bòrd na Gàidhlig, John Angus MacKay, demonstrates the view that GME was central to the 2011 Census figures and expresses the belief that GME could reverse Gaelic language shift within the ten years:

The 2011 census results gave us very encouraging evidence that the number of Gaelic speakers in Scotland has almost stabilised since the census of 2001. This is mainly due to the
rise in GME, which has seen excellent growth since its inception in 1985. The trend shows that within the next ten years the long-term decline of the language could be reversed. (John Angus MacKay, Bòrd na Gàidhlig 2014b)

In their latest National Gaelic Language Plan 2012-17, Bòrd na Gàidhlig consider Gaelic development in eight development areas including ‘Home & Early Years’ and ‘Education: Schools & Teachers’. One of three outcomes stated in ‘Education: Schools & Teachers’ is ‘an increase in the number of entrants to primary one GME from 400 to 800 by 2017’ (Bòrd na Gàidhlig 2012a: 22). Their support for the early years provision is viewed in light of this priority of increasing enrolment in primary one, which is described as ‘fundamental to the aim of stabilizing and growing the numbers of Gaelic speakers’ (Bòrd na Gàidhlig 2014b: 12).

The focus on education in Gaelic development is not without its critics, most notably Fishman (1991: 380) who criticised the Gaelic revitalisation endeavour for its ‘nigh complete reliance on the school and other higher order props’. Oliver (2006) also called into question this approach and the focus on census figures rather than language use:

At the moment much emphasis would appear to be on reversing the deficit trends reflected by census figures. This means increasing ascribed language ability, but not necessarily actual use. [...] The policy focus is on a continued national growth of GME but it must be understood that progress on this front will not inevitably increase the intergenerational transmission or everyday use of Gaelic (Oliver 2006: 164).

Language shift is a complex phenomenon with many influencing factors and is a process with a long history. The solution therefore will not be provided by one development initiative alone. The challenges facing language-maintenance efforts such as GME have been considered by many scholars and for some time. Dorian explained in 1987 that ‘maintenance programs are too easily and comfortably invoked as a solution to the decline of any speech form. The reality, as usual, is more complex and difficult’ (Dorian 2014: 224).
GME alone will not create a generation of adults who use Gaelic as a peer language. GME currently plays an important role in supporting and facilitating Gaelic language acquisition in children and young people. It provides employment and career opportunities for Gaelic-speaking adults and provides opportunities for families to access Gaelic language and culture that they may not get otherwise. Realistic expectations must be held for the contribution of GME to the future of the Gaelic language. Due consideration must be given to specific support that could benefit Gaelic-speaking families who currently face the challenges of intergenerational transmission.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have outlined the varied aspirations of parents who are involved with their young children in GME. Against a background of reticence to be or to appear prescriptive, parents outlined educational, linguistic and cultural aspirations as a result of their child’s education through Gaelic. Clear aspirations for future Gaelic use were rarely articulated, with parents stating that they would not seek to influence their child’s decisions on such a matter.

An interesting feature in parents’ responses was the expectation that their child will become fluent in Gaelic following GME. The level of certainty in this outcome, stated by several parents, contrasts with official information on GME, which frames fluency as an aim. In their responses, parents reflected on their own experiences to date or the experiences of others and identified some challenges that might arise in the future that could affect their child’s Gaelic use. These challenges included that English has been strongly established as a peer language, even within GME, and that opportunities for adult Gaelic use would be dependent upon having Gaelic-speaking friends and/or living in Scotland.

In the light of the findings on aspiration, language socialisation and GME choice, then realistic expectations should be held for the ability of GME and families with young children to meet the challenges of language shift and produce the next generation of Gaelic speakers. Informing parents that fluency is an aim rather than an expectation of GME could be considered in light of these findings. Parents could then be helped to view both developing fluency and accessing opportunities for
language use as areas where they can have a supporting role as part of their involvement in their child’s education.
Conclusion

Aims of the study
In this thesis, I set out to examine the role of Gaelic in families with young children in two locations, Barra and Edinburgh. In order to achieve this objective, firstly I explored education choice in both locations, primarily focusing on the choice of GME. Secondly, I examined the Gaelic language socialisation of young children; and thirdly, I considered parents’ aspirations for future Gaelic use. To explore these questions, I undertook twelve months of ethnographic research in two study areas, Barra and Edinburgh. I spoke to parents, teachers, nursery staff, and a range of other people involved in supporting Gaelic in families. The research questions identified at the outset of this study were as follows:

(i) Why do parents introduce their young children to Gaelic?
(ii) How do parents introduce their children to Gaelic?
(iii) What expectations do parents have for their child’s future Gaelic use?

