CLASSED:
A STUDY OF TRAVELLER MOTHERS AND THEIR CHILDREN'S SCHOOLING

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ABSTRACT

Irish Travellers have long been marginalised in Irish society, with educational attainment rates well below the national average. The purpose of this research is to elucidate and understand the experience of Irish Traveller mothers as they engage with their children's schooling. This study draws on in-depth, qualitative, one-to-one interviews with ten Traveller mothers. The research finds that Traveller mothers are interested in their children's education. Moreover, they are interested in their children's well-being. The mothers here will forego educational attainment in favour of their child's well-being, as they understand it. Traveller mothers do not trust the school to provide for the educational or emotional well-being of their children. They feel that, as in their own time, they are dependent on the good nature of key individuals to provide their children with an education and for their well-being in the school situation. This well-being can be defined as academic regard, but also, and more importantly for Traveller mothers, it is defined by social acceptance and inclusion. This definition of well-being resonates with mothers' experience of their own schooling. This situation of distrust leads to a state of 'hyper-vigilance', where Traveller mothers are sensitive to perceived mistreatment of their children, and sometimes of themselves, within the education system. When mothers feel their children are mistreated, they largely ascribe this mistreatment to their Traveller identity. In some cases this perpetuates their sense of isolation and distrust of the system. In other cases their dissatisfaction is directed towards their Traveller identity. In all cases, mothers' instinct to perceived mistreatment is to remove their children from the teacher or the school, in an effort to find a place or individuals to whom they can safely entrust their children.

This thesis locates the current situation and the research in the context of the evolution of national educational policies and national policies in relation to the Traveller Community.

This research has implications at local and national level for understanding, communication and engagement between schools and Traveller parents as partners in education. Other implications at national level are in areas such as

initial and continuing teacher education, curriculum planning and school development planning, as well as the wider equality agenda.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Amartya Sen put it succinctly when he asked "Equality of what?" (Sen, 1992, p. ix) Every indicator identifies Travellers as marginalised within Irish society. A much quoted Economic and Social Research Institute paper of 1986 describes Travellers as "... a uniquely disadvantaged group: impoverished, under-educated, often despised and ostracised, they live on the margins of Irish society". (Economic and Social Research Institute, 1986) This was reinforced by a National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016, which identifies Travellers as among the most vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion in Irish society. (Government of Ireland, 2007) Later, the All-Ireland Traveller Health Study, Our Geels, showed that this marginalisation was quantifiable in terms of health statistics, with the stark finding that "Traveller infants today are 3.6 times more likely to die than infants in the general population. In 1987 when rates were much higher in both groups, Traveller infants were 2.4 times more likely to die than infants in the general population." (Department of Health and Children, 2010, p. 87) The Our Geels study goes on to report that while mortality rates are higher for both male and female Travellers than for the general population, the suicide rate in male Travellers is a statistically significant 6.6 times higher than in the general population.(ibid.)

The Department of Education and Skills policy for the education of Irish Travellers at primary and second level has as its central aim "the meaningful participation and highest attainment of the Traveller child so that, in common with all the children of the nation, he or she may live a full life as a child and realise his or her full potential as a unique individual, proud of and affirmed in his or her identity as a Traveller and a citizen of Ireland." (Department of Education and Science, 2002) But what does this statement mean? What, for example, comprises "her full potential as a unique individual"? Who decides what constitutes this "potential"? What is the lived experience of this affirmation of identity? What is the experience of Traveller parents as they collaborate with the various education partners in this endeavour? The past twenty years have seen huge changes in the numbers of Traveller children completing their primary school education, though there are no explicit collated measures of their achievements there. However, while transfer to second level is almost universal among Travellers, Census 2011 shows that 55%

had completed their education before the age of 15 years, compared to 11% of the wider population. 3.1 per cent continued their education past the age of 18 compared with 41.2 per cent for the general population. 15% of girls stayed in school until the age of 17 or more, compared to 11% of Traveller boys. The census of 2011 shows an increase in retention. 21.8 per cent of Travellers whose education had finished school were educated to lower secondary level, compared with 15.2 per cent in 2002. Over the same period the percentage of Irish Travellers who completed upper secondary education more than doubled from 3.6 per cent to 8.2 per cent. 69.0% of the Traveller population were educated to primary level or lower, including 507 persons aged between 15 and 19. In 2011, 1% of Travellers completed third level, compared with 30.7% of the general population excluding Travellers. (Central Statistics Office, 2012)

Retention figures at second level clearly show a discrepancy between the successes achieved by Travellers and non-Travellers. But how are these figures interpreted by Travellers themselves? Do Travellers and non-Travellers have the same criteria for success and to what do they ascribe the gap between the achievements of Travellers and non-Travellers within the system? The official understanding of, and regard for, Traveller culture can be traced through a plethora of policy documents, each of which catches the official zeitgeist. Traveller education in Ireland first became a national affair with the 1963 Commission on Itinerancy. Engagement of Travellers with the system can thus be traced from the 1960s through these official reports and policy documents, from an era of assimilation and absorption, via a policy of integration of Travellers with the settled population, to the establishment of interculturalism as the official state policy on Traveller education. However, the evolution of official policy on Traveller education belies practice on the ground. What is at best an ambiguous relationship with the settled population is evidenced by the high aspirations of official policy and low actual outcomes, as mentioned above. This thesis will critically explore the experience of ten Traveller mothers as they engage with the Irish education system today.

I bring to this research eight years of work with the Traveller Community. When I began the work, I could see easily what might be termed the obvious, traditional

injustices, such as refusal of admission into hotels and difficulty finding work. Gradually I became aware of more subtle injustices of assimilation and incorporation. I began to see through society's implication, as Freire wrote of other oppressed groups, that Travellers are "the pathology of the healthy society, which must therefore adjust these 'incompetent and lazy' folk into its own patterns by changing their mentality. These marginals need to be 'integrated', 'incorporated' into the healthy society that they have 'forsaken'". (Freire, 1996, p. 55)

However, it has taken the marriage of reading and experience for me to fully recognise the subtleties of the systemic oppression and social injustice with which the Traveller Community live. They are summed up well in the sentence that follows the above quote from Freire, which did not have true resonance for me, until now.

"The truth is, however, that the oppressed are not 'marginals', are not people living 'outside' society. They have always been 'inside' – inside the structure which made them 'beings for others'." (Freire, 1996, p. 55)

I remain conscious that I am researcher from outside the culture of the researched. Though I deal with this in more detail later (Methodology Chapter), I do remain mindful that "(p)oor people, Travellers…and increasingly women become the subjects of books and papers in which their lives are recorded by professional experts who are frequently removed from their culture and lifestyle." (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon, & Walsh, 2009, p. 173) This means that given the subjective nature of research and the power of the researcher to present and analyse the data as they see fit, the integrity of the researcher is critical to whose story is told, to how authentic that told story is and how the story is presented to the intended audience. Tensions arise when merging the roles of advocate and researcher. There is an urge to bypass the conventions of rigour and thoroughness in favour of grabbing the megaphone and letting the whole world know the story I want told. On the other hand, I know that thoroughness and rigour bring value to the work. The story I present to the world is more definitive and trustworthy for the patience and consideration that rigour and thoroughness bring to it. However,

my position as advocate remains essential. It has been the impetus, the driving force behind bringing this work to fruition.

> This individual is not afraid to confront, to listen, to see the world unveiled…This person does not consider himself or herself the proprietor of history or of all people, or the liberator of the oppressed; but he or she does commit himself, or herself, within history, to fight at their side.

(Freire, 1996, p. 21)

This thesis takes a qualitative look at the experiences of a ten Traveller mothers as they engage with the national education system. I believe this methodology allows the reader to move beyond the raw statistics of school completion and learn what the experience of educating their children was like on a very personal level for the women in this study. I believe that our perception of reality is our reality, and in that, a qualitative methodology allows for the most realistic view and understanding of these experiences. In Chapter 2 I outline the personal context that brought me to the realisation that this was a piece of research worth undertaking. Working from a post-positivist perspective, I use this chapter to outline my own history and background to illuminate for the reader the origins of my own ontological assumptions. The next chapter concerns itself with the history of educational policy in this country as it particularly pertains to Travellers and more precisely to Traveller parents. It follows policy development and practice in a chronological fashion from the earliest policy documents to the present. The evolution of Traveller education is significant as the parents in this study have themselves been influenced by the education system at the point in its evolution where they attended. Chapter 4 concerns itself with the Theoretical Context in which the research plays out, setting the backdrop in terms of Capital Theory, the role of parents and the efficacy they bring to the education of their children, the role of education in defining identity, and the importance of the nature of communication in which all partners in education are involved. This chapter also considers the literature from the Britain and Northern Ireland, where research has been done into the experiences of Traveller parents. Chapter 5 is the methodology chapter, wherein I discuss my choice of qualitative methodology over other possible methods of gathering data, how and why operational decisions were

made and carried out in relation to all phases of the research process, from the choice of research participants, through the interview process and on to the data analysis phase. In Chapter 6 I take the most salient findings and paint for the reader a picture of the interviewee's experience, placing it in perspective through positioning it in relation to the canon of literature outlined in Chapter 4. I first consider how the mother anticipated the experience of educating her children and how her own experience coupled with this anticipation had a strong role in the education experiences she tried to construct for her children. Within this constructed experience I closely examine the key relationships between the parents and the school; the signifiers of belonging, for example, the relevance of the curriculum to the culture of the child and parent, and the importance of the meanings communicated in the triad of child, parent and school. The chapter goes on to examine the experience of the mother in relation to the care of her child and how this works in the context of the education experience, especially the influence of education, as it exists for Traveller children today, on Traveller identity. The conclusion in Chapter 7 reinforces the key findings and situates them within the context of current policy and practice. This chapter draws the thesis together and presents a final overview of the thesis for the reader.

The originality in this research lies in the participants, the timing and the methodology. The mothers interviewed have not been included in this kind of research before. They have not been asked at this level of detail to have their experience in relation to the education of their children recorded, written up and made succinctly accessible to policy-makers. Traveller parents generally, through a national consultation process, were invited to contribute to the Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy (2006). That was ten years ago in a different economic landscape. As per the recommendations following the economic collapse, most especially from Budget 2011, resources for Travellers have been cut considerably, as outlined in Chapter 3. Thus, the current experience for mothers in educating their children is different to that which has come before. The originality in the methodology arises from my position as known to the individuals, yet outside of their culture. There are grades of outsider and the relationship I have built with the community has allowed me to entry into this

conversation and to capture nuances in the women's voices that I would not have heard before I came to know the community well. This is not research that I could have undertaken ten years ago. It began the day I started work with the Traveller community and began building a relationship with the community and individuals therein.

And so, education must be about self-development in its broadest, most holistic sense. As Freire said, education cannot be neutral. It facilitates conformity to the current dominant ideologies or it supports people in critiquing and transforming their world. Freire's solution to society's inequality is "not to "integrate" [the oppressed] into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become "beings for themselves"."(ibid.) Before we start to transform that structure, we must examine it and the lived experience of it.

CHAPTER 2: PERSONAL CONTEXT

(T)he knowledge that people create is heavily influenced by their interpretations of their experiences and their positions within particular social, economic, and political systems and structures of a society.

(Banks, 1993, p. 5)

Before beginning research it is important to recognise and acknowledge what has brought us to this point and all that we ourselves as constructors and constructs of the society in which we live bring to bear on any kind of social research. The very fact that an individual is taking on research suggests an interest in the topic, an interest which may arise from personal or professional experience. To have a research question at this level suggests also that one has been through an education system and has engaged in a certain amount of directed reading. The nature of our education is linked with the position in society in which we were raised, who our friends are, what school we attended, the circles in which our parents moved.

Even research for funding cannot be done without acknowledging that a certain amount of social influence has brought the researcher to a place and time and situation where their research will be carried out.

From here, the progress of the research will be influenced by the value we place on the voices and opinions of our research participants, our concept of truth and our sense of what constitutes social reality, all of which are again subjective and particular to the individual researcher. The same holds for our findings. The starkest figures can be subject to and interpreted by the reporting style chosen by the researcher who is also the author of the recommendations.

To acknowledge my own position and influences, I am the eldest child of a rural middle class family. My father, a farmer and part-time pub singer, had opted out of second level education early. Despite the cost, (as those were the days before 'free education') he and his nine brothers and sisters had the support from their parents to attend secondary school, in his case the diocesan boarding college. My mother, a teacher, was the first in her family to go to university. Our maternal grandmother, with whom we lived, was a strong influence on us all, and widowed

young, she was anxious that all her girls would be financially independent. We lived in a traditional extended family household, where "lessons" were considered the most important pastime. Growing up, I was unaware of injustice or inequality of opportunity in our own society. Everyone in our parish went to the same primary and second level schools. Classes at second level were small and streaming was at a minimum. While convent in name, the co-educational school I attended was comprehensive in practice and culture.

> Louisburgh's only a built up crossroads, and so far west against the coast we don't even get tinkers.

(McCormack, 1996, p. 184)

Growing up, then, while there were some obvious differences in income, everyone seemed to have the same opportunities I had. There was little, if any, sense of social injustice or marginalisation in my immediate society. In our home, at that time, there was no sense of the stratification of our society on any grounds. My family valued a strong work ethic in any social class, despised laziness in any class, and differentiated between people on grounds of honesty and hard work rather than on the grounds of social class, skin colour, sexual orientation etc., all of which, looking back, seemed moot in our small world. My mother, a catholic, worked in the Church of Ireland school and some of our best family friends are from that minority community. My aunt lives in Northern Ireland. Throughout the 1980s, then, with the backdrop of the Troubles and the religious divide in Northern Ireland, I was aware that the big picture presented in the media could belie the individual relationships between people on the ground. Social injustice was a poster issue rather than something lived every day by people I knew. My awareness of social injustice concerned the plight of the third world, prompted by the television pictures of the African famines of the mid-1980s. It was the time of a lot of media attention on the emerging AIDS issue and the effects of heroin in parts of Dublin. Therefore, the social injustices I could name as such, felt very external to my world. I was not aware of any questioning of why these situations existed, only how much money it would take to remediate them. These far-off social issues, and social justice as charity fundraising, were not challenged by my schooling, my teacher education and my initial teaching experiences.

Four years into my teaching career I saw an ad for an adult education manager. Lured by the notion of working with adults and the intrinsic motivation they brought to the learning environment and admittedly, by the financial rewards, I became manager of a Senior Traveller Training Centre. On applying for the job, I didn't know that the institution was a Traveller Training Centre, and looking back, I think I would have not have applied for the position, put off by my perceived lack of experience and knowledge of Travellers and thus afraid that I possessed a lack of personal tools to draw on. Somewhere, not far from the surface, I was afraid of Travellers, a fear bred from perception, ignorance and nodding to a critical mass of anti-Traveller sentiment in wider society. I took up the position as STTC Director, not only compliant but archetypal 'middle class'.

Any actual relations I had had with Travellers, however, were benign. My father often played music in a pub in Castlebar. A Traveller man and his wife were regulars on the nights he was playing and he'd sometimes dedicate a song to them. In turn, that man called to our house every few months selling wellingtons, washing powder and other household items from the back of his van. My father used to bargain with him to the last, and to the embarrassment of my mother, who felt the man should get the price he asked. He in turn used to say, "You always buy the bit of stuff off me, Seán". And even though my father has long since retired from playing music, the Traveller man, whose name I don't know, still calls, and they engage in the same banter, the man asking Daddy if he sings anywhere these days and telling him he always buys the bit of stuff, Daddy in turn bargaining and jibing him about his new van and all the money there must be in wellingtons and washing powder compared to singing and farming. My parents never let salespeople leave our house without buying something, whether they needed it or not.

Another story came to light since I began this work. Sometime in the late 50s, my uncle was walking home alone from the bog, and as he came over a stone wall near a Traveller camp, he fell. It was about a mile from our house. My mother recalls the camp as being frighteningly dark to her as a child passing it on the road. He told me that the Traveller women, on seeing his injury, took him into one of the barrel-tops, cleaned his wound and dressed it. Bucking the stereotype, the

women were very gentle with him; the wound did not get infected, and healed perfectly. Though I had not heard of Travellers ever staying locally until I heard this story recently, my mother sometimes spoke of Travellers who came to our house for a day, the mother and children staying in the kitchen with Granny, the man fixing and talking outside with my grandfather. She speaks of them with great respect, and says that they were treated with great respect by her parents. Nor did I ever hear anything but sympathetic accounts of Travellers my father knew personally, growing up in north Mayo.

We then, as many others did, grew up thinking that the Travellers we came in contact with were fine. Some other 'gypos' were causing the trouble. My father sang a comic song about 'knackers', (to us 'knackers' were people who were rough in appearance and behaviour, not necessarily Travellers) and in the next breath, a lament by the Pecker Dunne, about the loss of a Traveller man's way of life. That was the way it was. In my world it was acceptable to be derogatory about the stereotype. A subconscious prejudice towards the group ran alongside an empathy and fondness for the individual.

I remember an incident as a child at home where my father turned up the radio so I could hear a song he knew about a Traveller girl called "Rosie", and how "they tried to bring her down" (Murrihy, 1994) when she went to school. She became a nun and returned to the school as a teacher. I remember thinking that it was all wrong, and worse, wrong at some subtle, unidentifiable, unfixable level, moreover that she had to become a nun before she was accepted. I can identify the feeling now as a helpless sense of injustice, though I could only have been about seven at the time and able to express it in tears only. Looking back, I can see that Daddy knew it would upset me. I remember him watching my reaction until he came over and put his arms around me, I was crying so much.

I think all these stories and experiences are part of my story, the story that brought me to this place and this research. My mother to this day, when watching any competition, will ask who is going to lose, and stand firmly in their corner until the final whistle blows. A college friend once said that the most important thing she learned there was something I taught her: "You never know where another

man's shoe is pinching", a saying my father had. No doubt there are many fine qualities we don't possess at home, but empathy we do possess, though we don't often act on it. When I peel away the layers, I suppose I am empathetic, then, by both nature and nurture. In my lifetime, the last forty years, Travellers have not stayed overnight or long term in our village, or in any place I lived or worked, so I had no directly developed sense of empathy with the position of Traveller women. Since I came to work in the Training Centre, I became a mother too. That brings its own empathy and understanding.

As I examine it now, it seems to make sense that I married someone who has an interest in development. I found myself dipping into periodicals my husband reads, such as New Internationalist, that question the dominant discourses with which I grew up. And while still just a leafer through this kind of literature, a would-be, or rather 'armchair advocate' rather than an activist, it has broadened my mind to the concepts of human development indicators, and the lack of agency and self-determinism of people caught in lives of poverty and social injustice. Moving things on from my own upbringing, my husband, my colleagues who stand for what is right, and the Traveller women I worked with, all taught me to look again at my world, to question it, to find the injustice and to feel indignation rather than despair in the face of it. Once I began to identify social injustice, my sense of empathy proved the lens that allowed me to see social injustice in sharp focus. It took a long time for my own position as a member of the dominant discriminating minority to become clear to me. There was no Pauline conversion, just a slow realisation that earlier in my position as Senior Traveller Training Centre Director I could and should have done more to challenge the oppression and social injustice that existed, in which I was complicit, without being aware of that complicity. Social injustice was, and is, all around me and I now know that social injustice is the source of some of the frustration and fatalism I have always felt in life.

The experience I wish to consider here is that of the Traveller mother as she engages with the education system in which her child must partake. All parents, even those who home-school, are obliged to interact with the system of education as it exists here. Traveller parents are no exception. Having worked in the STTC

area I constantly came into contact with mothers concerned about their children's education. On one occasion I met a mother and her two daughters of early school-going age. She spoke of her realisation that morning that her husband was gone to work in the car with the girls' school cardigans in the back. As she felt her writing was too poor to send a note to school with the children, and afraid they would get into trouble, she kept them both at home. This was a very simple story, but it has remained with me. The more I think about it, having encountered the system as a middle-class student, teacher and now mother, the more it resonates. For example, is the issue one of a disorganised mother, a disorganised family? What does it say about her experience of the system that it was better for the children to miss a day at school than to phone the school, explain as she dropped them off, have a spare uniform at home, or risk a reprimand? Did the mother consider the message transmitted to the school by this absence? How valued was the day at school? How and why did it come to attain this value? How easy is it to justify not sending your child to school? How safe a place is the child's school for this particular mother? The more I thought about this particular incident, the more questions that arose for me. As I engaged also with other mothers I met through my work, I began to examine our conversations, especially those about schooling through the lenses afforded me by this experience. When considering a research question, then, I was drawn again and again to this lived experience of the education system for Traveller mothers. With children in the junior classes in school, I am myself engaging with the system in a whole new way, a way that brings new insights and new perspectives. Despite 13 years of mainstream schooling, five years full time and five years part-time third level education, as well as four years mainstream teaching, ten years of marriage to a teacher and three years as a parent at primary level, were it not for my direct contact with Traveller mothers in the STTC, I may never have spoken about education and school with someone outside of my own socio-economic realm.

Moving then towards the crux of the research, my concern is with having this conversation, with telling the story of these Traveller mothers and what it is like for them to have their children educated in the formal state system. My concern is with using my experience as a lens through which the experience of these

Traveller mothers comes into sharp focus for the reader, a reader who might not otherwise get to hear it, a reader who might not know it needs to be heard.

CHAPTER 3: SITUATIONAL CONTEXT

The humanitarianism of the post-war years and the emergence of the welfare state brought ordinary people into a new relationship with government policy. Recognised as a 'problem' in the 1960s, the lives and experiences of Travellers meant that government policy at this time began to play a central role (especially due to the illegality of nomadism and the provision of state housing and social welfare) in these lives. Marginalised socially and educationally, Travellers thus became dependent on state provision for their essential survival and wellbeing. In developing this dependence, government policy thus developed control over Travellers and their lives.

The evolution of national policies in relation to Travellers can be divided into three broad approaches: assimilation, integration and intercultural. Each of these phases is defined by a particular report and recommendations on the situations of Travellers that would inform national policy. While each report contains sections on health, education, etc., the main focus here is on tracing the reports as they explicitly pertain to education, and within that to the role of parents in education and the role of the state education system in fostering Traveller mothers' efficacy as partners in the education of their children.

This chapter draws chronologically on a range of official government reports, policy documents at national and European Union level, Department of Education documents and teacher union reports to trace the evolution of policy as it related to education since the first official report in 1963. These official reports are supplemented by Dáil Debates, print and social media references and publications from Travellers and Traveller support groups which give an account of the lived reality behind this evolution of official policy.

It is essential for the reader to remember that the mothers in this study were raised and educated themselves in the shadows of the dominant discourses of their time. The mothers here went to school between 1950 and 2000. Early systematic research from the 1970s identifies Travellers as a subgroup of a homogenous Irish population. (McCarthy, 1994) An article by American

anthropologists George and Sharon Gmelch is the first published work to invoke Traveller ethnicity. (Gmelch & Gmelch, 1976)

Phase 1 - Assimilation

The Commission on Itinerancy was established by the Government in June 1960 with the following terms of reference: "

(1) To enquire into the problem arising from the presence in the country of itinerants in considerable numbers

(2) To examine the economic, education, health and social problems inherent in their way of life,

(3) To consider what steps might be taken

(a) to provide opportunities for a better way of life for itinerants and

(b) to promote their absorption into the general community,

(c) pending such absorption, to reduce to a minimum the disadvantages to themselves and to the community resulting from their itinerant habits and

(d) to improve their position generally

(4) to make recommendations" (Government of Ireland, 1963, p. 11)

The most cursory analysis of the discourse at play here sees a model of severe deficit, the implication being that the only solution to the "problem arising from [their] presence" (ibid.) is their remediation through assimilation into majority Irish society. Where children had attended school, "(t)eachers…have stated to members of the Commission that in their experience many of those who had obtained some formal education made little use of it subsequently, and indeed set little store by it" (ibid., p.65) It is explicit in the Report that "itinerant children are no less intelligent than the average child in the settled community and the opinion of teachers with experience of such pupils is that they are no less apt than the ordinary children". (ibid.) The Commission's belief in the detrimental influence of their homelife and culture on the education of these children is also evident.

> If these children attended school with reasonable regularity and had reasonably normal home conditions, there is no reason why they should not make satisfactory progress through the various school grades. But these conditions cannot obtain for children of families who live a nomadic existence and whose home is an overcrowded caravan or tent.
>
> (ibid.)

The pejorative implication that the lives and culture of these children are not normal sets them up as abnormal, subnormal or deficient. In making its recommendations, the Itinerancy Commission felt that "an education policy for itinerants can only be successful if it is one which aims at catering for those who have been induced to leave the wandering life and for those who are likely to do so". (ibid., p. 69)

The following article appeared in Nusight and captures the fallout from the publication of the Commission Report. The article suggests that explicitly becoming part of national policy somehow legitimised public expressions of opinion on Travellers, opinions that had no organised public outlet heretofore.

> Since the publication of the Report the instances of victimisation by local residents has doubled. In the Dublin area friction with itinerants has become not only more frequent but more organised. Before the popularity of this cause, prejudice existed but not on a highly conscious level. Then when the Report was issued itinerants became a direct threat to property values. There was a threat which all potential purchasers could understand. This fear, which the proximity of itinerants brings to the hearts of the middle class, resulted in the highly organised anti-tinker campaign in Stillorgan two years ago and in a bigger example in the Griffith Avenue area this year when all election candidates were pressurised in a disgraceful manner. Prejudice which hitherto was felt for most minority groups has been channelled mainly in the direction of itinerants in the last few years.
>
> (Browne, 1969)

The tone of the publication, in contrast to the behaviour of the protagonists in the article, gives an insight into the dichotomy in the public consciousness of the time in regard to Travellers. This extreme positioning can be traced through the past sixty years and remains evident in public opinion to this day. It mirrors divisions in the opinions of elected representatives, where there has always existed the same dichotomy of opinion and the sense of freedom to express it.

> An appeal was made…for people in a Corporation housing estate to drop their objections to a woman moving into a house in their area…She had been over ten years on the Corporation housing list and was squatting with her six children in a condemned house…residents of the area objected and during the weekend watch was kept on the house…This was Mrs. Furey's second time running into such trouble…[Residents] promised…possible bloodshed if she arrived.
>
> (Connacht Tribune, 1970, p. 1)

Further to the Itinerancy Commission report, the Department of Education established a committee to consider the provision of educational facilities for the children of itinerants. Published in Oideas 5, in Autumn 1970, their report makes explicit the Department of Education policy that these children should attend school in the same way as other children, securing full integration, but the two options of segregated classes and segregated schools remained. However, the Commission felt that this should not prevent them from receiving special provisions made for itinerant children or for "backward children generally". (Hyland & Milne, 1992, p. 470) Where numbers were too small for a special class, "remedial teaching" (ibid., p. 273) or joining a class "for educationally retarded which could also serve the needs of itinerant children requiring special assistance"(ibid.) was recommended. The Department of Education committee reinforced the Government aim of general integration of itinerants with the community and felt that better educational facilities would support the realisation of this aim. (ibid.) Assimilation very clearly remained state policy.

Meanwhile, in the broader context, the Irish educational landscape was changing profoundly. The advent of new political leaders and new policies changed the system forever. In the Second Programme for Economic Expansion (1963), the Lemass government introduced a wave of education reform of which the Free Education scheme was the cornerstone. (O'Buachalla, 1988) Free education to Intermediate Certificate level and transport under certain conditions of distance, were to be provided free to all children of the state. There was an immediate surge in school enrolment figures. The role of the parent and family had been enshrined in the 1937 Constitution of Ireland as "the primary and natural educator of the child". (Hyland & Milne, 1992, p. 13) It goes on to guarantee "to respect the inalienable right and duty of parents to provide according to their means for the

religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children".(ibid.) In practice, parents were generally not consulted where the education of their children was concerned, though the 1965 Rules for National Schools guarantees that "(n)o child may be refused admission to a National School on account of the social position of its parent, nor may any pupil be kept apart from other pupils on the grounds of social distinction." (Department of Education, 1965, p. 11) The 1969 Government publication for parents 'Ár ndaltaí uile' promised that "(e)very child without exception will receive the best possible education suited to his or her individual talents". (Hyland & Milne, 1992, p. 47) In realising this "urgent social and educational objective: *equality of opportunity*", (ibid.) the role of parents is critical. Opportunity is seen to be available to all, with the responsibility to take it resting firmly with the individual.

Concurrent changes in the practice of education in the country at the time include the introduction of a new 'child-centred' primary school curriculum in 1971. The post of National Co-Ordinator for the Education of Travellers was created in 1974 to visit schools with traveller pupils to "ensure that as many traveller children as possible throughout the country can avail of education". (ibid., p. 61) This was to be done through discussion with inspectors, children, parents and Department of Education officials.

To further set the scene, in the early 1980s, there were "between three and four hundred". (Travelling People Review Body, 1983, p. 18) Traveller children attending pre-school from a cohort of nearly 2000 in that age group. Again, working on a deficit model, where needs were identified and premises available, teachers were provided by the Department of Education for children of pre-school age "so as to compensate for the deficiencies of their background and prepare them for normal schooling" (ibid., p. 63)

The Association of Teachers for Travelling People had been founded in 1972 and in 1983 had a membership of 300, (220 of whom were teachers). At this time the organisation was working on the production of curricula specific to the needs of Traveller children in special classes at primary level and in the 12-15 age cohort.

(This was eventually published in 1985, and as little more than ideas for use in special classes, was soon forgotten.)

The Visiting Teacher for Travellers Service began on a pilot basis in Galway in 1980. The VTT visited families of children with poor attendance, organised help with homework, and generally liaised between schools, social workers and Traveller families in an effort to maximise attendance at school. Thus, despite the unequivocal absorption and assimilationist policies of the 1960s and 1970s, these decades oversaw the establishment of Traveller-only facilities at virtually every interface between Travellers and the education system. True to Freire's assertion that education cannot be neutral (Freire, 1996) the system both explicitly and implicitly identified Travellers as problematic and incapable of progression within regular mainstream provision, thus reinforcing widely-held perceptions of Travellers as deprived and of less worth.

Phase 2 - Integration

The next phase in the evolution of national policy on Travellers was heralded by the 1983 Report of the Travelling People Review Body. Recognising from "experience" and "current knowledge" (Travelling People Review Body, 1983, p. 11) that the assimilation and absorption objectives of the 1963 Itinerancy Commission report were "unacceptable, implying as it does the swallowing up of the minority traveller group by the dominant settled community, and the subsequent loss of traveller identity". (ibid., p. 6) The suggested approach is one of integration between travellers and the settled community, "a long and complex process involving adjustment of attitudes towards one another". (ibid.) The extent of integration would depend on the individual choice of the travellers themselves and would not be imposed on them. The continuation of a nomadic, or part-nomadic lifestyle was also to be their choice. These choices would be respected in the design of programmes to best meet traveller needs. However, the deficit model was still in operation, with recommendations that newly-weds be considered sympathetically for housing "to lessen the risks of regression to a travelling way of life and the consequential negating of permanent accommodation and education" (ibid., p. 45)

There are several differences between the discourse of the 1963 Itinerancy Commission and that of the 1983 Review Body. The label 'itinerant' has been replaced by the term 'traveller' as the former "is unacceptable to the persons to whom it is applied" (ibid., p. 6) The composition of the Review Body, while still comprising representatives from An Garda Síochána, the Health Boards and local authorities, now includes representatives from The National Council for Travelling People, and among their number, of great significance to the evolving discourse, travellers themselves.

This 1983 report recognised that the "lack of adequate education is the single greatest barrier to progress in the well-being of travellers." (ibid., p. 15) Travellers however, who were not housed, despite a desire to be so, "cannot hope to receive an adequate education", (ibid.) though the report acknowledged that "the desire of most traveller parents to obtain at least basic education for their children [was] clearly evident". (ibid., p. 60) Poor school attendance rates were considered by the Review Body to be the greatest cause of this deficit of adequate education. The report identified causes of this poor attendance as including "lack of stable accommodation; lack of running water and sanitary facilities; lack of transport; lack of will on the part of some parents to make the necessary efforts to get their children to school regularly and punctually; the antagonism of the settled community; the leaving of the decision as to whether or not to attend school to the children themselves" (ibid., p. 69). Despite acknowledging parents' desire for their children to be educated, the report stated that "the desire is not strong enough to overcome obstacles such as those listed above" (ibid.)

Another identified barrier to realising the educational potential of young Travellers was the environment in which they were brought up. In wider society, they "are probably the most deprived group of people in the country…consistently rejected by society and treated as outcasts." (ibid., p. 63) At home, various factors were considered as being detrimental to the progress of the child's education.

"The large average size of families means that many children get the minimum of stimulus from their parents…In addition, the almost universal illiteracy of parents limits their contribution to a child's vocabulary and academic development. There

is no possibility of parental help with homework" (ibid., p. 63). Further, "lack of stability in many families affects, often very seriously, the basic security of the child, which is essential to good learning". (ibid., p. 63) In order to make the most basic progress at pre-school level children need "love, security and consistent treatment by adults". (ibid., p. 64) The Review Body report concludes that "(i)t is almost impossible for a traveller child starting in an ordinary class, even at four years of age, to be able to keep up with his/her peers. They nearly all need a year at pre-school if they are not to remain in need of remedial education throughout their school years". (ibid.)

The Review Body regretted that "a majority of traveller children do not come from 'reasonably normal home conditions'" (ibid., p. 65), leaving many children with poor attendance rates. Even where conditions are considered good, and children are attending 'ordinary' classes, teachers reported a lack of progress among traveller children, many of whom left school with no more than basic literacy. Teachers reported to the Review Body "the vastly improved standard of attendance when a special class [was] established in a school".(ibid., p. 66) These special classes operated in a number of ways including

(1) The withdrawal of traveller children for the entire school day

(2) The withdrawal of traveller children for the 3R's and return for the subjects traditionally seen as non-academic such as PE, Music, Art etc.

(3) The withdrawal of traveller children for a specified time each day

No one method was recommended over another. "The wishes of the parents, the needs of the children and the judgement of teachers should determine what is best in each individual case". (ibid.)

The special classes with their low pupil-teacher ratio, their teachers, "selected for their special interest in travellers" (ibid.) and freedom for the teacher to plan a culturally-appropriate curriculum were considered as an "opportunity to build up the self-confidence of the children" (ibid.)

The essential conditions for success within the ordinary school class were identified as follows:

"(a) an accepting and tolerant attitude on the part of teachers and pupils;

(b) supplementary education to compensate for the deprivation of background from which the child comes;

(c) contact with the parents so that the teachers may know what are the particular home problems of the child;

(d) a greater effort to help the traveller child to integrate with the community outside school" (ibid. p. 65)

The report acknowledged the sense of isolation for Traveller children who were completely accepted by settled children within the confines of the school, only to find themselves excluded in out of school settings. Acceptance and inclusion at school reinforced the sense of rejection elsewhere so that "it sometimes seems as though education was adding to their sense of rejection by society" (ibid.)

In making recommendations, the Review Body was motivated by four main principles:

(1) That the key to a better way of life for travellers lay in improved opportunities for education, training and employment

(2) That, if they wish, travellers have a right to preserve their culture and way of life

(3) That to overcome their "disadvantaged background" (ibid., p. 73) and the associated social problems resulting from it, there must be "positive discrimination in their favour" (ibid.)

(4) That in the short term, traveller children should avail of "normal" (ibid.) school facilities, but special provision may need to be availed of in the interim.

Special classes and day care centres were to provide education "suited to the background and aspirations of traveller children". (ibid.) These discourses of

deficit continue throughout the report. As well as educational disadvantage, the Traveller would have to overcome both social and environmental disadvantages in order to gain employment, and on promoting employment for Travellers, extra measures should be taken to "overcome their handicap" (ibid., p.81)

As with the assimilationist policies before it, the policy of integration served to further separate and delineate provision for Travellers, reinforcing the 'otherness' of their situation. In a letter to the Galway Advertiser following an attack by settled people with sticks and torches on a Traveller campsite, the writer asks:

> How must a small child in that situation feel…Will it generate a long, cold determination to take revenge on the settled people…Do we want them to linger on, generation after generation, still on the margin of society…I suppose that a complete solution is very far away, i.e. integration into settled communities.
>
> (Galway Advertiser, 1986, p. 28)

Despite the concern for the child shown by the letter writer, there is no reflection on how this incident could take place. Ultimately, in this short piece, the writer implies blame can be traced to Traveller identity.

In the broader national context, 1987 saw the introduction of a national Programme for National Recovery. In acknowledging the role of parents in the constitution, the PNR further acknowledges that there should be an active parents' association in each school "to promote and develop effective and positive participation by parents at the school level." (Hyland & Milne, 1992, p. 80) The contribution of the National Parents' Council to central planning and policy formation is recognised. At an individual and local level the PESP stated that "positive parental interest is crucial to a child's educational attainment. It must, therefore, be an essential strategy of educational policy and practice to promote parental involvement in the education of their children" (ibid.)

