

Section 4 Chapter 8 Findings

8:1 Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the findings of my research as I draw together the various strands, insights and elements that emerged in the research process. I examine the impact and relevance of these issues in relation to my claim to have influenced in a positive way the educational opportunities of a marginalised group, namely Traveller children. I demonstrate how this improvement at the micro-political level of my classroom has had repercussions at the macro level of the school in terms of the achievement of personal and social transformation. I draw on my embodied values of social justice and equality to provide the living standards of judgement against which to test the validity of my claim to have improved my educational practice as well as the circumstances of my pupils. Finally, I show how, through engagement with more emancipatory pedagogies, I was able to promote a more equitable situation within the educational system for an ethnic minority group.

I aim to discuss my findings in terms of three main categories of analysis, which are

1. Structural and organisational issues
2. Conceptual issues
3. Pedagogical issues

Having outlined these categories and discussed their content, I will then go on to explain their significance in terms of enabling me to make my claim to knowledge, and to show how my living theory of practice has the potential to contribute to new practices as well as to new theory. In providing evidence of my claim to have contributed to new educational practices and to new theories of practice, I will draw on the data from my practice that I have presented in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. I will also refer to the feedback from a validation session that took place in the University of Limerick on 21 November 2004, at which I presented the findings from my research. The meeting was tape-recorded and the members of the group also e-mailed their comments to me.

8:2 Structural and organisational issues

One of the values that I hold, and that underpins my actions and judgements, is the right of all people to equality. By this I mean that all people are entitled to receive equal treatment in all aspects of their existence, and that categories of difference, such as race, gender or ethnicity should not be used to deny them their just entitlement. When I relate this value to my practice as an educator, it manifests itself in a desire to see all children treated equitably within the educational system. If some children, for example those with learning difficulties or those belonging to minority groups, are not receiving the educational provision that they require and to which they are entitled, then they are being treated unjustly. When the injustice is repeated so that it tends to become the norm, it becomes embedded in the structures and operations of educational institutions. This often results in a situation of institutional racism, structural oppression and discrimination, which then becomes the accepted and unquestioned mode of practice for the treatment of minority groups within schools. Giddens (2001) suggests that:

Discrimination can be seen in the actions that disqualify members of one group from the opportunities that are open to others.

(Giddens 2001, p. 251)

He explains how institutional racism can result from promoting policies that favour certain groups while discriminating against others. In Chapter 5, I have outlined various ways in which Traveller children have not been treated equally, for example, in relation to curriculum implementation and the provision of extra educational resources. Fitzgerald (2003) indicates the effect that discriminatory practices can have on the Traveller community in general:

The failure of successive Irish Governments to recognise the role of nomadism in Traveller culture has had adverse consequences for the Travelling community, and is a prime example of institutional racism.

(Fitzgerald 2003, p. 8)

Through engaging in my research I was able to challenge what I perceived to be discriminatory practices and to subject them to critical interrogation, in order to bring about a more equitable situation for those, such as Traveller children, who are not normally granted a voice in educational discourses. In adopting this stance, my actions were in keeping with the critical emancipatory methodological approach that I chose as a framework within which I locate my research. My educational practice became a space for the promotion of more emancipatory and more positive pedagogical approaches aimed at the inclusion of Traveller children in the educational system on the basis that, as authentic participants in this system, they have a right to have their voices heard and to have their culture recognised on equal terms with other participants in the educational system. Bernstein (2000) refers to the right 'to be included, socially, intellectually, culturally and personally' (2000, p. xx). He stresses that 'included' does not necessarily mean to be absorbed, but could mean the right to be separate, to be autonomous. This theory is congruent with my belief in the right of Traveller children to have their separate cultural identity accepted and validated within the educational system.

In the process of carrying out my research, I have developed a living theory of practice that incorporates a living theory of social justice. My living theory of social justice centres on my belief in the basic equality of all people and on my consequent wish to see all people treated with fairness and respect. It also incorporates my living theory of equality of respect as the recognition and acceptance of diversity. In regard to evaluating the claim to knowledge that I am making here, I am influenced by Ghaye and Ghaye's (1998) recommendation that:

Teachers need to specify the criteria that they wish others to use if they are to make valid judgements about the worthiness of the claim. Individual teachers should exercise their right to establish the criteria that they believe are appropriate, based on their practice-based knowledge.

(Ghaye and Ghaye 1998, p. 94)

In agreement with the living theory form of action research, within which my research is located, I respond to Whitehead's (2000) suggestion that, instead of applying external criteria, standards of judgements based on an educational practitioner's values can be

used in evaluating self-study research. I have articulated my living standards of judgement by which I wish my research to be evaluated in Chapter 1. In this chapter, as I explicate the findings emanating from my research, I will demonstrate how these findings fulfil the standards of judgement that evolved from my embodied values of social justice and equality (Whitehead 2000).

I submit, therefore, that in my educational practice of providing resource teaching to Traveller children, I have operated on the basis of my conviction that they are entitled to be treated with equality, fairness and respect as of right, and by virtue of their status as fellow human beings. I consider this right to be independent of any actions engaged in by the children, or of any conditions imposed on them, such as the achievement of certain standards of merit or desert on their part, in order to qualify for equality of treatment. In adopting this stance, I suggest that my actions were consistent with Green's (2002) proposal around the necessity of avoiding the marginalisation of others. Green quotes Rorty's (1989) position on this situation:

Rorty argues that we need to develop increased sensitivity to others so that we do not marginalise them. The process of coming to see other human beings as 'one of us' rather than as 'them' is a matter of a detailed description of what unfamiliar people are like and of a redescription of what we ourselves are like.