The main findings of this study
Families with young children have a wide range of backgrounds and come to Gaelic and GME in different contexts. The in-depth consideration of choice in the two locations in this study has yielded an important understanding of the impact of context on decisions regarding language and education. The main contextual factors that influence education choice identified in this study were linguistic, political, and social.

The linguistic differences identified between the field sites included parents’ prior experience of Gaelic, parents’ experience of bilingualism and language learning, and whether parents attempt to learn Gaelic alongside their child or not. Parents in Barra have experience of Gaelic. They can either speak Gaelic, are recessive bilinguals or have experienced Gaelic, through family members, in education or in day-to-day life in Barra. Important findings in terms of the Gaelic abilities of parents in Barra were that English had been established as the peer language of their childhood and many of the younger parents involved in this study in Barra reported having very little or
no Gaelic. Young children in Barra today represent the second generation to be brought up with English as the vernacular language. The community language shift context in Barra further reduces the opportunities for Gaelic speakers and Gaelic learners to use and hear Gaelic. The experience of Gaelic in many families with young children in Barra increasingly aligns with those of families in Edinburgh. Most parents use little to no Gaelic with their children and the small minority of Gaelic-speaking families face similar challenges in trying to maintain Gaelic use with their children and provide them with a range of socialisation experiences in both locations.

Although parents in Edinburgh often had little to no prior experience of Gaelic before involvement in GME, many did have experience of bilingualism or multilingualism and language learning. 21 out of 52 parents in Edinburgh in this study were bilingual or multilingual, with a wide range of majority and minority languages known by parents. In Barra, no parents had learned a language to fluency as an adult and no parents reported knowing any language other than Gaelic, Scots or English. In addition to their experience of language learning and bilingualism, parents’ efforts to learn Gaelic were particularly notable in Edinburgh. Parents attended evening classes, weekend and distance-learning courses and used holidays to learn Gaelic at the annual Family Week at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig.

The political contexts also differ. As outlined in Chapter 1, the widespread scepticism that exists at the actions of the local authority in Barra concerns a range of matters, including both education and Gaelic. Understanding education and Gaelic in Barra requires taking this wider political context into account. For example, this dynamic contributes to local support for Eoligarry School, the last remaining rural school. Although it can appear initially that parents in Barra have not engaged with local authority proposals for GME, it is not the case that no parental attempts have been made to improve provision in Barra. Parents were unsuccessful in their campaign to have Eoligarry School dedicated as a Gaelic school, but more recently parents succeeded in increasing Gaelic instruction to include physical education in primary GME. In Edinburgh, perceptions of the local authority did not feature as a background that influenced views on GME.
In Edinburgh, the social context of Gaelic-medium early years provision differs considerably from Barra. The vast majority of parents in Edinburgh that took part in this study were not brought up in Edinburgh. Parents often attended the Cròileagan sessions because the group provided a welcoming environment for their family, and allowed them to meet other parents with young children. The Cròileagan in Edinburgh provided extensive support for families with young children in terms of learning Gaelic and supported parents considering GME. On the whole, parents in Barra did not look to provision such as parent-and-child groups to provide social support for them as parents with young children. The Gaelic group in Barra did not provide comparable support for families in learning and using Gaelic and also in considering GME.

The choice of GME
In this thesis I have argued that the choice of GME should be viewed as a process. Throughout the fieldwork I encountered parents at different stages of this process, some had only recently learned about GME, others were researching GME as an option by visiting the school or meeting other parents and others were making decisions and enrolling their children in their chosen provision. In order to understand why parents have chosen GME then it is imperative to understand how they come to GME, how they make decisions, and who and what influences these decisions. The choice of GME is not one decision made at a single moment in the past, based on an identifiable attractive feature, but is the result of an ongoing process of consideration and reflects a combination of reasons, experiences, interests, priorities and concerns.