At European Union level, the Council and the Ministers of Education meeting within the Council passed a resolution in May 1989 on school provision for Gypsy and Traveller children. The resolution noted that "only 30 to 40% of gypsy or traveller children attend school with any regularity, that a very small percentage attend secondary school and beyond, that the level of educational skills, especially

reading and writing, bears little relationship to the presumed length of schooling and that the illiteracy rate among adults is frequently over 50% and in some places 80% or more." (European Union, 1989, p. 3) The Council resolved that states would promote supports for schools, teachers, pupils and parents in catering for Gypsy and Traveller children; teaching methods and material which included measures to facilitate the transition between school and "consideration for the history, culture and language of gypsies and travellers", (ibid.) on-going training for their teachers, as well as the employment of teachers of Gypsy or Traveller origin where possible. Member states were also to promote more documentation and information to schools, teachers and parents and the promotion of "socialmindedness" (ibid., p. 4) among the population, including "the encouragement of liaison groups bringing together parents, teachers, representatives of local authorities and school administrations" (ibid.) It also acknowledged schooling, in particular by providing the means of adapting to a changing environment and achieving personal and professional autonomy, is a key factor in the cultural, social and economic future of gypsy and traveller communities, that parents are aware of this fact and their desire for schooling for their children is increasing". (ibid., p. 3)

While the EU Council and the Ministers for Education were promoting "socialmindedness", the discourse at home remained one of freedom for public representatives to speak officially in overtly derogatory terms, with a County Councillor quoted as saying: "Killarney is literally infested by these people". (Cork Examiner, 1989)

In noting the powerful role of the press, Helleiner notes that "the powerful discourses of the press contribute to the creation of an ideological context which legitimates coercive state policies, everyday discriminatory practices, and ultimately violence against Travellers." (Helleiner & Szuchewycz, 1994, p. 112)

She wrote that: "While press reports of the 1960's and much of the 1970's, were explicit in their portrayal of the Travellers and the travelling way of life as problematic, during the 1980's overtly racist discourses were increasingly replaced by more sophisticated discourses of exclusion." (ibid., p.116)

Nonetheless, anti-Traveller discourses are thinly veiled both in media opinion pieces and among the legislature of the time:

A County Councillor was reported as saying that "(t)hese people have been a constant headache for towns and cities throughout the country". (Cork Examiner, 1990)

"They are dirty and unclean. Travelling people have no respect for themselves and their children", according to another. (The Irish Times, 1991)

"Deasy suggests birth control to limit traveller numbers". (The Irish Times, 1996) This article refers to a statement in the Dáil by Austin Deasy TD who said that the best way of resolving the Traveller issue is through a system of birth control in order to limit numbers and suggesting that this would be welcomed by Travellers.

I find it particularly disturbing to hear these remarks from local politicians, given, not so much the influence, but rather the visibility and authority, of local politicians in the provision of education through the Vocational Education Committees and accommodation services through the County and Town Councils at local level. The dependence of the public representative on the popular vote reflects a broad public acceptability of this type of discourse.

Thus, while the Integration Phase marked a pronounced shift in the discourse on Traveller education, the model was still explicitly one of deficit, and there had been no demand on the system to change at any fundamental level. By 1990, as we moved towards the next phase in Traveller education, special classes had become entrenched as the norm for many Traveller children, and lower attainment had become an acceptable, expected outcome. The Itinerancy Commission reported that 114 Traveller children of primary school age attended school regularly. By 1989, this figure had risen to 75% of Traveller children of primary age, some 4200 in all. (Irish National Teachers Organisation, 1992, p. 4) At this time 50% of Travellers were aged less than 15 years. (ibid.)

Phase 3 – Interculturalism

In September 1990, Ireland signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and ratified it two years later, so that the UNCRC became part of

national policy. Within the UNCRC, the best interests of the child must be the primary concern in all actions concerning children. The UNCRC places a high value on education as a human right:

Children are to be encouraged to reach the highest standard of education of which they are capable…Each child's education should develop that child's personality, talents and abilities to the fullest. Children should be encouraged to respect others, human rights and their own and other cultures. Their education should also help children learn to live peacefully, be protectors of the environment and respect other people. Children must respect the rights of their parents, and education should aim to develop respect for the values and culture of their parents…Minority or indigenous children are entitled to learn about and practice their own culture, language and religion. Everyone has a right to practice their own culture, language and religion; the Convention here highlights this right in cases where the practices and cultures are not those of the majority of the population. (United Nations, 1989) This coincided with and supported the emergence of a 'rights' discourse within the policy making domain in Irish education.

1993 saw the publication of the Report of the Special Education Review Committee which stated that schools "should adopt an inclusive, intercultural approach to curriculum development so as to ensure that their School Plan, class programme and teaching materials reflect a positive attitude towards the special customs, traditions and lifestyle of minority groups including the children of Travellers." (Special Education Review Committee, 1993, p. 160) The report concluded that Traveller children "insofar as possible should be educated together with their peers from the settled community and not in segregated groups" (ibid., p. 158)

In 1995 the Department of Education White Paper "Charting Our Education Future" was published on the key principles of pluralism, equality, partnership, quality and accountability. (Department of Education, 1995) It identified as a policy objective that "all traveller children of primary school age be enrolled and participate fully in primary education, according to their individual abilities and

potential within five years." (ibid., p. 26) Again, this was to be achieved, among other actions, through the development of culturally appropriate assessment and class materials, teacher pre- and inservice modules on traveller culture, and the "continuing development of the visiting teacher service" (ibid., p. 27) At second level, the overall policy objective was that "within ten years, all traveller children of second-level school-going age will complete junior cycle education and 50% will complete the senior cycle. Again, this objective would be met through the actions as for primary school and also the establishment of induction programmes "involving the family, the primary school where the child is enrolled, and the second-level school to which s/he is about to transfer" (ibid., p. 58)

The White Paper recognised that Traveller children "have the same rights as all other children to have access to publicly funded institutions". (ibid., p. 57) The White Paper identified the rights of parents to "active participation in their child's education" (ibid., p. 9) including their right to be "consulted and informed on all aspects of the child's education" (ibid.) and their right to involvement as a group at all levels. Parents have responsibilities too.

> Parents should nurture a learning environment, co-operate with and support the school and other educational partners, and fulfil their special role in the development of the child.
>
> (ibid.)

Meanwhile, the Dublin Travellers' Education and Development Group was established in 1983. Now Pavée Point, a government funded non-governmental organisation, the group placed the distinctly ethnic identity of Travellers at the centre of their campaign for human rights and self-determination. 1990 saw the establishment of the Irish Traveller Movement, a national network of Traveller organisations and individuals, formed as a national platform to highlight issues faced by Travellers and look for real solutions, offer support to local activists, debate ideas and promote initiatives which are culturally appropriate, develop alliances and challenge the many forms of racism experienced by Travellers. Today, the ITM has a membership of over 70 organisations. In 1993 the ITM working group on education published 'Education and Travellers', following a process of discussion and analysis which included a seminar attended by Travellers and Traveller groups from around the country, and opened by the Minister for

Education. The 'Education and Travellers' document (written for educators, administrators and policy makers with the aim of informing future policy decisions) identified education as including "social, cultural, intellectual, emotional, physical and spiritual development" (Irish Traveller Movement, 1993, p. 3) and stresses the importance of interculturalism in education provision. It recognised that "Travellers educate their children at home and within their community for the life of a Traveller"(ibid., p. 4) and that their cultural values relating to children and young people "can come into conflict with the formal system" (ibid.) An example given was the traditional position of children as part of the social and economic unit, which it claimed, had yielded, with economic and social costs, to the formal school system's introduction into the culture of a separate 'life of a child'. In order to gain from schooling, Traveller culture has had to make many such adaptations.

Regardless of a child's experience of school (and Traveller experience was recorded here as "very mixed" (ibid., p. 5)), this document acknowledged parents, teachers and children as "very disappointed with their educational achievement" (ibid.). Also recognised was the "often erratic attendance levels" (ibid.) which, coupled with disappointing achievement "challenge any assessment of Traveller education based on counts of provision and assessment alone". (ibid.) Many Travellers questioned the value of the education offered to them and its relevance to their lives. The document called for the investment of time, expertise and finance so that "the quality and suitability of educational provision for Irish Travellers meets their needs" (ibid.).

All schools where segregated provision exists should have a plan "outlining steps to full integration" (ibid., p. 11). In conclusion, while the ITM 'Education and Travellers' document identified the education system as it existed as maintaining the social inequality experienced by Travellers and called for its radical overhaul, it also recognised that education cannot solve all problems of social inequality. The attitudinal change which can be brought about by education would have to be supported by the elimination of institutional racism through enactment and enforcement of anti-racist and anti- discrimination legislation.

Even more specific in terms of explicit recommendations are the National Co-Ordinator Guidelines for Traveller Education. (Irish Traveller Movement, 1993) These guidelines were proposed mainly for the administration of special classes and so specific were some of the recommendations that practice on the ground must have prompted their inclusion. For example, it was recommended that

"There should not be

    (a) Separate entrances for Traveller children

    (b) Separate play times for Traveller children

    (c) Separate play areas for Traveller children.

Special classes should provide in the main for

    (a) Transient pupils

    (b) Late starters

    (c) Children whose parents enrol them in special classes". (ibid., p. 24)

Other recommendations made here were echoed in the ITM report, revealing a merging of the voice and experience of Travellers and the response of policy-makers.

More support for the principles of meaningful inclusivity came in the form of the 1992 Irish National Teachers' Organisation report 'Travellers in Education'.

As well as calling for submissions from Travellers, the report "was assembled following comprehensive consultation with teachers of Travellers" (Irish National Teachers Organisation, 1992, p. iv) As such, it is the response of some of the professionals. In setting the context, the report recognised the "continued reliance on compensatory and remedial education"(ibid., p. 1) and the systematic exclusion or different treatment of Traveller children "purely on the grounds of identity" (ibid.). It also acknowledged that while the primary school curriculum should be flexible enough to meet the needs of children of varying ability levels and cultural background, that "for many children of Travellers their cultural background and their day to day living experiences are rarely reflected, to any

significant degree, in the current school curriculum." (ibid.) Further involvement of Travellers in the education system would enhance their levels of awareness, their self-image and self-understanding. This in turn would facilitate Travellers in developing deeper relationships with the settled population and "to demand great equality and participation in every aspect of society" (ibid.) Like the ITM report, the INTO report accepted that integration can become largely an operational process if it is not supported by anti-racist policies and an interculturally inclusive and celebratory curriculum, including adequate provision for families who wish to remain nomadic, and reiterated the concerns of Traveller families about the "economic relevance and cultural impact" (ibid., p. 2) of schooling at post primary level. This highlights a move from a direct focus on Travellers as 'problematic' to an acknowledgement of their systemic exclusion.

On a day to day basis the report found that where children were made welcome in a school and where there were good home-school links programmes, attendance levels improved. At the time of the report, children were still being placed in these classes in some cases "without regard to their parents' wishes, and without the provision of appropriate educational assessment (ibid., p. 10), in contravention of Department of Education policy, which explicitly advised the involvement of Traveller parents in this decision. Teachers suggested that this lower attainment by Traveller children compared to their settled peers was mostly down to "disadvantaged home circumstances, irregular attendance, ill health, late start at school". (ibid., p. 35) Teachers felt that low numbers of Travellers transferring to second level could be accounted for by early adulthood among Travellers, lack of role models, a shortage of special provision at second level and lack of value of parents in education after primary school. In reply to a call for additional comments "some respondents reported a feeling of isolation in school and a measure of frustration with colleagues who did not see Traveller children as their responsibility too" (ibid., p. 38) A significant majority of respondents (72/91) felt that a curriculum which reflected and valued Traveller culture should be taught to all pupils in the school. Important conditions for successful integration included parental support/choice and full attendance, earlier integration/preschooling, satisfactory class behaviour, acceptance of Traveller children and their culture,

attainment to the class standard, local community acceptance, Board of Management/Principal support, stable accommodation, as well as health/hygiene and appearance. It is worth noting that these are largely assimilationist assumptions rather than a recognition that the system should adapt to the needs of Travellers. One of the most frequent 'final comments' called for "(e)ncouragement of Traveller parents to be more involved in education, and listening for special needs". (ibid., p. 42)

The recommendations from this report were numerous. In order to improve attainment, recommendations included "a programme of parent/teacher liaison" (ibid., p. 46). Traveller children should have "equal access to the educational provision best suited to their individual needs, taking parents' wishes into account" (ibid., p. 51). A process of involvement of Traveller parents in Boards of Management of schools with special classes should be facilitated. An investigation by the Department of Education into the low attendance of Traveller pupils should be undertaken, "in consultation with Traveller parents" (ibid., p. 57) In fact, it was recommended that "(a)ll decisions relevant to their children's education and welfare should be made in consultation with parents". (ibid., p. 59) To support parental involvement in decision making, Travellers should be able to access literacy/development courses that have Traveller input. Further, each school "should be supported in drawing up a special programme of home/school links". (ibid.)

In order to create an intercultural ethos in schools, it was recommended that modules on Traveller culture be included in revised school curricula, textbooks and materials, and should "reflect an intercultural society" (ibid., p. 60), not just be "free of racism". (ibid.) This should stand alongside training for teachers.

> Preservice and inservice education for all teachers should include modules on Traveller culture, in order to support teachers in providing the intercultural environment which is a pre-cursor to true integration.
> (ibid.)

1995 saw the publication of the Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community. This report marks a clear shift in national policy on Travellers from the time of the 1983 Review Body Report. In broad terms, the 1995 Task Force

report recognised Traveller culture and the need for anti-discrimination legislation. Among the terms of reference of the Task Force was the exploration of "the possibilities for developing mechanisms including statutory mechanisms to enable Travellers to participate and contribute to decisions affecting their lifestyle and environment." (Task Force on the Travelling Community, 1995, p. 67)

In educational terms, it heralded a shift from a deficit model of education to a rights model, stating explicitly that "all Travellers do not share the same educational needs and…access to mainstream should be regarded as the norm for Travellers" (ibid., p. 10) Six key principles should underpin the provision of education services at all levels:

(a) Equality of opportunity

(b) Anti-discrimination

(c) Acknowledgement of, and respect for, cultural diversity and multi-ethnicity

(d) Affirmative action

(e) "parental involvement in decision making and in the development of educational provision for their children" (ibid. p. 13)

(f) Integration

The key issues were identified as school attendance, parental involvement, Traveller nomadism, intercultural education and teacher training. The primary school curriculum was identified as "monocultural" (ibid., p. 14) and while there was no terminal test of attainment "teacher opinion is that many underachieve and are at least three years behind the norm in the core subjects, and that poor attendance, though a problem in many cases, is not a sufficient explanation" (ibid.). The report contended that at primary school level, the parents of Traveller children "are not significantly involved in the schooling of their children" (ibid.)

The report acknowledges that there had been "a failure of the [post primary] mainstream service to attract Travellers in this age group" (ibid., p. 15) negated the responsibility of mainstream to adapt to and accommodate the needs of young Travellers. While this was the first report to specifically mention Travellers

attending third level, it recognised that though few did attend further education and gain academically, there was a personal cost and those Travellers, "without on-going support risk losing their Traveller identity and being set apart from families and friends." (ibid.) In the report the Task Force recognised the importance of "on-going direct contact between teachers and Traveller parents". (ibid., p. 40) Traveller parents should be targeted to be involved in open days and similar events "before problems arise". (ibid.)

> The lack of direct communication is evident in the low level of knowledge that can be displayed by Traveller parents as to what is happening to or being done for their children in school.
>
> (ibid.)

Literacy difficulties and "lack of experience or knowledge in some school subjects" (ibid.) was recognised as a "source of embarrassment" (ibid.) to parents and a "barrier to communication" (ibid.) with teachers. This dearth extended to knowledge on how the school is administered, and lead in turn to a dearth of participation on the part of Traveller parents. It must be remembered that 'free education' was available in this country from the mid-1960s. The children of that generation of parents who availed of free-education were coming through second-level school from the late 1980s. Thus, by the time of this report, unlike a generation before, it could be said that parents were familiar with the system, most of whom had completed Leaving Cert themselves. Traveller parents did not share this insider knowledge of the education system.

At curricular level, the report recommended the development and implementation of an "intercultural, anti-racist curriculum" (ibid., p. 41), developed for all groups on an interagency basis including the National Parents' Council, teacher unions, representation from national Traveller organisations and other minority group organisations. This interculturalism should be reflected in text books, teaching materials and the drawing up of school plans.

On teacher training and awareness, the report recommended that the training colleges and Universities should design and deliver Intercultural Education modules on a compulsory basis to trainee teachers. Pre- and inservice training should be participative and help teachers acquire "a reflective and clearer

understanding of their own cultural heritage and social status, how these relate to others and fit with the professional responsibility for the educational and social development of pupils",(ibid., p. 42) helping teachers develop "a positive attitude towards cultural diversity"(ibid.) while developing "a critical knowledge of multicultural society, and an understanding of the causes and effects of prejudice, racism and xenophobia and other negative attitudes which contribute to discrimination", (ibid.) thus equipping them with the pedagogical skills to counteract these prejudices while facilitating "academic achievement in the context of cultural diversity" and the development of an awareness of the equality and anti-discrimination laws of the state. (ibid.)

The report recommended that each school have, not only a statement of policy on access, but also a statement of policy on equality of opportunity of Traveller children. Special classes should only exist "in cases of special educational need which have been identified in consultation with the visiting teachers or parents" (ibid., p. 47), with the objective of having all Traveller pupils integrated in mainstream classes by sixth class to facilitate transition to second-level. Further, "(s)ubstantial additional resources should be invested in supporting Traveller children at primary level, to ensure a level of attainment and personal development which would enable them to gain truly equal access to second level education". (ibid., p. 46) This continued emphasis on integration and access suggests an ongoing focus on adaption on the part of Traveller children to the education system, rather than any meaningful systemic change to meet their educational needs.

On transfer to second level, it should not be presumed that Travellers are low academic achievers, and only where special needs have been identified should "more information than is normal" (ibid., p. 50) be transferred to the post-primary school. "(A)ccess to mainstream provision must be regarded as the norm for Travellers", (ibid.) and they must not be segregated from their non-Traveller peers. Their full social and educational integration shall come under the remit of the resource teacher for Travellers, done as part of a School Plan, including measures to overcome prejudice as part of its policy on Traveller Education. All

aspects of the school "should reflect respect for cultural difference…and enable students to appreciate the richness of cultural diversity" (ibid.)

The report recognised that at second-level, Traveller parents can experience a great degree of financial disadvantage, due in part to the absence of a 'school-going network'.

In summarising the subsequent Dáil debate on the report, Minister for Equality and Law Reform, Mervyn Taylor TD (Labour) said that:

> Historically, discussions relating to the interaction between the traveller and settled communities frequently assume a bitter and antagonistic note. Myth masquerades as fact and people and communities often adopt polarised positions. Seeds of bitterness are sown which are very difficult to eradicate. On the whole, this debate was different in that there was, to a large extent, and absence of rancour among Deputies and candour was displayed on all sides of the House. There was a reasonable consensus on the significance of the report for mapping out a strategy which would, in time, prove effective for removing the sense of exclusion and of disadvantage which travellers experience. There was also consensus on the need for a response from government, at central and local level, and society in general to the report and on the need to support the Government's five year strategy produced and put in this report, notwithstanding the high cost factors involved. This positive response encourages me to believe a new era of better relations between the settled community and travellers to which I referred in my opening statement is now realisable. We have commenced the process of laying firm foundations for the removal of the root causes of the problems which the traveller and settled communities experience. The honest and forthright nature of comment and analysis by the task force, and the clarity with which it presented them in the report, in no small measure contributed to the consensus among Deputies. However, I sound a note of caution. The Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Deputy McManus, rightly stressed that the provision of accommodation for travellers, although at the heart of the solution to these problems, will not of itself resolve the issues concerning travellers and their relationships with the settled community. She said: "Providing accommodation is not the end of the story when it comes to true equality between our communities, but without accommodation the story cannot begin". People must be open to a change of attitude and be prepared to work patiently and continuously over many years to create an environment which will lead to harmonious relations between the communities.   (Taylor, 1996)

It was as part of this debate that Austin Deasy, TD said:

I am not denigrating travellers when I say that their numbers are creating a problem. I cannot stand dishonesty. Because people are not sufficiently well educated in birth control methods to keep numbers under control the problem will get worse. We must do what is necessary. This is in everybody's interests, both travellers and the settled community. There is no point in shilly-shallying. As we are all aware, the bulk of the members of the travelling community are good decent people born into misfortunate circumstances. Given this background they are doing an excellent job…The provision of a mixture of halting sites and a certain number of local authority houses will not provide a solution. The straightforward solution is that travellers must be integrated into the community. This might be achieved by housing them in established housing estates or in rural developments comprising one or two houses — a development of four houses might be acceptable, but not a major development. The provision of halting sites is a partial and unsatisfactory way of attempting to solve this problem…This may not be a popular statement, but the movement of travellers should be regulated. (Deasy, 1996)

When this speech from Mr Deasy is still acceptable discourse in public policy debate involving elected representatives in 1996, it is small wonder that Kenny in her investigation into the interaction between Traveller ethnic identity and schooling concludes that "dominant sedentary society and its institutions remain the instigators and maintainers of institutional and interpersonal racism and exclusion, which has pressured Travellers over a long time-span into distorted performances" (Kenny, 1997, p. 285).

Later and despite the optimism of the Dáil as mentioned above, the Monitoring Committee of the 1995 Task Force on Travelling People (2000) felt that there were shortcomings in the "integration of intercultural education into the education system as a whole." (Committee to Monitor and Implement the Recommendations of the Task Force on the Travelling Community, 2000, p. 52) In the revised primary school curriculum (which was to be phased in by 2004) responsibility for interculturalism fell to the Social Personal and Health Education module with associated inservice for teachers. The TFMC felt it insufficient to locate this within any one programme as "(i)nterculturalism and anti-racism should impinge on the whole school, the whole curriculum"(ibid., p. 54). The TFMC also noted that "(n)o action has been taken in implementing the changes in text books and teaching materials promoting interculturalism and anti-racism" (ibid.). They pointed to an obvious "lack of co-ordination here in respect of in service

training, teacher training and curricula development". (ibid.) There was no enquiry into the issue of poor performance and the failure of many Traveller children within the primary school system. This in turn points clearly to a lack of public appetite for system reform.

Despite the recognition of cultural difference in the 1995 Report of the Task Force on Travellers, subsequent education legislation fell short of providing a rights based education in favour of 'respect for diversity' and inclusion. For the first time in Irish history, the Education Act (1998) enshrined in law that "the education system is accountable to students, their parents and the state for the education provided…and is conducted in a spirit of partnership between schools, patrons, students, teachers, other school staff, the community served by the school and the state." (Government of Ireland, 1998, p. 5) While this acknowledgement of the "values, beliefs, traditions, language and ways of life in society" (ibid.) was a step towards equality, it does little to address some of the fundamental issues in the area of Traveller education. For example, Section 6 promotes "equality of access to and participation in education…the right of parents to send their child to a school of the parents' choice". (ibid., p. 10) Schools are obliged to "establish and maintain an admissions policy which provides for maximum accessibility to the school" (ibid., p. 13), it also obliges the Board of Management to "uphold and be accountable (for)…the characteristic spirit of the school as determined by the cultural, educational, moral, religious, social, linguistic and spiritual values and traditions which inform and are characteristic of the school." (ibid., p. 19). The right of parents' choice of school must have "regard to the rights of patrons and effective and efficient use of resources." (ibid., p. 20). Later the Report of the Task Force on Student Behaviour in Second Level Schools identified these opt-out clauses in the Act as having facilitated schools in refusing enrolment and thus in not providing maximum possible access and creating cultural imbalances between schools in a single locality.

> The refusal to enrol translates into a covert selection process and can act as an instrument of social division. The consequences of this practice have been described to the Task Force as a form of "educational apartheid". Parents and students are sensitive to this, and the result can make for hurt and bitterness among those who

experience a perceived rejection.
(Task Force on Student Behaviour in Second-Level Schools, 2006, p. 5)

Meanwhile, negative media reporting on Travellers during the 1990s further illustrates the imbalance between the equality discourses in policy and the, at best thinly veiled, at worst explicitly racist discourse of practice:

According to a Sunday Independent article, "Gardaí believe that Travellers are responsible for over 90% of attacks on the rural elderly." Mary Ellen Synon describes Traveller life as "a life of appetite ungoverned by intellect ..... It is a life worse than the life of beasts, for beasts at least are guided by wholesome instinct. Traveller life is without the ennobling intellect of man or the steadying instinct of animals. This tinker "culture" is without achievement, discipline, reason or intellectual ambition. It is a morass. And one of the surprising things about it is that not every individual bred in this swamp turns out bad. Some individuals among the tinkers find the will not to become evil". (Synon, 1996)

Brendan O'Connor who also writes in the Sunday Independent and has a prime-time talk-show slot on RTÉ One television, the national channel, wrote in 1997: "Traveller tradition is not a divine right" and that Traveller culture should be obliterated and Travellers should be assimilated into a 'normal' settled life. (O'Connor, 1997)

In a startling report in the Sunday Independent, a Fianna Fáil counsellor in a meeting of Waterford Council Council, is reported to have said "The sooner the shotguns are at the ready and these travelling people are put out of our county the better. They are not our people, they aren't natives." (Sunday Independent, 1996)

The year 2000 brought into law the Equal Status Act. (Government of Ireland, 1998) Though it fell short of acknowledging ethnic status for Travellers, it did define Travellers as having their own distinct culture and identity. As well as prohibiting direct discrimination of Travellers, the act prohibits any indirect discrimination where a service user "is obliged by the provider of a service…to comply with a condition (whether in the nature of a requirement practice or condition) but is unable to do so". (ibid., p. 8) This year also saw the introduction

of the Education Welfare Act, the provisions of which include an obligation on parents to "cause the child concerned to attend a recognised school on each school day". (Government of Ireland, 2000, p. 16) Schools are obliged to prepare a statement of strategies to promote school attendance to allow for "the identification of –

(i)   aspects of the operation and management of the teaching of the school curriculum that may contribute to problems relating to school attendance on the part of certain students, and

(ii)   strategies –

(i)   for the removal of those aspects in so far as they are not necessary or expedient for the proper and effective running of the school having regard, in particular to the educational needs of students, and

(ii)   that will encourage more regular attendance at school on the part of such students" (ibid., p. 20)

The 2002 National Children's Strategy, with a nod to the recent changes in immigration patterns and our developing multicultural society acknowledged that "(c)hildren with disabilities, Traveller children and children from ethnic minority communities, such as refugees and other migrants, have special needs which have to be considered and addressed collectively and individually, as required." (Government of Ireland, 2002, p. 23) Strategy objectives included that "(c)hildren will be educated and supported to value social and cultural diversity so that all children including Travellers and other marginalised groups achieve their full potential" (ibid., p. 70). In an effort to address barriers to participation in society, the strategy proposed that "school and community-based initiatives will be developed to promote a more participative and intercultural society which values social and cultural diversity". (ibid., p. 71) While this marks a policy shift to a societal level of interculturalism, it must be noted that it occurred in the context of a wave of inward migration into Ireland, rather than in the context of any societal change in relation to Travellers.

Guidelines on Traveller Education in Second-Level Schools was published in 2002. It stated that in the context of our multicultural society, "it is essential for schools to foster an understanding of and respect for Traveller culture", (Department of Education and Science, 2002, p. 19) accepting difference and promoting equality. To this end, the guidelines promoted an intercultural approach, the aims of which included the raising of "students' awareness of their own culture and to attune them to the fact that there are other value systems and other ways of behaving"(ibid., p. 20) and "to enable all students to speak for themselves and to articulate their cultures and histories". (p. ibid., 21) Opportunities for this were said to permeate the curriculum. In order to guide discussion on interculturalism within the school several questions were suggested including:

"-Are there opportunities to celebrate diversity in the school?

…-Is the implemented curriculum relevant to the different groupings in the school?

…-Are textbooks and resources bias free?

…-How are parents facilitated to be involved in their children's education?

-What kind of contact is maintained?

-How are parental fears and concerns about the erosion of Traveller culture and identity addressed?

-How is the wider community involved in the intercultural approach?" (ibid., pp. 24)

Again it is worth noting the implication here that no fundamental attitudinal change is required at institutional or societal level, the broad focus being on curriculum and parents. The guidelines asked school authorities to bear in mind that many Traveller parents did not attend second-level school, and that influencing factors for Traveller parents in sending their children to second-level included:

"-complex structures in second-level schools

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-the preference of some Traveller families for single-sex schooling

-fears of marginalisation or cultural erosion

-the absence of a tradition of second-level attendance

-early assumption of adult and childminding responsibilities" (ibid., p. 27)

When planning, structures should be in place to support liaison with parents, policies should be reviewed to make sure the values of minorities are included. The guidelines identified "(p)arental awareness of the value of education; and second-level education in particular" as a "key to increased participation" (ibid., p. 30), necessitating good mechanisms of communication.

Following entry, "(s)chool rules and the code of behaviour should be explained fully to parents and students and should be applied in a flexible and caring manner. The accommodation and the economic and cultural background of Travellers need to be understood in the context of the application of the school rules dealing with uniform and homework". (ibid., p. 35)

Close liaison with family is one of the key factors identified by the guidelines in relation to attendance and retention. Strategies included the use of mentoring, or friendship systems, as well as designated retention programmes. The "significant role" (ibid., p. 37) of parents in this regard is recognised. Parents, it said, "appreciate that schools are making an effort to protect, affirm and enhance Traveller culture…they realise that schools are a safe, caring environment for their children and have an important function in preparing them for working life". (ibid., pp. 37) Collaboration with all education partners is essential to ensure retention and attainment. Liaison with parents in the use of additional teaching hours "should be ongoing".(ibid., p. 48)

"…an intercultural perspective should underpin all school activity and inform the concerns of the school". (ibid., p. 39) The guidelines acknowledged that there were many areas of the curriculum where Traveller culture could be included and validated, but that more could be done "to identify and promote these opportunities". (ibid., p. 40) The guidelines identified this potential in a range of

subjects, but did not include English, Irish or any other language in their list. Leaving Certificate Applied is identified as having been "very suitable for a number of Traveller students" (ibid., p. 46). Travellers should have access to the full curriculum, with a restricted curriculum "actively discouraged". (ibid., p. 48) Thus, while the official policy is clearly one of inclusion, there is still acceptance of lower attainment levels for Travellers. 'Actively discouraging' a restricted curriculum suggests that there is a restricted curriculum being offered to some Traveller students and there is no official obligation to account for this or consequence for schools that don't. Twenty years after the 1983 report, which called for a culturally suitable curriculum, the guidelines call again for the same.

The ITM report "Travellers in Education: Strategies for Equality" published in 2004, said that "(t)he institutions remain to a large degree ignorant of Traveller culture and the needs of the Traveller Community and parents remain fearful and to a large degree uninformed of what education can offer their children or themselves. In terms of the overall framework for achieving equality, recognition is not being achieved and consequently, equality remains unattained and targets unmet. The lack of parental involvement as partners in their individual children's education, as decision-makers within the various layers of the system and as managers of educational institutions, is perhaps the most serious obstacle to equality for the Traveller Community". (Irish Traveller Movement, 2004, p. 14)

STEP Report 2005
Poor attendance rates are reflected in the Survey of Traveller Education Provision (the STEP report) carried out by the DES inspectorate in 2005. Absence rates for children surveyed at primary level showed an average of 32 days lost over six weeks' worth of school. The situation was worse at second level. While over the survey period, 8 of the 112 students surveyed achieved over 90% attendance, the average figure for a sample of 34 first years was less than 50% of the school year. The report suggested that "(s)ome parents perceived that their children achieved satisfactory attendance when they went to school for two or three days each week". (Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science, 2005, p. 28) Parents identified the following factors contributing to early school-leaving: "there were inadequate supports for their children in primary schools, the quantity of

homework was not achievable, parents and children felt frustrated with the lack of attainment and the curriculum did not meet their children's needs". (ibid.) Parents interviewed made three main recommendations to address these issues. Firstly, that continuous assessment would remove the final exam as the sole measure of success. They recommended that Traveller boys be taught by men, as being taught and corrected by female teachers was leading to situations of conflict. They also recommended an integrated provision where boys would share time between school and a training centre where they would be learning skills. One principal quoted in the report said "(o)nce the parents realise that there will be a follow-up from the school in instances of absenteeism, then there is a greater effort to ensure the pupils are attending regularly". (ibid., p. 29) Another commented: "In my opinion the biggest challenge is to convince the Traveller parents of the value of education. Getting the Traveller parents involved in school life is essential…Being in regular contact with parents and providing them with feedback on their children helps convince them of the value of school. Involving the pupils in extra-curricular activities helps bring the parents on board". (ibid., p. 30) According to principals, one factor contributing to low scores in standardised assessment tests was "a lack of parental interest in education". (ibid., p. 32)

A dearth of oral language skills on coming to school was felt to militate against attainment. Low levels of parental literacy were also considered a barrier to progression. Principals felt that Traveller pupils did not get adequate homework support. Schools reported increased contact between teachers and parents, with about half of parents attending the parent-teacher meetings and visiting the school. The survey reported a high incidence of learning difficulty among Traveller children, "approximately six to seven times greater than the expected occurrence of this disability in the whole population". (ibid., p. 33) It is suggested that this may be accounted for by non-culturally appropriate testing. "Some visiting teachers for Travellers expressed concern about the disproportionate number of Traveller pupils assessed as having a general learning disability and expressed doubts about the use of culturally inappropriate material in psychological tests." (ibid., p. 33) Assessment policies were found generally not to be differentiated for Travellers. In most cases subsequent reports were not kept. Almost half the pupils achieving

their grade level or above in reading and maths still received supplementary tuition, typically five hours of extra teaching per week and mostly in Traveller-only groups. Inspectors noted that pupils returning to the mainstream class were often "unsettled" (ibid., p. 44) and "unsure" (ibid.) what was going on when they were absent. "Half the principals interviewed stated that some Traveller pupils in their schools had behavioural difficulties". (ibid., p. 32)

One of the recommendations made was that resource teachers should support pupil learning through their presence in the mainstream classroom. The withdrawal process could curtail access to the full curriculum, with only 62% of Traveller pupils having "access to a broad programme in Irish". (ibid., p. 47)

By and large, Traveller parents expressed satisfaction with curricular provision, though concern was raised about missing Irish lessons. Some parents reported that their children had difficulties with homework and suggested that homework clubs focus more on actual homework and less on other activities. The majority of parents had concerns about the low attainment of their children. Some felt the teachers had low expectations of Traveller pupils.

> Other teachers take a serious interest in Traveller pupils and they have
> high expectations for them. Pupils do well with these teachers and we
> can see the difference.   (ibid., p. 50)

"The majority of principals stated that the management of behavioural problems in the case of some Traveller pupils posed a considerable challenge for the school" (ibid., p. 45)

 Over 80% of schools surveyed reported full integration of their Traveller pupils in the life of the school. However, some schools were concerned about "limited integration during recreational periods". (ibid., p. 51)

At second level, the STEP reported that Travellers have, in most cases, access to only a limited curriculum of three or four subjects. The "extensive support teaching" (ibid., p. 58) needed to access the curriculum militated against breadth of access. The competence of First Year Travellers in numeracy, literacy and general communication skills were identified as very low, especially for boys. Many Travellers were found to be studying most subjects at Foundation Level

which would make engagement at senior cycle more difficult. Most were taking Junior Cert Schools Programme, with some transferring to Leaving Certificate Applied. A poor homework completion rate was reported, with students reluctant to engage with homework clubs.

The creation of positive role models was identified as important by both the schools and the parents. An increasing number of Travellers (especially girls) were presenting at senior cycle. In these cases parents were interested in identifying how participation would be of benefit to their children. Inspectors reported that schools were very anxious to facilitate their retention, but that a dearth of role models made it hard to motivate students to stay on.

> School personnel, visiting teachers and inspectors commented on the importance for schools, parents and Traveller students themselves to set high expectations for progression and participation in higher and further education and training. (ibid., p. 61)

Almost all schools were concerned with low student attainment. Girls were reported as fitting in better than boys to the life of the school, with the report suggesting that this may reflect their culture, in that, teenage girls are more conforming and confined to the home than teenage boys. (ibid., p. 64) Some schools were addressing the issue of poor relationships the boys had with school staff through involvement in extra-curricular activities, especially sport. Half of the schools "recognised and celebrated" (ibid., p. 65) Traveller identity. Some young Travellers did not want to be identified as such. Parents were split on the issue, with some parents not wanting to identify their children as Travellers.

Parents interviewed spoke of how their own lack of schooling prevented them engaging fully with society and entering the workforce. They were unsure of how second-level schools operated and asked for more information. They all expressed a desire that their children would go on to do the state exams and gain adequate literacy skills and employment. They were reluctant to make the initial contact with the school if a problem arose, but would be happy for the school to ring them. Dealing with the myriad of personnel at second-level was described as "daunting". (ibid., p. 63) While linking with families was time consuming, principals said it was worthwhile.