(Green 2002, p. 133)

I contend, therefore, that my sensitivity to the normative positionality of Traveller children as marginalised and alienated, together with my commitment to living to my values of social justice and equality, enabled me to perceive Traveller children as belonging to an all-embracing 'us', rather than an excluded 'them'. Kincheloe (2003) identifies a similar perspective among the liberation theology practitioners who seek to overcome poverty and colonialism in Latin America:

Liberation theology makes no apology for its identification with the perspective of those who are excluded and subjugated. Proclaiming their solidarity with the marginalised, liberation theologians work alongside them in their attempt to expose the existing social order as oppressive and unethical. All aspects of our

emancipatory system of meaning and the teacher research that grows out of it rest on this notion of identification with the perspective of the oppressed.

(Kincheloe 2003, p. 60)

I have lived out my value of equality in my practice through engaging in the struggle to obtain resource hours for C, to which C was entitled but which had not been provided for her (see Chapter 5). I was also able to realise my value of equality in my practice in acquiring a psychological assessment for J, also illustrated in Chapter 5, through challenging a system that conspired to deprive her of such a resource and overcoming bureaucratic attempts to frustrate the process. These two incidents are practical examples of the prevalence of structural inequalities in educational institutions, and they provide evidence of the manner in which I challenged the illegitimacy of such practices in my struggle to achieve justice and equality for all. A member of the validation group, to which I presented the findings of my research at the University of Limerick on 21 November 2004, suggested that my struggle for justice and equality was beginning to have an influence at institutional level:

Because you have championed their (Traveller children) rights of equality of access to services and resources to which they were entitled but to which they were being denied access, you have also shown how you have raised awareness of these issues in your institution.

(e-mail 24 November 2004, retained in research archive, item 8a)

My living theory of justice also includes according recognition to the cultural traditions, values, beliefs, practices and identity of Traveller children within the educational system, in fulfilment of my commitment to the practice of diversity. One instance in which I appear to have achieved this recognition was in my acceptance and valuing of the speech patterns of the Traveller children, where these differed from the norm (see Chapter 5). The adoption of this new approach represented an improvement in my educational practice, as well as in the Traveller children's educational experiences. Traveller culture was also recognised and validated in the provision of a space in my classroom for Traveller children to explore, in a safe environment, cultural issues, such as their experiences of discrimination (see Chapter 6). The project on Traveller history that I undertook with a group of Traveller children helped to create in them a more positive

sense of identity, through positing their cultural history as a valued and valuable one. Engaging in this project provided what was probably the only opportunity during their primary schooling for the Traveller children to experience a focus on their particular history and culture. These initiatives that I undertook are evidence of my claim to have influenced the quality of educational experience for Traveller children, and to have their culture valued within the educational system. In response to this claim, which I articulated at the validation session that convened in the University of Limerick, one of the group commented:

You have contributed to new educational practice insofar as you have chosen to provide your students with a curriculum that takes account of their culture instead of forcing them to adapt to the values of the dominant culture of settled people.

(e-mail 24 November 2004, retained in research archive, item 8b)

8:3 How my living theory of the practice of social justice incorporates insights from Rawls's distributive theory of justice

My living theory of social justice, while evolving from my practice, draws on elements from the literature of some of the theorists on social justice. For example, I discovered that Rawls's (1971) theory of distributive justice provided an adequate framework for the location of my arguments for securing extra educational resources for Traveller children. According to Rawls's theory, principles of social justice:

provide a way of assigning rights and duties in the basic institutions of society and they define the appropriate distribution of benefits and burdens of social cooperation.

(Rawls 1971, p. 4)

The resources that I was seeking related to receiving psychological assessments that would result in the Traveller children being allocated placements in a special class, and also to actually receiving resource hours which had been granted to them as a result of undergoing psychological assessments. These issues are quantifiable in terms of comparison with resources allocated to settled children, and could therefore be accommodated within Rawls's distributive theory, which is adequate to cater for the distribution of material goods.

However, my wish to obtain social justice for Traveller children is not limited to acquiring extra resources for them. My values around the humanity and dignity of all people compelled me to promote also the idea of equality of respect, which I sought to promote through positing Traveller culture as a valid and legitimate one. As the concept of respect is not a quantifiable entity, it cannot be addressed by a distributive model of social justice. Rawls (1971) did not deny the existence of the concept of equality of respect but he did not seem to propose any model other than the distributive one for providing the conditions for achieving it. Young (1990) critiques the idea that rights can be governed by the logic of distribution, since 'rights refer to doing more than having, to social relationships that enable or constrain action' (1990, p. 25). I concur with Young in this view, as I would regard a distributive logic as appropriate for the management and division of material possessions, but I consider it an inadequate resource for the regulation of human relationships. Such relationships are grounded in qualities such as respect and esteem, and it would appear meaningless to attempt to quantify these qualities.

When some people are prevented from exercising their capacities or constrained from achieving self-determination by the actions or policies of bureaucratic institutions, they can suffer oppression and domination. Young (1990) describes oppression and domination as the two social conditions that define injustice, and therefore regards the elimination of these two factors as a means of achieving social justice. In providing a space within my classroom where Traveller children could explore aspects of their cultural identity and articulate their authentic life-experiences (see Chapter 6), I contend that I was promoting, not a Rawlsian form of distributive justice, but a concept of social justice as the enablement and fostering of self-determination and self-actualisation, and as overcoming the effects of oppression and domination. When I explained this stance to the validation group on 21 November 2004, one member commented:

You explained how this theory (distributive) could help you get extra resources for one traveller child but could not influence how that child was treated as a person. On this you are differing from Rawls because you see him valuing people

as things whereas you would value them through their relationships with other people – that we interact with people in a holistic sense not just one dimension.

