

‘They’re trying to teach them what I can teach them at home, and them not a Traveller!’: Introducing Irish Traveller identity into the curriculum

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Abstract: This paper documents research that investigated Irish Traveller women’s experiences of education within the context of a rapidly changing society. The paper discusses the methodological approaches chosen by the researcher in order to support research with hard-to-reach populations (Sydor, 2013). The findings detail the complexities surrounding the introduction of Traveller identities into the curriculum. The paper concludes with a discussion of need for a change in practice and understanding which values collaboration between Traveller communities and educational environments thereby benefitting Irish Traveller women who are the key actors in Traveller children accessing education and thereby improving educational outcomes and subsequent life chances.

Keywords: Irish Travellers; gender; education: identity

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Introduction

Within this paper I refer to the group of people known as the Irish Traveller Community. Irish Travellers (or *Pavees* or *Minceirs* as they refer to themselves) are a group of people originally from the island of Ireland. They enjoy a unique heritage, culture and identity, separate from that of the wider community, which can be traced back over 1000 years (Murray and Urban, 2012). Despite state recognition as a distinct ethnic group being awarded 2000 in the UK and many years of campaigning by the Traveller community, it was not until 2017 that Irish Travellers finally gained state recognition in Ireland as a distinct ethnic group (O'Halloran and O'Regan 2017). Irish Travellers, along with other Roma groups, have a rich cultural heritage and have significantly contributed to both European and world cultures (Im' Nin'alu, 2017).

Studies of Irish Travellers' culture have moved through a series of different phases from the '[Sub]Culture of Poverty' model (McCarthy, 1972) now withdrawn, to Sharon and George Gmelch's (1976) study of Travellers' move towards urbanisation. Helleiner (2000), Mac Aongusa (1992) and Ní Shúinéar (1994, 1997) have shifted the focus to considerations of ethnicity, relations between Travellers and the sedentary community and considerations of racism and structural inequalities. The subject of Travellers and education has been considered in the Irish context by a variety of authors: Bond (2006), Cavaliero (2016), Hegarty (2013), Kenny (1997), Murray and Urban (2012), O'Boyle (1990), and Sullivan (2006). This article aims to add to this body of knowledge by reporting on a study of Travellers' experiences of education conducted by the author in Ireland.

Background

According to Census 2016 the number of Travellers in the Republic of Ireland is 30,987 representing 0.7% of the population and showing an increase of 5.1% on the 2011 census (Census 2017). According to the AITHS (2010) most Travellers remain in one place and only 14% noted that they 'go on the road' once a year. More recent data (K.W. Research Associates, 2013) highlighted in a report for the Housing Agency (2014) noted that the majority of Travellers reside permanently in their local area, however, this data is contested – the same report acknowledges that Traveller organisations argue that these figures are inaccurate. There are differences in the demographic makeup of the Traveller Community and the general population. Within the Travelling Community 60% of the population make up the under 25's group as compared with 33.4% of the general population. 31.9% of Travellers aged 15-29 years old were registered as married compared with 5.8 % of the general population aged 15-29 years old (Census 2017, profile 8).

Discrimination

Research highlights that Travellers suffer significant disadvantage and discrimination across all social determinants of health (AITHS, 2010; Watson et al., 2011; MacGréil, 2010, 2011; ESRI, 2017) that accrues over time (Elder, 1985; Ross and Wu, 1996). Discrimination faced by Traveller women operates through a network of structures and processes of intersecting social locations. These sites and processes include family, education, nationhood, peer group, ethnicity, class, gender, generation / life stage, nomadic practice, and minority / state relations. Travellers experience spatial marginalisation that impacts on their ability to participate in society through education and employment (European Parliament, 2011). The EU Framework for National Traveller and Roma Integration Strategy 2020 established in May 2011 highlights the specific needs of Traveller women. Women, as the primary carers in the family, are more likely to come into contact with service providers and members of the wider settled community through schools, social welfare, doctors and the like, and as a result experience significantly more discrimination. Following Rosaldo and Lamphshpere's (1974) assertion that women are bearers of tradition and culture in society, Irish Traveller women have a key role to play in the education of their children. In line with Traveller organisations working from a perspective that recognises social determinants of health (Wilkinson and Marmot, 2008), the European Fundamental Rights Agency (2014) notes that:

Education is so important because it largely determines future life chances ... Just as a poor quality education limits future opportunities, a good one can lead to better employment prospects and help to lift people out of poverty. (p.7)

Changes in wider European society (Bancroft, 2005) combined with modern spatial practices in Ireland (Bhreachnacht, 2006) limit the use of public space and in turn the manner in which Traveller communities are able to practice their lifestyle. Helleiner (1997, 2000) who conducted fieldwork in county Galway in the 1990s, foregrounded the significant contribution made by Irish Traveller women to the family economy through hawking and begging, acknowledging that decline in travelling led to withdrawal from the workforce into the home place which in turn led to a reduction in Traveller women's participation in wider society. Helleiner notes that, at the same time as, and, as a result of, the increasing domesticisation of Traveller women through withdrawal into the home space, employment opportunities for women from the wider settled population opened up in the form of social work and teaching roles often in response to addressing these changes in Traveller society (including increased school attendance).

Media culture delivers the 'materials out of which people forge their very identities' shaping perceptions and attitudes towards others (Kellner, 1995, p. 1). Beach et al. (2013) argue for reflexivity in recognising how dominant

group discourse shapes perceptions of subordinated groups through media thereby limiting life successes. The persistence of certain stereotypes facilitates discrimination against Irish Travellers through the media (Fanning, 2002; Hayes, 2006; Helleiner, 2000; McVeigh, 2008). The Irish Traveller Movement (ITM) highlighted the discrimination implicit in a range of media channels which focus on Traveller crime, anti-social behaviour, nomadism and ethnicity implying that there are cultural traits which result in these anti-social behaviours (ITM 2012 – submission to The Leveson Inquiry). This reporting further exacerbates racialized stereotypes of the Travelling Community.

There has been a particular focus in recent years on the impact of the television programme, *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* (Clark & Taylor, 2014; Jensen & Ringrose, 2014; Tremlett, 2014). This is of particular significance because it is presented as a television documentary claiming to inform audiences of what is portrayed as the ‘secret hidden culture that is the Irish Travelling Community’. The representation of minority groups in the media is problematic, providing few opportunities for access to the modes and mediums of representation whilst at the same time influencing the creation of stereotypes (NACP, 2008). Of particular focus in these programmes has been intense public scrutiny over the dress and deportment of young Traveller women. This stereotyping and misrepresentation operates in a landscape where current recommendations from the Irish Government (*Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, 2014-2020*) acknowledge that:

Young people, especially young girls, are particularly vulnerable to negative self-image and media pressure surrounding body image. It is therefore important to promote a safe and healthy body image and self worth. (p. 54)

This context of changing lifestyles requires younger Travellers to renegotiate their own understandings of Traveller identity (Cavaliero and Levinson, 2019) and this can be influenced by increased involvement in schools and by the ways in which Traveller identity is represented within the curriculum.

Educational outcomes

Statistics from Census 2016 indicate that 13.3% of Travellers were educated to upper second level, compared with 69% per cent of the wider population (Census 2017). In 2006, the *Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy* (DES, 2006) foregrounded the key issues of attendance, retention and attainment. Reasons documented for non-attendance include bullying (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2016, citing Kelly et al., 2012) and lack of employment opportunities due to discrimination (AITHS, 2010). Recent research (ESRI, 2017) highlights the challenges facing policy providers needing to strike a balance between

mainstreaming and targeting (developing a tailored response to address the complex needs of marginalised groups experiencing severe disadvantage).