The STEP report recommended that parents should have opportunities to meet school personnel to discuss the education of their children. Schools should have high expectations of Travellers' academic achievement and this should be communicated to pupils and parents. Special plans should be drawn up for students with literacy and numeracy difficulties, with clear objectives, timescales and monitoring. Parents should be involved in drawing up of individual learning plans. Where pupils are absent on the day of an assessment, arrangements should be made for them to take the assessment. Supplementary help should be given in a pupil's own mainstream class on an integrated basis, and with parental consent. Traveller pupils should not be withdrawn based on identity. Where extra learning support is given, no aspect of the curriculum should be neglected. Experiential learning and real-life contexts should be provided. Traveller parents must accept their responsibility in the area of school attendance and recognise the value of education "to enable their children reach their full educational potential and for personal, social and economic reasons". (ibid., p. 78). They need to recognise their important role in supporting schools in providing a "broadly based" (ibid.) education for their children. Parents should liaise with school staff to ensure all supports are being accessed. The high incidence of Travellers assessed as having special needs should be investigated by the National Educational Psychological Service. NEPS and parents should be involved with schools in developing initiatives "that would contribute to the building of Travellers' self-esteem, confidence, social skills and a sense of belonging in the school community". (ibid., p. 80)

"Traveller culture should be an integral part of the intercultural curriculum and be represented positively in each school". (ibid., p. 78)

When identifying differences in cultural norms, the Intercultural Education in the Primary School document uses as an example, the fact that Traveller children speak openly and directly to adults. This is completely acceptable in Traveller culture, but may be considered inappropriate by the school. The report suggests that teachers become conscious of their own subconscious values e.g. what they consider 'normal' food, a 'normal' home, etc. and so become mindful of the messages being transmitted to children. Teachers are also advised to consider how minority groups are included e.g. "are Travellers represented in maths

questions or stories, or do they only appear when minority issues are under discussion?" (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2005, p. 46)

The issue of the Irish language is also raised explicitly. As part of Irish identity and culture and because it may be necessary for the child's choice of career, the child's parents "should be supported in a full and careful consideration of all of the issues involved before a decision on whether or not to apply for…an exemption". (ibid., p. 163)

The development of a positive self-identity is a key ingredient of general as well as intercultural education. This document promotes the development of self-esteem through awareness and valuing of a child's own cultural attributes as equal to those of others. In 2006 the Equality Authority examined the issue of ethnicity of Travellers from an academic and public policy perspective, and established "a clear case for the acknowledgement of Traveller ethnicity". (Equality Authority, 2006, p. 3) Further, "(a)n understanding and recognition of Traveller ethnicity is central to the effective promotion of equality of opportunity for the Traveller community". (Equality Authority, 2006, p. 3)

Also published in 2005, The National Action Plan against Racism 2005-2008 stated that "the enhancement of access to education services for Travellers is a multi-faceted issue that takes into account living circumstances, parent/pupil/teacher expectations and the wider marginalization/social exclusion experienced by Travellers". (Government of Ireland, 2005, p. 111) The plan called for the development of a national intercultural education strategy with reference to equality/diversity, the development of a more inclusive and intercultural school environment and the accommodation of cultural diversity within the curricula.

2005 also saw the publication of the Second Progress Report of the Committee to Monitor and Co-Ordinate the Implementation of the Report of the Task Force on the Traveller Community. The report stated that, since June 2004, there are no special classes for Travellers in primary schools. The "single most important priority" (Committee to Monitor and Co-Ordinate the Implementation of the Recommendations of the Task Force on the Travelling Community, 2005, p. 33)

was identified as the development of a Traveller Education Strategy with six key recommendations:

(1) Interculturalism and its continuing development

(2) Training of educators

(3) Equality of access, participation and outcome, recognising a balance between emphasis on enrolment and on outcomes.

(4) Review of the use of additional resources

(5) Traveller parents and community involvement

(6) Traveller-proofing all schemes and policies.

Since the publication of the first report, responsibility for Traveller Education had moved to the Social Inclusion Unit of the Department of Education and the Educational Disadvantage committee had been put on a statutory footing.

In its observations to the Irish state on its compliance with the convention, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child acknowledged the work of the state in adopting new legislation and policy measures including the Equal Status and Education Welfare Acts, both of 2000, as well as the Children Act of 2001 and the National Children's Strategy (2000). However, it found that the state should "(p)rovide in its next report detailed information on measures taken in order to enhance the enjoyment of the rights of children belonging to the Traveller community, in particular with regard to enjoyment and access to education, health services and housing facilities." (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2006, p. 17) It noted "that particularly high dropout rates exist among children belonging to the Traveller community", and that teachers should be trained "in order to sensitize them to Traveller issues and inter-cultural approaches."(ibid., p. 14) The Committee was also "concerned that the principle of non-discrimination might not be enjoyed equally by all children in the State party and that children of different ethnicities and children belonging to minorities face higher levels of racism, prejudice, stereotyping and xenophobia." (ibid., p. 5)

So while acknowledging progress in the area of policy, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child could see the dichotomy between the rhetoric of policy and rights on one hand, and on the other hand the lived experience of education for the children of Travellers.

Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy 2006

Meanwhile, from 2001 until 2006, background work was being done on the Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy. A survey of provision, a consultation process with Traveller learners, parents, and where possible, children was carried out in by the Department of Education and Science in collaboration with the Irish Traveller Movement, the National Traveller Women's Forum and Pavée Point. (Department of Education and Science, 2004) It also called for submissions. Several recurrent themes emerged from the consultation process:

(1) Access and difficulties enrolling from pre-school onwards

(2) Negative attitudes towards Travellers from principals, teachers and other students, impacting on the entire school experience

(3) Segregation in provision, leading to segregation in society and resulting tensions

(4) Additional resources and supports, "often part of the problem rather than part of the solution as they create a separate, parallel system, dependency and targets of resentment and bullying" (ibid., p. 5)

(5) Invalidation of Traveller culture in a monocultural curriculum

(6) Ethos in schools that don't acknowledge cultural diversity and don't recognise the associated internalised oppression

(7) Parental involvement is "crucial but currently minimal" (ibid.) for reasons including parents' own negative experiences of school and a dearth of understanding of the system. "In some cases this can lead to absolute alienation of some parents from the system" (ibid.)

(8) Outcomes are low for the investment in Traveller education. There needs to be ongoing evaluation of the cost-benefit of spending "with Travellers being the central participants in that evaluation" (ibid.)

Traveller parents reported that where children had positive experiences that this was largely due to the influence of one, or a small number of committed staff members, rather that the lived ethos of the school as a whole. This issue of "teacher attitudes" (ibid., p. 10) was raised in most workshops, with the attitude of the principal identified as key to the ethos of the school. Traveller parents cannot assume that their children will be treated fairly. Thus, Traveller parents have low expectations, with academic achievement lower on the list of priorities than not getting bullied. At the consultation seminars, Travellers spoke about the need for Traveller parents to "take more of an interest" (ibid., p. 9) in their children's education and "to support other Travellers who break the mould by staying on in education beyond the usual years" (ibid.) Parents called for help in getting to know the system.

> For many Traveller parents their lived reality is that their identity is a trigger for discrimination and a school full of potentially hostile settled people is not an attractive place to send their little children.

>   (ibid.)

Parents called on the schools to consult fully with them before giving extra learning support, which should be needs based and include all children from the school population. Parents suggested that there be no withdrawal of pupils during class time. The range of teachers at second level was difficult for Traveller parents "as it means negotiating the 'identity' issue with several teachers". (ibid., p. 15)

At third level, it was suggested that a strategy was needed to support Travellers who were under peer pressure to conform to community norms and not go to college.

Where the role of parents was concerned, it was recommended that the new Traveller Education Strategy would have a specific section on Traveller parents, focused on the engagement of parents with the school and their children's

education, including empowering parents with information on the system and how it works

Many parents were ambivalent to education because the levels of discrimination later would preclude their children from securing work.

> A space needs to be created for real dialogue between Traveller parents and teachers. Likewise their informed involvement in Parents' Councils and Boards of Management is something that needs to be actively supported.
>
> (ibid., p. 21)

> Expectations of both teachers and parents were felt to be low and a contributory factor to low outcomes. This was reflected in assumptions, for example, that Travellers could not and should not learn Irish. (ibid., p. 24)

In summary the following core strategies emerged from the consultation process:

(1) "Changing the attitudes and expectations of teachers and providers and improving their capacity to deal positively with Travellers in particular and with diversity in general" (ibid., p. 27)

(2) "Improving the capacity of Traveller parents to support their children's (and their own) education" (ibid.)

(3) "Shifting the focus in Traveller education from attendance and participation to a focus on the quality of the in-school experience and the outcomes/achievements/employment for Traveller learners, graduates of education and training" (ibid.)

(4) "Making interculturalism a cornerstone of all educational settings, so that all children learn to deal positively with difference, develop confidence in their own identity, whether majority or minority and develop the skills to think critically about racism and other forms of oppression" (ibid., p. 28)

(5) "Building multi-agency approaches in recognition of the complexity and plural nature of the factors that impact on Travellers' education" (ibid.)

(6) "Making the education service more accessible to Travellers who are nomadic" (ibid.)

(7) "Providing services to Travellers in an inclusive, integrated setting" (ibid.)

(8) "Placing Travellers at the centre of monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the strategy" (ibid.)

(9) "Ring fencing (r)esources". (ibid.)

The Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy was launched by Minister Mary Hanafin in November 2006. The Report, she said, provided "a catalyst for moving on from what was, in the past, a negative experience for many Travellers, towards a quality education for all in an inclusive and integrated setting".

The report is based on principles which include the rights of the child, the inclusion of Travellers in mainstream education "in a way that respects Travellers' cultural identity, including nomadism", (Department of Education and Science, 2006, p. 9) building the capacity of the system to deal positively with diversity, not the assumption that all Travellers have learning difficulties, equitable and fair provision based on equality of access, participation and outcomes, innovative approaches to planning, the value of cultural diversity to our society, commitment to partnership and the collective responsibility of all stakeholders, creation of independence, greater integration and co-ordination of services between government departments and other agencies, the importance of consultation with Traveller children, the importance of the role of teachers with an intercultural and anti-bias dimension to all teacher training and development, engagement with adult Traveller learners and the encouragement of parents to engage in education themselves. Explicitly, as a guiding principle, the report "recognises the role of parents as the primary educators and seeks to consult, support and promote the capacity of Traveller parents to effectively execute that role in a concrete manner. In particular, Traveller parents will be enabled to participate fully in the education process and to support their children in remaining in mainstream education as long as possible". (ibid., p. 10) The key value underpinning the TES is 'inclusion', explicitly "the inclusion of the reality, needs, aspirations, validation of culture and life experiences of Travellers in planning the curriculum, in educational

administration, and in the day-to-day life in each educational setting, including the special education section". (ibid.)

A specific chapter in the report is given to the role of parents. The challenges facing Traveller parents above and beyond those facing non-Traveller parents are identified, including the reality of living on unauthorised sites, without basic services and under threat of eviction, their poor educational attainment, their own poor experience of school and "the widespread experience of exclusion". (ibid., p. 22) Fair treatment and welcome, in some schools, are not assumptions Traveller parents can make, and so some can have "ambivalence and a negative attitude…regarding the value of formal education". (ibid.) Echoing the consultation with parents, the TES called on the Traveller community to support those Travellers who stay in school beyond the usual years. Also recognised was the assistance needed by Traveller parents in improving their capacity to support their children's education. The TES hopes that parents will become involved as workers, and as volunteers.

Six specific recommendations were made in relation to Traveller parents. The first related to their own education, that education providers should continue to meet the needs and encourage engagement of parents in improving their own educational attainment, and in developing parents' capacity to support their children in theirs. The second recommendation was community development based, and dealt with developing Traveller parents' understanding of the system and their involvement through the provision of information for Traveller parents, so they understood the importance of attendance and consequences of long term absenteeism, would have high expectations and support their children in staying longer in the system. Traveller parents should be supported to get involved in the School Completion Programme, e.g. through homework clubs, mentoring and summer projects. The third recommendation was the involvement of Traveller parents in the representative structures, and that those who wished to do so, should be given adequate support and training. The fourth recommendation was in the area of parent-teacher communication, with the key aim of building effective relationships. This was to be done by ensuring that "the professional training of teachers addresses the need to maximise effective and respectful

communication with parents from marginalised and minority backgrounds"; (ibid., p. 26) the inclusion of modules on diversity and equality in the pre- and inservice training of teachers, this to be required by the Teaching Council; and the support from the DES of "initiatives to build an effective dialogue" (ibid.) between parents and other partners in education, including higher education. It was recommended that parents be involved in all aspects of school life, with targets and progress indicators of this included in the School Plan.

> The Department of Education and Science should continue to take every opportunity to remind schools that they must take a whole-school approach to welcoming, acknowledging, respecting and having a positive attitude towards Traveller parents. In particular, Traveller parents should be invited and encouraged to take part in all aspects of school life in a manner similar to other parents.

(ibid.)

There should be regular culturally sensitive monitoring of attainment. Targets, outcomes and timeframes need to be established in relation to each pupil's attainment. The culturally sensitive instruments for measuring attainment

The final recommendation specifically for Travellers calls on an interagency response to meeting their needs, through co-operation at national, regional and local level between government departments, VTT, Home School Community Liaison personnel, School Completion Programme personnel, VECs, NEPS, the National Educational Welfare Board, all education providers, Traveller organisations and Travellers, "to determine what is required to make education a viable and positive experience for Traveller parents and their children". (ibid., p. 27)

In terms of attainment, all pupils should have full access to the curriculum and be encouraged to "achieve their highest capabilities". (ibid., p. 41) All children should receive in-class learning support based on an identified educational need, with parents fully informed and regularly consulted and brought up to date. This is to be evaluated as part of the school's Whole School Evaluation.

At local level, each County Council was requested by Government in 2006 to begin a process of developing a Traveller Interagency Group which would provide

measures to promote the social inclusion of Travellers. The first step was the production of a strategic plan for approval by each County Development Board. The five focused areas were Health, Accommodation, Employment, Discrimination and Education. (I was a member of the Strategic Planning Group as a representative of Kerry Education Service, the Vocational Education Committee in Kerry). The overarching goal of the Education section was the "full and meaningful participation and retention in education achieved at all levels". (Kerry County Development Board, 2007, p. 20) Specific expected outcomes included full access to, and participation in all curricular areas and improved attainment at all levels of education provision. To this end, intended outputs included the increased participation by Traveller parents in school life. According to the 2011 Census, Kerry has a total of 860 Travellers, 0.59% of the total population of the county. Traveller figures nationally are recorded in the 2011 census as 28,337 with some 12,000 of these under the age of 15 years. (Central Statistics Office, 2013)

The Principle of Individual Educational Need

The 2011 budget announced the removal of the Resource Teacher for Travellers service. In the subsequent circular letter the "principle of individual educational need" rather than identity was identified as the key criterion underlying the recommendations of the TES. (Department of Education and Skills, 2011), Within the broader context of a budget that disproportionally affected the more marginalised groups in Irish society, the budget also withdrew the services of 42 Visiting Teacher for Travellers, proposing instead that the School Completion Programme and Home School Community Liaison services adapt to undertake work with Travellers.

In their response to these cuts a joint statement between the ITM and Pavée Point and the National Traveller Women's Forum contended that the recent budgetary cuts to Traveller education were "short-sighted", disproportionate and undermine Travellers' integration and potential future educational and career opportunities. The press release goes on to say: "Traveller organisations sit on the Traveller Education Consultative Advisory Forum (TECAF) which oversees the implementation of the Traveller Education Strategy. Traveller organisations were not informed of or consulted about the budget cuts to Traveller education. As part

of the Education Strategy Traveller Representative Organisations are given a role in supporting the Strategy's implementation and in the monitoring and evaluation of the measures. These cuts are not in keeping with the TES actions mapped out, nor the recommendations for the enhancement or support for Travellers in Education." (Pavée Point, Irish Traveller Women's Forum, Irish Traveller Movement, 2011)

Collete Murray, Pavée Point Education Co-Ordinator said:

> We must all work together – Traveller children, Traveller parents, teachers and policy makers to change the situation whereby less than 1% of the Traveller community make it to third level education and only 10% of Travellers who enrol in post-primary education complete it. Travellers have begun to value education more highly and realise that it can be a passport to a better future for their community. We need to support them to stay in the education system and not remove the very supports that have begun to have a positive impact.
>
> (Pavée Point, 2011)

Meanwhile, the dichotomy in public attitudes to Travellers remains deeply entrenched. The early 2000s saw a massive increase in personal internet use. While public rhetoric in relation to Travellers seemed more guarded, online forums provided, and still provide, a largely anonymous platform for people to discuss and denigrate Travellers and Traveller culture in a way that a reading of the forum suggests as being broadly acceptable. For example, in a carefully written Irish Independent article from 2004 entitled "Travellers leave trail of resentment", Lara Bradley wrote that "The brand-new, top-of-the-range cars and flash clothes indicate that this annual outing is highly profitable, but residents in the towns where they pull in say they feel "intimidated" and "under siege"." (Bradley, 2004) Meanwhile, such guardedness has not been needed in the online forum. In 2009 a man in Kerry was brought before Killarney District Court under the Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act (1989) for allegedly setting up a Facebook page entitled 'Promote the use of knacker babies as shark bait'. The site had 664 fans before being removed by Facebook. However, the case was dismissed by the judge because "there was a reasonable doubt that there was an intent to incite hatred towards members of the Traveller community." (Public Interest Law Alliance (Free Legal Advice Centres), 2011)

A cursory trawl today through boards.ie (which claims to be Ireland's largest online community with 630,000 members) reveals overwhelmingly negative comments on threads about Travellers. However, it appears that comment threads are frequently shut down because they descend into a form of racism. One forum moderator has written:

> If people can talk about it without being racist and without demanding violent action be taken, then there'll be no locked threads. History has shown this to be near impossible. Please prove me wrong.
>
> (boards.ie, 2013)

In an article in 2010 Eilis O'Hanlon wrote about "the historic reluctance of Travellers to take responsibility for the multiple faults within their own ranks. Better by far to blame everything on what is called the Settled Community and to demand they remove the motes from their eyes while Travellers continue to walk about with beams in their own." (O'Hanlon, 2010) Ms O'Hanlon was writing in response to the publication by Fr Micheál McGréil of his study: The Emancipation of the Travelling People: A report on the attitudes and prejudices of the Irish people towards the Travellers, wherein he writes that the failure to emancipate Travellers is "one of the most serious social embarrassments in the history of the State". (McGréil, 2010) Ms O'Hanlon continues:

> Ethnic? Get a grip. Travellers are not a separate race. They're bog-standard Irish, just like the rest of us. As for valuable, to whom exactly? Certainly not to Travellers themselves, who remain poorly educated, unemployed in far greater numbers than their settled neighbours, and in shockingly ill-health. What "right" is being asserted here -- the right to be permanently off the pace in the race for personal, social and economic fulfilment?... Rather than getting indignant because three-quarters of people admit they wouldn't want to live next door to Travellers, they should ask why all those people who, in other areas of life, would be open-minded and friendly individuals, become scared and unhappy at the prospect of having Travellers for near neighbours.
>
> (O'Hanlon, 2010)

More recently, in an Irish Times opinion piece, Jennifer O'Connell wrote:

> (t)he kind of casual, venomous racism that Travellers are still subjected to, even by mild commentators in benign contexts, will prove one of this society's last great, collective shames. At school 30 years ago, I don't remember anyone questioning why the Traveller children always seemed to be seated alone at the "bold desk" or why

they were universally referred to by the rest of us as "smelly". Since then, the discrimination may have become more subtle, but it hasn't gone away. I have routinely been met with incredulity when I expressed the view that perhaps all Travellers weren't bad news – in conversation with friends; in taxis; by members of the public in my role as a journalist; and once, memorably, by a uniformed garda. If it was just the occasional crude generalisation and the odd anonymous online outburst that Travellers had to contend with, they'd probably consider themselves fortunate. Earlier this month, a house at Ballyshannon in Co Donegal was burnt down, days before the Ward family – Travellers who had lived, they said, without incident in the town for more than four decades – were due to move in. If this had been the house of an African family, or a Jewish family, or a family headed by a same-sex couple or single parent, it's likely there would have been mass protests at this KKK-style burning. Instead, what greeted the news was a broad indifference.

(O'Connell, 2013)

It is now fifty years since the Report of the Itinerancy Commission.

CHAPTER 4: THEORETICAL CONTEXT

This chapter stands alongside Chapters 2 and 3 in laying a foundation on which to build a reading of the research findings and analysis. It examines the literature on the overarching themes of capital, parental role and efficacy, identity and racism, the central themes emergent from the literature. The chapter further looks at the canon of educational research literature from England, Scotland and Northern Ireland where Irish Travellers engage with the respective education systems. The chapter concludes with a consideration of the literature on Communication, the importance of which is central, not only to the emergent findings, but in providing an initial theoretical rationale for this research.

The 2006 Equality Authority report on Traveller Ethnicity definitively establishes Travellers as an ethnic minority. Further, it explicitly recognises the importance of understanding and recognising Traveller ethnicity as "central to the effective promotion of equality of opportunity for the Traveller community." (Equality Authority, 2006, p. 8) This research recognises that ethnicity, and so allows itself to move beyond that ethnicity framework, and locate firmly within a framework of equality. The research could also have been located within a feminist framework, recognising the position of these mothers as occupying a specific role and position within society and their community, and advocating change from that perspective. The role of the mother as moral caregiver in this context has been well established. (O'Brien, 2007) Again, I chose an equality framework, because that framework, I feel, moves beyond establishing context and advocates for change. At a very significant, practical level, the equality framework is relevant, accessible and immediate to practitioners within the education field.

Equality

Education is widely accepted as a fundamental human right. Baker et al outline why education and moreover equality in education matter so fundamentally.

Firstly, education has an enabling function in the attainment of other rights. It has "an intrinsic worth for all human beings and…is indispensable in achieving other human rights including the right to economic well-being and good health". (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon, & Walsh, 2009, p. 141) Literacy and numeracy facilitate

participation in society, thus "education is essential for the exercise of global citizenship…and for the full exercise of people's capabilities, choices and freedoms". (ibid) Alongside this is its bearing on the "distribution of privilege" opportunities" (ibid.) through the assignment of qualifications and credentials essential for acquisition of not just economic capital, but social and political capital also. This privilege is cumulative, since the possession of capital contributes to the acquisition of further capital.

Education has a huge and powerful influence in the formation of identity at both personal and societal levels, on the sense of self formed by an individual, and collectively by a community. In shaping a person's identity and the identity of a community, I feel that it cannot but shape their relationship to the wider population. In turn, since education is "above all a major site of cultural practice" (ibid.) it "defines what is culturally valuable", (ibid.) in terms of both hidden and overt curricula and how these are taught. More specifically, it identifies whose culture has value and whose culture does not within a society and by implication who has value and who does not in a particular society.

Thus, education and equality in education are important because, at both explicit and hegemonic levels, education is a gatekeeper to personal and societal well-being and development.

Further, equality in education is important because where the system is not equitable and the systems and practice of education become damaging to the well-being of participants, it becomes "morally questionable" (ibid., p. 143) for the state to insist on participation. I believe that, as an agent of the state, an education service that overtly condones or appears to condone inequality serves to discredit the institution of the state in the eyes of the users, as a moral authority and arbiter of justice, within the education system itself and to some extent in wider society. At a crude economic level, inequality in public education devalues public education and the arguments for investing in universal mandatory education.

Capital

Pierre Bourdieu identified the education system as the greatest agent of perpetuation of the inequalities in society. Bourdieu writes that "(i)t is in fact impossible to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one reintroduces capital in all its forms and not solely in the one form recognised by economic theory." (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 241) According to Bourdieu, capital (which he considers the same as power) exists in three forms: economic, cultural and social, the latter two being convertible, in certain conditions into the former. Cultural capital can exist in three forms. Firstly, it exists in the embodied state, acquired for the most part over time, in the domestic situation, and recognisable in one's habitus (disposition, dress, speech, accent etc.). Secondly, objectified cultural capital exists in physical objects such as art works. However, while economic capital can facilitate the acquisition of a work of art, a certain amount of cultural capital is needed in order to understand the cultural meaning of the work. Thirdly, Bourdieu tells us that cultural capital can exist in an institutionalised state, typified by academic qualifications, which can in one sweep quantify and categorise the quality and quantity of cultural capital possessed by the qualifications holder. The education system, then, supports the ongoing transmission of social structure by supporting the "hereditary transmission of cultural capital." (ibid., p. 244) Bourdieu calls this handing on of cultural capital "the best hidden and socially most determinant educational investment". (ibid.) Running parallel to this is the notion of social limits, where people implicitly bind themselves to that place in society to which they feel they belong.

The other form of capital identified by Bourdieu is social capital which recognises and depends on two parts, firstly the network of relationships which allow access to resources possessed by others, and secondly, the amount and quality of the resources themselves. Social capital can give direct access to economic resources e.g. a young architect who gets a job at his uncle's firm or an investment tip from a friend you meet at the golf club. Social capital can lead to increased cultural capital e.g. through contact with institutions that offer valued credentials and "individuals of refinement". (Portes, 1998, p. 4) It can exist in the form of a dense network of strong ties e.g. close family and friends, or through 'the strength of

weak ties', (Granovetter, 1973) a wide range of acquaintances. In their study of the perceptions of Gypsy/Traveller parents in the UK, Myers et al found that strong familial and community bonds among Travellers can mean significant absences from school for family occasions. In the case of low attendance, "(w)here the cultural significance of such obligations is not acknowledged by the schools or simply underestimated by them, then this can be a source of tension in relationships between families and schools". (Myers, McGhee, & Bhopal, 2010, p. 537) While economic capital can be acquired quickly in some cases, social capital, like cultural capital usually depends on a significant time investment. There are also negative aspects of social capital, one of which is the demand for conformity created by a small community, which reflects a confining 'bonding' social capital, as opposed to a more liberating 'bridging' capital. (Portes, 1998) This tight social control can restrict personal freedom, privacy and agency. Portes also writes of the related notion of bounded solidarity, a confining, almost stifling identification with your own community as having a common fate, emergent from being thrown together in a common situation, as opposed to liberating bridging solidarity. (ibid.) Derrington's examination of coping strategies adopted by Gypsy/Traveller adolescents in English secondary schools found that early leaving was, in some cases, the result of a complex set of 'push' and 'pull' factors, the latter including bonding social pressures such as from peers within the community who have already left school, pressure from family to engage in family business and pressure from parents who are concerned about the safety (moral, physical and emotional) of their child at school. (Derrington C. , 2007) Another negative aspect is the self-preservation instinct of an oppressed group through ensuring that none of its members breaks through the glass ceiling.

> In these instances, individual success stories undermine group cohesion because the latter is precisely grounded on the alleged impossibility of such occurrences. The result is downward levelling norms that operate to keep members of a downtrodden group in place and force the more ambitious to escape from it.
>
> (Portes, 1998, p. 17)

Echoing the recommendations of its consultation with parents phase, the Department of Education Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy called on the Traveller community to support those who "break the

mould by staying in education beyond the usual years" (Department of Education and Science, 2006, p. 22)

I contend that social capital in a positive or negative sense extends beyond your acquaintances and the social capital you bring to a situation can depend to some extent on your habitus and hexis. While hexis has a similar meaning to habitus in its original Latin, Bourdieu uses it to signify how people carry themselves, their gait, stance etc. So integral is this embodiment that Bourdieu writes:

> Bodily hexis is political mythology realised…turned into a permanent disposition, a durable manner…of *feeling* and *thinking*…The principles …are placed beyond the grasp of consciousness, and hence… cannot even be made explicit.   (Bourdieu P., 1977, pp. 93, 94)

Travellers and settled people can identify themselves and others as such in almost any context.

> If unacquainted with the individual, observers can glean clues from his conduct and appearance which allow them to apply their previous experience with individuals roughly similar to the one before them or, more important, to apply untested stereotypes to him.   (Goffman, 1959, p. 1)

Identification as a Traveller is enough to confer you with a perceived quantity and quality of social capital.

One coping strategy identified by Derrington (2007) is 'passing', a denial of their Gypsy/Traveller background on the part of the student. Kiddle notes in her exploration into the relationships between Fairground and Gypsy/Traveller parents and their children's teachers in England that a significant number of 'settled' Gypsy/Traveller families deny their identity in order to "protect their children from discrimination and racial abuse". (Kiddle, 2000, p. 272) This is reinforced by Lloyd and McCluskey's study into the education of Gypsy/Travellers in the UK who found that "(s)ome children may feel safer in school both with fellow pupils and teachers if they conceal their identity" (Lloyd & McCluskey, 2008, p. 336)

> Many Traveller parents feel that they cannot take for granted things
> that settled parents generally do not even have to consider, for
> example that their child will be welcomed in some schools, will be
> treated fairly, and will have their needs dealt with in a respectful way.
> (Department of Education and Science, 2006, p. 22)

Parental Involvement

The right and indeed duty of Irish parents to be involved in the education of their

children are enshrined in the Constitution:

> 42: The State acknowledges that the primary and natural educator of
> the child is the Family and guarantees to respect the inalienable right
> and duty of parents to provide, according to their means, for the
> religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their
> children.

> (Government of Ireland, 1937)

The Irish National Teachers Organisation in their 1997 document 'Parental

Involvement – Possibilities for Partnership' wrote of the "increasing involvement

of parents in Irish education" and the "enormous possibilities to enhance the

existing educational partnership between teachers and parents" (Irish National

Teachers Organisation, 1997, p. ii)

 'Parental involvement' is a term used in the research to refer to communication

with teachers and other personnel within the school, attending parent-teacher

and Parents' Council meetings, helping children with academic activities at home

and attending events at school. (Hill & Taylor, 2004; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Irish

National Teachers Organisation, 1997) While most of the literature focuses on the

effects of parental involvement in the education of younger children, the positive

effects of parental involvement have been well established by both cross-sectional

and longitudinal studies (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Meidel & Reynolds, 1999),

with higher levels of parental involvement related to higher levels of academic

achievement for children. (Reynolds, 1992; Epstein J. L., 2001) There is an ever-

emergent body of literature showing that parental involvement is linked not only

to academic achievement, but also to greater social and personal competence.

(Kohl, Lengua, & McMahon, 2000; Epstein J. L., 2001b; Desforges & Abouchaar,

2003) Stevenson and Baker (1987) found that they could "not find a direct effect

of maternal education status on school performance independent of parental involvement in school activities". (Stevenson & Baker, 1987, p. 1348)

However, the nature of the specific parental involvement, and the relationship between the parent and the school are critical. There are many ways and reasons for parents to be involved with their child's school and education, with Hill and Taylor noting that "(t)he most significant advances in the research on parental school involvement have arisen from the recognition that context is important and there are multiple dimensions to parental school involvement". (Hill & Taylor, 2004, p. 163) Kohl et al and Moles both found that, by teacher report, the amount and quality of parental involvement was influenced, among other factors, by ethnic minority status. (Kohl, Weissberg, Reynolds, & Kasparow, 1994; Moles, 1993) Lareau in her seminal work 'Unequal Childhoods' argues that the nature of parental involvement is dependent on social class rather than on ethnicity.

> In real life, the educational and work outcomes of young people are closely tied to the class position of their parents. Because social class *is* a significant force, existing social inequality gets reproduced over time, regardless of each generation's aspirations, talent, effort, and imagination.

> (Lareau, Unequal Childhoods, 2011, p. 305)

The term 'parental involvement' reduces to a gender neutral discourse what is predominantly emotional care work by mothers. O'Brien (2007), Lareau (2000), Reay (2000), Allatt (1993) and David (1993) all show that this effort is made particularly on the part of mothers to support their children's education with O'Brien (2007) showing this in an Irish context. It is my experience that most of the practical and emotional care work among the Traveller families in this research is done by the mother.

My experience is that Travellers within their own community comprise various societal classes, as does the wider population. Thus, Travellers retain within their own community an internal class system, a spectrum of possession and privilege, with some of the associated trappings of wealth and poverty. In the national profile Travellers are widely regarded as structurally working class.

> While some would say they are second class citizens it may be, indeed, that in many ways they are considered third class citizens following

> members of the dominant culture and members of visible minorities who are frequently experience repression, suppression and discrimination.
>
> (McElwee, Jackson, & Charles, 2003)

Though she is writing in a different context, I agree with Lareau's contention that in education "a pattern of social inequality is being reproduced." (Lareau, 2011, p. 305) This in turn echoes Bourdieu (1986), who described education systems as supporting the ongoing transmission of social structure.

Hill and Taylor (2004) note the two means by which achievements are made through parental involvement. The first is in the acquisition of social capital. Parents through interacting with each other share information about the culture of the school and school policies and practices. They establish relationships with school personnel and learn about expectations the schools have around behaviour, homework and other school-related activities. In turn, teachers learn about parents and their aspirations for their children and how they expect their children will be treated. The second mechanism by which achievement is promoted is through the exercise of social control. The sharing of consensus around appropriate behaviour and academic goals can be transmitted through the school and into homes. Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) add that these received messages can, in stressing the importance of school, encourage children's motivation and improve their engagement and learning. However, Hill and Taylor again warn that "when families do not agree with each other or with schools about appropriate behaviour, the authority and effectiveness of teachers, parents, or other adults may be undermined." (Hill & Taylor, 2004, p. 162) Research has found that higher income schools have greater rates of parental involvement than do schools serving lower income families. (Lareau, 2000) (Epstein & Dauber, 1991)

Diane Reay notes that "(u)nderstandings of mothers' involvement in their children's schoolings are enhanced by including an analysis of the emotions, both positive and negative that infuse mothers' activities." (Reay, 2000, p. 572) Capital theory can be extended to include an examination of mothers' emotional engagement with the education of their children. Emotional capital was defined by Allatt as "emotionally valued assets and skills, love and affection, expenditure of time, attention, care and concern". (Allatt, 1993, p. 143) Reay considers it as

"emotional resources passed on from mother to child through processes of parental involvement…the stock of emotional resources built up over time within families and which children could draw upon." (ibid.) Unlike other resources that have a direct influence or correlation with each other, there is no clear relationship between emotional involvement and educational achievement. In some situations and across social classes, low academic attainment follows, despite a significant emotional involvement. Reay found that a dearth of other capitals, e.g. poverty, lack of knowledge about the education system, meant working class mothers found it harder to supply their children with emotional capital e.g. to generate as much academic confidence and enthusiasm than did their middle class counterparts. Emotional capital invested in a child's schooling sometimes comes with a cost to both the parent and the child in the form of well-being. In the case of the mother, it can be the cost of the personal anxiety of dealing with the school. For the child the cost can come in the form of increased academic pressure and a loss of free time. At times, there may need to be a pay-off between increased cultural capital for the child at a cost to their emotional well-being. Reay noticed that many working class mothers "made a distinction between children's emotional well-being and educational success, prioritising the former."(ibid., p. 579) Here she found "key class differences" (ibid.) between how parents viewed their children's happiness. For middle class parents, happiness was something to be invested in now for the future, while working class mothers spoke of their children's happiness "in the here and now". (ibid.) "(H)igh levels of anxiety that cut across class and 'race'" (ibid., p. 582) are the result of the intensification of parental involvement in education. "The mothers who escape this anxiety are working class mothers who have separated out their child's happiness from education success and are prioritising the former over the latter and those middle class mothers who have the resources to buy a high degree of certainty of academic success…this leaves a majority of mothers, both working and middle class, caught up in a middle ground characterised by various degrees of apprehension." (ibid.) The literature largely referred to 'parental' involvement in children's education. Nonetheless, O'Brien identifies that "(w)hile men may sometimes assist their female partners in this work, the norm is for mothers to be assigned the primary responsibility for emotional caring. The toll of this

responsibility and effort on mothers' own well-being is particularly heavy for those mothers who have little material and emotional resources and who occupy marginal positions in society." (O'Brien, 2007, p. 160)

Bourdieu's work is also given a practical basis in Annette Lareau's "Unequal Childhoods" and "Home Advantage", where she applies his theories to different styles of parental involvement in schooling and education in the USA. (Lareau, 2011) Like Reay working in the UK, she found that social class was not a predictor of emotional involvement in children's schooling. Maeve O'Brien grounds the theory in an Irish context.

> Despite different understandings of their emotional care work, and the idiosyncrasy of its production, relative to their material, cultural and emotional realities, mothers share a common view that caring for children and their education is a priority.

> (O'Brien, 2007, p. 163)

She writes that "mothers, irrespective of their differences, are subject to a moral order of care that necessitates the performance of a great deal of emotional work." (ibid., p. 159) She recognises that mothers are "moral care workers who engage in extensive and intensive emotional caring to support their children's education." (ibid., p. 160) The Traveller mothers in O'Brien's cross-cultural study had ongoing support, yet their poverty and lack of knowledge of the system meant that they had to make far greater efforts to attain a level of care routinely reached by middle-class mothers. Like Lareau, O'Brien found that "mothers who have little resources and who find themselves marginally positioned have to negotiate the imperative within dominant middle class ideologies of caring and 'good mothering'." (ibid., p. 174) Part of the difficulty for some working class parents and students is a sense of futility and resistance to a system which seems unfair and unyielding, as in Newberg's "The Gift of Education: how a tuition guarantee programme changed the lives of inner city youth". (2006) Resistance and refusal were not negative responses, but more like functional responses to an opportunity that seemed beyond the students. Again, back to the notion of doxa and an unstated sense of knowing one's place.