(e-mail 24 November 2004, retained in research archive, item 8d)

Influenced by Kant's moral theories, Rawls (1971) claims that equality of respect can be achieved through 'men's desire to treat one another not as means only but as ends in themselves' (1971, p. 179). While I have no quibble with this theory as a principle with the potential for achieving some measure of social justice, I have difficulty with Rawls's idea of the impartial spectator who passes judgement on the justice and fairness of situations. This impartial observer can ignore his or her own feelings and opinions and adopt a position of detachment, disinterestedness and objectivity in order to respond in a socially just way to the needs of others, and to make judgements that are regarded by all as fair and equitable. Such selflessness may appear to be morally just in theory but I think it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to achieve in one's practice a state of complete impartiality. In my practice of interaction with Traveller children, we engage with one another as whole people, in a holistic way, and so it is not only the rational side of our nature, but also the affective part, that comes into play in our relationships. It is through the affective domain that my values are defined, and I would not consider it helpful to abandon my values of social justice and equality, in favour of a rational, impartial approach, in my endeavour to achieve a greater measure of equality for Traveller children. In fact, were I to adopt the 'veil of ignorance' approach, as suggested by Rawls, I contend that I would remain largely unaware of the inequitable treatment often meted out to Traveller children, and thus would be less effective in my efforts to achieve equality for them. Having listened to my argument as to why I find Rawls's theory of the impartial observer's capacity for achieving justice untenable, a member of the validation group stated:

Your research has contributed to new educational thinking in that you have taken issue with Rawls and have considered the affective domain, the whole person, and not just their rational side. You have incorporated and added to the work of Rawls in your practice.

(e-mail 23 November 2004, retained in research archive, item 8e)

A further difficulty that I have with Rawls's theory is the fact that it does not appear to allow the possibility of dissent from the decision of the impartial spectator. This would suggest that Rawls is advocating a position of consensus or unity. In this, he appears to be influenced by the universalistic nature of Kant's (1964) categorical imperative, which states, 'Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law' (1964, p. 88). When I first encountered this principle, more than thirty years ago, I thought it a suitable maxim for ordering one's life, having connotations of the 'do as you would be done by' principle. However, my present thinking is that this view is at variance with my commitment to the ideals of pluralism and diversity of opinion. I consider these ideals to be essential to the survival of minority groups, for in a situation of consensus, it is the voices of the majority that would hold sway, and it is their opinions and beliefs that would be given precedence. Hoy (1998), referring to the problems with the practice of consensus, quotes Foucault's view on the matter, 'Being for consensus connotes for him the danger of intolerance of difference' (1998, p. 28). This quotation encapsulates my concern that theories promoting unity, consensus or monism preclude the possibility of diversity and pluralism that are necessary for the survival of minority groups.

A singular or unitary approach, therefore, might appear attractive at the conceptual level, especially to those who believe it is the only way to achieve peaceful coexistence, but attempts to realise it in practice reveal the inherent injustice of its application in the case of minority groups, since it ignores the particularity of their situation and serves only to increase their sense of oppression and marginalisation. In order to diminish the effects of such injustice, I provided in my classroom the opportunity for Traveller children to give voice to their experiences of discrimination within the educational system (see Chapter 6). Their voices became the voices of dissent, challenging the consensus of the dominant majority and in the process claiming for themselves a space for recognition and participation in educational discourse. This is nowhere more obvious than when the Traveller children rejected the stereotypical image of themselves that they perceived settled children to hold, and also in their transferring of otherness to settled children, when M declared, 'We could call a name to them, because they're not different in

anything to us, like they go to shops like us, dress in clothes like us and go to school like us.’

It could be argued that the main difference between my work and that of theorists such as Rawls, Kant and Young, is that my living theory is emerging from my practice, whereas Rawls, Kant and Young are operating at a conceptual level only. I am dealing with the lived reality of injustice and inequality, in contrast to the abstract theorising of Rawls, Kant and Young. Rawls’s theory of justice, which draws on the moral philosophising of Kant, applies to an idealised world, in contrast to my practice of engagement with real people, in a complex world, fraught with contradiction, injustice and imperfection. I am constantly struggling to achieve a situation that reflects a practice of justice and equality in what Schön (1995) refers to as ‘the swampy lowlands’, where ‘problems are messy and confusing and incapable of technical solution’ (1995, p. 28). In trying to make sense of this world, and to derive meaning from the plethora of conflicts and complexities within which it is ensnared, I draw on my embodied values of social justice and equality. I suggest that a logic of idealism, consensus and perfection is not relevant to the real world that I inhabit. I propose, instead, that what is needed is a living logic of plurality, inclusionality and diversity that takes account of the humanity, integrity and uniqueness of real people. In applying such a living logic to my educational practice, and drawing also on my embodied values of social justice and equality, I was able to theorise my practice as equality of respect for all and as the recognition and acceptance of diversity. I was able to do this because I was living to my values in my practice, rather than holding them up as noble concepts to be admired, and perhaps fated to remain, at the level of theory. When I presented my practical theory, indicating where I diverged from conceptual theorists such as Kant, Rawls and Young, to the validation group, a member responded thus:

You drew on Rawls’ theory of distributive justice, but critiqued him also. Rawls’ ideas are at a conceptual level whereas your form of theory is drawn from your practice. This demonstrates an original contribution to knowledge because you are not taking Rawls’ theory at face value; you are building your own theory from it. You believe that justice exists in the relationships between people, not just as a cake to be divided up between people.