Poor literacy has been a salient characteristic of Travellers' education (TES, 2006) contributing to transgenerational cycles of disadvantage (UNESCO, 2007; AITHS, 2010). Parental education is vital for children's educational (and by extension employment) achievement (Hossler, Schmidt and, Vesper 1999; Stage and Hossler, 1988). When parent's literacy is poor they are not able to support children with homework, read letters from school or follow medication instructions. According to the FRA,

Illiteracy in an age group expected to be the 'breadwinners' has consequences in terms of labour market exclusion, poverty and social marginalisation (2014, p. 28)

Many of the older generation in the Traveller population in Ireland received little education (DES, 2006). The education that they did receive was usually in segregated classrooms or schools (Forkan 2006), where Traveller culture and history was practically invisible, and accounts from Travellers articulate experiences of discrimination and racist name calling (Cavaliero, May and Dolan, 2010) which, not surprisingly, have had an impact on the way in which some Travellers engage with the education system. Lodge and Lynch (2003) reported that a deep-seated prejudice towards Travellers was encountered in most of the schools that took part in their study of educational equality.

Including issues of identity in the curriculum

In *Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy 2006*, the Irish Government advocated an anti-bias and intercultural dimension to education provision promoting integration. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) Guidelines for Intercultural Education (2005) also emphasise a focus on interculturalism as integral to the primary school curriculum¹. However, research conducted by Bryan (2008, p.51) found contradictory educational practices and texts that abnormalised diversity and individualised racism (see also Devine, 2011). Binchy (2009, p. xxxiii) highlights the fact that education systems across the world deny 'the deep legitimacy of non-sedentary life choices' thereby delegitimizing nomadic culture. A curriculum, which is sedentarist in perspective, fails to acknowledge Traveller lifestyle practices (AITHS, 2010; Hegarty, 2013; Harmon, 2015; Mac Aongusa, 1992; Waldron, 2004). The 2011 National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (DoJE, 2011) advocated a policy of integration, however the latest strategy (DoJE, 2017) calls for an approach centred around inclusion and recognition of Traveller culture and heritage. As Kenny (1997) previously argued, 'Outsiders, as teachers usually are, must exercise sensitivity about teaching culture "content"' (p. 294). Recognition of identities as historically constructed and

reconstructed, heterogeneous and hybrid is an essential ingredient in challenging inequality. This approach denaturalizes the concepts of ‘identity’ (Anthias, 2006, p.27) and ‘culture’, emphasizing their fluidity and dynamism (Parekh 2000, p.336). This highlights the importance of a genuine and congruent engagement between the school and minority families so that they move beyond what Banks (1989, p. 193), cited in O’Hanlon and Holmes (2004, p. 100), describes as a

Level 1 contribution approach, where cultural artefacts are introduced into the curriculum as ‘add-ons’, using what he (Banks) described as the saris and samosas approach.

A recent study conducted in Ireland by Hegarty (2013) noted the exclusion of both young and older generations of Travellers from the language, history and geography of their own people. The impact on children’s self-esteem, identity and ability to successfully engage with schooling being linked to recognition within the school curriculum is extensively documented (DCYA, 2014; Drudy and Lynch, 1993, p.271; Lynch, 1999, p.17; NCCA, 2009). Dei et al., (2000) have argued that questions of identity, culture, spirituality, place and history are necessary ingredients required for the secure sense of belonging in school (as advocated in the most recent Irish Early Years educational curriculum framework, *Aistear* (NCCA, 2009), and *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures* (DCYA, 2014), the national policy framework for children and young people (2014). Many studies have also testified to the importance of relationships within the school environment in contributing to the development of a positive sense of identity, belonging and security (Harmon, 2015; Kiddle, 1999). Logan et al (2012) and Schwartz (2012) have illustrated the process whereby categories of difference are created through children experiencing spatial segregation through quality of educational provision. Furthermore Kamali, (2006) and Öhrn (2012) recognize the schematic understandings that arise due to physical segregation. This highlights the need to explore Traveller’s experiences of current educational practices which are explored through the research study documented in this article.

Methodology

The research study reported in this article developed out of my experiences of working with the Travelling Community as a practitioner in a variety of posts in the arena of education, beginning in 2000 (Cavaliero, 2016). The style of approach that I selected in order to conduct the research project was informed by ethnographic principles (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). A key challenge when conducting research is gaining access. This is particularly so when the group being researched

is marginalised, hidden (Liamputtong, 2007) or hard-to-reach (Sydor, 2013). An arguably suitable way for someone who is not from the Travelling Community to gain access is by capitalising on networks already established through a practitioner role (Griffin, 2008). Participants were selected and accessed through prior relationship networks established in the field through my work as a practitioner. Twenty eight Travellers were interviewed 25 women (18-45 years of age) and 3 men (20-54 years of age) who lived in a variety of housing situations including trailers, halting sites, council housing, and private rented accommodation. Whilst 45 years of age may seem relatively young in terms of the sedentary community, the lifespan of Travellers is on average 11.5 years less for women than that of the sedentary community and 15 years less for men (All Ireland Traveller Health Study, 2010). All participants were interviewed on numerous occasions (between 3-6 times) depending on availability of participants as some moved back and forth between Ireland and UK.

