

INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL APPROACHES FOR GYPSY/ TRAVELLER PUPILS AND THEIR FAMILIES: AN 'URGENT NEED FOR PROGRESS'?

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ABSTRACT

Drawing upon data from an investigation of the enrolment, attendance and attainment of Gypsy/Traveller school-age learners at Scottish local authority schools, the article discusses issues of *identity*, *fear* and *contradiction* that appear to constrain official attempts to include Gypsy/Traveller pupils within state education. The educational aspirations of Gypsy/Traveller families' continue to be largely overshadowed by their fears, primarily for their children's safety in some school settings and by the threat that schooling poses for Traveller cultures and ways of life. Despite official attempts, since the mid 1990s, to provide more flexible educational approaches to include Gypsy/Traveller pupils within mainstream schools the research found that they continue to experience disproportionate educational and social exclusion. Frequently, this is through self-exclusion. The article discusses the lessons that can be learnt from this case study, a study which indicates limited policy and professional success.

INTRODUCTION

The Scottish Executive consistently highlights the need for a more socially inclusive Scotland. This is reflected in its many reports, policy papers and directives to support developments towards this goal. The Executive notes that all children from age 5 to 16 have an entitlement to a school education (2000). The social and educational exclusion of many Gypsy/Traveller communities is signalled as requiring particular attention in three key documents: 'The Advisory Committee on Scotland's Travelling People: Eighth Term Report 1995-1997' (1998); the 'Inquiry into Gypsy Travellers and Public Sector Policies', (EOC, 2001a; EOC, 2001b), a report published by the Equal Opportunities Committee; and the 'Scottish Executive Response to the Equal Opportunities Committee Report' (Scottish Executive, 2001). These official publications illuminate the complexities of Gypsy/Traveller families' everyday lives and clearly demonstrate their continuing need for development of flexible approaches at local authority and individual school level.

While many *known* Gypsy/Traveller pupils access formal education, others are *not readily known* by education departments or schools (McKinney, 2001). Other Gypsy/Traveller school-aged children and young people receive no formal schooling whatsoever. Using this group as a test case of well-intentioned inclusive educational policy, what can policy makers and educators learn from this paradigmatic case of continuing exclusion and apparent self-exclusion of Gypsy/Traveller children from formal education? (Liegeois, 1998; Jordan, 2001).

This article describes the findings of research that focused on two school sessions, from August 2001 to July 2003 (Padfield and Jordan, 2004). Its three main aims were: to investigate the enrolment, attendance and attainment of Gypsy/Traveller school-age learners, based on council sites, at Scottish local authority schools; to explore developments in Scottish local authority educational provision for Gypsies/Travellers of all ages since the mid 1990s; to raise awareness among policy makers and professionals of the complex constraints that limit Gypsy/Traveller pupils' access to and participation in formal education. The article discusses issues of *identity*, *fear* and *contradiction* identified by the broad range of research participants, and their negative impact upon Gypsy/Traveller pupils' experience of schooling, in schools and in out-of-school settings.

CHALLENGES TO LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND SCHOOLS

Local authorities are posed with considerable challenges in their attempts to meet their duty to provide Gypsy/Traveller communities with appropriate education and other essential public services (Scottish Executive, 2004). These challenges arise from a complex inter-relationship between estimating the size and make of Gypsy/Traveller communities in Scotland, where they may be living and for how long they might stay in any one place.

Who are the services for?

Gypsy/Traveller communities come from one of three historically, culturally and socially distinctive populations commonly referred to as 'Gypsies' and 'Travellers' (Fraser 1992). These comprise:

Gypsies, who may call themselves simply 'travelling people', Gypsies or Travellers. The term 'Gypsy' may be distinctive from the term 'Roma', which is more commonly used in England and Wales and other European countries to refer to other distinctive groupings within Traveller communities (Claveria and Alonso 2003). In Scotland, travelling people variously refer to themselves as Scottish Travellers, as Scottish Gypsies (others distinguish themselves from Gypsies) and more simply as 'travelling people'. Irish Travellers are also likely to spend time in Scotland, particularly over the travelling season.

Occupational Travellers, who are differentiated into Showground, Circus and Bargee Travellers.

New Travellers, who make up a more recent grouping of travelling people from non-Gypsy backgrounds.

Cultural distinctions within and between members of these groupings themselves are highly contested. The first group, for example, tends to draw upon historical roots to a social and cultural presence within the UK, whereas the second group define themselves largely in relation to their business activities. Due to intermarriage, the social and cultural boundaries between the two are never clear-cut (Equal Opportunities Committee Report, 2001). However, common to people from all Gypsy and Traveller backgrounds is the notion of travelling as a way of life and, partly due to the 'mobility' of some, a general experience of marginalisation from and discriminatory treatment by many 'settled' citizens across the UK (Kiddle 2000; Jordan and Padfield, 2003). Gypsies/Travellers is the preferred official term (SEED, 2003) for the many Scottish, and frequently Irish, Travellers who may be based on local authority maintained sites (Gentleman, 1992).

Gypsy/Traveller people and many professionals working with them, frequently challenge current official methods of estimating the size and composition of Gypsy/Traveller communities as inaccurate. For example, the twice-yearly 'count' of Gypsies/Travellers, gathered in January 2003, reported, "...a total of 931 people (were) recorded on Council sites..." (Scottish Executive, 2003a: 1) while the count gathered in July 2003, reported, "...a total of 813 people (were) recorded on Council sites" (Scottish Executive, 2003b: 4). These figures represent a numerical 'count' of people on one day in the winter of January 2003, and one day in the summer of July 2003. The latter 'count' reported that 26 Scottish councils were responsible for the provision of 37 council sites located across Scotland (Scottish Executive, 2003b: 5), two of which came into operation in the summer of 2002, while North Lanarkshire noted the closing of one of their two sites for September 2003. A few councils have two or more sites, some of which are seasonal sites. In addition, official use of the term 'count' is considered insensitive; this term continues to be associated with the negative treatment of Gypsy and Traveller groups by states seeking to destroy them and their cultures.