(e-mail 25 November 2004, retained in research archive, item 8g)

8:4 Misconceptions in the practice of equality

In my first encounter with Traveller children in the educational system, I operated under the impression that I could best serve their interests by helping them to fit into the system, and to act and behave like all the other children. By conforming to the dominant system, they would not be considered as outsiders, as different from the norm, or as other to the general student population. At that time I was unaware of the significance of culture as a factor in defining identity and in achieving recognition for a minority group, and so I was valuing 'commonness or sameness over specificity and difference' (Young 1990, p. 3). Engaging in my research enabled me to reflect on this stance, and my reflection led to a recognition of the lack of respect for diversity or difference, as well as a disregard for equality and justice, inherent in such an approach. Consequently, I abandoned the 'fit the system' method in favour of a more equitable and just approach that accepted and affirmed cultural difference and that acknowledged the specificity of the cultural norms of minority groups. I concur with Young that 'a denial of difference contributes to social group oppression' and therefore I favour 'a politics that recognises rather than represses difference' (Young 1990, p. 10). My living theory of social justice, therefore, is grounded in my embodied values that promote recognition of ethnic and social difference as a means towards the alleviation of oppression, marginalisation and alienation.

Having generated my living theory around the necessity for an acceptance of difference and diversity, as well as a recognition of the emancipatory ethos adhering to pluralistic ways of living, I became aware of the tendency in educational institutions to either deny or ignore the validity of this position. I attribute this stance to a misconception of the nature of equality, resulting from an interpretation of the concept of equality that equates it with sameness. In agreement with Tormey and Haran (2003), I argue that 'treating everyone the same is not the same as treating them equally' (2003, p. 31). Instead of promoting the principle of equality, a focus on sameness often has the opposite effect, leading to the creation of an inequitable situation, since it is grounded in the assumption

that all share the same cultural beliefs and practices, thereby denying recognition to the separate and distinct cultural identity of minority groups. Thus, while an educational institution might profess to subscribe to a policy of equality in theory, this principle may not translate into practice in the reality of its normative activities or in the manner in which it treats its minority groups. A member of the validation group, to whom I explained my views on the misconceptions around the nature of equality, wrote:

You described how your work with disadvantaged traveller children has led you to question the dominant understanding of the concept of equality. You acknowledge the right of these children to have their difference and diversity of culture and of traditions respected.

(e-mail 24 November 2004, retained in research archive, item 8h)

The lacuna resulting from such a dichotomy between theory and practice is manifested explicitly in the area of curriculum implementation. The curriculum offered in the educational system is usually a one-size-fits-all, monocultural model, based on the cultural norms of the dominant group in society. Textbooks, too, tend to conform to this ideal of sameness, and also reflect the culture and ethos of the majority within the educational system. When, therefore, minority groups, such as Traveller children, attempt to participate in the educational system, they generally do not find any representation of their culture in the curriculum or in textbooks. There is no acknowledgement of their separate cultural identity and no space within which their views and opinions can be articulated at the point where these differ from the majority viewpoint. The message that this situation transmits to Traveller children is that their culture is not valued within the educational system, that they themselves are inferior to the children belonging to the majority group in schools and that, if they wish to succeed in educational terms, they must conform to the norms and dictates of the dominant majority. The problem faced by Traveller children is articulated by Bernstein (2000) as follows:

the images, voices and practices that a school reflects make it difficult for children of marginalised classes to recognise themselves in school.

(Bernstein 2000, p. 14)

In my practice of working with Traveller children, the oppressive consequences of educational institutions' predilections for monocultural approaches to teaching and learning became apparent. I have had first-hand experience of the negative effects on Traveller children of trying to cope with learning situations that are located in what is for them an alien culture. Traveller children who have learning difficulties are doubly disadvantaged, in that, besides having to cope with academic problems, they also have to contend with having to renounce their traditional culture and to try to adapt to the school culture in order to participate in the education system. This situation renders them deprived of what Bourdieu (cited in Robbins 2000) terms the 'cultural capital' that would enable them to obtain maximum benefit from the educational system. In my work with Traveller children, I am claiming that I have brought about a transformation in this situation through accepting their culture as a valid framework within which to locate their learning. One example of my more emancipatory approach is detailed through the story of N (see Chapter 5). In this incident, I recount how I located N's learning in her own culture and background, and achieved greater success in terms of her learning, her confidence and her attitude to school, than was possible when I had tried to teach her through the medium of the normative school curriculum. Her culture thus became a positive and valued resource in her path to learning. This initiative had wider repercussions for social transformation in the school setting in that two of the mainstream class teachers, who taught N during the two years that I worked with her, decided to employ the method I was using with N. Both made copies of the culturally specific words that I was teaching N, and used them in the classroom to reinforce the work that I was doing with her. In a discussion on N's progress, one teacher remarked to me:

When you started using words relating to N's environment, I noticed a great improvement. We made up sentences using these words and it gave her more confidence in her reading, and she improved in this area.

(field notes, June 2004, item 8i)

I suggest that this is evidence of my claim to have increased awareness of the importance of Traveller culture and identity within the school setting, as well as of the need for more

emancipatory pedagogic practices. In a validation session in the University of Limerick on 21 November 2004, one of the group remarked:

A significance of your work is that others are beginning to follow your change in practice – a form of inclusion of your work into mainstream.