I had planned to interview equal numbers of men and women, however, during the interviewing process it became apparent that Travellers perceived education as situated in the realm of women's business, and furthermore, I had better relationships with the Traveller women as we had known each other longer. The majority of participants were interviewed several times within a framework of established relationships and throughout this project, participants were provided with information regarding training programmes and resources, support with college assignments and preparation for interviews. As the research progressed the interviews were modified into conversations involving the sharing of experiences between researcher and participants. The principle was that it was unreasonable to expect people to share intimate details about their own lives without something reciprocal, and in this way trust was developed.

Following on from practitioner-based approaches, I chose to apply the Cultural Safety model to my research. The model promotes a commitment to social justice and social change as promoted by Cemlyn (2008) who argues that all social work with Travellers must incorporate a human rights-based approach. This model allows practitioners to take an holistic approach towards working, whilst also acknowledging the impact that effects of cultural trauma have had on the community's willingness to engage with services which is important because research conducted with Irish Travellers in 2010 (AITHS, 2010) highlighted the level of trust held by Travellers for health professionals as 41 per cent, half that of their sedentary counterparts. Furthermore, a deep fear, rooted in historical experiences, particularly of losing children into care (Warde, 2009), may contribute to the lack of engagement between Travellers and educational and health service providers. Culturally safe practice, as outlined by Jessica Ball (2008) advocates a strengths-based model of working, rooted in personal knowledge, protocols, good partnerships and positive purpose. The 5 principles that informed my approach are as follows.

I worked in partnership as a participant observer in the field

- I utilised ethnographic principles that acknowledged a range of perspectives; sought cultural knowledge from indigenous communities; recognised the importance of oral based cultures;
- I followed protocols of informed consent and process consent in relation to participants who struggled with literacy;
- I reviewed data in conjunction with research participants;
- I applied a reflexive framework to hone my awareness of my own social locations / privilege; and engaged mentors through my community of practice in the research and Traveller communities.

Coffey (1999, p. 1) has argued that ethnographic research is invariably 'personal, emotional and identity' work. Therefore the application of a relational ethics framework was adopted in this study (see Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). Relational ethics focuses on those aspects of relating that develop out of interactions between researchers, individual research participants and researched communities of recognition, value, mutual respect, dignity, and connectedness (Lincoln, 1995; see also Brooks, 2006; Reason, 1993; Tierney, 1993). The interactions that develop between researchers, individual research participants and researched communities can create challenges for researchers as they attempt to navigate the research process (Blackman, 2007; Cruz & Gay y Blasco, 2011; Levinson, 2004).

Following ethics committee approval and prior to beginning fieldwork, I also sought advice from experienced ethnographers in the field of Traveller educational research. Further efforts were made to go beyond standard practices by engaging in ongoing family and individual family member discussions throughout the research process as I returned to the field to review data with research participants stating, 'This particular topic seemed to me, to be important, would you talk more with me about it.' While attempting to situate different, and often competing, voices (Bakhtin, 1984), the research involved on-going discussion with participants, however the findings are presented as only my opinion. All the participants have been assigned pseudonyms.