The factors influencing parents’ involvement in GME can change over time, with initial factors that instigate the consideration not necessarily being important to continued involvement. For example, some parents who initially expressed a preference for bilingual education in a language other than Gaelic or who were indifferent to Gaelic being the immersion language, became increasingly interested in Gaelic and even began to learn Gaelic themselves. By the same token, parents’ concerns can change over time; some abate while others continue or new reservations arise. Even parents who have made a definite decision to enrol their
child in GME, and are confident in that choice, may retain reservations. Additionally, the choice of GME is open to scrutiny and parents must respond to the views aired by extended family, friends and others. Finally, the choice of GME can be reconsidered and children transferred to other provision.

Overall, parents often framed the choice of GME more broadly, within a strong desire to find a suitable form of provision for their family. In commenting on different schools, parents identified some schools as ‘good’ schools. In further examining this notion of a ‘good’ school it became apparent that rather than the ‘best’ school available in a wide geographic area, a ‘good’ school is often the best amongst a small number of options that parents view as viable – options that align with the priorities of the parents with due consideration given to the practical implications. Parents valued highly a school that provides a welcoming and caring environment for the whole family, a school where their child will have access to additional opportunities or cultural experiences, and a school that aligns with their own interests. GME can be provided in the ‘good’ school, as was the case in Edinburgh, but a ‘good’ school can also be located in an English-medium school, as was the case in Barra.

In Edinburgh, parents were often interested in the cultural opportunities that GME might afford their children and the possibility that learning Gaelic could foster an interest in future language learning in their child. Without a more general interest in bilingualism and with cultural opportunities widely available in all education provision in Barra, the parental interest in GME reflected a desire for their child to learn Gaelic or for home attempts at Gaelic language socialisation to be supported. Some parents in both locations viewed GME as a means of connecting children to place and people.

In both locations, the challenges faced by Gaelic-speaking families differ from those new to Gaelic. The very small number of Gaelic speakers within educational settings, both formal and informal, means that opportunities to speak Gaelic to others are very limited for both parents and children. In Gaelic-medium formal provision at nursery and primary level, challenges also arise for the small minority of children who speak Gaelic at home. Parents voiced concerns about the impact on their child’s Gaelic
proficiency of the majority of children who are learning the language predominantly in education. Gaelic-speaking parents can identify low levels of proficiency in teachers and pupils that learners or parents without Gaelic are unable to identify.

**Language socialisation**

As language shift continues in the Western Isles there is significant convergence in the experiences of young families in these areas and in urban areas, especially in terms of language use and the limited nature of the Gaelic language socialisation of young children. The majority of children in GME enter the provision with little to no competence in the language. There are very few occasions where children speak Gaelic to each other. Overall, children learn Gaelic from and speak Gaelic to adults and possibly a very small number of children.

The variation in terms of support and opportunities available to families coupled with their own family circumstances, inevitably lead to divergence in the total experience of GME across and within locations. The Gaelic language socialisation of young children in both locations varies greatly, not only between families but also within families, with changing circumstances affecting the socialisation of children over time.

Overall the Gaelic language socialisation of young children is characterised by parents’ endeavours to facilitate Gaelic use and acquisition. Three main variables can be identified in parents’ approaches. Firstly, language socialisation can vary depending on parents’ own Gaelic competence and use, and whether this will increase through language learning or not. Secondly, how proactively parents access opportunities and use resources to support children’s Gaelic language socialisation outwith education, can significantly impact upon a young child’s opportunities to hear and use Gaelic. Finally, the support available for families to enable access to a wide range of resources and opportunities to learn and use Gaelic varies between families and locations. This support can increase the opportunities for families to engage with Gaelic outwith education but does no guarantee that families do so. Overall, supporting a child’s Gaelic language socialisation proves demanding even for the most proficient and committed parents.
In this study, I have identified the ways in which parents proactively support their child’s Gaelic language socialisation. Parents learn and use Gaelic with their children or use the Gaelic they already have. Parents acquire and utilise Gaelic resources at home, such as books, DVDs and Gaelic children’s television. Parents encourage other Gaelic speakers to speak Gaelic to their children and help their children to access Gaelic opportunities such as attending féisean and competing in mòdan. Parents maintain strong connections to Gaelic-speaking extended family and spend holidays in Gaelic-speaking areas.