(e-mail 23 November 2004, retained in research archive, item 8j)

A misconception commonly found in educational institutions is the belief that having an enrolment policy that admits all pupils to the school is sufficient to fulfil the requirement of equality. Prior to undertaking my research, I would probably have accepted that the practice of open admission of all pupils into educational institutions was evidence of equal treatment. However, I now perceive this view as defining equality in terms of access only, ignoring other aspects, such as equality of opportunity, of outcomes and, perhaps more importantly, of respect. Institutions that define equality in such narrow terms are unlikely to be aware of the existence of structural prejudice and bias within their organisations. Another common misapprehension regarding the nature of equality occurs in the manner in which schools communicate with their parent body. The normal method is to send written communication to all parents, which schools argue is treating all parents the same. However, I contend that this is not treating all parents equally, since it does not take into account that some parents, including Traveller parents, may not have adequate literacy levels to enable them to understand, or benefit from, written communication from schools. In order, therefore, to fulfil the requirement of treating all parents equally, I suggest that schools should communicate with parents in a more appropriate manner, certainly sending written communication to some parents, but also communicating orally with others. In this way, educational institutions would be fulfilling, not only the requirement of equality, but also the practice of diversity, both of which, I suggest, are necessary for the achievement of social justice.

Sometimes institutional discrimination can be overt, as, for example, when practised openly by settled children against Traveller children. I became aware of the prevalence of this type of discrimination through my exploration of cultural issues with Traveller children, in which they articulated their experiences of incidents of discrimination, the

effects of the discrimination on them and the reasons offered by them as to why they were discriminated against by other children (see Chapter 6). In our discussions, the Traveller children were able to articulate their thoughts and feelings around their experiences of discrimination in an open and uninhibited manner because they were not in the minority position that they usually occupy in their mainstream classes. There was just a group of Traveller children in my classroom, and the sense of solidarity that prevailed in this space of openness and freedom helped to create in them a more positive sense of identity, as evidenced by their ability to critique and reject the settled children's perception of them as inferior. I have come to the conclusion, therefore, that, while it is important for Traveller children to be integrated into mainstream classes in order to avoid situations of exclusion or marginalisation, it is equally important that they have a space to engage in constructive and uninhibited dialogue around issues of cultural identity. In relation to the integration of African-American people, Young (2000) makes a similar point:

The policies promoting integration amount to removing individuals from their sources of solidarity and isolating them, further disempowering them.
(Young 2000, p. 218)

It is imperative, therefore, to maintain an awareness of the potential for disempowerment of minority groups that can result from an over-zealous concern with attempting to secure their integration into the dominant majority, ignoring the necessity of providing a supportive social space for the autonomous exercise of their capacities and abilities in solidarity with one another.

8:5 Conceptual frameworks

Although the main conceptual frameworks for my research evolved from my values of social justice and equality, there were other significant conceptual issues inextricably linked to these central themes. For example, my commitment to social justice for Traveller children necessitated a consideration of the concepts of oppression, marginalisation, discrimination and exclusion, which were the conditions contributing to situations of injustice and inequality for these children. In raising awareness of what I

perceived as the equal value of Traveller culture with that of the dominant majority, I engaged with theories of ethnicity, identity, inclusion and interculturalism. Finally, my concerns around pluralistic ways of living that valued the equal entitlement of all people to self-determination and self-actualisation compelled me to explore the conceptual issues of difference and diversity.

My engagement with concepts of oppression, marginalisation, discrimination and exclusion has enabled me to theorise my practice as a space for the rejection of such negative concepts as the frameworks for determining the educational opportunities and life-chances of Traveller children. Through my practice of enabling the Traveller children to articulate, and to explore the implications of, their experiences of discrimination, I suggest that I have raised their critical awareness of the influence of concepts such as marginalisation and oppression on the formation of their life-views. This practice was a deliberate act of consciousness-raising, with the aim of encouraging resistance to, and rejection of, attempts at institutional and bureaucratic determination of the trajectories of the lives of Traveller children. It would appear, then, that I was fulfilling the criteria for Freire's theory of research, which, according to Kincheloe (2003):

provides critical educational action researchers with a sense of direction, an orientation which transforms our idea of research from mere data gathering into a consciousness-raising, transformative pedagogical technique.

(Kincheloe 2003, p. 136)

The consciousness-raising pedagogic approach is evident in the incidents related in Chapter 6, where the children articulated their experiences of discrimination and were able to analyse these events as oppressive and exclusionary practices. Occupying a position of being able to critique such practices empowered the children to reject and resist the view that relegated them to a status of inferiority and marginalisation. In this sense, my practice could be construed as influencing social transformation, through altering the usual hegemonic situation that consigned Traveller children to the bottom of the social hierarchy, and substituting it with a more socially just and equitable situation where they could temporarily experience themselves as powerful knowledge creators.

Through enabling the Traveller children to critique the injustice of their treatment by the dominant majority, I contend that I have engaged in what Freire (1972) calls a pedagogy of the oppressed, which he describes as:

a pedagogy which must be forged with, not for, the oppressed (whether individuals or peoples) in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity. This pedagogy makes oppression and its causes the objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation.

(Freire 1972, p. 33)

In my practice of encouraging Traveller children to reflect on the reasons for the discrimination suffered by them, I suggest that I was initiating them into a process that contained the possibility of rejecting such treatment in favour of more emancipatory human interactions. This situation is reminiscent of Freire's idea of 'man [sic] in the process of liberation' (1972, p. 42). Through engaging in dialogue with Traveller children on the subject of their oppression and marginalisation (see Chapter 6), I was involving them as subjects, rather than objects, in the process, a condition that Freire considered necessary so that the oppressed can 'see themselves as men [sic] engaged in the ontological and historical vocation of becoming more fully human' (1972, p. 52).