In Scotland, many Gypsy/Traveller families live in a mix of accommodations; including official local authority sites, roadside or 'unauthorised encampments', and/or living in houses. In addition, others use private sites, some of which are owned by Travellers. Gypsy/Traveller families describe themselves as coming from a particular place, to which they may frequently return, perhaps for the winter. The travelling season for mobile Gypsy/Traveller families, which inevitably entails crossing of local authority boundaries, tends to begin early in the spring and comes to a close in early winter (Whyte, 2001). Many Gypsy/Traveller children and some secondary-aged young people attend local authority schools; some are mobile, while others are 'settled', either on a site or in a house. Our research remit was to explore developments in Scottish local authority educational provision for and use by these Gypsy/Traveller communities.

CONCERNS ABOUT EDUCATIONAL PROVISION FOR GYPSY AND TRAVELLER PUPILS

Of particular concern to policy makers and educators, across the United Kingdom, is the persistent lack of effective delivery by education authorities and a poor uptake of compulsory state schooling by school-aged children and young people from Gypsy and Traveller backgrounds (DES, 1985).

OFSTED research noted the poverty of Traveller children's educational experience (OFSTED, 1996). Gypsy/Traveller pupils, in particular are found to lack access to a continuous and coherent curriculum that has relevance for their lives, and experience significant interruptions to the continuity and coherence in their formal learning and teaching (Dobson and Henthorne, 1999). Such discontinuities have been associated with marked under-achievement in formal education, and a subsequent reduction in their life chances, access to job opportunities and a reduced likelihood of participation in life-long learning initiatives (Dobson, Henthorne, *et al.*, 2000). Researchers adopted 'pupil mobility' as a general conceptual approach to researching the impact of such discontinuities on schools (OFSTED, 2002). 'Pupil mobility' was defined as, 'A child joining or leaving a school at a point other than the normal age at which children start or finish their education at that school, whether or not this involves a move of home' (Dobson and Henthorne, 1999: 5). A 'pupil mobility' perspective highlighted the negative impact of 'interrupted learning' upon learning and teaching processes, and showed that it limits progress for Gypsy/Traveller pupils and for learners from other backgrounds. As a cautionary note, however, English guidance for managing pupils' 'moving on' (DfES, 2003) does not go on to discuss the particular arrival and leaving patterns of Gypsy and Traveller pupils, nor their distinctive curriculum and learning needs. This omission carries a risk of class teachers continuing to lack the necessary knowledge for successful engagement with Gypsy/Traveller families and their children.

The Scottish Traveller Education Programme (STEP), funded by the then Scottish Office, undertook research to establish patterns and levels of Travellers' attendance at all schools in Scotland across a five-year period from early to mid-1990. This research into Scottish schools demonstrated findings similar to those of Dobson and Henthorne. Notably, children of parents working for international companies and chronically ill children experience similar discontinuities in their learning and teaching to children of mobile Gypsies and Travellers (Jordan, 2000). Jordan's research showed that, "Over ... four sessions, 133 different schools reported having Travellers on the roll" (2000: 2). Schools reported that many Traveller pupils' lack of progress was due not to their lack of ability, but to lack of access to a continuous, coherent and relevant curriculum. Another key finding was the evident difference between primary and secondary aged Gypsy/Traveller children's school attendance. Primary children were found regularly to attend school whereas high levels of non-attendance were reported for secondary aged pupils. Jordan also noted that the complexity and richness of Gypsy and Traveller children's cultural heritage and their

particular learning experiences were not well known or understood by schools. These findings, re-echoed in English research (Derrington and Kendal 2004), indicate that ensuring that Gypsy/Traveller pupils complete their formal schooling continues to challenge educators across the UK.

Conventional school assessment procedures cannot take account of the largely oral culture of Travellers. For example, “Cliff Cardona of the National Travellers’ Action Group can remember every sub-section of every piece of planning legislation enacted in his lifetime relating to gypsies. He has to remember: ... he can’t read or write” (Ferguson, 2004). The relevance of this important point for schools is that poor levels of literacy, frequently confused by teachers as ‘learning difficulties’, lead to embarrassing situations particularly for secondary-aged Gypsy/Traveller boys. Qualitative research shows the continuity of poor treatment of Gypsy/Traveller pupils, particularly from other ‘settled’ pupils who bully and call them racist names, on the way to school, while at school and on the way home from school; such treatment is a well recognised source of concern for Gypsy/Traveller parents (Lloyd, Stead, *et al.*, 1999). Of particular concern to Gypsy/Traveller young people is that their teachers do not believe them when they legitimately complain of such treatment (Lloyd and Stead, 2001). Such negative experiences often resonates with their families’ past experiences of schools and serves to discourage some parents and children from regular attendance.

Gypsies’ and Travellers’ patterns of arrival and departure from schools are frequently unannounced. Prefiguring the Standards in Scotland’s Schools etc. Act (2000), ‘The Advisory Committee on Scotland’s Travelling People: Eighth Term Report 1995–1997’ argued that Travellers have ‘a right to an education’ and that it be delivered from an ‘interrupted learning’ perspective. The committee identified an, “... urgent need for progress” in educational authorities’ development of flexible support for learning (1998: 25).