Some non-Gaelic-speaking parents engage in a concerted effort to learn and use Gaelic outwith education in what was described by some families as ‘learning Gaelic as a family’. In all cases where parents were currently enrolled in Gaelic courses, however, only one parent in the family was formally learning Gaelic. Amongst those that are actively learning Gaelic, some parents outlined difficulties in transferring what they had learned into use in the home.

Overall, very few families socialise young children as Gaelic speakers from birth in both locations. Three families involved in this research were doing so in Barra and five in Edinburgh. These children have limited opportunities to speak Gaelic to other children with similar Gaelic language ability. There is a level of continuity, however, in the intergenerational transmission of Gaelic to young children: on the whole parents that have maintained Gaelic use with their own parents maintain it with their children. In addition, two heritage learner parents have acquired sufficient fluency to use Gaelic in interactions with their children.

**Aspirations**

GME exists as part of the endeavour to support Gaelic language maintenance and revitalisation. Gaelic language development places great emphasis on GME to create future speakers of the language yet the aims of parents following their child’s GME focus less on future Gaelic language use than might be anticipated. The vast majority of the parents in this study did not express clearly a desire for their child to use Gaelic in the future. This finding might not be surprising considering that the choice of GME reflects a combination of multiple influencing factors and the children in this study were very young but this findings does have implications for how the
choice of GME is understood within a language development context that currently has high expectations for Gaelic-medium educated children’s future Gaelic use.

Overall, parents’ aspirations for their child’s future use of Gaelic were unclear. There was a general reluctance to be prescriptive in any way about a child’s future. Parents often foregrounded their child’s agency and expressed a personal view that use would be ‘nice’ or that they ‘hoped’ they would use Gaelic in the future. These parents did not outline a role for themselves in encouraging or supporting their child’s future Gaelic use. Parents who held clear linguistic aspirations for their child expected them to study Gaelic at high school and use the language as adults, while others hoped that their child could gain a greater understanding of Scotland’s cultural heritage from having acquired Gaelic in GME. Some parents did note concerns for the availability of opportunities in the future for their child to speak Gaelic, often reflecting on current experiences of language use or the experiences of others in immersion education.

**Relationship with previous research**

The findings of this study concur with previous research in a number of respects. Adler et al. (1989) found that parents often relied on the local reputation of a school in identifying a small number of options for consideration in their research on education choice in Scotland, this was also the case in this study. Where parents referred to considering more than one educational option they only considered one other. Secondly, the attractive features of GME that parents identified broadly align with previous research into GME choice (O’Hanlon et al. 2010, Stephen et al. 2010, O’Hanlon 2012). Thirdly, the findings of this study concur with previous research into the intergenerational transmission of Gaelic in families; very few families socialise their children as Gaelic speakers in both areas (Munro et al. 2011; Will 2012; Smith-Christmas 2016). Previous studies have also highlighted a lack of awareness of the needs children who speak the immersion language at home in immersion education (Hickey et al. 2014; Hickey 2001, Hickey 2007; Stephen et al. 2010).

In this study, at least some non-Gaelic-speaking families were making a concerted effort in the home and were trying to include Gaelic in family life to a greater extent,
especially in Edinburgh. This finding contrasts with Will’s (2012) research that found that families without Gaelic-speaking parents restricted their child’s Gaelic language exposure to school or discussions around school and homework.

Parallels can be drawn between the findings in terms of parental aspirations for their child’s future language use and the findings of Dunmore’s (2015) study into the actual language use and ideologies of adults who were educated in GME. Ideological themes, such as ‘Gaelic as a skill’, Gaelic as something that is ‘nice to have’ and individuals having a choice of whether or not to use Gaelic in the future, all featured in parents’ responses.

**Implications of findings**

In light of this research there are clear opportunities to improve the support for parents choosing and involved in GME, to support language learning and language use within the family and to increase the understanding of GME and its methods and expected outcomes.

There are opportunities for the development of Gaelic-medium early years provision and the support available for parents with young children, which follow careful consideration of the local context. Different families with different proficiencies in Gaelic and families at different stages in the process of considering GME all need appropriately tailored support.

GME has the potential to engage families in Gaelic language learning and use. The Cròileagan provides an example of how parents who come to GME for different reasons can be introduced to Gaelic learning and take up ‘learning Gaelic as a family’. The Cròileagan groups in Edinburgh catered especially well for those experiencing Gaelic for the first time or those that were beginning to learn the language. This study has highlighted, however, the need to consider how best to support parents with experience of Gaelic in learning about GME and to support Gaelic language learning in families beyond the Cròileagan stage.