Findings

Traveller identity in school

Whilst the parents I spoke with were keen to preserve their Traveller culture through a specific set of distinct observances and behaviours they were unanimous in agreement that mixing with members of the wider settled population during the

early primary school years is important for Traveller children:

They should mix. Travellers like to know what settled people are doing. Settled people like to know what Travellers are doing. This is how you get to know people, I got to know a lot of very nice people. Melissa (43)

Parents' experiences of Traveller-only education is not something that all Travellers wish their children to experience:

Where my husband went to school, they put all the Traveller kids into one class, but no settled kids in with them at all, everyone from the site in one class, and all the settled kids had their own classes. It was discrimination from 4 years to 16 years the Travellers, keeping them all in the one class. *All in one room!* Sometimes he didn't want to go to school because of that. And if something happened you always got the blame for it. Rosaleen (27)

Whilst segregation in schools is something that all parents disagreed with, some Travellers did acknowledge that it has a place in adult education programmes and can be useful when building confidence, in line with findings from ESRI (2017). However, the legacy of segregation is intergenerational and still colours interactions between some of the Traveller parents and parents from the wider community. Many parents described their experiences of historical practices of segregation within the education system:

In one way I think maybe they were afraid that they would pick up a disease or something. I often borrowed pencils, Biro's, or rubbers and you would see the kids pulling down the sleeves of their cardigans and wiping it. It makes you feel awful, you just feel so bad, I wouldn't like to see my kids or hear about my kids ever going through what I had to. As a kid you were the smelly one, putting germs on things. Why else would they clean them? Eva (30)

I would like to know if other people were treated different, in other schools. Was it hard on them at first, getting shifted into another class? Ailbe (28)

These experiences of difference and discrimination were felt keenly and recalled easily, with the understanding that the experience of difference contributed directly to their ability to learn in school:

Feels bad, you feel like dirt. If you're not getting treated the same, it's hard to learn, because you don't want learn, you don't feel welcomed, you would feel ashamed going into class, because you think the teachers are looking at you, they don't want you there. You were the outsider in the group. They just look down on Travellers, sometimes people are chatting amongst themselves and were laughing at you, and you know straightaway. I felt the settled kids got more attention than what we did. You would feel like you are being classed different. You weren't wanted, you know, like in a lot of places that you go to, they look down on top of you if you are a Traveller.

Some teachers would be worse. The Travellers would all be put together, with the settled kids, but you would be sitting beside a Traveller kid. You wouldn't be allowed to sit near the settled community. We weren't getting as much attention as what the other kids were getting. It's discrimination really. Rosaleen (27)

Worryingly, many Travellers spoke of missing out on Irish classes and geography and history (which as stated in the PSC, includes Irish history and Irish geography):

When we were in the Irish class, we weren't taught Irish, we had to do colouring, and sometimes you wanted to do Irish but you couldn't, I don't know if there is any Traveller kid out there doing Irish, I would have liked to do it. Oonagh (18)

What other kids got to learn about like history and geography and all this, we didn't get that. They should have left us mixed in...because we missed out on the Irish and geography. Ailbe (28)

Some parents did state that they did not see the need for their children to participate in Irish language classes.

(Re)Constructing Traveller identities in School

Whilst identity is sometimes concealed in the school environment, the issue of representations and visibility of Travellers within the curriculum varied across the generations and was met with a range of emotions. Most mothers did not remember any attempts to address Traveller culture or identity in the curriculum and when asked about memories of this, the experience of segregation and stigma came quickly to the fore. The challenge facing teachers attempting to address Traveller identity within the curriculum is complex as, similar to other findings in this research, not all Travellers are in agreement about whether or not to include references to Travellers. Of the parents I spoke with the majority did not feel that teaching Traveller history was important in school.

Of the women I spoke with, the majority had ambivalent feelings regarding the introduction of Traveller history in the education system:

I suppose it wouldn't do no harm, but what relevance does it have in education? Unless maybe they just brought it up, and lets other kids know a bit about the background, that kind of thing, but I don't know how that would further their education. I suppose they could and then the other kids would learn more about them, and their ways, and maybe accept them more. But then you also don't want to make people feel really different, and make it into a big deal. Yes because some kids may get embarrassed sitting there, if others know about their background. Yes it is a difficult one. Nessa (26)

One mother succinctly described the irony of introducing Traveller culture in the

curriculum, highlighting the inherent tensions of power dynamics and ownership:

They actually try and teach my aunt's kids stuff about being a *Traveller* and their lifestyle, they're trying to teach them what I can teach them at home, and with them not a Traveller. Maire (30)