Support for Learning

From the 1990s, Scottish education authorities offered Gypsy and Traveller pupils a range of projects and facilities to support their learning. For example, a few Scottish local authorities appointed designated ‘support for learning staff’ whose role is to support access to schools by Gypsy and Traveller families. Known colloquially as ‘Traveller Teachers’, their roll and remit is complex: Traveller Teachers may teach a range of pupils with different additional support needs, for example pupils whose home language is not English. They frequently teach in more than one setting during the course of a day, for example in schools and different out-of-school settings. In response to a range of research findings, for example regarding the disproportionate rates of disciplinary exclusion of Gypsy/Traveller pupils (Jordan, 2001), schools received extra resources to support ‘better behaviour’ (SEED, 2001). With the aim of achieving greater social inclusion for all pupils in Scottish schools, staff were encouraged to pursue more inclusive educational approaches (HMI, 2002).

Technological support for learning – mobile learners

The potential of interactive communications technologies (ICT) to support mobile learners is self-evident. Jordan and Padfield (2004) noted that Scotland was both a partner and a leader in supporting learning at a distance through ICT, to overcome the educational exclusion associated with mobility, principally with Occupational Travellers. Importantly, European developments in open and distance learning reflected educators’ awareness that distance education for travelling periods could be provided by a base school (EFECOT, 1994). A more recent pilot development in England, the E-Learning and Mobility Project (E-LAMP) has successfully focused on mobile pupils from Circus and Showground Traveller backgrounds (Marks, 2004).

Scottish projects, such as the SchoolsOutGlasgow.net project and the Virtual

Schoolbag, have made innovative and successful use of ICT to support a range of pupils with significant 'interrupted learning' (www.schoolsoutglasgow.net). Significantly, many Scottish participant learners were able to overcome their poor self-esteem as learners, were motivated to re-engage with formal learning and successfully achieved positive educational experiences and outcomes (Passey and Rogers, *et al.*, 2004: 77); (www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/education/sogrs.pdf).

Despite its capacity to transcend the interrelated challenges of time, place and pace of learning at school, Scottish local authorities' use of ICT to support learning at a distance (from school) for mobile Gypsy/Traveller pupils is yet to be developed (Padfield and Jordan, 2003). Local authorities' developments in use of ICT supported learning were found to be piecemeal, particularly for those educated largely in out-of-school settings. The provision of laptop computers and peripheral technologies have been limited to a few Traveller Teachers, mostly with little or no training and on-going support.

The significance of the above social, cultural and technological complexities for English policy on provision for Gypsy/Traveller communities is well documented (Hawes and Perez, 1996: 29–31). The Scottish Executive Education Department's publication of National Guidance, 'Inclusive Educational Approaches for Gypsies and Travellers: within the context of interrupted learning' (SEED, 2003), specifically aimed to assist schools in their provision of inclusive education that recognised and accommodated the distinctiveness of their educational needs. The Guidance suggests that schools develop more flexible ways of delivering the curriculum, for the potential benefit of all pupils, including Gypsy and Traveller pupils. Research into developments in Scottish educational services for Gypsy/Traveller pupils, particularly those based on Scottish council sites, provides a strong measure of the impact of Scotland's legislation regarding the entitlement of all children to a school education. The research addresses issues around policy goals regarding the educational inclusion of these Scottish pupils and discusses whether they are actually being achieved.

METHODOLOGY

The design and scope of our mixed methods research approach reflected our awareness of the complexities of Gypsy/Traveller communities' everyday lives, their frequently negative treatment by officials, especially in relation to their children, and an understanding of their many reasons for travelling (Hawes and Perez, 1996: 90–91).

Arising from the complex accommodation needs of Gypsy/Traveller families who may spend time in a number of Scotland's 32 local authorities, a 'focusing down' approach was adopted for making contact with the necessarily broad range of officials involved in delivering educational services for Gypsy and Traveller communities, including chief executives, directors of education and housing, local authority officers, site managers, designated support teachers for Gypsy/Traveller children and their families and school staff.

Our negotiated research approach involved a careful observation of ethical research principles around gaining participants' informed consent (Burgess, 1995:155). In practice this reflected a continuum of consent from official research permission to gaining the 'informed consent' of those participants with direct responsibility for delivery of educational services. Local authority employees were selected for research participation through a process of 'purposive' or 'snowball' sampling (Robson, 2002: 255–256). Cooper notes that, "Subjects will not reveal their beliefs and attitudes unless they have reason to believe in the integrity of the researcher (Cooper, 1995: 93). We prepared a research flyer that included a clear description of the purpose of the research, how the research would be conducted and the importance we placed upon participants' accounts of their experience. As a basis for gathering reliable information, a statement of our research intention was drawn up for use with Gypsy/Traveller families. It stated,

This research *is not* an exercise in finding out about Gypsy/Travellers. This research *is* an exercise in finding out what local authorities provide, and if support for access to that provision is easily available for Gypsy/Travellers.

As literacy cannot be assumed, both the statement and the flyer were described during initial contacts with Gypsy/Traveller participants.

Professionals facilitated our initial research contacts with Gypsy/Traveller children and their families. We established rapport with participants and ensured that they were aware of their right to withdraw from the research. We assured them that their contributions were private (in the sense that what they said would not be personally attributed) and that their anonymity would be preserved in the writing up and dissemination of research findings. We were careful to stress to all participants, particularly the Gypsy/Traveller children and young people (Alderson, 1995), that we were not researching the movements or reasons for movements of individual families.