Intergenerational transmission of Gaelic is weak and the linguistic needs of Gaelic-speaking families in this study appear to be amongst those least well supported. There is a need to support these families in their endeavour and to encourage other
families where at least one parent can speak Gaelic to do so. Gaelic-speaking families have often engaged less with early informal provision because it was not felt to be linguistically appropriate for them and their child. One parent explained that the Cròileagan in Edinburgh were looking to establish a group for Gaelic-speaking parents and advanced learners only. This type of development would go some way to improving provision for these families at the Cròileagan stage. Yet, the needs of Gaelic-speaking children in GME and their families must be acknowledged and addressed across all stages of GME.

An overall awareness of the variety of concerns and continued reservations parents have following enrolment is necessary in order to provide appropriate and timely support. An understanding is also needed of the barriers to involvement that might exist even at the very earliest stages of education choice. For example, before considering GME some parents in Barra sought evidence of their young child’s linguistic aptitude or spoken Gaelic after little to no exposure to the language before considering GME. To enable parents to consider GME as viable an option then it is imperative they understand that GME is indeed an option for all children including those with no Gaelic.

Overall, adults in Barra could benefit from a better understanding of GME and also of how they could support their child’s Gaelic acquisition outwith education. Providing opportunities to learn about GME, the methods, outcomes and the resources and support available is surely required in all areas, even those with higher proportions of Gaelic speakers. Opening out any opportunities to experience GME to extended family, young adults (not yet parents) and others in the community would help to increase the understanding of the methods and outcomes of GME more widely within the community. These adults could be informed about how they could support the Gaelic socialisation of children they interact with regularly and their increased understanding of GME would leave them better placed to support others’ decision-making or to choose GME themselves.

Parents in Edinburgh are well supported in this decision making process by the school, the nursery and the Cròileagan. They were well informed about the methods used in GME and the support available and receive reassurance following enrolment.
Even in Edinburgh, however, the expectation that a child will be fluent on completion of GME indicates that there is not a shared understanding of the range of possible outcomes from attending GME. Parents should be informed of the ways that they can support their child’s Gaelic language acquisition and realistic expectations for fluency should be discussed with parents.

Supporting widespread understanding of GME by allowing parents to experience the provision and meet other parents with children in GME should only be the first step in considering how best to support these parents in choosing GME. In this study, I found that the choice of English-medium education in Barra was not, for most parents, a decision against Gaelic but a decision that reflects other local concerns, such as support for a rural school or practical considerations such as location. Parents who chose English-medium primary provision or transferred their children to the provision indicated clearly that they support Gaelic instruction throughout primary education. It is unlikely that improving the understanding of GME alone would be sufficient to support these parents to choose GME. In the interim, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar have identified Gaelic as the language two for English-medium pupils in the national Language 1+2 policy (Scottish Government 2012: 13). The implementation of this policy may upgrade the delivery of Gaelic in English-medium education in the Western Isles.

Changes in working practices of parents mean that most families need childcare provision either part-time or full-time. Several parents in Barra were successful in accessing this provision for their children in recent years; however, both of the Gaelic-speaking child-minders stopped providing child-care shortly before the fieldwork for this research began. Parents were left with no option but to make alternative child-care arrangements with non-Gaelic-speaking caregivers, in most cases. An opportunity to support Gaelic in families lies in Gaelic-medium childcare, especially where parental demand for such provision already exists.

**Limitations of the research**

In this study, I focused on parents with children at the early years stage of GME. The findings are therefore limited to the responses of parents with children at the early years and primary stage, although parents with older children were able to comment
on their experiences of the later stages of primary and into secondary provision. The research is not only limited by this focus on the early years stage but also to those that took part. The data utilised in this study reflects the views of these individuals and those that chose not to take part, or were not aware of the research, may have had different experiences and perspectives.

Without in-depth case studies of an ethnographic nature in family homes, I have had to rely on the self-reported language and resource use, which is a clear limiting factor. The responses in self-reporting varied and some parents did openly admit that they used little to no Gaelic in the home or that their Gaelic use was confined to a limited number of phrases. I cannot guarantee that the self-reported use is accurate, but the responses included in this study give some description of language use.