I have found Freire's theories around the empowerment of oppressed people as a means towards their liberation highly relevant in my struggle to obtain equal treatment for Traveller children. However, I find myself diverging from his views in one respect, and that is in relation to the role of the oppressed in the struggle for their own liberation, regarding which he says:

It is essential for the oppressed to realize that when they accept the struggle for humanization they also accept, from that moment, total responsibility for that struggle.

(Freire 1972, p. 55)

I agree with Freire on the necessity for the oppressed to participate and be fully involved in the struggle for their liberation, but I differ from him in his placing of responsibility on

the oppressed for the whole process of bringing about a change in their situation of oppression. I would argue that years of domination and oppression could have deprived them of the confidence and sense of power required to undertake any such project independently. In addition, placing the onus for change completely in the hands of the oppressed might only serve to increase the burden of oppression under which they labour. It would appear, therefore, that the impetus to action might need to originate in a source external to the oppressed group. I am not suggesting that control of the project for liberation should be placed in the hands of the oppressors, but rather that those who find themselves members of the dominant group by default, simply because they cannot, for ethnic or social reasons, be counted among the oppressed, but who are sympathetic to the cause of the oppressed and share a desire to end their oppression, could provide leadership in the struggle until such time as the oppressed have gained sufficient confidence to undertake this role for themselves.

In attempting to rationalise this divergence between Freire's interpretation of the role of the oppressed in achieving their own liberation and my view on this possibility, I concluded that it resided in the fact that the situations we were theorising were not similar in all respects. While we were both concerned with a group of people who were subjected to a marginalising and oppressive regime by a dominant group, in Freire's case the oppressed people of Brazil formed the majority, whereas the Traveller community in Ireland comprises a tiny minority, accounting for less than one per cent of the population. In these circumstances, therefore, it is easy to understand how Freire could maintain such confidence in the possibility of oppressed people being capable of orchestrating and controlling the campaign for their own liberation. I, on the other hand, could not entertain any such hope that a miniscule group could challenge the power and authority of the dominant majority without the aid of some of the members of that majority group, particularly in view of the fact that the Traveller community appears to lack strong leadership, as well as any role model among its members, which could be of advantage in the struggle for emancipation. Another significant point of difference between the two oppressed groups is that Freire's group shared a common ethnicity with the minority ruling class, whereas the Traveller community portrays itself as comprising an ethnic

minority, indigenous to Ireland, with a long history of separate cultural existence. This factor appears to compound the marginalised status of Travellers and to reduce the possibility of having their voices heard or of being able to conduct a campaign for their own liberation. Nevertheless, I concur with Freire in his view of the necessity for the oppressed to be active participants in the struggle for their liberation, even if the guidance and impetus necessary for the attainment of this state have to emanate from outside of the oppressed group. Accordingly, I encouraged Traveller children to interrogate and critique instances of discrimination experienced by them, and provided the opportunity for them to do so in my classroom (see Chapter 6).

8:6 The idea of positive resistance

One of the concepts that I regard as a crucial element in the struggle to overcome oppression, marginalisation, discrimination and exclusion, is the idea of active resistance on the part of the oppressed to the imposition of these conditions on their lifestyles. Resistance is a theme commonly found in the literature relating to participation in the educational system, where it is often theorised as a response to what students perceive to be an oppressive and alien situation. Students who experience themselves disconnected from the educational system, who have no sense of ownership of their learning, and who possess neither the cultural nor the social capital (Bourdieu, cited in Robbins 2000) that could ensure success for them in the field of education, often find that the only response they can make in these circumstances is to resist whatever is provided by educational institutions. Often, this form of resistance is construed as deviance, and is cited as the reason for the failure of the students to achieve success in the educational system.

A claim that I have made consistently throughout my thesis is that I have encouraged Traveller children to resist the imposition of oppressive and marginalising practices on them by the dominant majority. In Chapter 6, I outline the manner in which the children were enabled to rationalise their experiences of discrimination with a view to rejecting and resisting them, and to put forward their own theories on the rationale that underpinned the discrimination. In theorising this form of resistance, I am proposing a concept of resistance as a positive and life-affirming response to the experience of

domination and oppression. This theory supports my commitment to my values of equality and social justice, and also concurs with Young's (1990) view that social justice can only be achieved by the elimination of oppression and domination. I am emphasising the positive element in my theory of resistance, and posit it as a view that could be considered as oppositional to some of the theories of resistance found in the literature, which often appear to be negative forms of resistance that do not offer any hope of self-realisation or self-actualisation.

I have referred briefly to the concept of resistance, as a strategy for rejecting the possibility of assimilation into the dominant majority group, in Chapter 6, and so I wish to discuss it in more detail here, due to the importance that I attach to it as containing the potential for transgression (hooks 1994). One theorist who mentions resistance as an aspect of educational discourse is Willis (1977), who describes how working-class boys reject the educational paradigm that suggests that hard work, plus some ability, will result in financial and social success. Their resistance takes the form of a counter-school culture, in which they demonstrate their ability to secure working-class jobs, in spite of, rather than because of, the educational system. On a similar theme, Fagan (1995) views absenteeism and the non-participation of working-class children as a form of resistance to a middle-class educational system with which they do not identify:

Oppositional behaviour among school goers is informed by a working-class understanding that the system perpetuates inequalities against them.
(Fagan 1995, p. 105)

Consequently, these school goers reject the authority of the school and resist the aims and values of the schooling system. Kenny (1997) regards the oppositional behaviour of a group of second level Traveller pupils as a form of resistance. She attributes this resistance to attempts to disrupt the process of change in their lifestyles, which appeared to be the result of increased participation in the schooling system. I consider the views expressed here in the works of Willis, Fagan and Kenny to reflect a negative concept of resistance, and to be rather limiting in terms of the achievement of positive outcomes.