THE STUDY

The research commenced in April 2003 and reported in March 2004. The range of policy questions entailed gathering quantitative and qualitative data from providers and users of educational services for Gypsy/Traveller families. Nuanced to their particular background, participants were asked to reflect upon and provide information about the extent to which Gypsy/Traveller school-aged children and young people living on sites were:

- a) using local authority schools;
- b) offered and delivered support appropriate to their learning needs; and,
- c) what educational support was offered and delivered for Gypsy/Traveller pupils' outwith school age.

Ultimately, permission to research and contact details were obtained from:

- 29 of Scotland's 32 local authorities.

Research contact was made with:

- 70 local authority officers, all of whom provided qualitative data;
- all 35 of Scotland's local authority site managers, all of whom provided qualitative and quantitative data;
- 23 designated support teachers for Gypsy/Traveller children and their families, a proportion of whom returned qualitative and quantitative data;
- staff at 163 schools reported as having Gypsy/Traveller pupils on their rolls, 69 of whom responded.

Gypsy/Traveller participants included 11 adults and 17 school-aged Travellers, whose recent experience covered provision of educational services *in at least 5* local authorities.

Data were gathered as follows:

- a telephone survey of site managers and a self-completion data form for return through a stamped addressed envelope;
- a self-completion questionnaire for schools for return through a stamped addressed envelope;
- a self-completion questionnaire for designated support staff with a stamped addressed return envelope; and

- qualitative semi-structured face-to-face taped interviews with Gypsy/Traveller parents and young learners.

Subsequently, with indirect support from a researcher, for example over the telephone, participants returned data from official records on: the number of enrolments to Scottish primary and secondary schools from Gypsy/Traveller sites; the rates of attendance and levels of attainments of Gypsy/Traveller pupils, from age 5–16 years, at school or in out-of-school settings. Descriptive data were also recorded concerning: schools' involvement of Gypsy/Traveller parents in their policies and development plans; support provided by Scottish local authorities for Gypsy/Traveller learners of all ages.

A comprehensive analytical scope was thus achieved from a wide range of research sources, including national and local policy documentation, salient officials and professionals, and Gypsy/Traveller families. Quantitative and qualitative accounts were collated, analysed and the emergent findings from these different sources were cross-referenced to check their validity and correspondence. Issues of interpretation of data and its meanings, however, are open to discussion as, "humans are always already tangled up, (...) in a secondhand world of meanings and have no direct access to reality" (Denzin, 1997: 246).

THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

With some **significant** and **impressive** exceptions, the research found that many Scottish local authorities lacked knowledge of the Gypsy/Traveller families in their area, and frequently had a poor understanding of the social and cultural realities of their everyday lives. While examples of 'good practice' were found, evidence of a patchy and poorly coordinated delivery of services at local level emerged with little evidence of major new initiatives coordinated around the policies referred to above. Three main interrelated themes of *identity*, *fear* and *contradiction* emerged as shaping families' decisions in relation to their children's attendance at school.

'Scottish folk' – dissonance between policy and experience

Some participants challenged our use of the term 'Gypsy/Traveller'. A site manager said, "that is not how they see themselves". Officials varied in their naming from 'Gypsies', 'Scottish Travellers' and 'travelling folk' with 'Travellers' emerging as the most common referent used by officials and Gypsy/Traveller people.

Individuals frequently described themselves as members of a socially stigmatised group, and of being treated badly by some members of the settled community (Goffman, 1963). One woman who self-identified as a Roma Gypsy, described how, when attending to her garden a few weeks after being housed, a neighbour had approached her and said, "don't bother with your garden because you will not be here long. We will burn you out." The mother went on to tell of her understandable fears about letting her children walk to school or play in the street where they lived. Claveria and Alonso argue that, "The Roma's status as outsiders in any state and their resulting invisibility make them particularly vulnerable to institutionalised and de facto racism" (2003: 562). While recognising the seriousness of Scottish policy makers' aims, the claim made on bus advertisements declaring, 'One Scotland, Many Cultures', did not appear to be supported by this research.

Social barriers to educational inclusion

Travellers' decisions about revealing their Traveller *identity* appeared to depend upon the quality of relationships between a Gypsy/Traveller family and the 'settled' community, which in turn shaped families' decisions about whether to use a local school or to prefer on-site or other educational services.

Gypsy/Traveller families' *fear* of hurt and a wish to avoid name-calling emerged as a key reason for hiding their *identity*. One Traveller father fearing that his children

might be hurt at school told them that they, "... must not tell people who they are or where they live... the children must just say 'I live doon there'". He preferred to risk that, "... people think you are rude, but we keep ourselves to ourselves." Gypsy/Traveller parents choose to remove their children from personal harm at school by 'moving on' with the *contradiction* that their children inevitably experience 'interrupted learning' and its exclusionary effects on their educational progress.

Analysis of participants' accounts identified interrelated issues of *identity*, *fear* and *contradiction* as negatively shaping provision of flexible educational services for Gypsy/Traveller young people, and their use of them. These issues appeared to constrain the effectiveness of working relationships *within* and *between* local authorities and ultimately the quality of educational services for Gypsy/Traveller families.

Gypsy/Traveller young peoples' discourses revealed these common themes. Most described the experience of negative stereotyping associated with having a Traveller *identity*. For example, when asked what they liked to be called, two secondary-age boys' almost simultaneous responses lead to a discussion about negative name calling at school.