Unfortunately I was not always able to interview both parents in all families. Where I was able to do so, hearing both parents’ accounts proved valuable in examining not only education choice, but also the language socialisation of the children. On the occasions where they were interviewed separately, their accounts revealed different perspectives, concerns and influencing factors but did also evidence clear agreement on many points.

Furthermore, the research was not a longitudinal study and the data is limited to the fieldwork period of one year. Since the fieldwork ended there have been changes in family circumstances in some of the participant families and also changes in the provision in both locations. Many of the key findings of this research indicate that education and language choices can change over time, as can the Gaelic language socialisation of children. For families currently engaged in Gaelic language socialisation, taking into account the parental effort involved and the challenges faced, sustaining the endeavour for a prolonged period of time may prove difficult.

For those ‘learning Gaelic as a family’ for instance, I am not able to track the trajectory of the adult and child learning experience, or if adult language learning has changed language use practices in the family.

In this research the importance of context has been stressed and thus the research is itself limited not only by time but also by place, to the two field sites chosen for the
study. It is important to acknowledge the limitations of place, and those contextual factors identified in each location are specific to those locations. Had two other locations been chosen then some of these factors would have differed. For example, had a location such as the Greater Glasgow area or the Isle of Lewis been chosen then the examination of choice would have included, for some families, an additional factor of accessible alternative Gaelic-medium provision. Or, had another mainland setting been chosen with many more parents originally from that location, unlike Edinburgh, then parents’ own experience of local primary schools could have factored more prominently in school choice than was the case in Edinburgh.

**Recommendations for future work**

Conducting a longitudinal study of GME from the early years through to adulthood would enable a more in-depth analysis of many factors identified in this study. Such a longitudinal study could examine ‘learning Gaelic as a family’, especially the trajectory of the adult language learning and any changes that might take place in home language use. Additionally, the impact of changing circumstances on education choice and language socialisation is an aspect that could benefit from a longitudinal approach. Aspirations for future Gaelic use may also change over time and such an approach would also be able to investigate this.

The transfer of children out of GME merits further study. A more in-depth study of the reconsideration of education choice would illuminate both the factors that initiate the reconsideration of choice, and the factors that influence the ultimate decision to transfer out of, or to remain in, the provision. Such a study might shed light on the long-term influence of parents not being fully in agreement over GME choice and if this is a factor in reconsideration.

Future research could further explore parents’ expectations for fluency following GME and their understanding of their own role in supporting language acquisition and use. How the aims and outcomes of GME are presented to parents and their understanding of language learning would merit further investigation.

It is apparent that greater awareness is required of the challenges to the Gaelic language socialisation of children in Gaelic-speaking families that GME can present.
A future study could also investigate the challenges faced by Gaelic-speaking families and their experiences at the early years and primary stages of GME. Future research could identify examples from other minority language contexts that could aid the development of appropriate support for these Gaelic-speaking families in their endeavours.

Another avenue for future study, especially in Edinburgh, would be to examine language socialisation in families where children who attend GME are also being socialised as speakers of two or three languages outwith education. Such an investigation could include an examination of the place of Gaelic in the home of multilingual families and the child’s multilingual repertoire.

**Contribution of the research**

The examination of education and language choice in the two areas presented in this study has revealed that the choice and process of choosing GME are not identical across locations. In fact, the decision is situated in a geographic, social, political and educational context. All families bring their own circumstances, experiences, interests and concerns to their education choice. By considering the context and utilising ethnographic research methods in this study, I have been able to reveal the highly nuanced nature of GME choice. There are significant differences in the provision and the local factors that influence parents’ language and education choice. This study contributes to our understanding of GME choice and builds upon previous research that has often anonymised locations and focused primarily on parents’ responses regarding motivations. By understanding education choice as a process situated within a specific context then we are better placed to identify and provide opportunities for development.

There was no accessible GME alternative in either location. Parents then often considered GME alongside an English-medium education alternative or consider English-medium provision with GME as a possible alternative. Parents also identified both Gaelic or English-medium schools as ‘good’ schools. Understanding the choice of GME outlined in this study contributes to the research on education choice in Scotland more generally.
This study contributes to the understanding of the lived reality of language shift. For Gaelic speakers in Barra, including young children, language shift has reduced the opportunities and number of people to hear and speak Gaelic. For Gaelic-speaking families in both areas, GME provision can support language maintenance, but in the face of this ongoing language shift and decreasing proportions of Gaelic-speaking children, the challenges that confront them are increasing.