Parental Role and Efficacy

The literature on parental involvement clearly points to parents' understanding or construction of the parental role as influential on whether or not they become involved in their children's education. (Lareau, 1989; Hoover Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Eccles & Harold, 1996) Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler consider the construction of the parental role as "a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for the emergence of parent-involvement activities. The presence of such a role construction means that relevant responsibilities and activities have been thought of and considered by the parent, thus creating the possibility of an active role." (Hoover Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, p. 313) The insufficiency arises because "the parent must take the role construction and *act* on it in order to be involved; to act on the role, the parent must believe that he or she has the skills and opportunities necessary for involvement",(ibid.) i.e. just because a parent thinks they should or could get involved in these activities does not mean they feel they can do these activities. Bandura, who developed the theory of efficacy, suggested that people higher in efficacy are more likely to engage in actions and behaviours that lead to identified goals and be more determined in the face of obstacles to the realisation of these goals. (Bandura, 1977) Both Eccles & Harold and Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler identify four sources of efficacy that allow parents realise, or act on, their constructed parental role in the education of their children:

> (T)he direct experience of success on other involvement or involvement-related activities; the vicarious experience of others' success in involvement or involvement-related activities; verbal persuasion by others that involvement activities are worthwhile and can be accomplished by the parent; and the emotional arousal induced when issues of importance to the parent- for example, his or her child's well-being or success, his or her own success as a parent- are "on the line".
> (Hoover Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, pp. 313-314)

Efficacy is certainly challenged in the power differential between the settled professional teacher and the Traveller mother. Lareau notes that working class and poor parents may "lack the requisite vocabulary to effectively challenge" teachers. (Lareau, 2011, p. 199) Hill and Taylor write that "(n)egative feelings about themselves may hinder parents from making connections with their children's schools." (Hill & Taylor, 2004, p. 162; Taylor, Clayton, & Rowley, 2004) Eccles and Harold identify parents' own intellectual competence as the key factor

in whether or not parents get involved in their children's education. (Eccles & Harold, 1996) O'Brien recognises that mothers, including Traveller mothers, who do not conform to the ideals of middle class institutions, "have been characterized in social and educational discourse as deviant and lacking as proper mothers". (O'Brien, 2007) This may have implications for mothers' own self efficacy when it comes to dealing with these institutions.

Identity and Racism

"Historically and in the classroom, Travellers' resistance struggles have been, and still are about identity and power/knowledge: how they want to name themselves, to control their lives". (Kenny, 1997, p. 289) The education system can confer recognition and value on an individual's personal and social identity, but equally devalue personal and social identity, values and abilities. (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon, & Walsh, 2009) The system does this in many ways including the selection of students for admission, grouping and streaming students, offering a pedagogy and assessment that values particular styles of learning, offering extra-curricular activities that are e.g. culturally exclusive or exclusive to particular socioeconomic groups e.g. through inducing extra costs. Schools can be sites of non-recognition (silence) and mis-recognition (negative stereotyping) of culture, with the socially dominant group in society identifying people from marginal groups as 'other'. (Young, 1990) With this otherness comes a presumption of cultural deficiency or deviance. (Lareau, 1989; Ball, Bowe, & Gewirtz, 1995) Charles Taylor in his seminal work on recognition, wrote that our sense of self, our identity is bound up with that of our cultural group, and the regard in which others hold that group. Members of this group will suffer harm if the group is held in contempt and disregarded by others. (1994)

Schools as important sites of cultural practice play "a key role not only in distributing cultural heritage, but also in defining that heritage". (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon, & Walsh, 2009, p. 142) Devine, Kenny, & Mcneela in their study into 'children's construction and experience of racisms in Irish primary schools' found that unlike incidences of racism against other minorities of which children were critical, name calling of Traveller children was never spoken of critically by other children. Unlike other minorities, where other considerations, e.g. sporting ability,

conferred children with negotiation rights in terms of inclusion and acceptance, Travellers were consistent subjects of racial stereotyping. (Devine, Kenny, & McNeela, 2008) This supports the findings of Lynch and Lodge (2002) who found that "(m)any students were quite willing to express their dislike and antagonism towards Travellers in public…(i)n general Travellers themselves were regarded as responsible for the discrimination and prejudice they experienced." (Lynch & Lodge, 2002, p. 138) In their research, 91% of students they sampled said that 'Having a Traveller in the school would make life difficult for the teachers and the pupils' (ibid., p. 139) The people who expressed positive feelings about Travellers had contact with the Traveller community, then or in the past.

I stand firmly with the Equality Authority in their statement that "(a)n understanding and recognition of Traveller ethnicity is central to the effective promotion of equality of opportunity for the Traveller community". (Equality Authority, 2006, p. 3)

Literature on UK Traveller Parents and Education

As they move beyond equality of resources, Baker, Lynch, Cantillon and Walsh also identify "equality of respect and recognition, equality of power; and equality of love, care and solidarity" (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon, & Walsh, 2009, p. 144) as other dimensions of the equality issue in the system. In Bhopal's 2004 study into the changing perceptions and education needs of UK Gypsy/Traveller parents, it was found that "(t)he confidence of Gypsy/Traveller parents is raised if they know and trust particular members of staff." (Bhopal, 2004, p. 58) Among the school-based factors that contributed to early school-leaving, Derrington identifies persistent name-calling and bullying, low teacher expectations where attendance and achievement were concerned, social and cultural isolation, difficulties in accessing curriculum, low attendance impacting on special needs support that might be necessary. (Derrington C. , 2007) bell hooks writes explicitly about the "power of shaming…as a threat to all students" (hooks, 2003, p. 101) and certainly the notion of 'shame', really felt or feared was ubiquitous in any conversation I have had with Travellers about their own schooling or the schooling of their families. This shame is also associated with illiteracy or the perceived gap between the literacy levels of Travellers and non-Travellers.   Derrington found that

Gypsy/Traveller parents felt a vocational education would best suit their children, with functional literacy the key determinant of a good education. (Derrington C. , 2007) This was supported by some parents in Bhopal's study of 2004, though others in Bhopal's study, mindful of changes in work patterns wanted more education for their children than basic literacy. This is also echoed in Kiddle. (Kiddle, 2000) However, Myers found that while "most [parents] acknowledged the importance of a more comprehensive education" (Myers, McGhee, & Bhopal, 2010, p. 534) than basic literacy, others found basic literacy to be adequate, and "some parents felt that education that went further [than basic literacy] was likely to have a negative impact on the family and the community" (ibid., p. 536) Levinson identifies the acquisition of literacy as a pragmatic adaptation which has won out in the battle between cultural identity and economic survival. He identifies illiteracy as an "ethnic identifier" and a "badge of honor" (Levinson, 2007, p. 33)

Our social structures, then, and the resources not just financial, but personal, educational, emotional etc., -the various capitals- that each individual, family and community possess, mean that at different strata in society, our opportunities yield different dividends. And this dividend is cumulative. The more of the various capitals acquired the more that can be acquired. Social justice is linked to agency, not just a handing out and accepting of resources, but "enabling people to exercise real choices." (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon, & Walsh, 2009, p. 41)

For those who stay on at school the critical factors are identified as including greater affiliation inside and outside school with non-Gypsy/Traveller culture, more diverse and secure social relationships, less reliance on siblings and other Gypsy/Travellers than those who left early and a greater likelihood of engagement with school, for example, through extra-curricular activities. These students had a sense of belonging to both the culture of the school and their family/community, and the ability to switch between both.

> In most cases this was coupled with a firm sense of cultural identity of which the students were proud.
>
> (Derrington C. , 2007, p. 365)

Those who left early often did so for the same reasons as their parents, thus stamping the children's reasons for leaving with a "cultural validity". (Bhopal, 2004, p. 52) Even where Gypsy/Traveller students remain at school beyond the legal UK age requirements, their attainment levels give cause for concern. Lloyd and McCluskey paint a dismal picture when they surmise that research in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland identifies for Gypsy/Travellers low attainment, disproportionate disciplinary exclusion, racist harassment and bullying, a lack of continuity of work, interrupted learning, inconsistent/often inadequate support, problems with multiple registration, the failure of schools to pass on records/evidence of attainment; and children identified inappropriately with special educational needs". (Lloyd & McCluskey, 2008) What then are the current dominant practices in Irish education, and how do these practices interface with the experience of Traveller mothers in our system? How do they interface with Traveller culture, identity and Travellers' expectations of the system? Critical pedagogy considers power in the system and sees schools as sites of reproduction of values and positions with society, but also as sites of resistance and change.

Communication

The first part of this chapter considers the understanding theorists have brought to the logic of the present system, as well as looking at the understanding other parents, Travellers and non-Travellers, bring to and from the system. The second part of the chapter, is concerned with how we can engage with each other, fairly and justly so that we all can bring about the transformation of the system.

> From Departmental level down, policy must demand that we examine the model of Travellers which shapes our perceptions, to identify if it leads us to miss and misread a variety of phenomena, and their structural or cultural base…Intercultural dialogue between Travellers and sedentary is required, but this includes recognising that Travellers need and are entitled to opportunities to undo the imposed 'culture of silence' (Freire[1970]), to reclaim their cultural space and find their voice. (Kenny, 1997, p. 296)

The interest in emancipation and freedom as identified by Habermas embodies a critical theory approach with the purpose of exposing the power situation (which has been facilitating oppression) and thus helping to bring about social justice. (Habermas, 1979) The time is ripe for the deployment of this kind of participatory

approach in engaging Travellers, and making that engagement with the system meaningful to them and more effective in meeting their real needs and bringing about true social justice.

Habermas tries to ground democracy in a theory of communication. He identifies the adult learning project as that of expanding critical theory to morality, communication and the organisation of society so that there can be the fullest, most authentic communication between members. The resulting reflexive learning and participation in discourse removes an individual's experiential context and facilitates the reaching of agreement from which communicative action emerges. In my experience, Travellers lack experience of the way systems work in education and in society at large, especially the systems of the state, and in turn, settled people at meetings (where it is expected that Travellers will contribute) are reluctant to challenge Traveller perspectives, possibly from a lack of immediate and rounded experience of Traveller culture. There are also, often, clear discrepancies in authority, some of us invested with it though education and our employment, our reasons for being there. Members of the Traveller community often don't have the same levels of literacy, the same cultural capital, and they are at meetings on different grounds, bringing with them a different kind of authority, the authority of experience. This dichotomy brings its own power relations and dynamic. Fundamental to change is the "supply of informal public opinions that develop ideally in structures of an unsubverted public sphere." (Habermas, 1996, p. 308) Are Travellers, identified as such or otherwise, ever included in debates in the national media that are not about Traveller issues? Where does there exist in this society an unsubverted public sphere? Baker et al have adopted the term "critical interculturalism" for the critical, though mutually supportive dialogue between groups. (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon, & Walsh, 2009, p. 35) While they acknowledge that this dialogue may not resolve all the issues raised by cultural conflict, it does provide a space to begin addressing the issues.

 Freire also says that dialogue is critical to change. "(T)o say the true word-which is work, which is praxis- is to transform the world, saying that word is not the privilege of some few persons, but the right of everyone". (Freire, 1996, p. 69) This dialogue cannot take place between the oppressed and their oppressors, or

on behalf of the oppressed by their oppressors. His reference to praxis is significant, as he believes there is no transformation without action.

This echoes the work of Erich Fromm who, in describing participatory democracy in the context of a factory, wrote that the worker needs technical knowledge, but beyond that he needs influence on decisions that really matter and the precursory information to facilitate his meaningful participation in this decision-making. For Fromm, the danger is that the individual succumbs to 'automaton conformity', which precludes autonomy and independent decision-making in favour of that dictated by the personality of the culture. (Fromm, 1941) This is an obvious antithesis to authentic communication.

Collaborative discourse is also a central tenet of Jack Mezirow's Transformation Theory which explains how our frames of reference influence the meanings we make. (Mezirow, 2007) Transforming these frames of reference facilitates us in reaching new understandings. The conditions identified by Habermas as necessary for authentic communication (trust and empathy between those discoursing, full and accurate information, freedom from coercion) are also ideal conditions for effective adult learning. (Habermas, 1996) Mezirow develops this further to say, like Habermas, that it is from these communities of authentic collaborative discourse that action can emerge.

All of the literature points to the essential point that "(T)here is no such thing as a neutral education process. Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes the "practice of freedom", the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world." (Schaull, 1996, p. 16)

For me, the first step, then, is an open, honest, transparent dialogue. The first step to that is an understanding of experience. And to understand, we must first listen. This was the cornerstone around which, as described in the Methodology Chapter, the methodological decisions were built.

CHAPTER 5: METHODOLOGY

This chapter takes the reader in a liner fashion through the process of the research. It begins with my own epistemological stance. Once my own position is understood, the narrative moves through the research process from planning the interviews and who to interview, through the interview process itself and reflection on that process to the rationale and methods involved in transcribing, coding and analysis to eventual writing up of the thesis. The chapter gives particular cognisance to my own role as someone who is not an outsider, but is well known to the participants and shown to have the trust of the community, and who, by the same token, is not, and can never be, an insider with membership of the community.

Epistemology

The All-Ireland Traveller Health Study of 2010 reports that "(c)ompared to the general population, Travellers experience considerably high mortality at all ages in both males and females" (Department of Health and Children, 2010, p. 86), even with the figures standardised; and "Traveller Infants today are 3.6 times more likely to die than infants in the general population". (ibid., p. 87) This is a stark figure by any standard.

For me it is not enough that research uncovers this kind of information (though this kind of 'cold' information has its own place and value in supporting more subjective research). As Jürgen Habermas wrote: "The positivistic attitude conceals the problems of world constitution…In this way the naïve idea that knowledge describes reality becomes prevalent." (Habermas, Knowledge and human interests, 1972, pp. 68-69)

For me positivism doesn't describe the whole picture. For me, to find out that a situation is unequal and unjust is to ask how it is being experienced and in turn how it can be changed for the better. I don't see positivism and the subjectivist anti-positivist approach as two separate camps, the researcher declaring loyalty to one to the complete rejection of the other. There are some realities that are knowable e.g. the mortality rate of Traveller infants. The qualitative, subjectivist approach asks how people participate in and what constitutes reality. Therefore,

while there is room for "what?", my own epistemology asks "how?" and "why?". These questions lead to a discovery of how we interpret the world in which we live. Each person has his or her own interpretation based on his or her own reality construed on their own way from their own experience. Each has created his or her own truth from his or her worldview. How Traveller mothers interpret their world will determine their interaction with it, and with the institutions with which they engage. From working with these experiences and understandings, I as the qualitative researcher will build theory, "sets of meanings which yield insight and understanding of people's behaviour. These theories are likely to be as diverse as the sets of human meanings and understandings that they are to explain." (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 18)

I will move a step beyond this and consider the paradigm of critical educational research. Critical theory is a social theory which goes beyond the traditional idea of understanding and elucidating society and is instead concerned with critiquing society with a view to changing it. Critical theory seeks to reform society through emancipation, the redressing of inequalities and the freedom of people through democracy. It follows then that critical educational research goes beyond interpretation of social realities and supports this explicit agenda of changing society. This interest in emancipation and freedom as identified by Habermas, embodies a critical theory approach with the purpose of exposing the power situation (which has been facilitating oppression) and thus helping to bring about social justice. (Habermas 1979) One of the central applications of critical theory to research in order to bring about social justice is participatory research, where rather than doing research 'on' participants, research is done 'with' them, thus challenging power relations and giving knowledge control and power back to the individuals or communities actively participating in the research, thus facilitating both understanding and change. (Pinto, 2000) This is a key feature of post-positivist methodologies.

To pin my colours to the various paradigmatic masts, I describe myself as post-positivist and gently postmodern. I reject a view of reality that is either singular or objective. I believe that knowledge, truth and reality are subjective constructs and no two people have the same worldview. I value the local and individual

perspective over the grand narrative or ideology. In research terms, I nod to complexity theory, recognising that phenomena are best understood when considered holistically and in an unrestricted number of variables. Rejecting the simplicity of linear cause and effect, complexity theory argues for "multiple causality and multi-directional causes and effects, as organisms (however defined: individuals, groups, communities) are networked and relate at a host of different levels and in a range of diverse ways". (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 30) Complexity theory requires that situations be looked at "through the eyes of as many participants or stakeholders as possible. This enables multiple causality, multiple perspectives and multiple effects to be charted." (ibid.) I am guided above all by a pragmatic approach to research and while I bring my own values to the research methodology, I am very conscious of the realisation that this research needs to be as fit for purpose as it can possibly be.

This research takes a phenomenological approach, "an interest in understanding phenomena from the actors' own perspectives and describing the world as experienced by the subjects, with the assumption that the important reality is what people perceive it to be." (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 26)

In carrying out my research I regularly returned to the "four main tools" in the kit of the post-positivist researcher. (Antonesa, et al., 2006) I found it useful to consider and return to these explicity, as well as knit them into my practice as researcher. I found that these four "tools" (as identified below), when considered together, allowed me, particularly as a novice researcher, to make explicit for myself what might otherwise have gone overlooked, in data gathering and analysis. Together,I used them less as "tools" but rather as a casual quality framework, or rubric, of sorts, by which I could consider my methodology. Using them as four considerations I had to regularly attend to, while at the same time try to build seamlessly into my practice thus allowed me to remain focused on the purpose of the research and on the bigger concepts informing the data.   The first of these "tools" or lenses is the concept of discourse. I consider a discourse as the set of transmitted messages or communications on a particular subject. These messages might be transmitted through words or actions. They may operate at a conscious or unconscious level. Discourses are not just cognitive, but are also

organisers of how we feel. Discourses and our relationships with them overlap, are fluid and they allow us to take different positions in relation to each other. In different groups we may be able to engage in different discourses to match our different roles, e.g. I can engage in different discourses about the education system or an aspect thereof, depending on whether I am speaking with a group of teachers or parents. Many discourses can exist at one time and vie for influence. Within each group we have a shared knowledge which facilitates implicit meanings in particular discourses. One of the more dominant discourses in the education of Travellers was that they would not be able to benefit from the education system until they stopped travelling, especially given the criminality of vagrancy and links with nomadism for many years. The assumption of nomadism as detrimental for children legitimised anti-Traveller discourse by associating a deficit model with one of the central tenets of Traveller identity. (Government of Ireland, 1963) Less visible than legal or material forms of power, discursive forms of power can have significant control in regulating people, nonetheless. A muted discourse in this context was that the system should be able to facilitate the nomadic aspect of Traveller culture. The dominance of a discourse facilitates general acceptance, or making 'common sense' of a particular position or ideology. It takes from the standing of those who question it. Thus, discourse is intimately related to the second of the post-positivist's tools: the concern with power.

Foucault wrote that "discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power". (Foucault, 1998, p. 101) In the search for meaning and understanding in our relationships with each other and the world, it is important to consider where the power lies in each situation, who possesses it, how they came by it, and what is its effect. Power shapes every interaction in the context of this research. Among other powers, the Traveller mothers in this study must interact with the legal power of the school and the state in obliging them to have their children attend and the authoritarian power of the personnel within the system which can work to influence how children, and in turn parents, experience that system. Power, in turn, and at a more subtle level, can reinforce a sense of power and efficacy in others or serve to undermine them. Parents, like all players in a scenario, bring

their own power to the school situation. For example, the school can serve as a site of acquiescence or resistance to the culture of the majority. This can work at both conscious and subconscious levels. The question of who gets to tell their story is bound up with power and discourse.

The consideration of prevailing discourses, power and the interests they serve can provide a useful framework for analysis of a particular situation or experience. Central to this is the third tool of the post-positivist: the value of narrative. As well as getting the details across to the reader, narrative captures the essence or the pertinent aspects of a story or an experience that are of use to the social scientist, and facilitates getting to the nub of the issues. (Fraser, 2004) In this research, I used a semi-structured methodology, with general open-ended questions prepared should there be a gap in the conversation. As expected, this rarely arose. The women here told their stories eloquently and generously. I made every effort to stand back from their telling of their story, to allow them not just to recall events, but to give space for them to recount the nuances of feelings and effects of the experience. This space allowed not only the breadth for the telling of the incident or story, but also allowed depth for reflection. It allowed for many levels of reading of the transcripts.

The fourth essential tool is the need for reflexivity. In the world of the post-positivist there are many contradicting and antagonising discourses, not all of which can be controlled, but all of which need to be examined. I asked my participants to reflect on situations as they described them and I remained constantly open to the subjective nature of the data. I was always mindful that my own opinions, biases and experiences were also brought to every stage of the research. This had to be factored into rendering this research as valid and reliable as possible. As researchers, we must always be aware of what we add to people's lives, and in doing so what we may also be taking away.

Planning the Interview

As well as in a sampling context, 'fitness for purpose' was my yardstick when choosing an instrument for data collection. Charmaz wrote that "(r)ich data are detailed, focused and full." (Charmaz, 2006, p. 14) The interview is a flexible tool

for data collection and one which I feel will yield the richest possible data in this context. As far back as Socrates, conversations have been used formally as a means of generating knowledge. Though clearly then, not a postmodern method, the evolution of concepts of knowledge and the construction of social reality have influenced the position of interviews in research.

> Knowledge is neither inside a person nor outside in the world, but exists in the relationship between the person and the world.
>
> (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 53)

The fundamental subject then is not "objective data to be quantified, but meaningful relations to be interpreted." (Kvale, 1996, p. 11) Through interactive dialogue interviewer and interviewee can explore their own realities and experiences to construct knowledge together. Thus, the interview, rather than reproducing an objective account of events that happened, facilitates the participant's recounting of how she experienced and interpreted these events and facilitates the researcher in understanding this interpretation and the social context that gives it definition.

The role of the interviewer is critical to the interview experience and the data collected. Kvale writes that "(t)here is no common procedure for interview research. Interview research is a craft that, if well carried out, can become an art". (Kvale, 1996, p. 13) He identifies two key stages before the interview itself. The first of these is thematizing. At this stage the purpose of the research is decided. From here, general research goals become specific objectives. After this the design stage prepares the interview schedule. This must be done in a way that ultimately links the purpose of the interview to the questions asked by the researcher. Cohen et al (2011 PG415) suggest that before designing questions the interviewer should not only look back to the themizing phase in terms of the interview objectives and the nature of the subject matter, but also look ahead to the interview and consider "

- whether the interviewer is dealing in facts, opinions or attitudes;

- whether specificity or depth is sought;

- the respondent's level of education;

- the kind of information she can be expected to have;

- whether or not her thought needs to be structured;

- some assessment of her motivational level;

- the extent of the interviewer's own insight into the respondent's situation;

- the kind of relationship the interviewer can expect to develop with the respondent."

(Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 415)

In my own case I was conscious in the thematizing phase that I wanted to capture the Traveller mothers' experience and understanding of the experience of engaging with the education system through the education of her children. Therefore, at design phase I knew I would be dealing in interpretation of events, opinions and attitudes. I knew depth would be sought in terms of reactions to events in the participants' lives and their feelings about how they experienced these events. I was confident that participants would have the information I sought, given that what I sought was their everyday lived experience, but I was conscious that I would be eliciting the common, making the familiar strange, giving it a gravitas that participants might not have considered before, insofar as here was someone coming into their homes asking about their everyday lives. Thus I was aware in designing the questions that having someone describe an unusual event or experience is often easier than asking someone to talk about the very familiar. In that context questions and thoughts may need to be structured in order for the participant to express and for the researcher to capture the experience. (ibid.) I was also aware at all times of the low levels of literacy and formal educational attainment of the participants. This had implications for the language used in the questions. Before interviewing I knew that I was offering little, if any, clear motivation to the participants to take part, and that in the interests of working ethically and honestly I could only describe my ambitions for the research as aspirational. This dependency on the good will of the participants and my knowledge of their situations meant that I was very aware of mothering and other family commitments they may have. This had implications for the time I

could expect to spend with each participant, and in turn for the structure of the conversation. (Lee, 1993) The nature of my contact was an initial cold-call to make a formal appointment to return. Many women were happy to talk there and then and so I also had to bear this in mind when designing the interview: that the time I had with them may amount to whatever time they had available when I called. This is one of the times that the issue of trust became significant. Most of the women I called to already knew me, and so, when I called to the door there was instant recognition and thus a relationship was already established. The participant knew already where I stood in relation to the topic I wanted to talk about, and that I was supportive of them in their efforts to engage with their children's education. For those who didn't know me, my introduction as "the woman who used to work in AnCO[1]", was enough to confer me with enough capital within the community to establish a trust-based relationship and allow me access to the participants. (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998)

Having considered these factors, the researcher can make an informed decision on the type of questions to use: open/closed, direct/non-direct etc. The type, variety and combination of questions used places the interview along a theoretical continuum from highly structured, direct, focused questioning to a format which is unstructured, open-ended and non-direct. I approached the interviews from a "shared-understanding" perspective, an active engagement with the interviewee. (Antonesa, et al., 2006, p. 76) The interviews were semi-structured, supported by a list of guiding questions where they may be needed to facilitate the conversation, rather than a pre-determined list which had to be adhered to. There could, therefore, be deviation from the list where the deviation may yield further rich data. In trying to understand the experience of the interviewees and their interpretation of their lifeworld, I realised that I must not allow my own preconceptions and assumptions to dictate or direct the conversation, but allow myself paraphrase and question for the purposes of clarity, while allowing for the existence of ambiguities. My goal was to gather rich, nuanced descriptive data

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[1] AnCO is the acronym for An Comhairle Oiliuna, the Industrial Training Body, established in 1967. When they were first established, the STTCs were under the remit of AnCO, and subsequently came under the umbrella of FÁS, An Foras Áiseanna Saothair, the state training and employment authority when it was established in 1988. Responsibility for the STTCs moved to the Department of Education in 1998, four years before I came to work in the STTC network.

which is suitable and sufficient for the purpose at hand. (Blumer, 1969; Charmaz, 2006)

In considering the questions to ask at interview stage, I was conscious of Blumer's "sensitizing concepts". (Blumer, 1969) These are topics which may act as launch points, or departure points in the interview process. For example, I began with the interviewee's own experience of school and the way it contributed to her own sense of identity, before moving on to her child's experience of school and how it may be different or mirror her own and how the experience of Traveller parents in the system may have changed in that generation. I asked about how she communicates with the school, how important or relevant school and education are in the lives of her family, what the effects of schooling are on Traveller life and culture. Key concepts are identity of self, child and community; the gift of education, cultural reproduction, transmission and preservation; care, capability, criteria for success, resistance, location of power, equality, justice and the perception of fairness, the interrelationship of the parent, child and school. While these concepts did not form questions explicitly, they formed the basis for my list of guiding questions. Despite having these key concepts as initial starting points, I remained open to the various perspectives my interviewees brought to these topics, while also remaining open to rich paths they wished to explore. Thus I wanted to remain open to these new directions that may arise during the interview process.

> We may begin our studies from these vantage points but need to remain as open as possible to whatever we see and sense in the early stages of research
>
> (Charmaz, 2006, p. 17)

I brought several concerns to the design phase and indeed to the interviews themselves. I was conscious that my questions might be loaded, that interviewer bias might, unintentionally, through the intention of gathering rich data, put words into the mouths of participants. In the same vein, I was conscious of pre-empting answers, of drawing out sensational data and confusing it with rich data. Another concern was stagnation in the conversation, which would lead to what Charmaz calls 'skimpy data' or worse, to no data at all, aware that "(a) researcher can rarely make a persuasive, much less definitive, statement from limited data."

(ibid., p. 18) Contrary to this was my concern that I would "gather everything and nothing". (ibid., p.23) She wrote that "(m)ountains of unconnected data grow but they do not say much." (ibid.)

Somewhere in between, my worry was that the conversation and hence the subsequent data would become skewed by outlying, atypical experiences that would go on to present an inaccurate picture in analysis to the reader unfamiliar with Traveller culture. I was concerned that I would not notice when key concepts arose in the conversation. Would I recognise them and would I be able to capture these key concepts in the conversation and support the participants in developing them further? Given the potential sensitivity of people's experiences in the education system, I was mindful before I began that these conversations may raise difficult issues for participants and I had concerns that despite my best intentions, the conversations might drift into areas where participants were vulnerable. Would I recognise this vulnerability and leave the participant unharmed? Cohen et al say that "social researchers must take into account the effects of the research on participants, and act in such a way as to preserve their dignity as human beings: this is their responsibility to participants." (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 84) Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) in turn recognise that "(t)here are no fixed criteria for what constitutes a good interview, not when it comes to the scientific or the ethical quality: The evaluation of interview quality depends on the specific form, topic, and purpose of the interview." (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 175) The responsibility for the quality of the interview rests in the skill of the interviewer, "the craftsmanship of the researcher, which goes beyond a mastery of questioning techniques to encompass knowledge of the research topic, sensitivity to the social relation of the interviewer and interviewee, and an awareness of epistemological and ethical aspects of research interviewing." (ibid.)

Having considered all of these, I knew my regular conversational style would have to be adapted to allow space for the participant to tell her story, to allow space within myself to hear what the participant is saying, to develop extra awareness around the purpose of the conversation and the comfort of the participants in engaging with the subject, as well as remaining finely attuned to the overarching objectives of the interview and the research goals. It was important also to be

mindful of the relationship between myself and the participant. (Lee, 1993) As Charmaz wrote: "Interviewers must remain attuned to how participants receive them, and how both participants' and interviewers' past and immediate identities may influence the character and content of interaction." (Charmaz, 2006, p. 27)

Thus I was mindful at the outset, and watching for, responses that participants felt they should give, or just as importantly, they didn't give because they felt they shouldn't. It is important for the on-going credibility of the research that the data gathered be both reliable and valid. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) advise that validation must be built in to the entire interview process from theorizing through to the final reporting stage.

Validity and reliability are key features of robust, trustworthy and transferable data in the social sciences. True validation operates throughout the research, at all stages from thematizing to reporting findings. In qualitative data gathering, Kvale and Brinkmann identify validity as "a quality of craftsmanship [which] is not limited to a postmodern approach, but becomes pivotal with a postmodern dismissal of an objective reality against which knowledge is to be measured". (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 248) Critical to this is the credibility of the researcher, the "moral integrity" (ibid.) and "practical wisdom" (ibid.) they bring to the research. It is important that the research, at each step in the process is examined for validation.

> Are the steps in the research process each reasonable, defensible, and supportive of what the researcher concludes? Validation rests on the quality of the researcher's craftsmanship throughout an investigation, on continually checking, questioning, and theoretically interpreting the findings
> (ibid., p. 249)

The tools of the qualitative researcher, mentioned earlier, have an important and mutually supporting role in the quest for ensuring validity and trustworthiness. Through the use of discourse, at one level, and an analysis of discourse at another, can allow for clarifying, examining and theorizing the interview findings as mentioned below. An examination of the power situation can illuminate the subjectivities and positionings of the researcher and help preclude needless bias

from this phase and thus from the ensuing phases of the research. Reflexivity should underpin all aspects of the research.

Challenges in establishing explicit validation in qualitative methods are often due to the complexities in society rather than any intrinsic methodological inadequacies.

> The quality of craftsmanship in checking, questioning and theorizing the interview findings leads ideally to transparent research procedures and convincing evident results. Appeals to external certification, or official validity stamps of approval, then become secondary as validation is embedded in every stage of the production of knowledge (ibid., p. 235)

Thus the research at all stages must be infused with a sound rigour e.g. interview questions must be linked to the themizing concepts, data must be accurately recorded and checked for understanding, analysis must be based on this accurate data with findings based on sound data analysis. In turn, the reporting of the findings must also be accurately transparent and impartial. Two other forms of ensuring validity are identified by Kvale and Brinkmann as "(c)ommunicative validity" (ibid., p. 253) and "pragmatic validation" (ibid., p. 257) of claims to knowledge. The former validates research through the ability of knowledge claims to withstand a conversational analysis, to the point where the work is accepted, in this case, in the field as a sound basis on which others are prepared to build further work. Thus, the nature of the 'conversation' is influenced by the context of the work, in that it can take whatever form of logical persuasion best befits that particular context. In this case, validation will take the form of acceptance of the research methodology and findings, after engagement with and consideration of the work by peer researchers and academics in the field, the people for whom the report is written, policy makers, management, school personnel, as well as members of the Traveller community.

Pragmatic validation is concerned with going beyond communicative validity, adopting and making practical the knowledge generated in the research. "A pragmatic approach implies that truth is whatever assists us to take actions that produce the desired results", and values and ethics come into play when deciding these desired results. (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 259) Both researcher and users

are involved in considering the direction of change. Again, whether or not the researcher is considered credible is critical to any potential change. This type of validation has links with catalytic validity which, having links in turn with critical theory, "both advances emancipatory theory-building and empowers the researched". (Lather, 1986, p. 64) Maxwell (1992) contends that "*understanding* is a more fundamental concept for qualitative research than validity". (Maxwell, 1992, p. 281) As befits my research, the applicability of this concept of validity "does not depend on the existence of some absolute truth or reality to which an account can be compared, but only on the fact that there exist ways of assessing accounts that do not depend entirely on features of the account itself but in some way relate to those things that the account claims to be about" (ibid., p. 283)

Validity then is not an intrinsic aspect of a particular method, but rather is a property of the data collected and how that data is used for a particular purpose in a particular context. Validity is also related to the "community of inquirers on whose perspective the account is based"(ibid., p. 284) rendering it relative insofar as understanding is relative.

A key feature of this work is its cross-cultural nature, and I see its overall credibility, validity and reliability as critically dependent on this cross-cultural soundness. In a personal communication to Cohen et al, Morgan (2005) writes that "cultural validity entails an appreciation of the cultural values of those being researched…; and being aware of one's own cultural filters as a researcher". (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 194) The key to the cultural soundness of this work for me is the lengthy time I gave coming to know the culture of the Traveller community, and they to know mine, so that a working relationship of mutual understanding, respect for difference and recognition of our common roles as women and mothers (albeit in different contexts) was established before the data gathering phase had begun.

In another personal communication to the same authors, Joy (2003) identifies 12 potential questions for the researcher. These are designed to ensure cultural sensitivity and cultural fairness and are reprinted here from Cohen et al:"

1. Is the research question understandable and of importance to the target group?

2. Is the researcher the appropriate person to conduct the research?

3. Are the sources of the theories that the research is based on appropriate for the target culture?

4. How do researchers in the target culture deal with the issues related to the research question (including their method and findings?)

5. Are appropriate gatekeepers and informants chosen?

6. Are the research design and research instruments ethical and appropriate according to the standards of the target culture?

7. How do members of the target culture define the salient terms of the research?

8. Are documents and other information translated in a culturally appropriate way?

9. Are the possible results of the research of potential value and benefit to the target culture?

10. Does interpretation of the results include the opinions and views of members of the target culture?

11. Are the results made available to members of the target culture for review and comment?

12. Does the researcher accurately and fairly communicate the results in their cultural context to people who are not members of the target culture?"

(Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, pp. 194-195)

Though not all these questions pertain to this particular cross-cultural work, those that do serve as another tool in supporting the research as ethically and culturally sound and valid.

Justification of data analysis hangs on transparency, communicability and coherence to prevent any tendency to apply one's own subjective bias to the analysis of data. (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003) Thus, the process of the interpretation of the data is open and clearly delineated, the constructs and the themes can be understood by participants and other researchers and these constructs in turn facilitate the telling of a coherent story.

Thus, irrespective of the validity framework adopted the fundamental questions remain: can this research be justified, does it stand up to and remain valid and trustworthy in the face of analysis? Does it retain validity in a cross-cultural context? Is it accessible to the audience for whom it was intended? Ultimately, have I established myself as a credible craftsman in the art of qualitative research?