- Secondary Boy 1: Gypsies
- Secondary Boy 2: Travellers.
- Researcher: Right. You call yourself Travellers?
- Secondary Boy 1: Really it means the same thing. But some people call us names (*pauses*)
- Secondary Boy 2: I come from a Traveller (*interrupted*)...
- Secondary Boy 1: We are Traveller people. But people, names wise, we are Gypsies as well. We are called Gypsies but it doesn't hurt our feelings because that is what we are.
- Researcher: So they use the name 'Gypsy' in a bad way?
- Secondary Boy 1: Aye. But it doesn't really affect us because we are Gypsies. That is what we are. So it no really affects us but they still shout it.
- Researcher: But it makes it easier if you use the term Traveller?
- Secondary Boy 1: I don't really mind. The only thing I don't like people calling me is a 'tink'.

Conveyed by a tone of voice and shaped by the context of the situation in which a name is used, names once acceptable are now frequently used as an insult, a point illustrated by a girl who reflected upon an adult's handling of a 'name calling' incident when at primary school.

- Secondary Girl 2: I had a schoolteacher, she wasnae really my teacher. She just worked in the playground called Mrs A. and there was this boy who always used to aggravate me all the time, he was always 'Gypsy' and 'tinker' into my face. So if you called them what B. said back (*an insulting name for non-Gypsies, that was not repeated out of respect for the researcher because it had connotations of swearing*), he would go tell and if you said to her 'but ...' she would then say 'but you have called him that back' and I'd say 'I know but he started it' and then she would take his side and I'd say 'but that is no fair'. So she said to me 'but are you?' and I said 'it is still no nice what he is saying'.

Another girl in the group interview joined in to say,

Secondary Girl 1: This is what I'm trying to mean. If a black person, we are white people, but if you called a black person to go against them (*pause*) but if they called you a Gypsy, a 'tinker', if they called you a 'tink' back, they were really spiteful to you and called you a 'tink' or something and you called them something back, you would (*pause*) the person, like me myself, the Traveller, would get into really top bother and, you know what I mean? And they (other children) would get away with it because you'd get into trouble.

The latter's comments clearly reflected her understanding of the complexity of racism and a perception that her people experience a poorly recognised form of 'white minority' racism in Scottish schools. Secondary-aged girls revealed that 'bad mouthing' goes both ways, however, and that insulting names for non-Gypsies are generally kept a secret.

Social barriers between 'settled' and Traveller communities in their everyday interactions continue to pose a challenge to educational service providers. The choosing not to self-identify as a Gypsy/Traveller clearly contributes to local authorities' difficulties in identifying whether and how many are living in, or passing through their boundaries. One might ask to what extent has provision of flexible educational services helped improve Gypsy/Traveller families' access to education?

Organizational barriers to educational inclusion

While most chief executives and senior housing and education executives responded fully to research requests for contacts and information, the responsibility for gathering requested information was usually assigned to less senior colleagues. Some evidently had more direct knowledge and experience of supporting Gypsy/Traveller families than others. Some, frequently new in post, had little knowledge of Gypsies and Travellers.

During telephone interviews, officials were frequently guarded in their responses. Cases emerged of officials, some of whom were designated as having responsibility for Gypsies and Travellers, who were both unable to provide factual information about Gypsy/Traveller communities in their locality, or their authority's services for them. No overall information source existed, which significantly limited their capacity to respond to our research enquiries.

On a more positive note, our inquiries apparently had an awareness-raising effect. A few officials subsequently sent limited information about the presence of one or two children at a number of schools after making what they described to us as, "persistent inquiries to colleagues in schools".

By cross-referencing the responses of Education Directors, site managers and Traveller Teachers to our requests for a list of local authority schools attended by Gypsy/Traveller pupils, it emerged that some education departments were apparently not aware of all the schools currently attended by Gypsy/Traveller pupils. This applied particularly to secondary-aged pupils. This research found that across two sessions, 163 schools were reported to have Gypsy/Traveller pupils on their school roll, an increase from 133 schools in 1992 used by Gypsy/Traveller pupils (See above, Jordan, 2001a: 2).

Staff attitudes towards Gypsy/Traveller communities

Officials in some local authorities had a good knowledge and understanding of Gypsy/Traveller families and the complexity of their public service needs. Their accounts showed families as having a range of beliefs about education and that many value the basic literacy, numeracy and ICT skills taught to their children at school.

Families were described as actively supporting their children's education. Some families travel long distances to ensure their child's regular attendance at a particular school. Gypsy/Traveller young people frequently described life on a site as, "very boring". Site managers recognised their feelings and some had successfully secured funds for an on-site portacabin, which facilitated interagency working, provided a communal space for tenants' meetings as well as a space for the Traveller Teacher to work with children of all ages. In a few cases, site managers had organised computers, some with online facilities, for use by all Travellers on their site.

By contrast, other officials, who clearly lacked the factual information we were seeking, *volunteered* their negative stereotypical perceptions of Gypsy/Traveller people. Some stated that *no* Gypsy/Traveller people were interested in education for their children. Some described families as lacking educational aspirations, either for themselves or their children, as not valuing education, and as being "too lazy" to ensure their children's attendance at school. Officials' negative beliefs were sometimes presented as a justification for the lack of education services. Some site managers, for example were not prepared to facilitate on-site learning support. Other officers considered that existing provision *should be* improved, but gave the impression of being relatively less pro-active on the grounds that the families had limited interest in formal education.

In conclusion, officers with positive beliefs about Gypsy/Traveller communities and their rights to education appeared to be energised in adopting a more pro-active approach to securing appropriate education services, while officers articulating negative stereotypical beliefs appeared to be less proactive in their approaches, which impacted upon service developments (Padfield and Jordan, 2004: 27). Overall, authorities' delivery of equality of opportunity for Gypsy/Traveller families was found to be very poor.