However, these theorists also demonstrate awareness of a positive aspect to the concept of resistance. Willis (1977), for example, acknowledges that resistance can be a radical act by working class boys who refuse to collude in their own educational suppression. Fagan (1995) suggests that the oppositional behaviour of working class students can be politically based, rather than deviant, in a situation where the students, recognising the inequalities in the educational system, reject schooling. It is perhaps Kenny (1997) who provides the most powerful interpretation of resistance as a positive force when she states, 'Resistance is emancipatory, when it is no longer primarily oppositional, but autonomous' (1997, p. 284). This resonates with my view of resistance as a positive and transformative influence on the life-chances of my Traveller pupils. I do not think that resistance for its own sake, or resistance that manifests itself in oppositional behaviour, in obstructionist policies or in reaction to unwelcome change, can have a transformative, emancipatory effect on the lives of oppressed people. Therefore, when I encouraged my Traveller pupils to resist the negative and dehumanising acts of discrimination experienced by them (Chapter 6), it was with the purpose of enabling them to question and critically reflect on these experiences and to reject them as frameworks for their educational lives, in favour of more life affirming and liberatory concepts.

8:7 Linking issues of ethnicity, identity, inclusion and interculturalism

The concept of ethnicity is a major influence in defining the status of the Traveller community. Travellers themselves often invoke this status in seeking entitlement to equality of treatment with the settled community. Pavee Point Traveller Centre supports the view that ethnic status is the only condition that can ensure humanist consideration for the Traveller community. Being able to claim ethnic status would also provide Travellers with a definitive framework for the construction of their identity. Ethnicity grants to a minority group a certain degree of acceptance and recognition by the majority group, and so allows for the possibility of inclusion, while avoiding the risk of assimilation. When policies promoting ethnicity are put into practice, there is a strong probability that a situation of interculturalism, giving equal value and status to the minority culture, will ensue. However, Travellers have not been able to enjoy the various

benefits that would accrue to them as a result of the recognition of their ethnicity, because the Irish Government has never endorsed their status as an ethnic group, opting instead to refer to them as a nomadic group or a minority group. The Report on The National Education Convention (Coolahan 1994) acknowledges Travellers' claim to ethnicity, when it says: 'The discussion opened with the suggestion that Travellers must be recognised as a distinct ethnic, nomadic group' (1994, p. 200). I find it incomprehensible, therefore, that official acceptance of their ethnicity has not yet been granted to the Traveller community, in spite of the fact that, as I argued in Chapter 2, they meet all the requirements, as identified by Barth (1969), for recognition as an ethnic group. It would also appear that the Traveller community fulfils the conditions of ethnicity articulated by Giddens (2001):

Ethnicity refers to the cultural practices and outlooks of a given community of people that set them apart from others. Members of ethnic groups see themselves as culturally distinct from other groups in a society, and are seen by those other groups to be so in return.

(Giddens 2001, p. 246)

If self-ascription and designation by others are sufficient grounds for the recognition of ethnicity, as Giddens appears to suggest, then Travellers are entitled to this recognition, from the evidence above.

The interconnectedness of the concepts of ethnicity, identity, inclusion and interculturalism became evident in my involvement in the after school group (see Chapter 7). Initially, this group consisted of Traveller children only, and the aim was to develop an enhanced sense of self-confidence and self-esteem around the issue of progressing to second level education, an option that Traveller children had not considered, until quite recently, as having relevance to their lives. The after school group provided the space for Traveller children to give free rein to the expression of their ethnicity, without the risk of being categorised as belonging to an inferior social group. They were, for example, able to discuss concepts such as friendship and relationships in the context of family and community solidarity, which is a traditional feature of Traveller life. In this way, they were enabled to experience their culture as a valuable and valued entity, which provided

evidence of my claim to have enabled Traveller culture to be viewed in a more positive light, and to have it accorded equal status with the dominant culture. The after school group also allowed for the construction of Traveller children's identity in a positive and life-affirming environment. There was, therefore, both the space and the opportunity for their voices to be heard, and they appeared to experience a sense of agency as they participated in the group activities. However, it was not until the after school group opened up its membership to settled children that the concepts of inclusion and interculturalism were called into play. As I outlined in Chapter 7, the Traveller children were resistant to the idea at first, but following discussion, their fears around the situation were allayed, and consequently, two settled children joined the group. This event presented an excellent opportunity for the development of an intercultural ethos, as both groups worked together in a spirit of collaboration, cooperation and mutual respect.

When the after school group expanded to include settled children, I had an instinct that something unusual was occurring here. However, when I attempted to share this knowledge with a critical friend, she did not share my enthusiasm around the event. She engaged in a critical dialogue with me, asking questions such as:

- What is different about the new group?
- Is it not simply the reverse of what normally occurs?
- If so, does it not still contain the possibility of powerful/powerless, dominant/subordinate, Traveller/settled dichotomies?

Question one was easily answered, in terms of the composition of the group, but questions two and three, which were interconnected, were more difficult. I knew at an implicit level what I understood to be occurring, but could not articulate my tacit knowledge in a manner that was comprehensible to my critical friend. It appeared as though I was in 'the domain of ineffable knowledge – where the tacit predominates to the extent that articulation is virtually impossible' (Polanyi 1958, p. 87). I was obliged, therefore, to critically reflect on the process that was involved in the new, inclusive group, and the following explanation was the result of this reflection.