Recruiting the Participants

If 'fitness for purpose' is a defining criterion for good research methodology, then so also is choice of participants critical to the 'fitness for purpose' of the research. In carrying out research, the ideal scenario would be to identify the population included by the research parameters and proceed to carry out the research with all cases therein. Reality does not always lend itself to these kinds of exhaustive possibilities. In these situations the best the researcher can hope for is to choose a sample of cases or individuals from the population that most lends itself to meeting the 'fitness for purpose' criterion. Five key sampling decisions face researchers, specifically

"1) the sample size

 2) the representativeness and parameters of the sample

 3) access to the sample

 4) the sampling strategy to be used

 5) the kind of research that is being undertaken"

(Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 143)

 I add a sixth decision to this list: choosing key informants. While decisions on each of these factors are interdependent, for me the most fundamental was deciding

the kind of research to undertake. Knowing I wanted to capture the lived experience of Traveller mother and supported by my epistemological and ontological positions, it was clear to me early in the process that this research would be qualitative in nature, that a quantitative approach would not support my interest in the individual narratives and their analysis. Thus, I knew early in the process that my research would take the form of interaction with individuals so that they would be facilitated to tell their stories in the most authentic way possible. From here, the next point of consideration was the representativeness and the parameters of the sample. Fundamentally, what did I want the research to do? I came to the research believing that our experiences are highly subjective, that no two people will completely share one interpretation of a single event, so the lived experience of an individual could not stand as the experience of the population. My concern was not with exhausting the field by allowing for all variables within the population, that is, for example, once I bounded my population within the county, I didn't feel the need to have a representative from the population of Traveller mothers at each school. My interest is not in recognising common experiences in order to make generalisations. It lies instead in understanding the underlying common conditions on which further research, theory, policy and reformed practice can be built. My interest, then, was in identifying participants who would act as key informants, a sample "deliberately and unashamedly selective and biased". (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 157)

> Thus, sampling in qualitative inquiry must be purposeful, with participants invited into the study according to their knowledge about the topic being researched, or type of information that is needed to complete or complement our understanding

(Morse, 2007, p. 234)

Having decided on sampling strategy, my next focus was on identifying who these key informants from with the community of Traveller mothers might actually be. Critical to identifying these 'excellent informants' was my work with the Traveller community and the relationships I developed with the women who attended the

programmes on which I worked. (Spradley, 1979) As per Spradley's work on ethnographic methods, I was able to identify "experts in the experience or phenomena under investigation;…willing to share the necessary information;…[and who were] reflective, willing and able to speak articulately about the experience". (Morse, 2007, p. 231) As important as deciding the individuals to include, was the decision on who to leave out. While not striving for general representation, so also did I not want to expose individuals who could be too easily identified by the data. As I began the research I deliberately did not include a Traveller mother I know well who is currently studying Social Science at third level. I was afraid that in the very small sample I considered initially, her language skills and testimony would skew the data for the uninitiated reader. Informing the reader of what I felt would be her atypical contribution would leave her vulnerable to identification. While, in hindsight, as in foresight, her opinions would have added to the research, such are the ethical dilemmas facing the researcher.

While my insider position facilitates access and efficiency, researching outside my own domain would preclude this and other similar issues. Thus, while not trying to be representative, I chose my initial key informants cognisant that their relevant experiences were typical of the general population, or rather cognisant that their experiences were not atypical. I selected participants from different parts of the county, again, not for the sake of representation but rather to avoid the skewing of data based on a high concentration of potentially atypical data. (Lee, 1993) Possible participants were identified from both affluent and less well-off backgrounds. While both single (separated and widowed) and married mothers were invited to participate, all participants are married. With the exception of one case, all are married to Traveller men. In this one case, the husband is of Traveller background, raised as a settled person. Conscious of becoming prescriptive, I wanted at all times to generate meaningful data.

Knowing that a pound of bad data would not make an ounce of good data, moreover pounds of data could obfuscate the most precious ounces, I began my sampling by identifying three key individuals and allowed for sampling decisions

therefrom to be informed by the data and the interview experience. (Sandelowski, 2007; Charmaz, 2006; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009)

> The size of the sample in an interviewing study is something that should be determined toward the end of the research and not at the beginning.
>
> (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 93)

For example, at the commencement of data collection, I did not know if I would revisit these participants, keeping my sample size very small, or meet with more participants once only. The decision would ultimately be based on the interviews and their findings. I was also aware that asking for engagement over several visits would necessitate a significant time commitment on the part of each participant for no obvious tangible return.

The final sampling decision is that of access. I was fortunate that I having worked in two centres I engaged with members of the Traveller community in five large towns over a wide geographical area of the county. I am known to many members of the community on a personal level and by repute as "the woman from AnCo" to others. Thus, in my relationship with the Traveller community mine was a clearly defined identifiable role which, I feel allowed me to live out and allowed others to see, my keen interest in and commitment to education in all its guises. While professional, my relationships with the community and Traveller groups were personable enough that I would be trusted to act appropriately both socially and ethically in the field. I felt therefore, that in terms of access, I would be made welcome. The only potential 'gatekeepers' I could see were partners of the women I interviewed, who, as it transpired, did not impose any impediment at all and who, in all cases where I met them, were welcoming and facilitating.

I contend that there exist various levels, or grades of outsider, and hence of access.

"As a qualitative researcher I do not think being an insider makes me a better or worse researcher; it just makes me a different type of researcher." (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 56) In this case, there was physical access from the population of potential participants to the key informants who would ultimately partake in the research. At another level, with these women, as with all research

participants, there was an issue of access to their story and their willingness to share their experiences. (ibid.; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998)

> The benefit to being a member of the group one is studying is acceptance. One's membership automatically provides a level of trust and openness in your participants that would likely not have been present otherwise. One has a starting point (the commonality) that affords access into groups that might otherwise be closed to "outsiders."… Although this shared status can be very beneficial as it affords access, entry, and a common ground from which to begin the research, it has the potential to impede the research process as it progresses. It is possible that the participant will make assumptions of similarity and therefore fail to explain their individual experience fully. It is also possible that the researcher's perceptions might be clouded by his or her personal experience and that as a member of the group he or she will have difficulty separating it from that of the participants. This might result in an interview that is shaped and guided by the core aspects of the researcher's experience and not the participant's. Furthermore, its undue influence might affect the analysis, leading to an emphasis on shared factors between the researcher and the participants and a de-emphasis on factors that are discrepant, or vice versa.
>
> (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, pp. 56, 58)

Trust must also be established at an individual level, and again I feel that while not developing these relationships at a conscious level, or with this piece of work in mind, my long term relationship with this community has opened that gate to allow me access to the reality of these women's lives. Having already pre-established trust, it was easier to build rapport in the interview context. (Lee, 1993) On thanking one woman I spoke to in the course of the research she replied, "You were so nice to us Martina, that we'd do anything for you, girl". It has taken all of the eight years I spent working there to develop a relationship with the community where I feel that my interest in and commitment to education and the Traveller community have been established sufficiently to undertake this research in a credible way with participants and in turn with the reader. The issue is one of mutual trust – in this case, establishing a cross-cultural relationship between the researcher and participants, whereby the researcher is trusted to enter and leave the field without causing harm, and the participants are trusted to provide the researcher with the access needed to make the research worthwhile. The issue of trust is particularly relevant when the researcher and participants are

from different cultures, especially where there exists a power differential between participants and where traditional antagonisms have existed between communities. The time I spent developing a relationship with Traveller mothers was essential in order to develop the skills to hear the narratives, identify where power was operating and understand the discourses at play. This is not research I could have validly undertaken ten years ago.

> …(W)ho conducts the research, particularly what they know, and the nature of their critical racial and cultural consciousness – their views perspectives and biases – may also be essential to how those in education research come to know and know what is known.
>
> (Milner IV, 2007, p. 397)

This said, there remain power differentials between the participants and I. For those who attended the training centre, I was their paymaster and line manager, essentially, and though that relationship no longer exists, that is the role in which I first came to know these women and them to know me. I am a non-Traveller, with the opportunities and access, real and perceived that my culture affords me, which creates another power differential between us. On one occasion during an interview, I was asked to turn off my recorder so a mother could talk to me off the record. Her sixteen year old daughter is out of school and she was wondering if I could "get her in" to the local YOUTHREACH provision. While she saw me as a gatekeeper to the statutory education system: the schools, YOUTHREACH, FÁS etc., she also saw herself as a gatekeeper, controlling access to herself and her opinions, to the information that I needed for my research. I answered her honestly, that I did not know about the application procedures for these programmes, and would recommend calling in and asking the personnel there. Her mood was despondent and she didn't go any further with asking me to turn off the recorder. She asked me later to help with information in regard to another education issue. This is related to Lee's concept of "servicing", whereby "(i)t is sometimes possible to obtain research subjects by offering them a service of some kind." (Lee, 1993, p. 72) In this case the service required was my influence in a course application. Co-operation with my research by participants may thus have been seen as politically shrewd. It has been my experience since I began work with the Traveller community that my role within the formal education bureaucracy

suggests to some members of the community that I have influence over access to all state services including health and accommodation.

I remain conscious that another power differential exists: that I am not, nor will I ever be, of Traveller culture and able to speak with their authoritative voice.

Another aspect of the anonymity issue with which I have concerns is that of pseudonyms. In the older generation of Travellers, names like Doll, Nan and Winnie were common, and for me conjure up stereotypical images of elderly Traveller women with shawls, old boots and their hair tied neatly at the nape of the neck. More recently, Travellers have tended to move away from these names and adopt, for women now in their twenties, names like Lisa, Crystal and Savannah. Younger Travellers now have, in many cases, names from celebrity culture, such as Beyoncé, Brittany and Princess. My dilemma is this: to ascribe any one of these pseudonyms to a particular person is to immediately bring to mind for me, and thus I expect for the reader, well-defined images and suppositions. This may lend itself to a distortion of the reading, accepting that the reader also brings an ontological and epistemological position to their reading of the research. To ascribe a traditionally non-Traveller name is, for me, to bring a different image to mind of the participant and to take from the identity of that individual. To ascribe a participant a non-Traveller name feels like taking away part of her voice. So too does the assignment of letters or numbers as identifiers. In order to retain the essential voice of each participant, I am giving each a name that I associate with many Traveller women, names that I feel are non-defining in terms of image, while remaining firmly in the Traveller realm: Mary, Teresa, Kathleen, Bridget, Ellen, Christina, Margaret, Ann, Nora, Elizabeth.

I began by identifying three people I felt would be willing to participate, rich in experience as the mothers of several children. Mary and Teresa I had known well through work. The third person had, some years ago, considered joining our programme. The pressure of raising her family was the reason she gave then for not being able to make the commitment. Mary and Teresa are loquacious, well-spoken women, though not confident, especially around their own educational

attainments. On several occasions at work I have spoken to each of them about their families and whatever school issues were live for them at the time.

Before I secured ethical approval I met Teresa in Penneys by coincidence. Though a school day, she had one of her school-age daughters with her. She smiled, knowingly, when I told her I was doing a course and when I asked if she would participate in the research, she said she would, anything to while away the day. I took her number and said I would be in touch. Shortly after this she suffered a close family bereavement. I didn't approach her initially when it came to gathering data, affording her space and time after her loss, but rather approached her some months later towards the latter end of the data gathering phase, as I felt her contribution was well worth having. I remembered her as keenly interested in her children finishing school and quite literally ashamed and embarrassed by her own standard of literacy. On occasions she asked my advice about issues (mostly behavioural) her son was having in school, or her concerns arose in conversation. She sometimes took calls from the school during her time at the training centre. I don't recall her meeting often with the Visiting Teacher for Travellers. Teresa tended to deal with the school directly. At times she seemed weighed down by it. Her breadth of recent experience across the spectrum of services coupled with the interest I perceived she brought to the education of her children led me to believe that her contribution would be a good starting point for the research. Thus my selection of participants brought together my prior personal experience of the individual and the context, bound together with my understanding of her vulnerability, sensitivity and interest in the topic. True to Cohen et al's description of 'purposeful sampling' I "hand-picked the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of [my] judgement of their typicality or possession of the particular characteristics being sought…[to] build up a sample that is satisfactory to [my] particular needs." (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 156)

I called to Mary's house on two occasions before finding her at home. I explained my position and she agreed to participate. She is doing a training course and had to check her diary to arrange a date. We agreed that I would call to her house on a day the following week. I remember her checking her diary because as she did so, she was recounting what she learnt on the course about the history of

government policy in relation to Travellers, all the money that had been spent to date on education, and how Charlie Haughey tried to "save us from ourselves" [through the Itinerancy Commission]. I also called to Nan, mother of my third key informant whom I know better than her daughter. She was very willing to help with the research and we arranged that I would call back on the following Friday when her daughter would be available. According to Nan, she was in bed having spent much of the night up with her teenage daughter who was sick. However, on calling back, Nan's daughter was in bed, overcome, according to Nan with bringing up the children. I was interested in hearing about this struggle, it might have made for rich data, but I felt it would be unreliable and ethically unsound to put pressure on the woman to participate. Nan, in her willingness to help, grabbed her coat and offered to introduce me to some other family she had living locally, and that is how I came to meet Nan's daughter-in-law, Ann and Nan's other daughter Ellen. Given Nan's obvious enthusiasm in helping, I didn't want to deflate her pride in her contribution by rejecting her help. Therefore, despite my best planning provisions, my first three potential key informants became one in which I had confidence and two of whom I knew nothing, beyond the essential criteria of being Traveller mothers. Even with insider knowledge of the community, I was not confident that the people I was going to speak to would be useful informants. The main risk I foresaw was in relation to time, that not knowing these women might mean I would spend a valuable amount of time trying to engage them in conversation, interviewing and transcribing without acquiring useful data. (Lee, 1993) This turned out to be more a lack of confidence on the part of the novice researcher than a valid concern.

> The quality-and credibility- of your study starts with the data. The depth and scope of the data make a difference. A study based upon rich, substantial, and relevant data stand out. Thus, in addition to their usefulness for developing core categories, two other criteria for data are their suitability and sufficiency for depicting empirical events…A novice may mistake good, but limited data for an adequate study.
> (Charmaz, 2006, p. 18)

There always remains a concern however, that the researcher does not know what experiences and viewpoints a participant brings to the research. For example, there may be issues there that are troubling for the participant to speak about.

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The researcher may not have prior knowledge of this, knowledge that would prevent the researcher bringing the conversation somewhere difficult for the participant, putting the participant at risk. There is a danger of "(e)xposing participants to physical or mental stress" as "questionable practice". (Kimmel, 1988, p. 200)

The contributions of my first three participants were significant. Particularly surprising was the contribution of Ann, whose children were in Junior Infants, and thus in this system for only a matter of weeks at the time of interview. She was novice enough in her dealings with the school that I could really glean the experience of initial engagement with the school for her and the early commencement of the relationship between her and the class teacher.

Having interviewed these three women, I felt their contributions met the suitability and sufficiency criteria. I knew from the interviews already done, that every mother who had engaged with the system had a story to tell, her own particular story, which was no more or less important that the next, but that each brought their own unique insights. I began to trust more in my ability as a competent interviewer and thus became more confident about casting my net wider. I spoke to people I knew who worked as teachers, explaining my purpose and asking if they knew mothers whose testimony could add to the data. I engaged with the local Traveller Development group and added their suggestions to the sample of the Traveller population I knew through my work in the Training Centre. I had initially expected that I would interview perhaps five participants and re-interview them to develop depth in the data. However, I found that interviews were longer than I had expected. I found them sufficiently deep and clear for purpose after one visit. I decided, given the time involved for the participants, that I would conduct just one visit. That would allow space and time in the research to interview more participants that had been initially expected.

The Interview

The use of a semi-structured interview approach does not imply a half-hearted approach to the interview process. While handing over some control to the

participants in terms of the direction of the conversation, the interviewer must remain rigorous about the operational aspects of the interview.

Once the format of the interview has been decided, the researcher must consider how the data will be recorded. Electronic data recorders can capture vast amounts of conversation accurately. While the textbooks suggest that these might prove intimidating to participants and stifle authentic conversation (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011) I contend that recording devices have become very small and their resemblance to other widely used devices such as mobile phones and MP3 players makes them far less obtrusive in the interview situation, and therefore less intimidating to respondents than devices of former years. The alternative, or supplement to mechanical recording devices is manually writing down responses the interviewer feels are noteworthy. This can be a source of interview bias in that the interviewer is evaluating the data without hearing the interview in its entirety, and on this basis making what might be considered a premature choice in deciding what to omit and what to bring to the next stage for analysis. Also, given the subjective nature of the conversation there may be responses that appeal to the personal and professional interests of the interviewer and gems in the conversation are lost, their value not realised. Interrupting the conversation with writing can stifle the flow of conversation, and lead to the situation feeling uncomfortable. Electronic voice recorders cannot capture the physical features of conversations, such as, lapses in eye contact, other facial contributions to conversations and understanding, and physical distractions for the interviewee. In this work I chose to use a digital voice recorder so that I could accurately capture all words in the conversation, and, as importantly, devote myself to the act of interview conversing and listening. I brought a notebook and pen with me. The notebook contained my guiding questions. I wanted to be able to write down any features of the conversation that would not be captured by the voice recorder, and note understandings I was gleaning as the conversation progressed. Mindful of not interrupting the flow of the conversation the notebook facilitated jotting down topics I wanted to return to later. I used my notebook rarely and only when necessary. Given the literacy difficulties many of these women had, and their awareness of their low education attainment, I felt that writing down their words

was akin to processing the conversation, so that before the conversation was even concluded, their words would be beyond their grasp. This I thought would be disrespectful and rude given their willingness to help. In the long run, it may even have proved stifling. I felt that excessive writing and reference to written materials would smack of officialdom. I also felt it was wrong at an ethical level, emphasising the power differential between the book-educated researcher and the participant. Therefore, I honestly explained, aware of the potential of sounding patronising and condescending that the notebook was there to help me remember the questions I wanted to ask and to write down things so I wouldn't forget them later in the conversation.

Another aspect of the interview that needs to be considered in advance, especially in the field of cross-cultural research is that of how the interviewer is dressed and otherwise presents (him or) herself. Bailey notes that "often little or no mention of appropriate dress is made in the interviewer's instruction manual. (Bailey, 1994, p. 184) He goes on to recommend that "(e)ven if the interviewer is interviewing members of the counterculture, his or her role is still, according to the expectations of the respondents, that of an "establishment" interviewer. Therefore, the interviewer should dress the way the respondent thinks an interviewer should dress, which may or may not be similar to the respondent's dress and grooming". (ibid.) When deciding what to wear, I took my cues from the women in the training centre, who, to signify important days, even if we were not having visitors join us, chose to dress up. Also, as the women are used to me in a professional capacity they are used to me, not quite suited and booted, but certainly smart casual. To give the research value and signify the importance of my visit to their homes, I chose to dress as I would at work. Again, I chose to avoid any trappings of officialdom, such as formal jackets, briefcases, clipboards and laptops, relying on my handbag to carry the voice recorder and pens.

Ethically, it is important to prepare in advance of the interview for explaining to the interviewee the interview process, the expectations and role of the interviewer, the objectives of the research, the probable duration of the interview, protection issues such as those around confidentiality, anonymity and general non-malevolence. After explaining my purpose to participants, I told them what

format the final publication would take, (or might later take in the event of commercial publication) who the potential readers might be, where and how the data would be recorded, stored and destroyed. I explained the format of the interview and that the data would be made anonymous in print. I explained that there were no 'right or wrong' answers, but that I was very interested to hear about their experiences. I ensured them that I would not be reporting back to the schools in a 'tell-tale' fashion and that this research was part of a course I was doing in my own time and paying for myself. I explained that I was on career break. If participants were happy to continue I read through the ethically-approved consent form with them before we both signed it. I then chose a technically appropriate, inconspicuous place to leave the digital recorder and switched it on. In the vast majority of cases it was just ignored. In one case, a participant at first didn't name people she spoke about, but rather called them "the principal", "the teacher" etc., throwing a glance at the machine. After she did this a few times, she laughed and knowing I knew who she was talking about, just named them thereafter. This to me was a sign of trust. She named individuals because she trusted that I would honour my commitment to her anonymity.

In advance of the semi-structured interview process, it is important, not just to have possible questions prepared, but to have thought in advance about the commencing topic and question. It is the responsibility of the interviewer to make the interviewee comfortable, establish and maintain an atmosphere conducive to the purpose, address what Cohen et al call the "*interpersonal*, *interactional*, *communicative* and *emotional* aspects of the interview". (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 422) There are many ways these can be encouraged or stifled. One way of providing encouragement is by conveying to the interviewee the interest of the interviewer in the responses of the interviewee and in the conversation, Facial expressions, body language and the use of positive encouragement such as "hmm, aha", on the part of the researcher can make the atmosphere more personable and everyone more comfortable. The choice of initial question can make a crucial difference to establishing this rapport. I began all interviews by asking how the interviewee experienced their own time at school. This immediately established the interviewee as being the source of knowledge in

the room, and established that I was interested in the experiential nature of education. At all times, I presented questions in the colloquial, avoiding, where possible, the use of technical terms that might prove intimidating or exclusive to those with little formal education. I probed for clarity, asking "Can you tell me more about…?", and "What do you mean by…?". I explored topics at a deeper level by asking "How did it feel when…?" and "Why do you think he…?". Even where I felt I knew the answer, I still offered the questions to the participant so that I had the experience in their words and I was not just speculating or applying my own prior assumptions, "Did you mind when that happened?"

When offered, I always took tea or coffee, mindful of experiences at work, where some of the learners on the programme assumed that visitors, and even some settled people who worked in the centre, who never had tea when offered, thought the learners were 'dirty'. I often bring a travel cup of coffee with me in the car and I was conscious not to bring it into anyone's home, in case it inadvertently implied that I didn't want to drink from their cups, which would in turn imply that I think they, and by extension, Travellers in general, are 'dirty'.

I met with refusal on two occasions. Each I knew from working in the training centre. When I called to each initially, she agreed to take part, but when I returned at the appointed time, she wasn't there. Doll has literacy difficulties and is parenting alone. She has a child with special needs. I called five times to Doll. On one occasion she was there, but ill. After the fifth unsuccessful visit, I stopped calling. I appreciate that hers was an exceptionally busy life, and financial difficulties, parenting alone and her illiteracy compounded what would otherwise have been an already difficult situation. I felt that the research was less something she was trying to avoid, and more something she didn't prioritise. I was disappointed. Though my aim is not to generalize, I felt her contribution would add value to the data. I also felt it would be of benefit to her to annunciate the difficulties she has had to face in educating her children, difficulties we would have touched on informally when she was in the Training Centre. I feel she is not going to come forward and share her story voluntarily; she will have to be approached and asked for it. The very nature of situations like hers means she is not in a position to make that situation known. In research generally, if we only

listen to the loud voices, many quiet voices remain unheard. Garland, Spalek, & Chakraborti (2006) attest in relation to Travellers and the judicial system, that unless academics "adopt more imaginative ways of accessing these hidden voices, then there is a danger that policy and practice may be formulated on inaccurate notions of community requirements." (ibid., p. 428) This also holds for education.

Philomena also agreed to take part. When I called she was not at home. Her husband told me she had been delayed down town, but as I drove home, I saw her hiding from me in her sister's front yard. My first reaction was surprise. I didn't presume that this research was high priority for any of the participants involved, that, in reality, they were obliging me by taking part, but I didn't think anyone would go to that much trouble avoiding it. Given that she had earlier consented, I began to think about the style in which I asked people to participate. Was I forceful in tone? Did I leave people with an option to refuse? On consideration, I feel that those who participated did so without feeling coerced.

> The problem is that if researchers follow the path of least resistance and study only those settings which are easiest to access, the consistent tendency of sociologists to study only the powerless, the near at hand or the relatively innocuous will be reinforced. Moreover, because research which fails or which is never attempted is not usually reported, it becomes difficult to assess just how far the total universe of studies is weighted in a particular way.
>
> (Lee, 1993, p. 141)

The Interview Considered

All interviews lasted between thirty and ninety minutes. Each person interviewed seemed interested in the research and the possible outcomes. This supports the contention that parents are interested in their children's education. (see findings chapter) The interest shown contributed to my feeling welcome, and set a nice tone for the interview. I feel this setting of a 'nice' tone is important, as it makes both interviewer and interviewee more comfortable, and this in turn facilitates the flow of the conversation. This in turn allows the interviewer to listen closely to the interviewee so that there can be greater insight into the meanings the interviewee is bringing to the conversation and the conversation can continue in a relevant way. Further, a difficult experience for the interviewee can contaminate the field for other researchers.

> (T)he onus is on the interviewer to establish and maintain a good rapport with the interviewee. This concerns being clear, polite, non-threatening, friendly and personable…to give the respondent the opportunity to ask questions, to be sensitive to any emotions in the respondent, to avoid giving any signs of annoyance, criticism or impatience, and to leave the respondent feeling better than, or at least no worse than, she or he felt at the start of the interview.
>
> (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 422)

In one case I felt that while there was interest in what I was doing, there was incredulity that this was a cause to which I would devote my own time and money. I was quickly moving to a place that I was afraid would leave me sounding patronising, and would thus expose that power differential. That left me trying to justify the research on the grounds that this was my contribution to the community after working with them for so many years, and that perhaps there were issues that I wasn't fully aware of at the time but could and should have done more about in retrospect. I could only go so far with that point for fear of contaminating the data. I wondered at the time if I felt intimidated by the fact that I had walked in on four women and clearly interrupted whatever conversation they were having, just as anyone feels awkward when they walk into a room and the conversation stops. Throughout the interview they had their own jokes about each other and the system to which I was very obviously an outsider. In any case, as the conversation went on and I began to analyse the discourse, I could sense a very clear despondency with the education system and life in general for these women, which came across subsequently in a close analysis of their narrative.

It was not unusual for people other than the anticipated participant to be present for the interview. Husbands, friends, children and a mother-in-law were present at various interviews. I was surprised by the engagement of the wider audience once the interviews began. It has long been my experience that everyone has an opinion on how to teach, bred from his or her own experience, positive and negative, of being in school themselves. I was surprised, however, that, others in the home contributed so fully to the conversation. These included Teresa's daughter who tried to deflect from other commitments they had in order that the conversation might be kept going. There were several uninvited interruptions with opinions, clarifications, perspectives, and accounts of experiences. This lead to a

welcome informality, and added richness and depth to the data. In other cases, where I spoke to the participants alone, there was clear support from family members who minded older children, took away younger crying children, made tea, arranged a quiet space for us and generally facilitated the conversation. Thus I can say that that the interviews were a very positive and gratifying experience for me at a personal level. I enjoyed each of them, though in the single case mentioned above where I could sense the despondency of the participants, I left with a low grade headache and heavy sense of despair. Here is a quote from an email sent to my supervisor on that evening:

> The feeling that has stayed with me is one of despondency, a cynical hopelessness. There was laughter, a gallows humour based on the difficulties they encountered. There was a sense that difficulties were so obvious that to talk about them was a chore, too laboursome to bother with. The handy answer was that everything was fine. There was a huge sense of disappointment in the system to the non-fulfilment of the promise of education. I'm not sure if that will come across in the interview transcript, but it has remained with me all day.

While enjoying the interviews for the most part, I had to constantly stay tuned to bring the issues back on track where participants wandered off subject. This was a small pay-off for establishing an atmosphere which was comfortable and people were free to say what they wanted. There was little straying off track, as all conversation and their insights into various aspects of their own lives and experiences served to build an understanding of the participants and their sense of identity. I noticed on returning the transcripts that the mothers who were most ambitious for their children in the system were the most interested in what I found out from the research.

Transcribing

Transcribing speech into text is a laborious task, especially without professional transcribing equipment or training. Cohen et al identify this as "a crucial step in interviewing, for there is the potential for massive data loss, distortion and the reduction of complexity." (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 426) I transcribed verbatim, recording pauses and tones where I felt there may be ambiguity in the words. Part of this difficulty is consigning a dynamic social event into words on a page, with visible non-verbal communication absent. Therefore, this data

becomes, to some degree, interpreted by the transcriber, and the researcher must consider whether this transcribed data adequately captures the narrative of the participants, and is sufficiently meets the 'fitness for purpose' criterion. (McLellan, MacQueen, & Neidig, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994)

Transcribing ran parallel to interviewing. Therefore I remained close to the data for a significant time after each particular interview. Parallel transcribing influenced the interviews in several ways. Firstly, I spent less time saying "aha, yes", and more time reinforcing through nodding. This was initially to take some of the chore out of the actual transcribing process, a job Kvale and Brinkmann describe as "tiresome and stressing". (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 180) I found, however, that it made for a better interviewing style, since in wanting to reinforce or encourage what the participant said, I actually began to speak more in sentences, or phrases, repeating their words for clarification in a considered way, where I felt it would be valuable or necessary. Therefore the process of transcribing made me more efficient in speech, kept me from saying things that were unnecessary and clarifying where I thought there might be ambiguity when it came to transcribing, ambiguity in terms of voice and in terms of meaning. This left more space in the conversation for the participant to naturally develop their ideas and accounts. The transcribing process slowed down my own speech considerably. When nervous, as I was at the outset of the interview stage, I speak quickly and fill in gaps in the conversation. Slowing me down was a profitable exercise, and reviewing the interviews so closely and slowly with an eye to my own style, facilitated an exponential improvement in my interview technique. Transcribing straight away meant that where there were nuances as to the meaning of particular statements that I could remember their context, the body language and facial expressions that could illuminate the statement. In turn, my experience of transcribing meant that I knew where difficulties in transcribing might arise and where necessary could jot down a quick note in anticipation during the interview. While hugely time consuming, the process of transcribing had huge value in terms when it came to interpreting and getting close to the data.

> Researchers who transcribe their own interviews will learn much about their own interviewing style; to some extent they will have the social and emotional aspects of the interview situation present or reawakened during transcription, and will have already started the analysis of the meaning of what was said.
>
> (ibid.)

As an average self-trained typist, I had to listen to each piece of text several times in order to ensure I had captured it verbatim. In the rare cases where the voice was unclear, I marked this on the transcript. Thus, in my rigour, I had listened to the recorded conversation several times before the transcribing was completed. In this I had followed closely where the conversation was leading, what the participant was saying, their tone; by implication, what they did not say, for example, in identifying priorities, what wasn't identified as priority. Cohen et al recognise that the researcher "will need to consider the costs and benefits of transcription". (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 537) Transcribing the interviews myself came at a great time cost to me. However, in terms of affording me time to listen very closely to the narrative and hear the stories, the pauses, the sighs, and within them, the discourses, muted as well as dominant, it was the correct option for me overall. As well as being faithful to the data, transcribing every word meticulously, I found that in thus listening to the conversations several times, I was starting to watch for recurrent themes and codes. (Miles & Huberman, 1994) Thus the analysis had already begun.

Coding and Analysis

While I planned the interviews using of Blumer's 'sensitizing concepts' to prompt questions and conversations, I was mindful during the coding process that I did not want these 'sensitizing concepts', nor my own suppositions and presumptions to lead the data. Instead, having listened to the voices of the participants, I was anxious that their words would drive the research onwards, that my analysis would be faithful to their accounts of their reality.

As Charmaz writes: "A fine line exists between interpreting data and imposing a pre-existing frame on it." (Charmaz, 2006, p. 68)

She identifies six problems that result in poor coding:

- "Coding at too general a level

- Identifying topics instead of actions and processes

- Overlooking how people construct actions and processes

- Attending to disciplinary or personal concerns rather than participants' concerns

- Coding out of context

- Using codes to summarize but not to analyze" (ibid., p. 69)

I used a mixed approach and I coded in several phases. Initially, I did an in-depth, line by line open coding manually on the margin of each transcript. I noted flashpoints e.g. homework was an issue that parents referred to often, as they did uniforms. I was conscious not to be blinded by these incidents at face level, but also took a discourse analysis approach, noting what participants' feelings were in situations they chose to tell me about, what processes they engaged in and the contextual significance of the story.

I took a "meaning condensation" approach to draw together the major themes that were arising from the data. Kvale and Brinkmann describe the meaning condensation approach as follows:

> First, the complete interview is read through to get a sense of the whole. Then, the natural "meaning units" of the text, as they are expressed by the subjects, are determined by the researcher. Third, the theme that dominates a natural meaning unit is restated by the researcher as simply as possible, thematizing the statements from the subject's viewpoint as understood by the researcher…The fourth step consists of interrogating the meaning units in terms of the specific purpose of the study. In the fifth step, the essential, nonredundant themes of the entire interview are tied together into a descriptive statement.
>
> (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 207)

I used MAXQDA qualitative computer software to reinforce this, coding the data again under the axial headings that were emerging from the data. For example, these included 'Arbitrary Rules', 'Identity', 'Communication' and 'Expectations versus Reality'. Having compared my manual coding and my coding using the

software, and satisfied that I was coding consistently within and across the data, I began manually to put the picture together of the story that was emerging, how these themes were related, inter-related and how these relationships would form the basis of my thesis. Thus, as coding began to emerge during the transcribing process, so too did the coding and analysis processes merge and emerge from one another.

Central to this method is the consideration of what the purpose of the research actually is. Am I interested in what the experience of educating their children is like for Traveller mothers, or am I ultimately asking what changes need to be made to the education system in order that there are improved outcomes for Traveller children at school? I began with the first question, but as I was gathering data, I felt that I was well placed to offer recommendations on the latter. Thus the questions put to the text ask not only what how the Traveller mothers experience the education system themselves, but also how society has constructed this experience for the mothers involved. The analysis can then move into the realm of theory. A theoretical reading is applied to the data and the data can be thus placed in the context of the theory to which it adds.

> The analysis of the transcribed interviews is a continuation of the conversation that started in the interview situation, unfolding its horizon of possible meanings.
>
> (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 193)

Here can be found the reliability and validity trap. There is a danger that in performing the analysis and interpreting the data, the researcher "expropriates the meanings from the subjects' lived world and reifies them into his or her theoretical schemes as expressions of some more basic reality". (ibid., p. 218) The danger is that the meanings attributed to the participant, are actually the unfounded meanings the researcher wants to read into the data. The constant reflexivity of the researcher is essential to ensuring the theory is free from bias; reflexivity about one's own position and biases as well as reflexivity about the data and the theories emerging. Again, the commitment to fitness for purpose and this constant reflexivity mutually support the trustworthy researcher.

Writing Up

Writing and presenting the findings is another layer of construction in the interview and research process, one that also demands reflexivity and conformity to the principles of trust and fitness for purpose. Again, the research brings his or her epistemology and subjectivities to bear on the data through the style of writing and presentation. The writing process demands another skill: that of presenting the analytic interpretation in a way that is engaging and clear for the reader, while maintaining the conventions demanded by the method of publication. This is another craft demanded of the researcher. My findings and discussion chapter follows.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

Christina: *"I thought this education'd be very good to them, 'cause we didn't get, myself and my husband didn't get much education, so we said we'd give it all to them, we'd send them out to school".*

Having analysed the data, the aim of this chapter is to present and discuss the research findings, making the knowledge explicit for the reader. This in turn gives a sound basis for identifying the theories and concepts that underpin the findings and how the findings and discussion complement or contradict the canon of literature on the subject.

The chapter takes a layered approach. The first layer is concerned with how mothers anticipate the experience of engaging with the school in the education of their children. The section describes the parents' experience of their own schooling, and how this forms the basis for the relationship they expect their children will have with school. The understandings parents bring to their child's experience of school will influence the relationship that develops between the parent and the school.

The second layer deals with how parents are actively concerned with constructing their child's experience of school. This section describes the mothers' experience. The importance of relationships with key individuals within the system is considered, as are broader relationships with settled people and with other Travellers within the school setting. Also emergent from the data and included here were the importance of meanings parents took from communication with the school, especially through the curriculum, the importance of belongings as signifying belonging, and homework as a crucial communication between parent and school. The withdrawal reaction of parents in response to difficulties is also considered here.

The third layer in this chapter examines the experience of Traveller mothers and their response to this experience of their children's schooling. The pre-eminence of the care role and the efforts of the mothers in providing protection for their children are clearly evident and explored here. In examining experience, the

evolution of Traveller identity in the face of increasing engagement with the current education system is considered.

As identified in the Methodology chapter, I began my data collection phase mindful of the sensitizing concepts of identity, the gift of education, care, equality and power. While these concepts were constantly implied in the interviews, the participants took me on a journey I had not quite expected, identifying the key issues for them in the experience of educating their children, and the key lenses through which I could view these overarching concepts.

Experience Anticipated:

Parents' Own Experience of School

I asked parents about their own experience of education. There was a wide spectrum of responses, which broadly identified four key features: dependence on the acceptance of teachers, social segregation, academic disregard and public humiliation. Firstly, experience was determined by how children were received and accepted by teachers in school: Bridget said her experience was *"(v)ery nice. They were very good."* This was echoed by Kathleen who said *"I had a great experience at school, because, like, I never had a run-in with any of the teachers"*. Teresa's experience was *"(v)ery bad".* She did not attend school from second class until she was making her confirmation in sixth class. Like the other mothers here, she defines her experience in terms of her relationships with teachers.

"The teachers, the teachers in Abbeytown were the worst…genuinely they were the worst, I didn't like them at all, loved the school in Ballytown I was in…lovely teachers".

Margaret felt little care at school. She describes it as *"(v)ery boring, felt very left out, in the sense of being a Traveller, like, in the sense with the teachers, like…[they] just didn't care, they weren't really bothered about Travellers at that stage…It was great in one way, but in another way it made me more determined…there were some teachers that you'd know they'd have interest in you, like they'd give you the time, like…I gave cheek, like, but like that, it was my way of being recognised, do you know, by the teacher, because like, it was just like*

you weren't even there, you were just sitting at the end of the class and that was it". She says she was not included for turn taking. This effort at being recognised was Margaret's way of countering misrecognition, described by Honneth as "the withdrawal of social recognition in the phenomena of humiliation and *disrespect*." (Fraser & Honneth, 2003)

The experience of this dependence on teachers does not stand alone, but is closely bound up with two other common features of mothers' experience: Social segregation and academic disregard. Central to this academic disregard is how various levels of neglect by the system co-opts learners into a position of non-learning, and feeds into a downward spiral of non-achievement.