The findings of this study provide an insight into the intersection between language shift and language revitalisation initiatives such as GME.
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Appendix A – Semi-structured interview outline

Background questions

1. Can you tell me a little about yourself and your family?
2. Where are you from?
3. Where do you live now?
4. Have you always lived there?
5. Do you work?
6. What is your profession?
7. Do you work full-time?
8. What is your highest qualification?
9. What languages do you speak or have you ever learned?

Gaelic-medium education

10. How did you find out about GME?
11. When did you become involved in GME with your children?
12. Why would you like your child to attend GME/learn Gaelic?

The Cròileagan

13. Did you ever go to the Cròileagan?
14. How often?
15. Can you think of any reasons why you went/go?

Nursery education

16. How did you come to a decision about nursery education?
17. Does your child attend Gaelic-medium nursery?
18. Do they attend for the full five sessions?
Primary education

19. Where will your child attend primary school?

General questions about GME

20. Do you have any concerns about GME?
21. Have you encountered any difficulties to date with GME?
22. When you think of your child in the future, how to you think they will use Gaelic, if at all?
23. Who would you ask if you had any questions about GME?

Language use

24. What language(s) do you use at home?
25. If more than one language is used, who uses what language and when?
26. When does your child hear Gaelic at home? How often? With who?
27. Does your child hear Gaelic outside education or the home at all? How often and with who?

Resources

28. Do you have any Gaelic resources?
29. What resources do you have?
30. What resources do you use? How often?
## Appendix B – Table of participants

### Edinburgh

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family number</th>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Speaks Gaelic</th>
<th>Currently learning Gaelic</th>
<th>Number of children</th>
<th>Education stage of children</th>
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<td>Maria</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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<td>preschool</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roddy</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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## Barra

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<th>Gaelic competency</th>
<th>Number of children</th>
<th>Education stage of children</th>
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<td>Oighrig</td>
<td>Mainland</td>
<td>Heritage Learner. Now fluent.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2 preschool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>Barra</td>
<td>Native Gaelic speaker.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Catriona</td>
<td>Barra</td>
<td>Native Gaelic speaker.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 preschool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>Barra</td>
<td>Native Gaelic speaker.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ailsa</td>
<td>Barra</td>
<td>Recessive bilingual</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1 preschool; 2 primary; 1 secondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Father</td>
<td>Mainland</td>
<td>Recessive bilingual</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Origin</td>
<td>Language &amp; Education</td>
<td>Father Origin</td>
<td>Father Language</td>
</tr>
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<td>-----</td>
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<td>----------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Louise</td>
<td>Barra</td>
<td>Brought up speaking English.</td>
<td>Other island</td>
<td>Native Gaelic speaker.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Carmen</td>
<td>Barra</td>
<td>Brought up speaking English.</td>
<td>Mainland</td>
<td>Brought up speaking English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Marsaili</td>
<td>Barra</td>
<td>Native Gaelic speaker.</td>
<td>Barra</td>
<td>Native Gaelic speaker.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Niamh</td>
<td>Mainland</td>
<td>Brought up speaking English.</td>
<td>Barra</td>
<td>Brought up speaking English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>Barra</td>
<td>Brought up speaking English.</td>
<td>Barra</td>
<td>Native Gaelic speaker.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Annie</td>
<td>Mainland</td>
<td>Recessive</td>
<td>Barra</td>
<td>Native Gaelic speaker.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Mairead</td>
<td>Barra</td>
<td>Recessive</td>
<td>Mainland</td>
<td>Brought up speaking English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Background Information</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>Mainland</td>
<td>Brought up speaking English. Learnt some Gaelic as an adult.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2 primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alasdair</td>
<td>Mainland</td>
<td>Brought up speaking Scots/English. Learnt some Gaelic as an adult.</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>Barra/Mainland</td>
<td>Brought up speaking English.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2 preschool; 3 primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>Barra</td>
<td>Native Gaelic speaker.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Elaine</td>
<td>Barra</td>
<td>Brought up speaking English.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1 preschool; 1 primary; 1 secondary; 1 an adult</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>