Well-meaning intentions can have disastrous consequences as illustrated in the scenario below described by Mellissa about her daughter's early experiences in school. The following scenario highlights the confusion and misunderstandings surrounding the introduction of 'Traveller' culture into the curriculum:

I remember a few years ago with Caroline, she came home from school and I nearly died. She had a new colouring book about how Travellers lived in caravans, and Caroline said to me, 'Mum, am I a Traveller?'. She says, 'Traveller girls are different to other girls in my school' so she takes out the book and she shows us, and she said, 'My teacher told everyone I was a Traveller'. It really upset me. It really, really upset me. To say this in front of all the other children and tell them how the Travellers live. When she was in junior infants! They apologised, but that didn't do much good to my child who didn't know she was a Traveller. She was so confused, 'We don't move around, why are they saying I'm a Traveller. They took me up to the front of the class and said Caroline is a Traveller!' And immediately the kids do see the difference. I went up to school first thing. I thought maybe they thought they were doing a good thing. I wouldn't mind them talking about Travellers, it's just the way they bring it up. They should talk about three or four different races, and just tell good points about Travellers, not all the bad points. I remember, *I was never brought up as a subject*.
Melissa (43)

This excerpt illustrates the challenges surrounding confusions of terminology of 'Traveller' and 'Settled' and their associated spatial practices. The consequence of misrepresentation is to limit children's conceptualisations of their own and others' identities, which, in turn limits their movement and access to particular spaces, namely educational environments. Melissa's closing statement also echoes the sadness of an identity not given full recognition, when she states, 'I was never brought up as a subject in school'. The quotation highlights the issues of symbolic violence through misrepresentation, the lack of awareness of diversity within a population and failure to include parents as partners in education thereby reinforcing taxonomies of difference. The scenario points to the limitations imposed on expressions of Traveller identity to a two-dimensional, stereotypical view.

At second level, Britney describes a difficult scenario, Britney's teachers were interested in the television series *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* and attempted to use it as a springboard to introduce the topic of discrimination into the Social, Personal and Health Education Curriculum (SPHE) classes yet this only served to exacerbate tensions and left her feeling exposed and awkward:

We had the subject coming up and we talked about a Traveller being called a knacker

like and they asked me if I had ever been called that? And they all looked at me and I got embarrassed. So I didn't answer her. And so the next time that class came up I avoided it so that I wasn't put in that situation.

Britney felt that the discrimination she experienced was heightened by the advent of the television series and worked to shape the teachers' perceptions of her:

I don't think the teachers know what biased means. If you say to some teachers 'You are biased' they say, 'Oh you're just trying to be smart'. If teachers are in school and talking to Travellers they should listen to the two sides, not just one because it does make you unhappy, and it can make you sick and you don't want to go back to school, that takes a lot of personal strength in you, it's almost as if they're trying to push all the bad feelings on to you and make you cope with them when actually it's not all about you, it's about them aswell, but they're saying it's all about you.'

She decided that the on-going discrimination she was experiencing was having a detrimental effect on her mental health and made the difficult decision to leave school in order to preserve her emotional wellbeing:

My parents wanted me to stay in school. I wanted to stay in school, and finish my Leaving Cert, but with all that happening like, I left school before. I told my mum and dad how I felt and they went to talk to the principal about it but nothing changed. So then you don't want to go back, you don't want your family to feel the same way you feel, to feel so much pain so you do that by saying, 'I won't go back into that situation'.

Britney completed her studies at an adult education centre. What is remarkable about Britney is her continued persistence pursuing an education in spite of the challenges she faces.

Some participants in the research had experienced positive recognition and acknowledgement; the findings suggest that when addressed sensitively the issue does not cause harm:

In religion we talked about cultures and that, and we talked about weddings and how the Travellers have them. That was okay. I didn't have to stand up, it didn't make me embarrassed. She just said, 'You have a different culture' I just said yes I do. And then I talked about the wedding. One teacher asks questions and makes it into a big deal but the other teacher she was just talking about weddings and religion, and she just asked about the wedding. It wasn't something directly about me. Oonagh (18)

The issue of recognition for Travellers within the curriculum is not straightforward, and not all Travellers share the same views on addressing Travelling culture within the curriculum, therefore awareness of each particular situation needs to be considered in each context.