Effective record keeping – "it's just not that simple"

Site managers frequently reported official records as poorly kept or non-existent. Teachers also reported that information about school enrolments, attendance and attainment of Gypsy/Traveller pupils, particularly those based on sites, was poorly kept and widely dispersed across a number of schools. By way of explanation a Traveller Teacher wrote, "During the course of an academic year – many (*Traveller children*) have attended several schools and lived at several locations. It is not uncommon for a family to live on-site — at a roadside encampment — in a house successively or simultaneously within a year." The research also found that school teachers rarely received up-to-date records for their mobile pupils (O'Hanlan and Holmes, 2004: 167). Lack of pupil records certainly resulted in delayed learning for Gypsy/Travellers, who frequently report being taught one subject many times over, and in missing others altogether! Individuals' *fears* about revealing their Traveller *identity* apparently limit officials' capacity to keep accurate records.

Some Traveller Teachers were concerned that we did not present a distorted account of Gypsy/Traveller pupils' participation and achievements in education. Their remit is to provide additional support for Gypsy/Traveller pupils in school and out-of-school settings. We asked them to gather data relating to those pupils educated in out-of-school settings. They were rightly concerned that we did not exclude data about those attending schools who **did not require support**. Our research also included a survey of schools used by Gypsy/Traveller pupils, which was how we attempted to gather data on Travellers attending schools.

Sufficient numbers of officials and professionals were prepared to 'go the extra mile' to gather what data they could find for the research. Site managers, for example while not identifying individual children, nevertheless, provided data from 24 council sites that showed an estimated **357 potential enrolments or admissions** of Gypsy/Traveller children to local authority schools from those sites over 2 sessions (August

2001 to July 2003). While not statistically robust, as many children clearly returned to a site more than once during this period and may well have been double counted, the combined data from site managers, Traveller Teachers and schools showed:

- complex patterns in their enrolment and attendance at local authority schools;
- good use of primary schools;
- poor levels of gendered enrolment and attendance at secondary schools;
- particularly low levels of national and local authority testing and attainment of primary and secondary Gypsy/Traveller pupils relative to 'settled' peers.

Despite the scope of our research design, our quantitative findings present a 'partial picture' of Gypsy/Traveller pupils' achievements in schools.

Collaborative working relationships

A common finding identified across all authorities was that relationships between Gypsy/Traveller families and local authority officials and professionals were characteristically complex and open to misunderstandings. **Local authority officials** and professionals frequently expressed a concern that their comments did not damage the mutual 'trust' and 'respect' necessary for effective co-operative working with the families. **Site managers**, for example were particularly careful in responding to our questions, not least because two cases of 'serious trouble' between Gypsy/Traveller families had led to families 'moving on', a fear of 'pulling on' to particular sites, and to the closure of a site.

The right to privacy and children's right to an education clearly emerged as a daily tension in negotiations between Traveller Teachers and families in securing effective access to education. **Traveller Teachers** support for families and their children's learning required considerable sensitivity to the circumstances shaping a pupil's movement from one school to another and of their not infrequent need for support at roadside encampments. Staffing arrangements for Traveller Teachers teaching in these different settings, limits the range of topics that can be offered to Gypsy/Traveller children in the short space of time available for actual teaching. For example, staff travel various distances between one location and another, ranging from 3 miles, to 6 miles, to 35 miles and to 80 miles in any direction during the course of a day. Certainly, unless they attend school, very few Gypsy/Traveller children are able to access a range and quality of ICT supported learning opportunities.

The attendance at local schools by Gypsy/Traveller pupils from local sites was found to be more likely in the context of regular, positive communications between Traveller Teachers, site managers and schools. Successful informal interagency working with Gypsy/Traveller families was ensured by a telephone call from the site manager to let the Traveller Teacher know that a new family had arrived. The Traveller Teacher would then visit the family to offer information and support and help liaise their relationships with the school. The reports of site managers also reflect the significance of local authority transport arrangements in supporting regular attendance. It was found that many local authorities were not pro-active in their provision of transport yet most council sites are located far from local bus routes. The roads to sites were frequently reported as too dangerous for use by pupils due to lack of street lighting or pavements or because getting to school involved walking close to very busy main roads.

Significant numbers of Gypsy/Traveller school-aged children and young people experience interrupted learning, and its negative effects were found to be exacerbated by difficulties faced by schools in organising flexible access to appropriate and relevant curricula for these mobile pupils (Demie, 2002). A school's ethos of

inclusion and its capacity to respond flexibly to the frequently unexpected arrivals and departures of a few Gypsy/Traveller pupils was clearly reflected in the kind of welcome and practical support its staff offered to the families. However, many schools relied heavily on the Traveller teacher's practical support in negotiating relationships between school staff and Gypsy Traveller parents. Some schools claimed to treat, "all children the same". But, this raised questions about how they supported the distinctive learning needs of Gypsy/Traveller pupils. Very few schools reported proactive home-school links, and no schools used or had developed distance learning for mobile Gypsy/Traveller pupils.

GYPSEY/TRAVELLER FAMILIES' PERSPECTIVES ON LEARNING

Data indicates that Gypsy/Traveller families' use of schools is constrained by issues of fear, for example fears for their children's safety in some school settings, and their perceptions of the secondary curriculum as a threat to Traveller cultures and ways of life. However, the data collected showed that Gypsy/Traveller parents' educational aspirations for their young people are broadening (Bhopal, 2004). In addition to valued basic literacy and numeracy skills, young people, particularly boys, described their mothers *and* fathers as encouraging them to acquire ICT skills and qualifications, for example in building and gardening, to help them access an ever changing labour market.