Nora sums up her experience by saying *"basically they didn't give a shit about Travellers, one teacher especially…she used to call us the "horses from [the estate]"… that we were no good for nothing, we'd never become nothing and she'd leave us there for as long as we want without opening a book"*

She further describes her days at school using the language of coercion and force: *" …they decided to open a class for ten of us, now 'twas mixed, it wasn't all Travellers, there was a couple of settled girls, but they were all from [names the local council estates], but we knew the girls, we used to hang around with the girls as well, they put the ten of us into one class, from nine in the morning until half twelve, we were in there like, and that's where we were left, and then we were allowed come out, we were left out then at quarter past twelve, but sure we were going home that time at quarter to two, and our own teacher then only had us for an hour and a half…We were supposed to be learning, but sure, we could do what we want, we were basically left to do what we want if we wanted to do it".*

Mary always lived in a house and went to a country school where they were the only Traveller family and there was no separate provision. She too felt a lack of academic interest.

"I would say before, now, that we were treated different, because we, if we didn't have the books we'd get a colouring pencil. We should have been great artists, we were put colouring and colouring".

Closely related to these three features of dependence on individual personnel, social segregation and academic disregard is the fourth key feature: public humiliation, which included being ignored, comments on clothes, cleanliness, and the very public withdrawal to attend special Traveller only classes.

Teresa: *"…[in Abbeytown] they used to give out medals then at the end of the year for the best student and worst, I was never worst, I was second worst, but it would make you feel so low as a child…(t)hey didn't care if we learned or not…she'd just make sure, no matter how many times you put up your hand, that [teacher] would just pass you, she'd just, no matter how much you tried, you'd give up trying, 'cause you'd know, or with your homework, you know, she'd just throw it like…"*

Nora left school before completing her Inter Cert exam to take up a factory job. She said, *"the only time I got any education was when I went to the secondary…I learned a bit in primary…they'd be saying things like "look at your clothes, you're not clean…I had the best of everything when I was reared up, and still they'd make you feel as low as possible (Martina: the teachers?) and the chil, the others, do you know, both of them like."*

The level of public humiliation was often experienced in the context of learning support, which, at the time, was related closely to Traveller identity.

Elizabeth says: *"I had a fine childhood going to school. I can see nothing wrong with it"*, but speaking then about the school's special class for Travellers, she says:

"I was very educated, I didn't see why, but sure now I only know that, why I needed to go there…It wasn't her really that done it, but she really used to do nothing in there with us,…once you were a Traveller you were in there…Was it nice, no at the time it wasn't, you'd be taken out of your own class, you'd have to be took out of your own class in front of all the pupils…They wouldn't play with you, no…they wouldn't play with you as a Traveller, you had to have your own friends".

Again, her experience, like Nora's is described using the language of coercion: *"you'd be put in there…put down to [the special education class]."*

Ellen had varied experiences, having travelled in early childhood, before moving permanently into a house. She ascribes her difficult experience to the fact that she travelled.

"Well it was, Martina, like, d'you know the way it is today, your child'd come home and say "my friend Peter", or "my friend Jack", and "sharing is caring". There was none of that for us, there was do you know, kind of, you were looked at, Martina, like you were someone that came in from a different country, black, or do you know what I'm saying, not being rude or anything, Martina, and you were kind of three or four Travelling children it'd be at a time would be put over at a table and they mightn't have the right books, Martina, do you know, stuff the other children would have and then when you'd go out maybe to play, Martina, there might be two out of the whole school might play, play around in the school yard with you, or talk to you, whatever. That's the way it was…she carried me away alone…and when I went to the class they all looked back at me, because it was only done to me because I was a Traveller…And we kind of got used to being in the one place then, Martina, for years, like everyone became our friends because we were kind of always around, but going back again to the caravans, we might be only in school two weeks, we didn't know them, they didn't know us, so there was really no bonds there or anything."

In both circumstances her learning was haphazard and today she struggles with literacy:

"…it was only, you go with the flow and you catch what you, what you could catch and that was it."

Christina also travelled as a child. Travelling in a group made transitions easier, providing a buffer against the public humiliation experienced at school:

"…we'd always have our friends, we'd always park in a row, and we'd always have our friends with us, never kinda…we'd never kinda have to go in on our own, we were always kinda there together, do you know, in together, out together."

While there was segregation, with Traveller children spending part of the day in separate classes, *"we wouldn't be [in school] long, we'd have to get up again and*

move on…(w)e thought it was a good thing that they accepted us into their school". Clearly, she felt no sense of belonging there, rather an implicit social segregation.

Ann told me that she *"loved school"*, but as she began to speak more about her experience I gleaned that she also felt that she did not belong. Her experience of difference was felt at a subtle level:

"…I used to go every day, and did you ever see, you'd always feel out, you'd always feel out when you're a, a Traveller, did you ever see, with the country people 'twas Travellers, you think they'll always find you different, it's like a black person out there, 'tis like a lot of country people out there, they see Travellers "oh look at the Travellers, the tinkers over there"…you feel it, you feel it among ourselves".

Parents' Aspirations and Realities

Epstein and Dauber (1991) found that teachers from a cultural background different to parents are more likely to believe that parents and students are not involved or interested in schooling. Lareau in 'Home Advantage' (2000) asserted that working class/poor parents were as interested in their child's success in education as were middle class parents. She is supported in this contention by Eccles and Harold (1993) and by Chavkin and Williams (1993) whose US research found that "all parents regardless of ethnic or minority status are concerned about their children's education". (Chavkin & Williams Jr., 1993, p. 80) In 'Unequal Childhoods' Lareau states this position explicitly:

> Across all social classes, parents pay close attention to their children's education. Working-class and poor parents are no less eager than middle-class parents to see their children succeed in school.
>
> (Lareau, 2011, p. 198)

Diane Reay found, in her 1998 ethnographical study of parental involvement in two London schools, that "(i)t was evident that there was little difference across the sample in either the importance attached to education or to the mental energy women devoted to their children's education." (Reay, 1998, p. 70)

Despite the range of experiences, parents sent their children to school ambitious for 'success' which means different things to different families. I was surprised

where, despite negative experiences of the mothers in this study, they remained hopeful for their children in the system.

Teresa said: *"I'd love to see one of mine finishing school, straight out, something carrying on then…just for one to go the whole way, I'd love it…I could see then they got the opportunity, see what they can do out of it."* Her children to date are all early school leavers. Though her children were assessed and found to need learning support, Teresa says she knew in her "heart and soul that the children could have done anything they wanted." This is reinforced by Kathleen who recounted telling her daughter *""I hope to see that day that you graduate"…I says "there's a grant there for being a doctor and being a nurse or whatever…I'd never force them into something that they don't like, but I'd like them to stay in school, I will hope if I am alive to keep them in school for as long as they can…there's never too much education…cause you need as much education as you can, and especially in all walks of life, there's new things every day, technology and everything".* Speaking about her children, she said *"I says it every day, education is the only thing that's going to get them out of anywhere".*

This is also supported by research among Gypsy Traveller families in the UK, where despite negative experiences of education on the part of parents, they remained largely positive about their aspirations for their children's education. (Bhopal, 2004; Derrington & Kendall, 2004) Reynolds et al (2003) stated explicitly that in their West Belfast study "(i)n the majority of cases parents and young people expressed a positive outlook on the benefits of participation in the education system. This was evident despite an often expressed disappointment in what had in the past been provided by way of Traveller education at primary level." (Reynolds, McCartan, & Knipe, 2003, p. 410) The findings in this research support Myers et al (2010) who found that more than half the Traveller parents they interviewed in their UK study felt that a more comprehensive education than the acquisition of basic literacy was important.

I found the criteria for success varied and the goals and aspirations of parents in relation to education operated on a wide spectrum. Though only one of her children attended school beyond the legal age and one other attended second

level, the others finishing after sixth class, Bridget describes her children as "*all well-educated*". When I asked Bridget how much education a Traveller girl should have, she replied: *"She should have a lot for her to get into a good job nowadays, but then again, I suppose, if they are able to read and write it's the main thing."* At the other end of the spectrum, Mary feels that *"in today's world you can't live without education…I'm hoping [my daughter] goes through school and go through, am, not alone finish secondary school, go through third level education".* Though parents were largely optimistic about their children achieving educational success, as per their own definition of that success, the subsequent goals of education are varied.

For Ellen, who cannot read, it is enough for her that her children are literate. Her children left school before sitting the Junior Cert. She describes her youngest daughter as *"very bright, very educated...Travellers today is very proud of the girls, if a party came up for them they'd have a big party because she can read, she means so much to them,…it's a big thing cause I never got where [she] was…I see Johnny [Ellen's husband] here now, very very proud of the children".* For her, it is enough that her children have the opportunity of attending courses, irrespective of the outcomes:

"(D)o you know the way a settled child'd say, do you know, FÁS mightn't be good enough for them, which a Travelling child, Martina, it's what's, ah, baking today, they want to grasp everything, Martina, because in our times, through our experience, they knew there was nothing there for us, so everything now they'll get hold of, they go for it…we need never be looking out for a big job or this or that".

Ann, whose children have just recently started school, would like her children to go beyond basic literacy and get jobs. She said *"I'd like my children now to go, when they leave the school up here, to go to secondary, whatever, and get a job out of it…I'll keep them off at school until they're going to have an education…I'd like her to become a tea…, she said to me herself now "Mom, I'd like a teacher".* Again, her being new to the system, means that her opinions are less a reflection of her children's experience at school, and more a reflection of the understanding

she brings to the system. Her own experience tempers her optimism, or prepares her for her hopes not being realised:

"Every traveller have to go to school…that's the law…some teachers have no choice but to accept the Travellers in their classes...you get a feeling over being a Traveller…[Travellers] find then I think…they're well able to write their names, they leave school at sixth class then, they make out they're well able to write their name, by the way, why go any further, what am I going to get out of it, I'm not going to get a job out of it, they'd be thinking in their head… I dunno would you become a teacher when you're a Traveller".

Mary wants her daughter to go to third level and *"for Travellers to get into more positions at the top level…the only reason that Travellers isn't up there is because they're not educated."* Mary is optimistic because she knows someone who has been to college and is now working: *"(E)verybody was saying "what is she going to college for 'cause she's not going to get nothing out of it"…people looked down on her because [people thought] she thought she was something she wasn't because there was no-one educated and to go out of the circle, and go to college and do, you're classed, like, as a snob, and "ah, they think they're country people"…[now] people is actually after saying "Hello!" since they seen [these women] going into jobs…now people realise it".*

For Kathleen, education is the key to social mobility: *"I says it every day, education is the only thing that's going to get them out of anywhere."*

For Nora, like Ellen, education has value on a personal level, irrespective of the employment outcomes: *"You see there's some of them, kind of, like he'd say to you, "what good is an education, they might never make nothing out of theirself, they might never get a job". Most of them don't, but still, it's when, if they ever get married and have kids, like when their kids come home from school they're able to sit down and help them…they can do their homework with them, whatever, teach them, learn them".*

Nora had different expectations for her boys and her girls:

"Well I knew it was kinda changing some bit, and I know from what I put up with that I wouldn't allow it for my children like, I'd be sending my children to school to learn, to go on and do their Junior Cert and Leaving Cert, and like, we always said that, whatever about the boys, but the girls, yes, the girls have to go on…and they did it, every one of them…my priority was for them to go to school". Nora can recount her children's Junior Cert results off the top of her head, and differentiates between LCA and "the proper Leaving", aware that "they have to have some bit of paperwork." She says about her husband: *"he's the same as me, 'cause he wants his children to have an education",* later contradicting this: *"like he often said to me there, "what's the point in putting them through education?".* I sensed when I spoke to them both, that, as young parents their plan was for their children to be educated, though her husband grew disillusioned with it as time went on. He said: *"It's alright when you're young, being a Traveller, but when you become we'll say the age of getting a job, anything like that, then it's all going to come again you…the minute I give them my name it's 'no' straight away, they don't want to hear what I did before, where I'm from, it doesn't matter".*

Margaret too has different ambitions for her sons and daughters. Like Nora, she is not optimistic about her children getting jobs, but sees value in education for its own sake. Her eldest son is at second level, her other children still in primary. I asked her what she hoped they'd do after school:

"My boys, whatever they can, whatever they have to do to survive, I can't see them getting jobs…the girls will go, finish, definitely, they will go, but I know the boys won't cause the boys have no patience for it, the boys just want to get out of there now…sure what's the point? I know Traveller women that's after getting through college and things, sure they're still no better…they just end up getting married and having children, that's it, the only way that you'll benefit is you'll learn more yourself and you're more educated, of course, you'll benefit in that way, but you're not going to get a job …I don't know any Travelling women working, in jobs, teachers, things like that…maybe down the country there might be, but not as far as my knowledge anyway, no solicitors, no judges, no policemen…if my little girl wanted to be a nurse all the doors are shut in her face from day one".

While Margaret is pessimistic about employment prospects, she recognises that *"Travellers are getting more education, we can read and write…but when you hear how far we're after coming from [Margaret's mother] and how far she came from her mother and father, you'd say "God, times are changing",…[Margaret's daughters] are taking it to a different level, that's what everyone does, you go from what you have to better".*

Elizabeth's educational ambitions for her sons are low. She describes herself as *"very educated"*. She went to second-level for two years. She will be satisfied if her children "get an education" before leaving school. By that she means *"just to read and write, but they won't get no further places than that…read and write, basics, cause that's all they'll ever need…I knows there's nothing ever going to come out of it, like, they'll have to get up and do their own thing, like everyone else around. My husband done it, my father, my brothers, they all done it".*

It was when I met Christina that I saw the true effect of disappointment in the system. She too had been optimistic when she began sending her children to school, but her sense of despondency was palpable. She said: *"I thought this education'd be very good to them, 'cause we didn't get, myself and my husband didn't get much education so we said we'd give it all to them, we'd send them out to school…that there'd be a good job waiting for them".* Though only one went as far as the Leaving Cert year and he left before sitting the exam, she says "*they're all top scholars*". The futility of her investment in her children's education was most evident when she spoke of her son who had left school during his Leaving Cert year:

"I have a young fella there that did school, went to all of it. (her emphasis) *He was 18 years of age…and he got nothing out of it…if he were a buffer boy now, he'd have a job…That young fella every day used to be below at the school with his uniform on him, he usen't pal up and down with Traveller boys, all settled boys he used to be up and down with. He got nowhere out of it…, he'll stay in bed now every morning until next Monday, he'll be coming out with €80, he have to go up now and play with the PlayStation upstairs, he's inside in bed now above, waiting*

now again til Monday, til he goes down again to collect his €80. That's it. That's his living now…I feel very bad about it, like, it gets very bad".

In summation, Traveller mothers send their children to school with the expectation of educational success. In reality, however, these outcomes for Elizabeth and Christina feed a fear that other mothers have also shown, that despite their best effort and the amount of energy it takes to keep their children at school, their children will not attain work or any other perceived benefit from schooling. Rather it may come at a cost. This may bring the value of education into question, as well as question the value of the mother's effort. It may also lead to social ambiguities for the children concerned, as their friends are already working, taking the role of adults within the community. This is especially true for the boys who tend to engage early in traditional work within the Traveller economy:

"I've a fourteen year old now, and the majority of his friends is stopping school, and to get him out of the bed every morning is like, you've to fight with him and I hate fighting and roaring at him, but he has to go to school, so I told him he can go on now until he's fifteen…and I said, "That's it, I'm not doing it anymore", if he doesn't want to be there…I know young fellas his age is off gathering scrap and going out foreign and working and things, it's just impossible, he hates school."

These are changing and challenging times for Traveller mothers. At a basic, educational level, Kathleen notes that "you need as much education as you can, and especially in all walks of life, there's new things every day, technology and everything." For the vast majority of our daily social functions, e.g.: shopping, making and receiving payments, passing a driving test, tending to a sick child, literacy is now a presumed ability. Thus education is assuming an ever-increasing currency. This is also visible in the tiny but increasing number of Traveller women who have jobs outside the home. With the advent of the Primary Care Workers employed by the HSE, the Liaison workers in the local IT, and various CE projects locally, I can see from my own personal knowledge of them, that some Traveller women are gaining confidence and looking to each other as role models. Even if they are not yet exploring them, many I meet are considering their options outside the home. Traveller men locally have gone working to Europe. This working

abroad is becoming an increasingly viable option for some Traveller men and their teenage sons.

At a critical level for Travellers is the issue of suicide. Mothers in this study have been affected by the premature deaths of family members and friends. The 2010 Department of Health Traveller Health Study said that "Premature mortality, especially among younger men, reflects the high rates of suicide and accident-related mortality. The qualitative consultation highlights thoughtful discussion on what it means to be a man in Traveller culture and how Travellers engage with each other and with wider society. The disintegration of traditional family structures, the decline of religious certainty and belief are adverse trends, though not as much as in the wider society. A further compounding issue is the traditional problem of finding employment, which is tied in with identity and personal self-esteem in the accounts of Travellers themselves." (Department of Health and Children, 2010, p. 167) This has implications for the ambiguities surrounding staying on in education. While these are difficult times for Traveller men, the role of protectors of their children lies heavily also on the shoulders of Traveller mothers.

Experience Constructed:

Constructing Experiences

Lloyd and McCluskey (2008) and Derrington (2007) suggest the varying perspectives that exist among Gypsy Travellers on the relevance of school-based education are related to varying experiences of school. I contend that the while aspirations are not generalizable into a dependence on mothers' own experience of school. Rather, and this I see as probably the key finding within the research: parents are actively trying to influence the experience of school their children have, and the varying experiences of school that mothers themselves had are crucial to these experiences of school Traveller mothers are actively trying to construct for their children. The evidence here suggests that mothers are greatly influenced by their experience of school. Where mothers had a negative experience of school, suffered academic disregard, social segregation and public humiliation, they are super-sensitive to these where their children's education is

concerned. I found that the feelings of non-acceptance have not gone away, rather the energy is channelled into trying to ensure a different outcome for their children. As Reay found in her study of middle and working class mothers in London, I found here that "many were acting assiduously to ensure that their own educational experiences were not replicated." (Reay, 1998, p. 205)

In constructing her children's experience, Christina says she tries to remain one step ahead of the schools: *"They're up to anything, I'm saying, like they have to be in the right time, you have to collect them the right time, you have to have everything A1 before they go out the door and if that's not done they could have something to talk about, like. What I do is when my children goes to school they be's A1, I don't give them anything to talk about…the teachers, the principal, I don't give them anything to talk about."* Christina's effort is not on creating a positive experience, but is concentrated on offsetting the negative experiences she expects her children will have if she does not intervene.

Ann sent her two children to school at the same time in an effort to improve her daughter's experience, *"because my other, little girl is really soft, and I said if I put her in alone, I said she had a few friends here…she has her cousin then…if I leave her alone 'til next year, she won't go at all, 'cause she's a very soft kind of a child"*. Later in the conversation more light is thrown on this. Sending the two children together may be a form of protection, and ensuring that there is always company for each child at school. Ann says, *"When they know you're a Traveller, they keeps to theirselves, they wouldn't mix with you at all, things like that, out in the yard or in the school."*

Nora has clear expectations for her children. She too is adamant that their experience will not be as hers was:

"Well I knew it was kinda changing some bit, and I know from what I put up with that I wouldn't allow it for my children like, I'd be sending my children to school to learn, to go on and do their Junior Cert and Leaving Cert."

Margaret is also actively ensuring her children's experience of education will be different to her own. For example, she couldn't ask her own parents for help with

homework, as they couldn't read and write. Now when Margaret's children come home, *"well, they do homework club now in the school so they get most of their homework done there, but for a day they wouldn't go to the homework club, the very minute they comes back I say "Right lads, table, do your homework".*

Looking back, Elizabeth remembers being taken out of her regular class and being put into her school's special class for Travellers. She was adamant she did not want a similar experience for her sons:

"Was it nice, no, at the time it wasn't. You'd be taken out of your own class, you'd have to be took out of your own class in front of all the pupils and you'd be put in there, like…we were called out…we'd be put down to [that class]…I was young, I didn't understand the difference." She says her parents *"went down a few times complaining, but I don't think it worked."* Later in the conversation she recounts going into the school to talk to the principal about her sons' needs. *"I did go down about that special needs. I told them that I knew that my oldest boy didn't need it, because he's very edu…he's very clever, like, he's bright, but I knew the second did from my own experience…I was talking to [the principal] and he told me…it was only by assessment it would go, but every pupil was put through the assessment and that was it, it wasn't just special children targeted, like Travellers."*

Elizabeth, in constructing a different experience of secondary education for her children to that which she had herself, said she *"wouldn't want them to go through it"*. She said she would rather keep them at home altogether *"before they'd go through that, like, the embarrassment every day, the shame, being called names and being left by yourself, like, no friends, and no friends, do you know in secondary you go out for your lunch, but you couldn't go nowhere cause you had no-one to go with"*.

Ellen too wants her children's experience to be different to her own: *"when my children started I kinda never wanted to go on the road, because I knew, I'd been there, do you know, so we got the house then…so I kinda learnt from my own experience, Martina, about the road, what effect it have on the children when they grow older, like me today, now, Martina, I can write my name, my address and stuff, but to catch a book and read it, I couldn't do it, which today now Timmy*

could catch a paper, my son Timmy, Martina, and no problem to him." In fact Ellen does not even want her children to be aware of how difficult her experience was:

"Times was very hard, Martina, especially children when they grow older 'cause I have all that in now, do you know, which [her daughters], thanks be to God, they never seed, they never knowed…Anthony [her son] never seed the road, Anthony was never in, like when he grow older, he wouldn't, explaining this to Anthony about a trailer and about this, Anthony only knew about our house, do you know what I'm saying Martina,…today now, a child they have their birthday party, they have their school, they have their homework, and, do you know, things that mean something to children…and they never came home a day, Martina, saying "this boy called me tinker."

In summation, then, Traveller mothers, mindful of their own experience of education, are anxious that their children will receive a different experience of education to that which they received themselves. They are actively trying to construct an experience for their children where the children will experience inclusion, academic achievement and recognition of that achievement within an environment which recognises and confers value on them as individuals.

The Role of Key Personnel

As identified earlier in their own experience as children, the construction of experiences for the children of these mothers is also largely dependent on key personnel within the system.

Bridget's very positive experience of school was replicated in her experience of educating her children. One of her children has stayed at school beyond the legal age requirements. She said that *"(a)ny of the teachers I ever went to, the teacher-parent-teacher meeting, they were very good to me."* So too was Ellen's. She describes her daughters as having *"lovely little teachers"* in secondary school. Mary considers herself *"lucky…all the teachers I have met is lovely and the principal".* She finds it valuable that he is a *"young teacher…because I think older people you're not going to change them".*

Elizabeth puts the dependence on teachers explicitly when she says

"It is down to the teachers I knows that, because some of 'em is very nice, they don't have discrimination in 'em, and, but some of them then do…it depends who you're dealing with, like, only that he's a nice understanding man, the principal, but I think if he weren't that way, you wouldn't have the power. He's a very nice understanding man, like, he'll always talk to you, like, never go behind you…[but if he did] you wouldn't get no power. They'd listen to him before they'd listen to you… [cause he's] the principal, they're teachers, do you know."

She said of one teacher in particular: *"…she was just that kind of a teacher."*

Christina who had high expectations for her son, also felt dependent on key individuals in the system: *"I blame the school for [him being out of work].They could have done a little bit more…They could have, ah, put a good word in for him"*. He daughter left FÁS because the manager *"was bullying her"*. Her younger daughter has *"a pig of a teacher…I can't take her out of school when I want to take her out…the teacher she had last year, she was a lovely teacher"*.

Teresa describes her experience of going in to the school principal and recognises the role of individuals in the system:

"[I got a] great reception, great, like, he listened, and let me say my part and I didn't have to be ignorant or rude, I could say it in a nice way and he understood." While she says directly that her children have not been treated differently as Travellers, she contradicts this by saying that her children are *"disrespecting the teachers themselves without us even telling them, d'you know, if I said "ignore her, just do what you're supposed to do, like", she'd say "it's very hard to ignore, Mammy, when you know they're just on your case all the time and don't like you.""* Her daughter had transferred school, but after two years had returned to her original primary school.

"I knew putting her back…that I had no more worries, like I knew if I was called in that she was definitely in the wrong, or even if she wasn't in the wrong, she was in the right and we could talk normal. I knew going to the [other school], forget about it, the settled person's side was taken straight away, that was it".

When Teresa's daughter went into second-level, she began dropping out of classes. Teresa felt there was no interest in her academically.

Teresa: *You see that's what I don't like*

Martina: *That's what you don't like what?*

Teresa: *Like when she didn't want to do a thing, she could turn around and say I don't want to do that, I'll go out and do my homework.*

Martina: *And do you think they'd let settled girls away with it?*

Teresa: *No, they couldn't, their mother would be called in straight away."*

Martina: *So if she was a settled girl*

Teresa: *They'd push her.*

Teresa's daughter went on to say that *"you should like know that if you are not going to do [homework], she is going to punish you, you have to, it's a 'have to do it'"*. Eventually this girl dropped out of school. Teresa says, "*I seen the teachers have no interest, do you know, she might be better off not here at all."*

Margaret also feels this lack of academic interest: *"With the Traveller young fellas they just let them slip through, like they were saying what's going to happen they'll end up on the dole, they'll end up getting scrap, that's their way of life, that's their culture, what's the point, why should I get up and roar about this and that and the other, just let them sit and do what they want…[they're] not worth the effort.*" She describes her daughter's primary school principal as *"a very nice man, and [you] couldn't get a nicer man than him"*. She describes the daughter's class teacher as having a *"snappiness out of her"*. She quotes her daughter as saying *"she shames me, all the other little girls looks at me"*. Margaret has spoken to the principal but she says *"he couldn't really go again [the teacher]"*, as they are related.

Kathleen has several children in the system. She named only one occasion when her son was treated differently *"over he being a Traveller"*, that the particular teacher *"had no interest in him"*. She says her son was *"afraid of this teacher, I*

knew there was something wrong, so I went in and I approached [him], so [he] said that John'd never come anywhere in life…straight up to my face".

She goes on to mention several teachers and ancillary staff by name. She says of one child's current teacher: *"…she have… kids herself going to the school, and come in [Kathleen], there's no such thing as Mrs [O'Brien] or the whole lot, and that's what I like, more homely like".*

Her son went to FÁS, but the manager *"kept criticising him"*, so she allowed her son to leave. Of another son's school, she says *"I couldn't thank [the school] enough for all they have done for [my son]…I don't know how I'll ever thank them…the interest alone they've taken".*

Nora names individual teachers she considers *"genuine"*, and another who *"treated [all children] as equal"* and without whom she felt her son would not have been able to do Junior Cert. One child transferred from mainstream school to Youthreach because that child *"fell out"* with the school principal. While her husband, Tom, says that *"most of them is alright",* he says *"the worst of these people'd be alright when you were going to school, but when school is finished then, they'd turn again you, whatever way, you'd swear you were dirt in their eyes."*

Nora feels that all schools have a lesser regards for Traveller students:

"I think, to me personally, even my time, and their time, they'd prefer if they didn't have Travellers in their school, seriously, that's what I think, and I think the only reason why they're taking the Travelling children is because they're getting these special grants for Travellers, though they don't spend it on the Traveller children."

Margaret's son is 14. *"…he hates school, so to be honest, if he's going into that every morning, I wouldn't blame him…they're talking down to him".*

The importance of the relationship with key frontline personnel within the system comes into sharp focus for parents when it comes to school procedures, policies and rules, the development and enforcement of which can sometimes seem at best arbitrary, at worst explicitly targeted against Travellers.

In Ann's case, even before starting school, her Junior Infant son's hair had become an issue. She says *"I just went in to sign him on and she said to me "no streaks allowed in children's hair"…I'm only in school…with a month now…it's just with the hairstyles…I dunno do she do the same and I see one who's allowed them, his hair all, am, d'you know he was a country kind of boy, we call them country people…I called her one day there in the yard, and I said you told me to cut out Mikey's streaks out of his hair…and am, she said "oh no, everyone have the same rules"… d'you know, 'cause I was spottin' the difference and I seen another little boy going in the gate here above and he had his hair kinda in the streaks, d'you know…I mean to say they'd always kinda be on your case when you're a Traveller, I think".* Ann was putting hair gel in her son's hair and the teacher *"had another problem again, am, she said "no gel, no gel in his hair", so I came down and told my husband and my husband then went up to her. He said "have you a problem with my son, like you said we cut his hair to get out the streaks", and "oh no", she said, she got all nicey nicey to my husband then, she said then to him "ah, no, a bit of gel is no harm", did you ever see, she was all nicey to him, so he came down and he told me, he told me if I went up with the children she'd say no more then. I think it's over you being Travellers."* She has shared her experiences with her sisters: *"I have sisters now in [another town nearby]…and they, am, they gives their little boys' hair the streaks and they get the steps and things like that, and some of the schools have an awful lot of discrim, did you ever see them, they find out you're a Traveller."*

Elizabeth feels that different treatment permeates school life for Travellers. She felt that her son missed out because he was a Traveller, because it meant *"he didn't get as much attention as the rest of them, cause I knew by the teachers he was in".* She says that when her sister's child was called names the perpetrators *"were suspended, only that she fighted for it".* She doesn't think settled mothers *"puts up with the discrimination, where we have to put up with it, like".* She says the system does not belong to everyone, that *"there is a separate list for everything, when I going to school they had a different roll book for Travellers".*

Christina's daughter has left school early. She applied to the local YOUTHREACH provision, but was told it was full. She asked if I could do anything to get her in. She seemed to have little faith that there were no available places.

Nora had a similar experience when trying to enrol her daughter in secondary school. She missed the enrolment as she was out of town. She says *"I know for a fact that if the Visiting Teacher was around the time I missed the appointment for Stacy, Stacy'd be in [that school] today… If it wasn't for her, I'd say we'd still be back in the 70s, 80s".*

Moles (1993) writes that "(d)isadvantaged parents and teachers may be entangled by various psychological obstacles to mutual involvement such as misperceptions and misunderstandings, negative expectations, stereotypes, intimidations and distrust." (Moles, 1993, p. 33) Central to the feelings of distrust in this research is the supposition on the part of several mothers that some school rules and policies are at best arbitrary and capricious, at worst discriminatory. Parents don't feel that they are protected by equitable enactment of policies and procedures within the school situation. Rather, they speak as though they are dependent on the influence and actions of individual personnel to protect their children within the system. Where relationships are good, parents largely ascribe this to the personal traits of the individual school personnel. This supports Bhopal's 2004 study into the changing perceptions and education needs of UK Gypsy/Traveller parents, where it was found that "(t)he confidence of Gypsy/Traveller parents is raised if they know and trust particular members of staff". (Bhopal, 2004, p. 58)

> Many Traveller parents feel that they cannot take for granted things that settled parents generally do not even have to consider, for example that their child will be welcomed in some schools, will be treated fairly, and will have their needs dealt with in a respectful way.
> (Department of Education and Science, 2006, p. 22)

This dependence on key individuals undermines mothers' own sense of efficacy and agency. Where mothers feel their children are not treated fairly, they ascribe the perceived ill-treatment to their Traveller identity.

Relationships at School-Traveller/Traveller, Traveller/Settled

The relationship between Travellers at school is somewhat ambiguous. Those Traveller mothers most hopeful that their children would go on to third level, wanted their children to be separated from other Traveller children in the classroom. Kathleen asked that all her daughters in primary school be removed from classes with other Travellers because *"there was two Travelling girls with [her daughter] inside in the class, and I actually, because she was coming nowhere, she was coming very very low average and I actually asked [the principal] to separate her into a different class, because I think that where there's a lot of Travellers in one class they don't get on…first of all they mightn't get on with each other, and number two they mightn't get, they mightn't be listening, they might be having their own conversation, they could be putting notes together…they would be a distraction and that's why I have all the girls separated in class"*. She also went with her friend to the school because her friend's child *"can't focus because you have all of the Travellers in some of the classes"*. The arrangement with all Travellers in one class, she felt, was *"just the way it happened"*. (She describes herself as *"more of a settled person"* in relation to First Communions, having borrowed a dress for her daughter and not hiring a limousine. She is involved in the local residents' group, the Church and speaks often of her settled friends.) So too did Mary ask that her children be separated from other Travellers in class:

"…it was my own nieces and nephews…I knew that if she was in the class with them there'd be messing going on, d'you know, that there'd be more about, whatever, messing, and less about work. So it wasn't really about Travellers or anything, it was just that she, I didn't want her messing."

Ellen is pleased that her children mix with non-Travellers. She says that *"the next little fella might come in next door and he'd say, "Is Patrick coming out?" I'd say "two minutes boys", which in our time, Martina, people would hardly look at you because you were Travellers"*.

Ellen also says "…you'd see Lisa with all the little settled girls and they'd all be laughing and do you know going back years ago, Martina, you'd see nothing like that, Travelling little girls was all on their own, they had no friends".

Christina is disappointed that her son has no work despite attending school until he was in his Leaving Cert year. Nodding to Bourdieu's theory of social capital, and in support of her son's entitlement to a job, and her disappointment he didn't get one, Christina says *"he usen't pal up and down with Traveller boys, all settled boys he used be up and down with."*

Elizabeth's experience has been very different. She says about the other children, *"they wouldn't play with you as a Traveller, you had to have your own friends...That's the way it was and it still is today in the schools...they don't play, they don't mix no more, still don't mix like, they prefer, like, they think Travellers is worse than any foreign nationals or anything...they won't mix at all down there, any of the kids, I know my child...she has no friends, girls, in there, in the class she's in, and she don't have, she don't like the class cause no-one'll play with her, and she's only four...so she plays with her friends in different classes"*. Elizabeth describes her caution as she sent her children to school:

"I wasn't excited because I know what kind it is, school is very prejudiced, other children down there are very prejudiced,...[my sister's child] was bullied an awful lot down there, called names, and bad names like, by other girls in their yard, and she's frightened, she don't want to sleep...children don't pick that up, they're taught by their parents to be discriminating, it's like me telling my children, "oh the polish are this, the blacks are this", they're taught that, because they can't pick that up...it's not Traveller kids, I think that the settled ones wouldn't be left mix any more. There are certain ones that are very nice, 'cause they're settled community married into Travellers...it's going on in the yards there, anyway, out at playtime".

Socially, Elizabeth found secondary school much more difficult than primary. When I asked if this was down to her relationship with teachers or other kids, she replied: *"Kids an awful lot, 'cause they're older, and they were bullying more, do you know, name-calling more, do you know, you'd be left out an awful lot there, you'd be always alone there"*. Again, the experience, she feels, would have been different if she had the company of other Travellers for her two years at second-level:

"there was no-one going to secondary school…I had no-one there…there was no-one with me, like, no other Travelling girl…'cause I had to go through it, I wouldn't want [my children] to go through it". She says that she would keep her children at home *"before they'd go through that, like, the embarrassment every day, the shame…being called names and being left by yourself, like, no friends…in secondary you go out for your lunch, but you couldn't go nowhere cause you had no-one to go with…you'd be alone unless you had a friend, but you'd never have one, unless you had a Traveller."*

Having other Travellers with her in primary school tempered Elizabeth's own experience of school. She spoke of being *"put into different classes": "When you've all your friends doing it, you're doing it, so you think it's right."*

Ann sent one child to school when some relatives were going because she was *"really soft…thinking if I leave her alone' til next year, she won't go at all"*, even though she was young to start.

Teresa's daughter left school when her friends did:

"There was no Traveller, I was in a class by myself, even settled people, and they, even the girls in that school they made you feel out, if you weren't one in that school, if you weren't a settled person in that school you were kinda, not the teachers so much, but the students, you were kinda just you were different, there was a few then out of every group, there was a couple of girls that was alright, that you'd talk away to and there was more that would just turn up their nose". She talks about another girl who is still at school, saying she's *"doing it by herself the whole way…she's half settled, half Traveller…she can get on like a country person at school where I couldn't…she fitted in…I suppose when they're with country people they acts like country people and when they're with Travellers they act like Travellers"*. Teresa feels that staying on would have been *"no bother"* for her daughter, if her Traveller friends had stayed on. Nora sees a clear delineation. When her daughter who did Leaving Cert says *"I got on with every single person inside in my class"*, Nora adds, *"You did, but the majority of them'd look down on you as if you were dirt, like…you're settled, that's it, you're a buffer, that's it…in Travellers' eyes, girl"*.

Margaret's son in has poor reading skills for his age. She says that moving on from a boys' primary into a mixed secondary school has made him more self-conscious of this:

"…do you know these girls with the lipstick and the eyeshadow on them and he can't read such a thing, read such a page, you're not going to say "no I can't read it", because you're going to look like a fool, so the best option for you is to just "I'm not reading it, I don't want to read it", take your shame out that way". She says that *"a Travelling child is more stronger and more emotional than I think what a settled child is…with settled children, God bless them, you see them there like, they're so small and innocent".*

Thus, while having other Travellers in the class, and at school may provide a sense of safety and security for some, other parents are concerned that association with other Travellers may result in lower academic achievement.