Discussion

The complex dynamics at work in these situations highlight a number of significant issues, these include; problematic terminology; acknowledging heterogeneity of Traveller identities; changing lifestyle practices; the impact of media stereotyping; and the importance of including parents as partners.

As Kenny (1997, p. 290) has noted, 'Changes in terms have resulted in a conceptual vacuum, or in silent maintenance of space for old constructs behind new terms'. Difficulties in conceptualising Traveller and Settled arise in teaching and learning spaces at all stages of the curriculum. A lack of suitable terminology creates misunderstandings over lifestyle and spatial practices which impact on understandings of identity (Logan et al, 2012; Schwartz, 2012) as evidenced in Caroline's experience in junior infants. The lack of appropriate terminology reinforces categories of difference thereby further alienating children who are experiencing spatial marginalisation (Kamali, 2006; Öhrn, 2012).

For a community that occupy 'the half shadows' lack of access to media representation is problematic as it facilitates discrimination (Fanning, 2002; Hayes, 2006; Helleiner, 2000; McVeigh, 2008). Current popular television shows situate themselves as 'documentaries' providing insight into the 'secret' culture of Irish Travellers (Clark & Taylor, 2014; Jensen & Ringrose, 2014; Tremlett, 2014) thereby exacerbating stereotypes and furthering distress for members of the Travelling community who find disconnection between the way they are represented on screen and their lived experiences. Discrimination further impacts on subsequent life successes as Travellers attempt to access education and employment opportunities (FRA, 2014).

Despite calls to introduce identity into the curriculum, in line with other studies (Bryam, 2008; Devine, 2011) the findings from this research indicate a variety of practices, some of which are detrimental to self-esteem and the ability to participate in school as evidenced in this research by Britney. Inclusive practices which value diverse expressions of identity are recognised as being necessary ingredients in encouraging engagement in education (DCYA, 2014; Drudy and Lynch, 1993; Lynch, 1999; NCCA, 2009). In line with earlier research that recognises the importance of relationships as key to self esteem and belonging, the findings from this research also document the importance of building relationships by engaging in genuine dialogue within educational environments between pupils and between teachers and pupils. Lack of engagement in a genuine dialogue results in a situation whereby Britney is discouraged because she attempts to engage in relationship by discussing her experience of discrimination. Yet a genuine dialogue offers Oonagh a positive experience when one of her teachers introduces the topic of cultural difference sensitively.

Introducing Traveller identity into the curriculum requires a careful and considered approach, with time and space built in for reflection that creates

opportunities for Traveller parents and pupils to feedback on current initiatives, acknowledges the expertise of Traveller parents and recognises the way in which mainstream discourses shape understandings of minority identities (Beach et al, 2013) all of which have profound implications for subsequent life outcomes (Wilkinson and Marmot, 2008). Without adequate consideration this attempt fails to build real and authentic relationships with parents and children. Failing to include Irish Traveller women as partners in education is an opportunity lost to educators. Furthermore, recognition of identities as fluid and dynamic (Cavaliero and Levinson, 2019) is an essential ingredient in challenging inequality and can be influenced by increased involvement in schools and by the ways in which Traveller identity is represented within the curriculum.

Conclusion

Designing curricula (materials and pedagogic approaches) in tandem with Traveller communities offers opportunities to value identity rather than exoticise difference. Intercultural training, developed in conjunction with Traveller communities, should be incorporated into all teacher-training programmes (ESRI, 2017; Harmon, 2015) including intersectional perspectives that allow critical reflexivity on positions of privilege. Failure to explore divergent identities is a key human rights issue as well as an issue facing Traveller communities, as voices remain unheard and marginalised.

Note

- 1 Addressing both the formal and ‘hidden’ curriculum, it provides a comprehensive series of suggested lesson plans and recommendations for the physical and social environment of the school, with the objective of mainstreaming anti-racist ideology and critical, reflective opportunities into the daily life of the classroom. The NCCA publication additionally foregrounds diversity as a normal feature of life and recognises normative whiteness in Irish society.

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