Gypsy/Traveller girls clearly valued their literacy. In a largely oral culture, however, being the 'family's reader' is a 'mixed blessing' as s/he is asked to read everybody else's mail.

Researcher: So they (*parents*) think there should be some privacy (*from officials*) but they want you to learn to read and write?

Secondary Girl 4: Yeah. They get books for us and we've got to read them. Does your Mam do that? (*to other pupils*)

Secondary Girl 3: Yeah.

Secondary Girl 5: I read as well but I don't read their letters because I think they've got to have some privacy as well. I don't think really, it is not very nice. And you know when it is your parents', and your mother and your father's name comes through the letterbox and you open it, a child, and you are reading all their business, know what I mean.

Secondary Girl 4: Like going in their bedroom. You are not supposed to go in your mammy and daddy's bedroom.

Boys were more focused on the world of paid work, which frequently began as an informal arrangement between them and their fathers. One of two Secondary-aged Gypsy/Traveller boys, interviewed together volunteered the following points.

Secondary boy 1: We learn to read and write... If it wisnae for that I wouldnae have went to school. I never went to school to learn any fancy things. And I'd get my papers like my dad's got – at college. It is better that way. People can trust you more when you get the work, when you are working for them.

Researcher: So what do you mean? Oh, when you are doing work...

Secondary boy 1: Some people don't trust you. Can't do the job proper - like a cowboy. That is how, if you have got the qualifications, the paper to show the people, there is a lot more trust in them for you.

Researcher: They'll believe you can do the job?

Secondary boy 1: Aye there is a little bit more trust in them, that we are a professional company. Well, no a company...

Most of the young people had attended primary school, but *generally* held negative feelings about high school. It was a place where, "...other pupils think we are going to take things away and that they have got a right to bully us." The following comment, from one Traveller girl presents a rare positive comment,

Secondary Girl 3: At my old school, everybody knows me. It was all right at my old school. I know a lot of people and some of them are bad and some of them are good. Some I get along with and some I don't. They all know me. Some people stick up for me. I am not frightened. If someone called me names I'd tell them to stop it.

However, Traveller boys' experience of schools was generally less positive and largely explained in terms of racist incidents; one said, "I went to primary school and I went to the academy. I went to first year and second year, but I only went about a week into third year and then I left."

These participants, who clearly valued formal learning skills, suggested that generally girls expect and are expected to help take care of the family and its privacy, while boys accept that they acquire occupational skills through working with their fathers and other male family members.

Young Travellers' and teachers' views of out-of-school provision

Data suggested that secondary-aged Travellers *generally* preferred to learn in out-of-school settings, and were positive about the learning opportunities accessed through the few 'alternative' local authority projects.

A **Traveller** girl recounted how the local authority welfare officer had come to her site to find out why she was not attending school. Her father had explained that he could not force his daughter to attend, and pointed out that many other children on the site were not attending school. The officer left. Within a year or two of her reported encounter, evidence emerged of that local authority's innovative development of its existing youth services; collaborative working between educational professionals, youth workers, ICT support services and Gypsy/Traveller parents had helped the local authority deliver an ICT supported educational service for primary and secondary-age Gypsy/Traveller pupils. Such approaches reflect a Habermasian 'communicative shift' identifiable in a, "... society ... currently moving toward a dialogic tendency in which people *have to dialogue* (my italics) and come to agreements in order to coordinate their actions, solve daily problems, and make decisions about their lives." (Claveria and Alonso, 2004: 567).

The young people all enjoyed attending and learning at the above project, and were happy with the quality of its teaching and learning opportunities. One said of the project, "this counts as school". While a boy said, "we learn just as much here", others expressed a wish for a broader range of topics, "at the academy or the high school you get more learning. Because we have only got one teacher and a short amount of time, we can only learn a couple of things." One girl would have liked to learn modern languages. The service, collaboratively developed with Gypsy/Traveller families, was valued, well supported and proved to be a 'bridge back to school' for some and a 'bridge to opportunities' for others.

Teachers acknowledged Gypsy/Traveller pupils' experiences of bullying at school, but some thought these were sometimes presented as an excuse for avoiding formal learning, particularly at secondary schools, and suggested that parents' views limited their children's aspirations. **Traveller Teachers** voiced concerns about the

limitations of the support for learning offered in out-of-school settings, although one teacher described the collaboratively developed service as, “an excellent provision”, which ensured basic literacy.

Traveller Teacher 1: With the language it is more about reading so that they can read what is necessary, whether it be a newspaper just to keep up, for interest. Or whether it is forms or official letters, things like that. So that they are not totally lost or abandoned... like they feel they are. Not just Travellers, I mean my father was illiterate and what a handicap it is.

Traveller Teacher 2: Particularly now, but I suppose at anytime. A father told (*the name of a teacher*) that was what he wanted, he just wanted her to be able to read and to ... so when she tried to do other things (*he prevented her from doing so*) but that was what they wanted for her.

Traveller Teacher 1: I suppose we feel frustrated because we are providing what I suppose parents want really. Just basic literacy and numeracy and maybe a wee bit computer skills, but that is basically what the parents are wanting. Whereas as teachers we think it is much more about the rights of the child...

Traveller Teacher 2: It sounds dramatic! We are giving them choices.

Traveller Teacher 1: Their dreams are a bit constrained by what is expected of them. Very much so... their expectations and what they are looking for are very restricted for them as well.

Teachers described how they acted as brokers between their pupils and other agencies, such as further education colleges, to ensure young people's continued access to education.