Relationship with other Parents

Ellen was so conscious of the opinions of the settled mothers at parent-teacher meetings that she chose not to attend. Her perception of what would happen at the meetings seemed to resonate with her own experience of school and recall shameful memories of her illiteracy and Traveller identity:

"I couldn't go, Martina, because if I was asked something in front of the settled people I don't know it…I have no education for it…I always thought, Martina, that all the mothers would sit on chairs and they may ask them questions down…maybe I'd have to sit in front of a load of women and read out stuff I wasn't able for…the rest of the women is probably sitting down and when you're asked something or given a form and you'd have no reply to it, Martina, and the women are going to look back and say, they'd know straight away, this woman can't read or write…and then Martina, I'd say, then where I'm livin', all the women, you know, meeting them every day, they'd know the sort I am, 'cause at the parent-teacher meeting: "she don't know how to read and write".

Ann is conscious that settled parents *"think Traveller children have nothing…They think they're above the Travellers…'tis like settled people, 'tis like black people, when they say "oh look at the black man,", like Travellers now, "oh look at the*

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tinkers"…a country little boy, he was over there saying 'cause he do be listening to his own parents, did you ever see, about old Travellers, the tinkers…I don't care, let them on, we just don't care, we just ignores them, we keeps to ourselves down here, we keeps to ourselves, we does our own thing, we brings our children to school now and things like that."

I asked Elizabeth if she talks to the other mothers when she goes to the school:

"No, they don't like us, like. Oh most people is very nice, like, you meet very nice women I knows, a lot of them is very nice, but then some of them is, they're prejudiced, they just don't like us…they don't want their children to mix with us…"

When I asked about the parents organising the First Communion Do This in Memory meetings, she says *"Oh, no, I wouldn't mix with them at all. They don't like, most of them obviously, of course they're not all the same, but I know most of them, but most of them I know is not very nice, they wouldn't give you a civil "hello", but sure we're like that, I'm like that myself with some Travellers, if you don't like people you just don't like them sometimes".*

Margaret says of the other parents: *"…I don't really bother with them… I wouldn't mix with the other parents…there'd be no need to"*

Martina: *"Okay, so is that why you don't go to the meeting for all the parents together, because there's just no need?"*

Margaret: *"'Cause I feel out, like"*

Martina: *"'Cause you're a Traveller?"*

Margaret: *"Yeah".*

Teresa mixes with settled parents when they are waiting to pick up their children.

"I know a lot of, like I said I know a lot of settled people below in the school and I chat away for a few minutes, what I does is I moves around, 'til I get to the class do you know, I'll chat away", though she adds that *"You'll always get the ones that'll cock their nose."*

Kathleen's experience is similar. She says that when she goes *"into the school grounds, everyone knows who I am…They are friendly, very friendly back. Everyone know who I am, like, which, I think that's great as well"*.

Again, the experience of Traveller mothers echo in the relationships formed in the school-life of her child.

Belongings as Signifying Belonging

Ownership and sharing of objects can be a source of tension for the mothers I spoke to. The evidence here points to two reasons for this. The first is a feeling on the part of some mothers that settled people think Travellers are deficient in belongings. Margaret says her child's teacher has a *"snappiness out of her"* evident when Margaret's daughter needs to share with other children. Margaret says that *"if [her daughter] takes the loan of a rubber now or a pencil off the little girl next door to her, sitting next to her, like, she'd say "give that back, how did you get that?". [Margaret's daughter] would say "well, Mary gave me the loan of it". "Did you Mary?". "Yes". "Okay so", but it's along the lines of like she took it without asking."* Margaret says she is like that to everybody, but she quotes her daughter as saying *"Mammy, she shames me, all the other little girls looks at me."* Ann feels that settled people *"think Travellers have nothing"*. She says that if settled people get something new, they get suspicious of Travellers and think *"they're tinkers, they've none"*, and that settled people think Travellers then might take their new things. This happened her Junior Infants son recently when another child accused him of being "*at*" his new bike. About her son, she says *"whatever he wanted he always gets…and like he have a bike, he have a scooter under the stairs, but what I'm on about is, when they   know you're a Traveller they try to play up".* Margaret puts great store in being able to see her children's work:

"…with the two boys it was always blank, like, there was no bringing you in and showing their work, the boys, I don't know was it just over boys being boys, or what was it, or never coming home "Mammy, I done this today", which the girls would come home now today and they might be after doing some kind of cards, or my youngest now would say "Mommy, I done this for you today."

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Kathleen feels that having the right books and school accessories is important for children:

"…that was the new edition, so I had to get that, and another phonics book, but like, I'll be gathering from May onwards I was, say, [the principal] put me down for the list then, and I'd be paying away, so he knows, like that I have vast interest in things like that, make sure the children don't feel out, because there are some Travelling children that the teachers are [photocopying pages for] and putting them into a book, like some Travellers don't have, you get some settled people the same now, they don't have any interest in getting books, and I think the children feels out when they don't see them with the book, and see other children with books, like [my daughter] now, wouldn't have that, she said "You have to get me a new maths book", and if I have to beg it, I had to get her the maths book but I'd have got it myself anyway cause I said "look, if I don't get it, she's not going to get much places".

In the second case, having the class materials signifies belonging and inclusion for parents. It comes from parents' own experience of school when they did not have the books and class materials that the other children had. Sometimes this was a source of academic exclusion. Some parents found it a source of social segregation or exclusion. To place this in the context of Bourdieu's Capital Theory, mothers here feel that belongings confer on the child a certain amount of capital, or rather, their absence denies the child academic and social acceptance that are fundamental to acquiring the social and academic capital needed to succeed in the school environment. Possession of the materials that other children have is an expression of interest in acquiring this capital.

Mary spoke about having to do without books or a school uniform, because if her mother *"didn't have the money for them you didn't get them…if we didn't have books we'd get a colouring pencil."* She recalls getting her own children ready for school. Of her daughter's first day she says:

"I was completely excited, it was like my new toy. I had her uniform, her bag and all her little knick knacks and her lunchbox with all the little, am, it was like the three princesses, and the little bottle with the three princesses".

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Ellen talks of the long preparation for sending her children to school, *"maybe with months back you'd have the uniforms, the bags, gathering your stuff up".* She does not like sending her children to school the first day of the year if she does not have all their belongings in place, *"while I have the shirts, the jumpers, the pantses, I need two jackets for the boys, the whole lot's stopped now until tomorrow, don't go today…and that'd be a day missed."* Not having *"the right books"* contributed to her own feelings of exclusion at school. She says she mightn't have *"stuff like the other children would have…in our time we hardly hadn't even books…it was only just school, back and whatever bag my mother'd have maybe from a charity shop, Martina, there was often two of us had to put our stuff, Martina, me and [my sister] into the one bag, yeah, today, Martina, they have their own little lunchboxes, their own little bags, their folders, their copybooks, they could tell you "this copy is my maths copy, this copy, this book is my English book, this is my Irish", in our time, Martina, we didn't know one from the other, and we were never really, Martina, in a school long enough to have a bond there, to say "this is our books".*

"…today if you went into a school, Martina, you can't tell the little Travelling child from the settled child, because there is nothing, there is nothing, Martina, that the little settled child would have that the Travelling child wouldn't have, and everything is so neat, with their lunchboxes and their little shoes, their little socks, the colour of their uniforms, the books, the manners of the small little children now Martina".

Thus, parents are providing their children with the necessary class materials in an effort to increase the sense of belonging the child feels at school, and as a statement to the school of interest in their child's education.

Curriculum as Signifying Belonging

Curriculum was another site of difference and deficiency for Traveller mothers when they were in school, often precluded from Irish language classes in favour of 'remedial' education. When mothers were asked what they would like their children to learn at school, there were broadly two responses, as identified by Mary:

"Different languages…They should have [Traveller culture]…there's no such thing if a Traveller comes in…which is a good way in one sense, you're not put into the corner or all at one table, but still and all they're not highlighting that you have a different culture to everyone else…like for instance if somebody came from India…well if that child comes into the class they'd say well listen…tell us a bit about you, where you come from, a bit about your culture". Bridget says there should be *"classes there for them…in the afternoons, there should be classes there for them, the girls, some kinda skills, cooking and baking and for the boys then, like I said woodwork and blocklaying".*

Christina would also like her children to learn different languages. "*Suppose*", she says, "*they wanted to go to a foreign country, now, do you know the way some people talks in their own language, well none of my children knows that language now*". Christina would *"give [children] all separate things to do, just teach them all the same thing".* She finds it "*wrong*" that because children are removed for special education, *"when they go back, those other children are ahead of them".*

This may be the nub of the issue for the parents here. Traditionally, foreign languages were confined to second-level schools. There they were the preserve of the more able children in the class, with children who went to the 'remedial classes', or children who weren't going to college often precluded from taking part. Again, participation in language classes was a statement of interest and aspiration in the child on the part of the school. Participation signified belonging. Not taking part in language classes was a statement of deficit. Returning to Baker et al (2009), each of these statements of ability and belonging are hugely significant in forming the identity of the individual and the community.

Teresa also agrees with having languages on the curriculum. Moreover, when I asked her if Traveller children should be learning Irish she replied, *"Yes, leave them learn as much languages as possible…our own beliefs…I'm not into wagons, I am into horses now with my young fella, but I think there should be a little bit more added to the school, like we'll say, Irish is part of settled people and Traveller, but mainly the settled people, well I think something what [Travellers] have interest in should be involved in the school as well…they're still not doing things*

they're interested in, proper interested in that they'll put their heads down to a book with".

This ties in with Elizabeth's assertion that the Irish language is not part of her "*tradition*". This disconnect between Travellers and the Irish language is a product of the widespread educational practice of removing Traveller children from mainstream class during Irish time for 'remedial', or compensatory education. In the 1963 Itinerancy Commission Report it was recommended that time teaching Irish might be confined to 30 minutes daily and to oral work only. This offer of a reduced curriculum immediately signified and served to identify difference: deficits in intellect and in terms of a right of access to the language and the culture. Working from a compensatory model suggested diminished ability and precluded rejoining the regular curriculum and thus having the same post-primary and post-secondary options later, especially in the area of state employment, and particularly in roles of authority and influence where they could be visible role models to other young Travellers, such as primary school teachers and Gardaí. The Survey of Traveller Education Provision (the STEP report) carried out by the DES inspectorate in 2005 found that only 62% of Traveller pupils had "access to a broad programme in Irish". (Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science, 2005, p. 47) This is despite the fact that the primary school Irish language curriculum "enhances the cultural identity of the child through cultural awareness activities." (Department of Education and Science, 2005) Nora describes her children's experience with learning Irish: *"Well what happened was, I think, when, it was only when they were in about second class or third class, that I found out, as far as I was concerned they came home, I was in [the estate] that time, they did their homework, and when I used to go in for the parent teacher meeting, "They're a bit behind in the Irish, but they're picking up"…and in the end I had to give consent for them to be, well, tell them don't bother learning Irish…because they were older it was harder, the Irish was getting harder, like, for them…what used to happen, they'd be gone for the hour out of Irish, they'd be gone out and they could be doing Maths or English…they just didn't do it then."*

I asked Elizabeth if her children learnt anything about being a Traveller, or Traveller customs, to which she replied, *"Nothing like that, no…there's traditions*

down there for Polish and I don't even know what's the rest of them, non-nationals, what do you call them, they have all their own tradition, they don't have to stay in for the religion, I knows that myself, they don't have to do certain things because it's against their tradition, but for Travellers, there's nothing about their tradition down there." While Teresa wanted her children to learn about things in which Traveller girls have interest, such as *"a design thing",* her daughter, aged 14, cautions about superimposing a specific-interest subject, *"no, let me tell you something, 'cause when you are then, you actually feel out, when something like that".* Her mother contends that this would work *"if it's in from day one, that it's like have to do it, the settled have to do it along with the Traveller, then they'd get used to the idea of it."* Ellen's son read a story in school about a Traveller man shoeing a horse. She says he's thinking *"where's this woman learning all the Traveller man's, do you know, his thing, she must be…a Traveller woman, but like that now, Martina, that's great to see in the schools…it's more equal, that's what the woman would be telling [him]…she wouldn't hold anything back…it's spoken out to the children, and it's no different".*

Homework

For these Traveller parents, homework is a key indicator of both their interest in the child's education and the school's interest in the child. Thus it is an important though often under recognised communication tool between mothers and schools. In their own childhood, homework was a point of separation at school between them and the other children in the class. Homework seems to have been a measure of acceptance and inclusion.

Teresa: *"(Y)ou'd always find a spot to do it in…you'd sit outside coming near to the summer holidays when the weather'd be fine…the front of the van, anywhere…no matter how much you tried, you'd give up trying…with your homework, you know, she'd just throw it, like…when [my kids] started…I got involved with their homework…'cause I didn't want them thinking like I was thinking and I growing up, if I done it or not it didn't matter".*

Ellen: *"(I)ong ago we never knew a birthday, we were far from all that, Martina, do you know, which today now, a child they have their birthday party, they have their*

school, they have their homework, and do you know, things that mean something to children…in our times Martina there was no such things as "ye've to do yere homework now", it was only school, back and whatever bag my mother'd have…we were never really in a school long enough to have a bond there, to say "this is our books, and these are our", 'twas always moving, moving, moving."

Mary: *"My mother, see, she couldn't read or write…the older ones was put out working, or staying at home minding the younger ones, so then, they couldn't read, so they couldn't help us…"*

Ann: *"I was in with settled people, but they'd put you in a special class then to help you with your homework and things like that, the Travellers"*

Elizabeth: *"[In secondary school] if you were quiet and done your homework they wouldn't bother you".*

Margaret: *"…when I was growing up my father and mother could never read, so like, when I came home for what homework I would have, be doing, like, I couldn't ask my father and mother "what's this and what's that, what's four and four, mom can you help me with this, she couldn't help me".*

Traveller mothers here see setting and marking homework is a statement of interest on the part of the teacher. Supporting homework is a statement of interest on the part of the parent. Thus, homework has become a tool for parents to gauge their child's inclusion in the academic work of the class and in the life of the class and therein also a measure of academic progress. Problems with homework are a key, and often first indicator for parents of wider problems at school. Going back to their own time, homework was a signifier of acceptance in the class and interest on the part of the teacher. Not having homework done, or the way it was done, left you vulnerable to humiliation in front of the class. Thus homework to these parents can often signify more to the parent that the teacher may realise.

Mary: *"I'd hear a lot of mams now, they'd be blaming the system, blaming the school…[these mams] mightn't even do the homework with [their kids]".*

Ellen: *"Anthony now is a five year old, and he'd come home there and you'd watch him there in the evening, Martina, sitting up there and he'd be saying, do you know with his books, and a five year old, making the sounds, do you know, "sss", do you know the way they go on. Well in my times, we were far from that…do you know the sense and the cleverness, Martina, and "sharing is caring, Mamma", do you know, all the words, in our time, Martina, we didn't get chances to do this stuff."*

Nora's son John said: *"we could do what we want while the class is doing work then, we'd get no homework, no nothing,"* which Nora describes as *"very, very tormenting, because that's one thing about me…my priority was for them to go to school…I used to make them take out their homework, whatever bit of homework they'd get to do, make sure their homework was done…if they ever get married and have kids, like when their kids come home from school, they're able to sit down and help them, they can do their homework with them".*

Elizabeth: *"James, now, he don't know nothing, when he come home with his homework…he actually really don't know how to read half, he don't know how to do maths very good, so…I knew the teachers where he was in didn't give him much attention with his homework cause he used to, she used to say to me he was very quiet in school, very good, but that was no good, because he didn't know nothing…when they're younger, when they're only learning, they depend on us for their help at home, like, with their sums and everything."*

Kathleen values homework as a way of assessing how well your child is doing in school. She recommends to parents to *"keep an eye on your child, you know well if your child is going down a wrong road by not doing lessons"*. She illustrates this with an experience she had herself:

"(t)hey just let him fall behind, until one day I seen him doing no homework, and he said, he got very upset, he said "I'm ashamed to stand up in class. They don't ask me for homework, I just sits there like a dummy." It was going on for about four months…I said "how do you mean they don't ask you?" "They just don't ask me have I homework, and I just don't be bothered to ask them"…so I said "you have to do your homework because how are you going to learn?"…[Another son] is after

starting Junior Cert and he finds it hard…I just drives him on… *"you can do it"*, so he'd be asking me about sentences and I'll say *"you start your own sentences and I'll see what I can do"*, and before he knows it he's finished it…Shanice came up to me one day and she said to me *"Mammy"*, she said, *"I can't do this homework"*, and I knew then. I took two days off [my course] and I had a meeting with [the principal], and I said *"My child needs help"*… I make sure the homework is done when they come out of school, up on top of the table, then they go to the Homework Club, or if she had a problem, I'd say *"right, go down to the Homework Club and see what they say, or I'd get a neighbour or someone, I'd always try to do it"*.

Margaret: *"(n)ow when my children come home, well they do Homework Club now in the school so they get most of their homework done there, but for a day they wouldn't go to the Homework Club, the very minute they comes back I say "Right lads, table, do your homework", well my little girl then she'd say well "Mommy, I can't do this", I'll go over…If [her son] was doing his homework now at the table when he was in sixth class, he'd often say to me "Ma, how do you spell 'hospital'? or silly things, maybe 'door'…I said to the teacher, "what's the sense in sending him on to secondary school where the work gets harder that I mightn't be able to help him with cause I've never been to secondary"."*

I remember Margaret, when she was attending the centre, talking about all the colouring they did at school in her time while other children were concentrating on the curriculum. I asked her if that was the story for her children to which she replied: *"No, oh no, my little girl comes home now and she has a load of homework to do"*. She would advise other mothers to *"keep an eye on the teachers and make sure that the kids are bringing homework home."*

Meanings Communicated

Part of the reason why parents are not successful in creating a different experience of education to that which they had themselves is a fundamental lack of understanding of how the system works, the nuts and bolts of the system.

Communication in its many forms permeates every aspect of the parent-school relationship. Critical to the relationship between parents and schools are the

methods and meanings that each party bring to and take away through the process of communication. The issue of communication is a broad one, so I focus here on the gaps in communication that can lead to problems.

Everyday procedural communication seems to be working well for mothers in this study. Mothers understand how and why the procedures work on a day to day basis. For example, Nora says that "*...if you keep them home a day you give in the note. I remember one day I didn't give in a note and…they rang me and said it to me, 'cause they'd be afraid over the child would be mooching, do you know, dossing school like, but they're good enough now like that, or if they've any problems that they need me to go in straight away they'll ring me…the discipline is the same now, Traveller or…settled person it's the kinda discipline if you do something wrong you do detention…*".

However, where there are changes or new initiatives, gaps in understanding can lead to needless difficulties between parents and schools.

For example, Elizabeth's child was enrolled in an after-school club but never attended. When the school contacted Elizabeth for the fee, she felt that the school would not have contacted settled parents for what she considered a small fee.

"I never knew you'd have to pay for it when she wasn't attending, do you get me, I never knew that, 'cause I thought that when she didn't go that it wasn't paid for, so I was here one day and she rang me. I couldn't believe it, she rang me on my mobile for €5 of a bill, like I said to her "Do you ring everyone's mobile for €5?"…She wouldn't dare ring…she called up to my friend's house another day for a tenner…that's not normal for €5 and €10 to be calling out to parents' homes or ringing you on a mobile after six o'clock in the evening".

When I asked her why she thought it happened, she replied *"I know she only done it to us"*. *"Cause ye're Travellers?",* I asked. *"Yeah",* she replied.

There is a danger that where parents feel systemic inequality, situations which might not be born out of inequality are read as discriminatory. This can be a source of conflict with the school. Further, where conflict exists and where further

actions are ambiguous, these actions may be read as threatening and add to an escalation of the situation. (Pruitt, 1965)

Christina: *There was one time now, my young fella, he was going to the school over here, I couldn't find his tie that morning, and when I brought him over, he was sent back home, a tie!*

Martina: *But would that have happened if he was a settled, a country boy?*

Christina: *I don't think so.*

Martina: *You think it was because he was a Traveller?*

Christina: *It was because he was a Traveller…they had a very bad set on him,…blamed for things he didn't do…If that was a settled person, there'd be, they'd have a job straight away, waiting for them [when they finish school]".*

Christina blames the school and her son's Traveller status, legitimising her son's position as discriminated against by the system, thus stamping the non-participation of her other children with her approval and a cultural validity. (Bhopal, 2004) Like many other parents in this research, she displays a lack of understanding about systematic procedures such as how the points system works and what is required from an individual in order to move on to secure work. This lack of understanding leads to further distrust of the system. Once this kind of issue is identified, it can be addressed positively. For example, this could be done here through the introduction of career guidance for children who are at risk of leaving school early. This is in line with the OECD Review of Career Guidance Policies in Ireland which found that in over 60% of schools, less than 20% of Career Guidance allocation was spent on Junior Cycle classes, a balance which they found "very hard to justify." (OECD, 2002, p. 7) This could be coupled with careers information for all parents as part of the transition to second level, so that both pupils and parents understand the implications of standardised test results, subject choices and levels, as well as understanding that there may be possible routes to chosen careers through both Higher and Further Education sectors. In this way, parents, pupils and the school can make informed decisions and make them together. Moreover, this kind of information session is one that could be

offered to groups of Traveller parents in their own community setting initially, as a means of fostering positive engagement between them and the school and giving parents a safe forum for asking broader questions they might not like to ask in a more public setting. An occasion like this may prove the first step in engaging them further and with the broader parent body, e.g. through the nomination of representatives to attend the Parents Council meetings.

The communication about this type of new initiative is critical for their successful introduction, acceptance and success. Margaret is sensitive to information coming from the school. She reinforces Pruitt when she remarks that *"the very minute we all heard about [the breakfast club at school] straight away my thoughts on that was are they trying to say Traveller children is hungry in the morning and they going out?*

Margaret anticipates that her children and mine would be treated differently: *"Being a settled person, like, if your daughter grew up and wanted to get a grant for college she'd get it, do you know where Travellers…there's just so many barriers"*. She does not know that grants are means-tested, but instead has come to expect that settled children are advantaged over Travellers in the system. Another barrier she met was in relation to sources of information. She had concerns that her son might have ADHD and raised it with the teacher, but *"when she heard about the ADHD she just dismissed it straight away, now if that had been another, I thought she'd have been, maybe, well do you know where to go to find out, do you know, where they test, give you something, some bit of information, nothing."* She also wondered why, when her eldest son was dyslexic, her second son wasn't tested. In these instances, the teacher was the only source of information Margaret could access, and when she did not get the information she needed from the teacher, she felt she had nowhere else to go with her queries, only wait until the children moved into another class and ask that class teacher. Again, a forum or individual she trusted could reassure her that she was getting the best possible advice and her son in turn the best education.

Mary perceives that a lack of education they bring to the system means that Traveller mothers find it harder to read how their children are doing in the system,

if there's *"something going wrong, where we overlook it or wouldn't understand it, and wouldn't have to education to read, to know to, know what the meaning of the word is"*

Ellen's literacy difficulties have been a barrier to her communicating with the school. Because she did not know the structure and procedure of the parent-teacher meeting, she did not attend: *"(D)o you know the parents teachers meeting, the fault I have there and even Patrick and he young, the creature, he'd say to me "Momma, why won't you come to it?". No I couldn't go, Martina, because if I was asked something in front of the settled people I don't know it…I have no education for it…I always thought, Martina, that all the mothers would sit on chairs, and they may ask them questions down…so I just say something to Patrick, I say "Patrick, I must see [the principal] and explain to her, trying to cover it up with Patrick…I often got the letter and the minute I'd hear, Martina, what 'tis about, I'd say, "I can't go there", the education to me, Martina, held me back a lot".*

The 'Traveller Grant' was a clear source of misinformation, mistrust and hurt. Parents I spoke to thought the money was coming to schools to be used to support individual Travellers' educational needs. Officially, the grant was "allocated to assist schools in providing appropriate teaching materials and supports for Travellers and in meeting other costs incurred by schools in responding to the educational needs of Travellers." (Department of Education and Skills, 1999) The fact that this money was not accounted for by schools to Traveller parents (and there was no suggestion from the DES that they should) meant that parents sometimes felt, or presumed it was misappropriated and used for other purposes, further devaluing the education of their children and reinforcing their feelings of inequality and mistrust in the system.

According to Nora, *"the only reason why they're taking the Travelling children is because they're getting these special grants for Travellers even though they don't spend it on the Traveller children".* Margaret felt it was *"for the teachers thinking they have extra work to be doing"* in educating Traveller children. Margaret said her brothers got showers at school, that that might be where the grant was spent

in those days: "*…And when people didn't need it, what did they do with the money, when the showers stopped, when we got our own showers?*" About her time at school, Mary says *"there probably was grants there for books, but we didn't get 'em, so if [my mother] didn't have the money for them you didn't get 'em,,,he mightn't even have put in for the grants, or maybe he got it and spent it on whatever"*. Elizabeth recounts that a leaflet came from the local Traveller support group outlining what the school gets for Traveller children's lunches, books etc. She asked the Visiting Teacher for information *"cause my children don't get no lunch…my children don't get no books."*

In summation, there is a broad communication gap existing between parents and schools. Where Traveller parents feel slighted, their Traveller identity is largely ascribed to be the cause of the perceived ill-treatment.

Withdrawal

For mothers in this study, the well-being of their children was paramount. Where this came under threat, the logical step for them was to move that child to another classroom or another school. As already mentioned above, where Mary and Kathleen felt their children were not doing well in the class with other Travellers, each requested that her children be moved to another class.

Bridget says of her experience: *"Any of the teachers I ever went to, the teacher, parent-teacher meeting, they were very good to me."* She adds quickly, that *"If they had something again my kids, and if they weren't in with settled kids I wouldn't let them go to school…I wouldn't have them in it. I would not leave them to no school if I knew that…cause they're as good as the settled child, Travelling kids, there's nothing wrong with them, just because it's the name of the Traveller…if they're not accepted, I wouldn't just keep them at school."*

The mothers I spoke to were unanimous on this point. If their children were not happy, or if they were not satisfied with the treatment of the child, they took them out of the class or the school.

Margaret said her daughters were not made to feel any different because they were Travellers, adding, *"I don't think they are because if I did I'd pull them out of there…if they were treating them different I'd pull them out of there."*

Margaret recounts for me the time her son was sent home from his post primary school because he was not wearing the correct school shirt: *"(T)hat was it, anyway, he was sent home, I took him home…and I kept him off for a week and a half…I rang [the Education Welfare Officer] I got on to her, and she got me on to someone from the VEC, one phone call she gave, I told her, I said "I'll take him out".*

Mary also threatened to remove her son, this time for academic reasons. She wanted her child to repeat a year in primary school, while the school wanted him to go on so that he was eligible for assessment:

"I went down and I said, "I am taking him out of school if ye don't keep him back a year", that I do think he need to keep back a year and I think the year'd make a big difference."

Ann's had taken her daughter out of preschool *"'cause, did you ever see, she knew no-one, she was kinda frightened."* When she went to primary school, Ann says she *"thought she'd drop after a week, did you ever see, she wouldn't want to go, 'cause she's very soft".* Ann was accepting that the child might not want to attend school, and if that had been the case, she would have kept her at home for another year.

At the other end of the system, Ellen's daughter left school in third year. She would have liked her to continue, but she recounts her daughter saying: *""No Mom, I did Third Year now in [school] and I wants to go to FÁS, and I want to", so that way then I didn't want to be pushing her maybe she weren't happy."*

Despite having no alternative plan, Christina's daughter left FÁS because she was *"being bullied by the manager".* As younger children, Christina's daughters attended a cooking class at school. Christina said *"they nearly got poisoned…they were only children and had cooked their own food, their breakfast…and they sat them down and they made them eat it, and when they came home they had an*

upset stomach after eating the food, the food was half raw…they didn't go there since…they went to the school but never went to the, ah, cooking classes."

Nora took her child out of secondary school and sent her to YOUTHREACH because the child *"fell out"* with the school principal. On another occasion when her daughter rang her to say that a teacher had upset her in front of the class, Nora drove straight to the school and told me she *"said in front of the class, "You should be ringing me", I said, so I said, "I'm taking her out, you can go and tell [the principal]", I said, I'm taking [them all] out", and I did and I'll never forget, I was on [the way] home when [the principal] rang me and he was all apologising on the phone and gave me his word that that'd never again be said, he would make sure, I dunno was it, was it sixth year, so I let them back".* The same daughter recounted an incident with a teacher, where she *"asked to be taken out of his class, because first, ever since I started in [that school] me and that teacher never saw eye to eye",* and she was moved*.*

Teresa recounts the difference in her ten year old daughter's attendance in two schools:

"It affects if they are not getting on at school, Martina, because she never missed a day when she was in [that school], when she was in [the other school] she missed [89 days in one year]"

She said of her older daughter in secondary school: *"I seen the teachers have no interest, do you know, she might be better off not here at all…I don't want her unhappy, 'cause if you are looking at their faces unhappy, forget about it, not a hope would I."*

Kathleen is unequivocal about this issue. When she felt her son was under pressure at school she decided that *"he needs to be put into a different place…so I decided to move him to [the other] school because I knew that by leaving him there he wasn't getting any help."* Later he went to FÁS where the manager *"kept criticising him, so I said, "Look", I said, "you don't have to stay there if you don't want to"…there were a lot of young fellas from [town] going there at the time, and they had serious problems, so I didn't want him working in that environment."*

When she felt the teacher had no time for her son in primary school she said, *"I want [her son] out of his classroom…and they took him straight out…he wasn't afraid going to school anymore"*.

Elizabeth is also explicit in her reaction to perceived threats to her children's well-being. She tells of her experience with her son:

"He was, my oldest was in a class there two years ago with Mrs O'Sullivan her name was, she's still there, but she was there and I a child too but I never liked her, and he used to be afraid to go to school, do you know, over her…she was just not a nice teacher, she was a prejudiced woman, I knew by her, she was the same way and I a child going to school, so I got him removed from her then…it wasn't nice to leave him there…but the rest of the teachers was very good with him. "

When asked what advice she would give a young Traveller mother, she replied:

"I'd tell her if they're upset going in or if they didn't like the teacher, I'd take them out…move the class…if they're not happy, you're going nowhere, like…if you're not happy, with the teacher or the school, I'd take them out…just move them."

Later she says she would rather keep her children off secondary school, *"before they'd have to go through that, like, the embarrassment every day, the shame."*

Clearly, the care and happiness of the child and the mother's construction of the child's well-being is the priority for mothers in this study. Where children are unhappy, unaccepted, under academic pressure, upset by teachers and bullied, the reaction of the Traveller parent is immediate and dramatic, and in all cases involved moving the child to what was considered a safer location with different personnel, in some cases within the same provision. This comes contrary to the literature which notes that working class or poor parents might not have "the necessary vocabulary to effectively challenge" teachers (Lareau, 2011, p. 199, Hill&Taylor, 2004; Taylor, Clayton & Rowley, 2004)

The only parallel I could find to this situation in the literature involved an ethnographic study of Mexican-American families living rurally near the Mexican border area of the USA. In this case, a mother who did not understand what was

happening in the school believed the teacher was doing something wrong. On the advice of the extended family's trusted advisors she removed her child from school to teach a lesson to the teacher. (Valdes, 1996)

Experience Examined

Parental Role – Hyper-vigilance

In constructing the role of mother, the Traveller mothers I spoke to often built on the role their own mothers had played in their education. I found that mothers here often did this by considering the actions of their own mothers, learning from it, and acting to construct a different experience for their children. Teresa's children describe their mother as a *"control freak with homework"* and she agrees that she was. She says: *"I didn't want them thinking like I was thinking and I growing up, if I done it or not it didn't matter"*. In her own day, *"it mattered to [her] mother"*, whom she describes as *"too quiet for the nuns"*. Teresa was determined that her children would have a different experience:

"…if a teacher only roared at one of them I was gone in, head on first…straight away to find out what the problem was, where my poor mother believed the teachers were right, the nuns were right and that was it."

Mary was conscious that when she was at school she was often without class materials the other children had:

"(M)y mother, see, she couldn't read and write, and say, like the older ones couldn't read or write either…so they couldn't help us…like, any books that there was, there was no grants there for books, there probably was grants there for books, but we didn't get 'em, so any books or uniforms or anything like that, my mother had to pay for them, so if she didn't have the money for them you didn't get 'em".

She is determined that her children will have a different experience to hers:

"Now, I blame my mother for some of it, for it, because she didn't challenge them, but she didn't know because her parents didn't do it for her, d'you know. And education wasn't a big thing back then, they could live without it…I feel that there's no way they're going to do to my children what they did to me".

Ellen was also aware of difference when she was at school. Not having *"the right books"* added to her own feelings of exclusion. She says she mightn't have *"stuff like the other children would have…in our time we hardly hadn't even books…it was only just school, back and whatever bag my mother'd have, maybe from a charity shop, Martina, there was often two of us had to put our stuff, Martina, me and [my sister] into the one bag, yeah, today, Martina, they have their own little lunchboxes, their own little bags, …and we were never really, Martina, in school long enough to have a bond there, to say, "this is our books""*. She does not like letting her children out to school without all their belongings in place. Rather, *"while I have the shirts, the jumpers, the pantses, I need two jackets for the boys, the whole lot's stopped now until tomorrow, don't go today…and that'd be a day missed."*

Parental Role and Efficacy

The literature on parental involvement clearly points to parents' understanding or construction of the parental role as influential on whether or not they become involved in their children's education. (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1995; Lareau, 2000; Eccles and Harold, 1993). Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler consider the construction of the parental role as "a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for the emergence of parent-involvement activities. The presence of such a role construction means that relevant responsibilities and activities have been thought of and considered by the parent, thus creating the possibility of an active role." The insufficiency arises because "the parent must take the role construction and *act* on it in order to be involved; to act on the role, the parent must believe that he or she has the skills and opportunities necessary for involvement", i.e. just because a parent thinks they should or could get involved in these activities does not mean they feel they can do these activities. (Hoover Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, p. 313)

Eccles and Harold (1993) and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) identify four sources of efficacy that allow parents realise, or act on, their constructed parental role in the education of their children:

> the direct experience of success on other involvement or involvement-related activities; the vicarious experience of others' success in

> involvement or involvement-related activities; verbal persuasion by others that involvement activities are worthwhile and can be accomplished by the parent; and the emotional arousal induced when issues of importance to the parent- for example, his or her child's well-being or success, his or her own success as a parent- are "on the line".
>
> (ibid.)

I contend that it is this fourth condition of efficacy that activates initial parental involvement for the mothers I have spoken to in the context of this research. Later, that initial experience can support activation of the other conditions as factors for involvement. As per the mother's role as actively trying to influence construction of the child's educational experience as identified above, it is the child's emotional well-being and success that is of paramount importance to the mother, and a threat to this is often the stimulus for getting involved. This study clearly shows that the well-being of the child is the mother's primary concern. Where they felt a choice had to be made between educational success and emotional well-being, the mothers here prioritised the emotional well-being of the child in the here and now. (Reay, 1998) These threats to the social and academic well-being of the child activated the "emotional arousal" that supplied parents with the efficacy to become involved. Sometimes these threats were a precondition to their engagement with the education system as parents and were based on their own experience as children. Sometimes they were activated initially for parents in their parental role. In my conversations with these mothers, I found this state of "emotional arousal" was sustained in the lives of some parents to the point where it became a state of hyper-vigilance, a constant awareness and attention to potential threats to their child's well-being. The following examples give testimony to this:

Elizabeth says: *"you have to stand up like for [your children when they are being called names etc. in the yard], if you don't [the school] are not going to do it otherwise"*.

Ann's son is only attending school a month. She has been in to the school about his hairstyle and a threatened allegation of theft from another child. She is comparing children at the school gate:

"I often see children going to school above there, half the time their shoes'd be all gutter or going in up there, they're settled, but some teachers think by, the Travellers are not up to standard…they'd always kinda be on your case I think a bit when you're a Traveller".

Margaret clearly feels that the point of communication and contact should be the mother: Margaret is anxious to protect her daughter who came home and said the teacher *"shames"* her. Margaret's response is *"If my daughter say to me she have a problem with a teacher, I'd say, say it to her, do you know, "tell her to contact me", I'd say to my one, "sure I'm the mother, if she had a problem, that's the first thing, she should have contacted me, not say it to you in the class".*

Parental Role - The Care Priority

Reay noticed that many working class mothers "made a distinction between children's emotional well-being and educational success, prioritising the former."(ibid., p. 579) Here she found "key class differences" (p579) between how parents viewed their children's happiness. For middle class parents, happiness was something to be invested in now for the future, while working class mothers spoke of their children's happiness "in the here and now". (ibid.) "(H)igh levels of anxiety that cut across class and 'race'" (ibid., p. 582) are the result of the intensification of parental involvement in education.