Traveller Teacher 2: It is frustrating. I think what we are doing here is great. The kids wouldn't otherwise go to school but we are facing the dilemma that by providing this very flexible alternative, which sounds great, but it actually, in itself restricts pupils because we are finding some Traveller children who are quite happily at primary school just now. Now that their parent's know (*about us*) their parents think, ah ...

Traveller Teacher 1: ...that is where they'll be going.

Gypsy/Traveller and other pupils not able to regularly attend school require additional support for learning, *a wider concept than special educational needs*, to help overcome the gaps in their learning (STEP, 2004: 4). Despite concerns regarding the exclusionary effects of 'part-time' and out-of-school provision, some teachers thought that, in an ideal world, pupils from a range of backgrounds experiencing difficulties in coping with the size and pace of a 'school environment' should be offered a more protected kind of service.

Young people frequently feel ambivalent about school, a feeling shared by Gypsy/Traveller pupils.

Researcher: Have you a question for me?

Secondary age Girl: I would. How is it up to (*pause*) why are you trying to

find out what we think? I know you should and which I am glad of it. See other children that go to the high school they don't go to them and say 'would you like education?' - that is made for them. They are told that is what you are doing that is it.

Researcher: So would you like a better education?

Secondary age Girl: I don't think that is fair to ask me because I know when I get older I'll say 'I wish I did,' but see the now, I'll say 'I cannae be bothered, I don't want a better education'.

The research concluded that Gypsy/Traveller pupils distinguished between school as a place, and learning as a process. However, in rejecting 'place', they effectively exclude themselves from formal processes of learning.

Reflections on policy goals and research findings

This research was constructed within the following legislative and policy framework. The Race Relations (Amendment) Act (2000) placed specific duties on Education Authorities to assist them meet the general duties of the Act, which entail the prevention of racial discrimination and the promotion of equality of opportunity and good race relations; and, The Scottish Parliament's 'Inquiry into Gypsy Travellers and Public Sector Policies', stated that, "All legislation and policies should be framed on the understanding that Gypsy Travellers are an ethnic group, until such time as a court decision is made on recognition as a racial group under the Race Relations Act 1976" (2001: 2).

Drawing upon data gathered with the active support of a wide range of providers and users of educational services for Gypsy/Traveller families, the article has demonstrated the relevance of the above policies and, more specifically, the limited effectiveness of educational policy goals to ensure that Gypsy/Traveller families are included in the government's commitment to "A Scotland in which every child matters, where every child regardless of their family background, has the best possible start in life" (SEED, 2001b).

The research showed that many Gypsy/Traveller families clearly valued education, but for the complex reasons outlined in the article, 'they do not (learn) just as they please ... they do not (learn) under circumstances chosen by themselves'. Many Gypsy/Traveller families were 'mobile' for occupational and cultural reasons, and at times to avoid 'trouble' with other Travellers. Some choose to hide their 'Traveller identity' to keep family members safe from frequent racist acts and name calling by some 'settled' people. These factors appeared to contribute towards the lack of knowledge held by local authorities, and a poor understanding of the educational needs Gypsy/Traveller pupils. Additionally, it found a general lack of flexibility in support for teachers' development of more inclusive educational responses to the distinctive needs of Gypsy/Traveller pupils. The organization of school learning and teaching processes assumes regular attendance at school. Gypsy/Traveller and other pupils who do not regularly attend school inevitably experience structural 'barriers to learning' and the negative effects of 'interrupted learning' on their self-esteem and motivation to learn. These effects are exacerbated by the likelihood of the 'delayed learning' that results when a class teacher cannot access a pupil's up-to-date records. These challenges are heightened for those learning and teaching in out-of-school settings.

The evidence strongly suggests that access to an appropriate and relevant curriculum can only be achieved through a 'communicative dialogue' approach among service providers and Gypsy/Traveller families. The research did find some *significant and impressive exceptions*, where appropriate and relevant services had

begun to emerge from,

- the regular, positive communications between designated teaching staff and other relevant service providers
- their will and capacity to develop *trusting relationships* with Gypsy/Traveller families, and,
- their *mutual* commitment to work collaboratively.

An educational youth service, for example, clearly developed effective services that were accessible to, welcomed by and had positive educational outcomes for primary and secondary aged users. Its successes are significant as secondary schooling is a particular source of concern for many Gypsy/Traveller families. In other cases, designated teaching staff, working with schools and Gypsy/Traveller families, focused upon overcoming the negative effects of racist stereotyping, and the resultant fear and intimidation they frequently found to affect relationships between families and school staff.

Many Gypsy/Traveller parents clearly recognised their children's entitlement to literacy, numeracy and ICT skills, and valued formal education, not least as a necessary means for Gypsy/Traveller communities to adapt to the changing social and economic landscape of the twenty-first century. Within the boundaries of their particular local authority, some staff made good use of ICT to motivate and engage Gypsy/Traveller pupils in learning. However, ICT's capacity to support learning at a distance (from school) for 'mobile' Gypsy/Traveller pupils has not been locally or nationally developed. In envisioning the communicative potential of ICT for supporting access to an appropriate and progressive curriculum for Gypsy/Traveller pupils, a cautionary note must be sounded. Research has shown that designated teachers and schools must not, "...hasten into cyberspace without sharing clear educational vision for change" (Conlon and Simpson, 2002), and, that local authorities must ensure *adequate* and *sustainable* provision and support for staff, pupils and their families. Such technological support for learning presents educational policy makers and practitioners with an 'innovative moment' for ensuring that 'urgent need for progress' in meeting the learning needs of Scotland's Gypsy/Traveller pupils.

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