> The mothers who escape this anxiety [include] working class mothers who have separated out their child's happiness from education success and are prioritising the former over the latter.
>
> (ibid.)

Consider Kathleen's case. She has compromised her children's academic achievements in order to protect their wellbeing. Her daughter is *"exempt from Irish because she was struggling, and she felt that she was under pressure, so the last thing in life, life is too short for to see children under pressure".* About her son, she says: *I'm not going to put [him] under pressure, if he's not able for the work, he needs to be put into a different place…thank God that I did cop on when I did because the child could have led to depression…he didn't like FÁS 'cause yer man down there, he's not a nice man and he kept criticising him, so I said "look", I said, "you don't have to stay there if you don't want to", because I, above anything…I*

don't like nobody criticising my children, cause nobody has the right to tell anybody and to make them feel very low, low self-esteem and confidence, not in this day and age…he felt under pressure, but thank God that I just caught him in time, that I noticed it in time, that he felt very pressurised and he didn't want to go to school".

When Teresa's daughter started school, she says "*I'd be ten minutes outside make sure she's settled, I'd be walking round make sure, I'd collect her at 3, I'd be there at half two, a bit like that, cause I was very attached and I'd question her about "do you like it?" and all this".*

Lareau found in 'Unequal Childhoods' that "working class and poor parents often fear doing "the wrong thing" in school related matters. They tend to be much more respectful of educators' professional expertise than their middle class counterparts. Thus, working-class and poor parents typically are deferential rather than demanding toward school personnel; they seek guidance from educators rather than giving advice to them; and they try to maintain a separation between school and home rather than foster an interconnectedness…Moreover, these parents view education as the job of educators and thus they expect teachers and school staff to be the ones primarily responsible for seeing that their children learn all that they should." (Lareau, Unequal Childhoods, 2011, pp. 198, 199)

Here I depart from Lareau. I found that despite the power differential above, and even lacking confidence in their own efficacy at times, parents in my research were not deferential towards school personnel, and parents felt that it was their role to monitor the teacher and the school both academically and affectively. This role typifies mothers as "moral care workers who engage in extensive and intensive emotional caring to support their children's education." (O'Brien, 2007, p. 160) I found a profound lack of trust on the part of the parent that the school would fulfil its remit, affectively, socially and academically. This, in turn, is supported by Liegeois (1994) who wrote that "(t)hose parents who experienced it themselves generally have negative memories of it, and hesitate to entrust their children to it". (Liegeois, 1994, p. 87) In Myers et al (2010) it was suggested by one non-Gypsy Traveller respondent from the school system that a history of bullying 'generation after generation' in schools has produced a heightened sensitivity to

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bullying by Gypsy and Traveller parents and that poor childhood experiences often make the prospect of engaging with school a highly daunting challenge. As a result Gypsy and Traveller parents sometimes respond 'in what seems to be a totally inappropriate manner to something that's a fairly low key issue (for the school)' and results in these parents withdrawing children from school. (ibid., p. 538)

When Teresa's children talk about being discriminated against in school, she says

"It'd torment you Martina, make your stomach sick, but I'll be honest, Martina, I tells them if anyone discriminates against them, if they go up and tell the teacher, and if the teacher gives them no law, tell me and I'll go in and get law, 'cause I would make, I wouldn't go in roaring and shouting, I'm not like that, but I would make sure that my word was heard, because if I can't back them up and the teacher's not doing it, you'll give up, like, in life, and I wouldn't do that…that's all they have to turn to is their parents, good and bad, you have to take the whole lot together, deal with the whole lot…you have to accept that [your children] do be wrong as well, sometimes".

For a parent starting off, she'd say *"make sure and keep involved with the teacher all the time, if they really want to be part of their child's education, make it your business to get in there once a week."* When I suggested that other Travellers I had read about said they'd rather take their children out of school than see them there unhappy, she agreed *"'cause if you are looking at their faces unhappy, forget about it, not a hope would I [leave them at school]".* Her daughter missed over 80 days in one school year, before she changed school. For the future she says *"I'd like them to get jobs they're happy in, not something they're just pushed into."*

Mary's vigilance is born out of her own experience:

""I slipped through the cracks. Ye did it to me", I said [to the principal], "in school…I tell you, the system did it", I said, "and ye're not doing it to my children"". She says that "looking at it now, if I don't keep on top of my children's education they do slip through the cracks, like if I don't keep going down to their schools checking up on their reports and checking up on getting their books and getting their stuff and going down to the parent-teacher meetings". She spoke to me about her son who

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the school thought might have dyslexia and wanted to continue into second class so that he could be tested. Mary on the other hand felt he just needed to be retained another year in first class. She described her conversation with the principal:

"…"ye're not doing it", I said, I'll take him out of school. I'll find a school that will keep him back", and he said "calm down Mrs. McCarthy, we'll deal with it". I said "there's no dealing with it", I said, "I don't want him to go forward and ye're pushing him forward" and I said "I can't see, as teachers, why ye want to push him forward when ye know he can't, he'll fall behind", and I said "this will, it's when he go into later, ah, bigger classes, that he'll find he's struggling and he'll end up giving it up", I said. "He'll lose con, he'll even lose everything", I said. "He'll just end up doing nothing,", I said "because it happened us"." She added that *"between me really hard pressing on it he stayed back, and this year on his report it said "we are glad you made the decision that you made". He has boosted completely".* She reiterates several times in the conversation that *"there's no way they're going to do to my children what they did to me in the system".*

When asked what advice she would give a young Traveller mother, Mary replies:

"Follow up on the schools, like, am, don't take it for granted that they're teaching your children the right things, like, follow, go into the schools, meet the principal, meet the teacher, question them, am, don't think, like, they know best because they don't. It's your child and you're at home with them, and you know what's right for your child".

Margaret says she is *"having problems with [her child's] teacher because [the teacher] is very stubborn"* and that her son *"is having a few problems now with Year Heads".* She says of both these children *"I don't send my child to school to be spoken to like that, or to be roared at".* She finds it difficult getting her 14 year old son out to school:

"You have to fight with him and I hate fighting and roaring at him…". When she was called in about his school shirt, she seemed disappointed in herself that she had failed to realise the gravity of the rules. *"I said "he told me that about the*

shirt, I didn't want to believe my own son", I said, *"I actually didn't believe him"*. Margaret shows empathy with her son. She says *"he hates school, so to be honest if he's going into that every morning I wouldn't blame him"*. She understands that he is embarrassed about his literacy and the lengths he would go to in order to hide this: *"You're not going to say "no, I can't read it", because you're going to look like a fool, so the best option for you is to just "I'm not reading it, I don't want to read it", take your shame out that way"*. When she realised her son was not adequately able to read and write she went to the principal hoping he could stay longer in primary school, but to no avail.

She would advise other Traveller mothers to *"keep their children going to school, number one, don't let them out of primary, but am, yeah, Martina, keep them going to school, if you can read and write help them with their homework, and make sure, like, look at their school journals now and see if there's any notes and see how they're getting on at school, ask them questions about their teacher, do you know, make sure that they're getting on, that they're happy with their teachers, don't let them out of primary unless you think that they're ready…just keep an eye on them and keep an eye on the teachers".* Though she says that being a Traveller means that the schools *"just don't care"* about her son, she adds that if her daughters were treated differently because they are Travellers that she'd *"pull 'em out of there."*

"I'd put them into a different school…of course if I thought there was any difference, if they were treating them different I'd pull them out of there".

Later, when they are finished school she would like her daughter to work *"somewhere she wouldn't be picked on or abused, do you know, stuff being said to her…if she had to get a job, I'd prefer if she got a job in England or someplace out of this county".*

When Nora's children started school she *"wouldn't let them go on the bus, [she] actually used to drive them"*. She says she was *"pure conscious of what might happen them, over they being Travellers and coming from the site, because it was a mixed site"*. She is mindful of them being singled out as Travellers:

"If a child needs remedial, a child needs remedial. What would torment me was if one of mine came home and said, "we went out for extra help today, Mommy", and I said, "who was in the class?", "oh, they were only all", they'd name out the children, well I'd know then that they'd be only all Travellers."

She recalls an occasion when her son took a drink out of his bag during class, resulting in confiscation. He had no drink for the day. Nora says the teacher *"told him to go out and drink out of the tap in the yard if he was thirsty…it's an outside tap, and everyone uses it, and it was after being heard that people was actually going to the toilet into it…I had murder with her above in the school and I told her she'd have a replacement, I'm sorry I didn't put a case against her, but she made it out to be different altogether, but he sat all day without a drink"*. When asked what advice she would give to a Traveller mother starting her children off at school, Nora says she should *"stick to her guns, and don't leave them off with nothing, go in about everything if she have to".* She agrees that Traveller mothers have to be more like that than settled mothers because *"what an awful lot got to do with it, if the teachers or the principal think the mother have no interest in the child, that's the time the child will get no education".*

Bridget is very happy with the education her children received and how they were treated at school. She says that at parent-teacher meetings, *"they were talking very good about them, how polite they were, you know, how nice they were, things like that"*. She adds that if there was anything wrong *"I'd see it myself, if they had something again my kids, and if they weren't in with settled kids I wouldn't let them go to school…I wouldn't have them in it. I wouldn't leave them to no school if I knew that…it's cause they're as good as the settled child, Travelling kids, there's nothing wrong with them just because that's the name of the Traveller…if they're not accepted with the settled, I wouldn't just keep them at school…It's very embarrassment, you know, because Travelling kids is Travelling kids, they're clean going to school, and they're well fed and things like that, I don't know what the reason, that they're not, in a lot of schools, they're not accepted like the settled children, they're not in with them, like."*

Educating her children has also been a positive experience for Ellen. She says *"it's eleven o'clock, it's playtime, out into the yard everyone, no difference and I think that's very good, Martina, it lifts the mother, it lifts the father, and you know your children is gone, they're safe, they're in school, they're learning all these things, little boys are not bullying them, and I see [my husband] here now, very very proud of the children, because he thinks they're all, in his time, like myself, there was none of that".*

Though she would have liked her daughter to stay on at school, she did not push her when she wanted to leave:

"She'd say, "Momma, I went to third year now, and I've enough done now", so there's for the break then, you kind of, well you say then, like with me now Martina, I'd say "Lisa, but Lisa listen, it's best for you and you'll get a good job out of it, and t'will bring you, you'll be up like, you'll never be like me", do you know, explaining, Martina, like, "I couldn't even read, Lisa, look where it got you so far, so keep going", and she'd say "Momma, I went to third year now and I want to stop, and I want to do now with the rest of the girls, there's beauty courses going on in FÁS, and there's these places"…it was something for her to look forward to…then I didn't want to be pushing her maybe Lisa wasn't happy. Lisa is kind of a soft little girl." Ellen and her husband chose a second level school in a smaller town for their children over one of the larger town schools. She says this was because *"in a town they'd be up to everything, do you know the way little girls'd be smoking…we was mostly reared around villages…it's homely…little girls and boys there from the country, not townies, not saying anything Martina now, don't get me wrong…my husband's very old fashioned".*

Kathleen's experience of educating her eldest son has impacted greatly on the experience of school for her other children. Her son she said *"was afraid of this teacher, I knew there was something wrong, so I went in and I approached [the teacher], so [he said] that [her son] would never come anywhere in life."* She describes the experience as *"like getting a knife and putting it through my heart".* Her response to the incident was to move the child into another class *"and they took him straight out of his classroom".* After this she says she *"kept checking, they*

were in dread of me then, every time I'd go down to the school, like, they shiver, like they knew then I wouldn't take any messing…he wasn't afraid going into school any more". She says that later in secondary school, *"they just let him fall behind…I think I left it go too late with [him]".* She moved him to another, smaller non-mainstream provision. She did not send her other son to mainstream second-level, but sent him directly to the same non-mainstream provision as his brother. She was satisfied to sacrifice his educational attainment in order that he be happy in whatever school he attended. She is concerned that her children would not be under undue academic pressure at school:

"I'm not going to put [him] under pressure, if he's not able for the work, he needs to be put into a different place…thank God that I did cop on when I did because the child could have led to depression…he didn't like FÁS 'cause yer man down there, he's not a nice man and he kept criticising him, so I said "look", I said, "you don't have to stay there if you don't want to", because I, above anything…I don't like nobody criticising my children, cause nobody has the right to tell anybody and to make them feel very low, low self-esteem and confidence, not in this day and age…he felt under pressure, but thank God that I just caught him in time, that I noticed it in time, that he felt very pressurised and he didn't want to go to school".

She recounts that later when her daughter was struggling with her homework, she went to the principal saying *"it happened to my young fella, and I don't want to repeat it".* She says that the principal *"knew where I was coming from…I knew what to do because I had been through, been down that road…so I said "I'd like her to repeat the year"…life is too short for to see children under pressure…I don't want to see [her] under pressure…she have plenty of confidence and I don't want her self-esteem being brought down".* She says she *"keeps watching"* her other daughter *"cause [she] is the one with the habit of no confidence".* The responsibility for children, she feels lies with the mother:

"I think it's up to number one anyway, you've got to spot things in families, you've got to keep spotting them and you've got to make sure that the children are interested and make 'em interested and…you have to bring the school to the

attention of it…you've got to have communication between the parent and the teacher…at the end of the day, it's up to the parent".

She hopes *"to keep them at school for as long as they can",* though she says she'd *"never force them into something that they don't like"*. She describes the world of work as putting them potentially *"in danger, 'cause you will meet the opposite person that will criticise and I'd hate for them to lose self-esteem about, or confidence [in their identity] 'cause something like that would put you down".*

Efficacy is certainly challenged for parents in the power differential between the settled professional teacher and the Traveller mother. Lareau notes that working class and poor parents may "lack the requisite vocabulary to effectively challenge" teachers. (Lareau, Unequal Childhoods, 2011, p. 199) Hill and Taylor write that "(n)egative feelings about themselves may hinder parents from making connections with their children's schools." (Hill & Taylor, 2004, p. 162) Eccles and Harold (1996) identify parents' own intellectual competence as the key factor in whether or not parents get involved in their children's education. The Traveller parents in this research have worked with and through this power differential, conscious of but in spite of it.

Kathleen says that *"if they know you're a Traveller and that you know nothing about the education system, and they might think that you're a walkover…[Traveller mothers] feel embarrassed, they feel embarrassed for theirself, they don't understand what they're on about, the teachers …[so] the parents don't bother going in…but I often said to them, "but you see that's where you're lacking because ye're letting them win".* She adds that *"a lot of them, like, in other words, a lot of Travellers don't know the meaning, of 'philosophy' or, do you know, 'sarcastic' and all this and a lot of people who wouldn't have the confidence that I would, I'd say "stop, speak English, I don't know what you are saying". That was like when I was speaking to [the principal] one evening, he was on about and I said "No", I said, "I can't cope with this", and [my husband] was with me and he was nudging me, "Please don't open your mouth", and I said, "Stop,", I said, "Excuse me, could you identify that in English please, 'cause I haven't a clue what you are on about".*

Mary says that lack of education means that Traveller mothers find it harder to read how their children are doing in the system, if there's *"something going wrong, where we overlook it or wouldn't understand it, and wouldn't have to education to read, to know to, know what the meaning of the word is…[the teachers] if they're speaking to you they'd speak in high words that we wouldn't understand and just through being embarrassed we just agree with everything, "okay, okay", and they could be saying whatever, and they'd be using these words knowing that we couldn't understand them in the first place."*

Education and Traveller Identity

To engage with the education system is to operate within a stream of hegemonies that exist within that system. As a site of cultural validity, the system is constantly identifying what and who are culturally valuable. Margaret feels that since Ireland has become a more multicultural society, there is a greater understanding of cultural difference, and with that has come greater recognition of Traveller culture:

"…since different cultures started coming into this country now, you hear a lot about race, but ah, Martina, the point I'm making is like, now it's more [recognition of] racist remarks, and do you know, they're starting to believe more in Travellers, and about their ways and their cultures like, do you know what I mean, they're starting to understand us more, anyway, respected, I feel more respected now, that what we would have been years ago".

Ellen seems to equate 'becoming settled' with gaining equality. She spoke of her cousins who have been to college: *"If you see them, Martina, you'd say, and the way they'd be talking, and they often said, like that now, about people, Travellers'd often say, "sure there's no more of that today, everyone is equal now", which going back, maybe 20 years ago…there was no way you could say that".* While she enjoys that her son is learning about Traveller culture at school, she doesn't express regret at the prospect of it being lost:

"Anthony and Patrick never seen it, Martina, so I wouldn't, it's like what I told you there now, Martina, I could never tell Anthony and Patrick that, do you know what I'm saying, we hadn't them books going to school, I wouldn't like to hurt their

feelings, I had no job and I couldn't go to school every day because we were moved on and moved on…saying this to Patrick, I wouldn't dream of saying this to Patrick, Martina, I'll only keep at the measure I am today. Patrick is happy, Patrick is going to school, but you can't be putting these things into Patrick's head…Patrick don't look at himself as tinker".

Kiddle (2000) notes in her exploration into the relationships between Fairground and Gypsy/Traveller parents and their children's teachers in England, that a significant number of 'settled' Gypsy/Traveller families deny their identity in order to "protect their children from discrimination and racial abuse". (Kiddle, 2000, p. 272) This is reinforced by Lloyd and McCluskey's study into the education of Gypsy/Travellers in the UK who found that "(s)ome children may feel safer in school both with fellow pupils and teachers if they conceal their identity." (Lloyd & McCluskey, 2008, p. 336) In Ellen's case, while the school personnel and pupils are well aware of her identity, she is protecting her son from his own reaction to his Traveller identity.

In this study, Ellen is the only parent who reports that she does not go to parent teacher meetings. She feels that, by not going, she is letting down her son: *"I often got the letter, now…the minute I'd hear, Martina, what 'tis about, I'd say "I can't go there"…even Patrick and he young, the creature, he'd say to me, "Momma, why won't you come to it?...and do you know, even to answer the creature alone, Martina, you'd say, you'd have to make up an excuse, you'd say "Oh, Patrick, son, do you know where I went?"…trying to cover up with Patrick…Sure Patrick would know by the look in your eyes, straight, God bless him".* Though Ellen clearly feels she should go, if only to please her son, her sense of responsibility is leaning towards protection of her son and herself, or in terms of this example, the parental role she has constructed as supporter of her child's education has been over-ridden by the role she has constructed as protector or her children. Her feelings of inadequacy about her literacy skills, her own experience of school, and the protection of her children and their feelings are her priority, i.e. while she has the opportunity for involvement, she does not feel she has the skills to get involved, she does not feel she "*can* do" this activity:

"You could say to Patrick, "Patrick, son, I'm not educated love, and all them women are going to be there". Patrick'd be in school with this thought in his head, Martina, so I wouldn't want to be putting that thought in Patrick's head either, do you know what I'm saying, thinking when he's at school, "Them women, Momma's not like them, she's dull". I wouldn't like to put that in Patrick's head either".

Ellen's mother was unequivocal. When I told her that others had suggested that getting educated means you stop being like a Traveller she replied:

"I think they're right, to be, to stop with the Traveller life and be with the country life". When I suggested that could mean that Traveller customs and the Traveller way of life would die out, she said, *"I wouldn't mind about it. It's too troublesome".*

Bridget is also an older Traveller. She says *"the younger crowd wouldn't know much about Travelling, like, today they want to be just like the settled…I suppose, I dunno, just when they get in with them, get on with them or something like that…they want to be more settled"*. Ann wouldn't mind if her children lost their Traveller identity. While she said, *"You can never forget you're a Traveller, girl"*, she said about her children *"that wouldn't bother me, no, lose their Traveller thing, it wouldn't. It's up to theirself how they want to live their own life…you can't stop the children, whatever they want to do".*

Nora's reply was similar. She said *"It's their choice at the end of the day, do you know, but once they know who they are, and what, what they are,…like he'd always be saying there now, ye're full Travellers now to the backbone, don't forget that…people will tell you that you're better off not being a Traveller, but I don't think so, I think that if you're a Traveller, you're a Traveller, and you should never deny it."*

For these women, Traveller identity is less something you want to remember, and more something you can't forget. At best the women here talk of their children 'not hiding' or 'not denying' their Traveller identity, rather than celebrating it. Baker et al wrote that the education system can confer recognition on an individual's personal and social identity, values and abilities, and equally devalue

them. (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon, & Walsh, 2009) For these Traveller women as children at school, their social identity as Travellers became the fulcrum on which their own personal identities, values and abilities were appreciated or discredited. Their ambiguity to the loss of Traveller identity for their children is a reflection of this.

Margaret wouldn't let her child hide her identity. *"No, no, I wouldn't leave her do that, no , no I wouldn't let her in for a job and pretend that she's a settled person, no…that wouldn't be good for her, how would that be good for her, she's not who she is then, like, doing that, she's got the settled job, she's got the settled friend, who's she going to marry?"*

This also holds for Teresa, who says *"never deny what you are and you going in, if you get [the job] you get it, and if you don't you don't".*

I put it to Elizabeth, that others have told me that when some Travellers get educated, they in some way stop being Travellers, they don't want to be Travellers, they want to be settled, to which she replied:

"Yeah, to hide their identity, they're ashamed of it, an awful lot of them is".

Martina: *Yeah, would you be afraid then that if your children got educated that*

Elizabeth: *I wouldn't mind, no*

Martina: *You wouldn't mind them hiding?*

Elizabeth: *I wouldn't mind if they got educated and I wouldn't mind what they done, no…if that's what they wanted, like."*

I asked Kathleen if the same scenario would be difficult for her, given that she wants her girls to stay on at school.

Kathleen: *It's not really cause I know the girls'll stay and I know how Travellers do be afraid to show their identity…they hides their identity for various reasons…if [her children] were to do that here in Ireland and if I thought for a minute that they were in danger, 'cause you will meet the opposite person that will criticise and I'd hate for them to lose self-esteem about, or confidence, cause something like that*

would put you down, so I'm hoping they wouldn't [hide their identity]…I wouldn't mind [if they started acting like settled people], it would be up to theirself to lead their own lives, I wouldn't mind it…eventually, like everything else it grows out…it will be lost because there's no-one travelling anymore…I think it's a fear of letting the settled person know where they come from, some settled people gets an issue with Travellers, if they know that you're a Traveller they just lose interest in you."

Early in our conversation, Mary commented: "*my dad was well educated, his mother was very educated…They were more like settled people. I don't know how far, how well educated he was".* Education, then, is something she associates with being a settled person. She sees education, not as a threat to her being a Traveller, but rather a means of dealing with her own negative feelings about her Traveller identity. She asked that her daughter be removed from a class with other Travellers and be the only settled child in her class, *"the reason of this I wanted her to concentrate, to learn like, no messing around"*. For her knowledge is power, and as she describes below, greater knowledge may offset the negative feelings that interaction with society will bring:

"It's going to be hard [for her children], like, I'd, life, it's going to be very hard, d'you know, I want them to be proud of who they are, d'you know, 'cause they are what they are, and they're not going to change that, no matter where they go, like my own experience there, where I'm going with that there is no matter where you go in the world, and no matter what you do, you are who you are, and, am, if you're not ashamed of it, it's half the battle, now, there is like everything, like, there is people who do do things that you would be ashamed of and I am ashamed of, but I just, in an ideal world, I love people just to judge you, and, ah, I think education is the way to do it, like, I think, educate yourself more about everything, educate yourself more about Travellers, different cultures, different, like, everything, and then you're kinda more prepared for when you meet those negative people, d'you know, you can read up on things and you have more, like, there is more other cultures out there that have harder times than you and you can, d'you know, like, every country has an ethnic group, d'you know".

Elizabeth also recognises an association between Traveller identity and shame. I put it to Elizabeth, that others have told me that when some Travellers get educated, they in some way stop being Travellers, they don't want to be Travellers, they want to be settled, to which she replied: *"Yeah, to hide their identity, they're ashamed of it, an awful lot of them is".*

Elizabeth made reference in our conversation to non-nationals in her children's school. She sees that they are not required to attend religion classes in the catholic school, yet her children are required to attend Irish classes which are not part of her *"tradition".* She says *"my beliefs weren't picked up at all which these one's beliefs were…there's traditions down there for Polish and…non-nationals…they all have their own tradition, they don't stay in for religion, I knows that myself, they don't have to do certain things because it's against their tradition, but for Travellers, there's nothing about their tradition down there."* Clearly, for her, a hierarchy of cultural value exists in the ethos of the school, and she feels that Traveller culture is not highly rated. She identifies her understanding of her position in this hierarchy later in the conversation when she speaks about other children:

"They prefer, they think Travellers is worse than any foreign nationals or anything."

This supports the work of Devine et al, who found that Travellers were consistent subjects of racial stereotyping in schools by other children. (Devine, Kenny, & McNeela, 2008) 91% of students in the Lynch and Lodge study said that 'Having a Traveller in the school would make life difficult for the teachers and the pupils' (Lynch & Lodge, 2002, p. 139)

Kathleen has asked that her daughters be removed from the class which has other Traveller girls in it, to a class wherein she is the only Traveller. She justifies this on academic and behavioural grounds:

"I think that where's there's a lot of Travellers in one class, they don't get on…first of all they mightn't get on with each other, and number two they mightn't get, they mightn't be listening, they might be having their own conversation, they could

be putting notes together…they would be a distraction and that's why I have all the girls separated in class."

She is ambitious for her daughters, who have both settled and Traveller friends, and feels *"education is the only thing that will get [her children] out of anywhere"*. She goes on to say that she *"would never discriminate that I'm a Traveller, 'cause I am who I am, I can't hide that fact"*, but says she doesn't believe in the traditions that Travellers are developing around First Communions with *"big dresses"* and limousines. Therefore, she says of herself: *"I'm more of a, do you know, in my own way, I'm more of a settled person"*.

Where Traveller parents could not identify role models they wished their children to emulate, people who had stayed on in school and got jobs based on their qualifications, they displayed a sense of fatalism in terms of post-education employment for their children.

Margaret said: *"it would be a great thing for her to get a job and, but like I said, if she worked some place where she wouldn't be picked on, or abused, do you know, stuff being said to her, by I suppose that she'd never get a job [here] anyway, forget about it…I don't know any Travelling women working, in jobs, teachers, things like that."*

Christina said about her son: *"If he were a buffer boy now, he'd have a job…If that was a settled person, there'd be, they'd have a job straight away, waiting for them, they would always get something out of it."* Christina's son had stayed in school beyond the minimum age, which is why she was hopeful that he would get work. He did not do his Leaving Cert.

Mary spoke about someone she knew who went on to third level: *"(E)verybody was saying "what is she going to college for 'cause she's not going to get nothing out of it"…people looked down on her because [people thought] she thought she was something she wasn't because there was no-one educated and to go out of the circle, and go to college and do, you're classed, like, as a snob, and "ah, they think they're country people"…[now] people is actually after saying "Hello!" since they seen [these women] going into jobs…now people realise it"*.

Echoing the recommendations of its consultation with parents phase, the Department of Education Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy called on the Traveller community to support those who "break the mould by staying in education beyond the usual years". (Department of Education and Science, 2006, p. 22) This would counter a negative aspect of social capital - the self-preservation instinct of an oppressed group through demanding conformity, restricting personal freedom and agency thus ensuring that none of its members breaks through the glass ceiling.

> In these instances, individual success stories undermine group cohesion because the latter is precisely grounded on the alleged impossibility of such occurrences. The result is downward levelling norms that operate to keep members of a downtrodden group in place and force the more ambitious to escape from it.
>
> (Portes, 1998, p. 17)

Teresa's daughter left school early. Her friend in the same class stayed on. Teresa's daughter ascribed this to her friend being *"half country…when they're with country people they acts like country people, and when they're with Travellers, they act like Travellers."* Teresa says: They *"fitted in…mine can't do that"*. This ties in with Derrington's findings of 2007 that stronger affiliations with both communities and ability to switch easily between them was one of the most productive strategies.

"The group of retained students tended to have stronger affiliations with both Traveller and non-Traveller cultures, than those who left school early." (Derrington C. , 2007, p. 365)

Christina's son mentioned above, didn't get a job on leaving school despite the fact that *"every day [he] used to be below at the school with his uniform on him, he usen't pal up and down with Traveller boys, all settled boys he used be up and down with. He got nowhere out of it."* His affinity with "settled boys" was seen as a form of social capital acquisition that would improve his employment prospects and hereby his cultural and economic capital.

Role construction, efficacy, agency and hyper-vigilance are all bound together as and within the complex web of identity. Their interaction with the education

system is another force forging the development of identity for Traveller mothers. Each of the incidents mentioned above is reflecting on and refining her sense of herself, her family and her community in the context of broader society.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

This chapter gives an overview of the context and findings of the research. Based on these, recommendations and implications of these findings are advised.

The 1960s saw the introduction of specific national policies in relation to Travellers. Early policies reflected and reinforced the position of Travellers as a "problem" within Irish society, in need of remediation and support to become assimilated into the "normal" majority. It was in this context and central to the fulfilment of this aim that early policies on education were devised. Based on a model of Travellers as academically and socially inferior, a deficit model emerged that segregated Travellers within the education system as being in need of benevolent remediation measures to overcome the negative influences of their homes and culture. The ultimate goal of these measures in education was the absorption of Travellers into Irish society, but instead the reality served to isolate and stigmatize Travellers within education and reinforce their marginalisation in wider society.

The 1980s brought some recognition of Traveller identity through policies of integration, though it is easy to see how, by then, an official rhetoric of integration belied a persistent and acceptable public anti-Traveller sentiment. The emergent Traveller voice though the Traveller development groups and intercultural policies of the late 1990s were supported by rights legislation such as the Equal Status Act and Ireland's signing of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Again, however, this formal rhetoric falls short of officially recognising Travellers as an ethnic minority as was recommended by the Equality Authority in 2006.

Further, and to reiterate the concerns of the Traveller development groups, much of the educational ground won through the Visiting Teacher for Travellers Service, the experience of parents engaging in education and specific supports for Travellers within the system, is in danger of being lost in the recent years of budgetary cuts. For example, the principle of individual need was used in Budget 2011 as grounds for a reduction in Traveller-specific supports, despite a recognition of need evidenced through the provision of "alleviation" measures to compensate for these reductions.

Withdrawal of Resource Teachers for Travellers posts at primary level so that educational teaching supports to Traveller students will now be provided on the same basis as other students in schools. Alleviation measures will be put in place for schools with a high concentration of Traveller children. At post-primary level teaching hours for Travellers will be withdrawn, again with alleviation measures for schools with high concentrations of Traveller children. This measure will secure savings of approximately 600 posts net.

(Department of Education and Skills, 2010)

While I don't, of course, advocate a return to previous policies and support a system whereby your abilities and ambitions are determined and often stifled by your socio-economic status or your culture as has been the case in Irish education in the past, I do contend that the testimony of the ten mothers within this thesis alone provides enough evidence of structural inequality within our education system to justify a significant challenge to that system as it currently exists. Supplementing current provision with compensatory extra tuition for Traveller children with learning difficulties does not support an authentic principle of individual need. These measures do not confer equality.

This research sought to capture the lived experience of Traveller mothers as they engage with their children's schooling, in this time and in this place. It sought to provide these Traveller mothers with an opportunity to have their voice documented and made accessible to practitioners and policy makers within the education sphere. Moreover, it sought to make that voice accessible in a way that was safe for them to do so. It sought to move beyond the standard issues of stereotype and redistribution and, in a nod to the practices of Critical Race Theory, provide an opportunity for these women to name their own reality.

Main Findings

To draw together this research, it is clear that Traveller mothers are interested in their children's education. Moreover, they are interested in their children's well-being. The mothers here will forego educational attainment in favour of their child's well-being, as they understand it. Traveller mothers do not trust the school to provide for the educational or emotional well-being of their children. They feel that, as in their own time, they are dependent on the good nature of key

individuals to provide their children with an education and for their well-being in the school situation. This well-being is defined as academic regard, but also and more importantly for Traveller mothers, it is defined by social acceptance and inclusion. This definition of well-being resonates with mothers' experience of their own schooling. This situation of distrust leads to a state of 'hyper-vigilance', where Traveller mothers are sensitive to perceived mistreatment of their children, and sometimes of themselves, within the education system. When mothers feel their children are mistreated, they largely ascribe this mistreatment to their Traveller identity. In some cases this perpetuates their sense of isolation and distrust of the system. In other cases their dissatisfaction is directed towards their Traveller identity. In all cases, mothers' instinct to perceived mistreatment is to remove their children from the teacher or the school, in an effort to find a place or individuals to whom they can safely entrust their children.

Thus parents' own experiences influence their construction of experiences for their children. The understandings they have about how the system works are based to a large extent on their own memories of social segregation, academic disregard and public humiliation, as well as a lack of agency typified by their dependence on the empathy of individuals within the system to make their experience a positive one.

The reality evidenced by the testimony of these mothers suggests the primacy of habitus within the field of education, with mothers feeling that their own experiences, and those of their children, are largely dependent on their Traveller identity and the relationship between that identity and individuals within the education system. With that and within that, a dearth of understanding of how to succeed in the system, the requisite social and cultural capital, serves to thwart Traveller mothers as agents of construction of a different experience of education for their children. In turn, this dearth of capital can further conspire against the acquisition of the cultural capital needed to change their social trajectory, their acceptance within wider society. Where their social trajectory has changed for these women, it is largely within their own cultural sphere. Their social status within the Traveller community has little bearing outside it. The dominant discourse here is that the system has not changed to value the capital or to

embrace the diversity Travellers bring to the system though their own culture and values. The muted discourse is that the system has not changed to compensate Travellers educationally for what were in reality, state policies of segregation and marginalisation, nor has there been a process of restorative practice in this area. Thus, the Irish education system ascribes to high ideals on paper, but in reality, is complicit in failure as a valid outcome for some.

Recommendations

The implications here are many and need application right across the education field. At a very fundamental level there are practical issues for schools and educationalists in relation to the doxa that exists in the field, demanding an openness to the possibility that parents do not understand school policies and procedures, that these may need to be explained, and sometimes questioned in order that all parties understand, agree and accept that which is in the best interests of the child. Coupled with this valuing of the contribution of parents to the education of their children, there is much work to be done in educating parents about the current education system, the standards required in terms of application to study and the procedures and commitment, at individual and family level, involved in securing a college or training placement and supporting their child in moving from that to the world of work. Much of the despondency I came across in the course of this study emerged from misconceptions on the part of parents themselves as regards the pathways to third-level and employment for their children and settled children.

There are also pressing implications here for both the initial and continuing professional development of teachers. I feel that this study has presented valid perspectives that would otherwise not be accessible to most mainstream teachers at any point in their careers. It has strongly emerged as important that the signifiers of acceptance for parents and children are understood as such by those who confer acceptance. In very practical terms, examples include the expectation on the part of Traveller parents that homework be set, completed by their children and valued by the teacher, this being a measure both of academic regard and social inclusion; that ownership of the trappings of education, as an acquired form of cultural capital, from books, to lunchboxes, to coats signified membership

of and parity within the class group. An inclusive curriculum that valued Traveller traditions as well as access to the full curriculum emerged as crucial signifiers to Traveller mothers of the regard in which their children were held, both academically and socially.

These are just some of the many possible readings that can lead us to a framework of action which supports the wider equality agenda. It is clear from this research that we are all products of the system in which we are educated, and our experience of that system feeds into the education we want for our children and thus how we engage with the system as parents. Breaking the cycle of mistrust is critical to change. For example, where parents, not just Traveller parents, feel they and their children are welcome in the school and are valued by the class teacher and principal, they are more likely to engage in a mutually supportive dialogue. As this study shows, a lack of transparency on the part of the school, albeit at an unconscious level, coupled with sensitivity on the part of the parent can be a source of needless conflict. Schools do not have happy associations for all parents. Some parents, as was the case for mothers in this research, find schools are threatening places, full of bad memories where their own self-worth and their sense of themselves as citizens, and now as parents, becomes devalued. Parents who have not had a positive experience of school, or parents who left school early, may need extra support from school personnel in negotiating the path of policies and procedures. The success of this engagement depends on the cultural appropriateness of the interaction and cultural sensitivity of the person engaged with the parents on behalf of the school. It is important for school personnel to realise that schools can evoke difficult memories for some parents and going to the school can be a source of stress that negates the good that comes from participation. Establishing a situation where all parties can engage in meaningful, honest and authentic communication is crucial. The next step in this process is thinking up and implementing alternative ways to support parents who are already interested in their children's education. There is work required in supporting teachers and administrators who want to engage meaningfully with parents in order to do their best by their pupils and their schools.

This is only one facet of the many long term issues that need to be addressed in the context of Irish Travellers and society. The long term issues are more fundamental issues of power, values, hegemony and restoration in society, issues that will not be changed without changes of mindset, discourse and culture at individual, local and national levels. Education can be the first site of that transformative change.

As Mairin Kenny has written:

> Emancipatory education is the primary and effective healing strategy for Travellers. But, given their dominant position, the sedentary have the greater need for learning.
>
> (Kenny, 1997, p. 285)

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