What was innovative about this situation was that the practice of inclusion did not originate with the dominant majority, but rather with the minority group that had traditionally been excluded from decision making processes. The marginalised group expanded its boundaries to include those belonging to the oppressor class, in a manner reminiscent of the theme of Markham's (1936) poem:

He drew a circle that shut me out –
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.
But Love and I had the wit to win:
We drew a circle that took him in!

(Markham 1936, cited in Billington and Pomerantz 2004, p.1)

My reflection on the powerful concept of inclusion portrayed in this poem, resonating as it does with the reality of the similar occurrence in my practice with the after school group, has caused me to theorise inclusion as being most influential, and more likely to be successful, when originating in the marginal space. Because the Traveller children were already firmly established in the group, and had a strong sense of their positionality within that space, their acceptance of the other children into the group provided them with a rare experience of empowerment. The benefits from the expanded group were not one-sided, for the other children experienced the positive effects of being accepted and included in the group. Although the cultural differences remained, as illustrated in the incident regarding the Traveller phenomenon of 'double cousins' in Chapter 7, they did not present a barrier to the inclusionality of the group, but rather contributed to the achievement of an intercultural space.

The process of inclusion that occurred in the after school group is the reverse of what normally takes place in educational institutions, where the minority group is integrated into the space already occupied by the majority, and often results in the minority group being absorbed into the majority grouping. It could be argued that the possibility of absorption was also present in the expanded after school group, in that the two settled children could potentially be assimilated into the majority group. I suggest that such an eventuality was highly improbable, given that the two newcomers, though in the minority

while participating in the after school group, belonged to the majority group in society in all other aspects of their existence. There was, therefore, little threat to their cultural identity as members of the dominant majority group, during their brief encounters in the after school group. Because the model of inclusion that characterised the after school group did not reflect practices of absorption or assimilation, I submit that it was a more socially just framework for accommodating different groupings. In accepting the cultures of both groups, normally designated as majority and minority in the social hierarchy, as equally valid and valuable, I contend that the after school group represented a counter-hegemonic space of diversity. As such, it enabled me to theorise my practice as the provision of a space for the recognition and acceptance of diversity, as well as a practice of social justice as equality of respect for all.

8:8 Difference and diversity

Through engaging in my research, I have come to a realisation of the significant impact of the various interpretations of the concept of difference on one's sense of identity and on one's ontological stance. My understanding of difference is of a positive concept, the nature of which can perhaps best be expressed in the context of the rubric 'different but equal'. This stance is indicative of an acceptance of difference, in a non-judgemental way, as an authentic existential framework. It is also an affirmation of the equal humanity of all people, and of the right to be different. There are, however, other interpretations that seek to equate difference with deviance, or with inferiority. When Traveller children are viewed as different from the norm, that is, from settled children, they are thus rendered somehow of less value and of less importance than settled children. The minority positionality of Traveller children, both in society in general and in educational contexts, seems to compound the sense of their inferior standing resulting from their separate cultural identity, when compared to the privileged status enjoyed by the settled children who belong to the dominant majority group.

Because they subscribe to different beliefs and value systems, commensurate with their separate cultural identity, Traveller children are assumed to be outsiders, not belonging to the mainstream of society. Thus marginalised, it is easy to translate their otherness into

inferiority, deviance or deficiency. The acceptance and legitimation of such a negative viewpoint causes educational institutions to adopt an approach that denies Traveller children the resources necessary to secure for them equal treatment with the dominant majority within the educational system. The oppressive and demoralising effects of this approach are clearly visible in the context of children with learning difficulties (see Chapter 5). In my practice, I have endeavoured to bring about a more just and equitable educational situation for Traveller children, in pursuance of my values of social justice and equality, through a rejection of a concept of difference that defines it in terms of deviance or inferiority. In this context, I have demonstrated how I have fulfilled my standard of judgement in relation to promoting difference as a quality to be recognised and accepted, rather than an excuse for engaging in marginalisation and oppression.

Gillborn (1995), citing Giroux (1991), refers to the potential conflict inherent in the notion of difference when he speaks of:

the danger of simply affirming difference as an end in itself without acknowledging how difference is formed, erased and resuscitated within and despite asymmetrical relations of power. Lost here is any understanding of how difference is forged in both domination and oppression.

(Gillborn 1995, p. 69)

This represents an apt and cogent description of the situation of the Traveller community, whose difference is often quantified in terms of how far removed the Traveller culture is from the dominant culture, in order to justify keeping Traveller people in a state of oppression, domination and powerlessness. Gillborn (1995) also critiques the tendency towards essentialism and reductionism that defines minority groups solely in terms of their difference. This view can result from an interpretation of culture as fixed or static, but tends to lose its impact and influence through a more emancipatory definition of culture as fluid and ever changing.

Having rejected the concept of difference as a framework for accommodating the distinct cultural practices and beliefs of the Traveller community, due to the negative connotations accruing to such a framework, I opted instead to locate Traveller cultural

issues within notions of diversity, on the basis that this concept did not entail the same degree of negativity. Diversity is closely related to plurality, which as a conceptual framework does not appear to deny equality. It allows for a more liberatory interpretation of a multiplicity of cultures than the more limiting concept of difference. Boon (1972), citing Lévi-Strauss (1952), describes the sense of liberation attached to the notion of diversity in the following extract:

We can see the diversity of human cultures behind us, around us, and before us. The only demand that we can justly make (entailing corresponding duties for every individual) is that all the forms this diversity may take may be so many contributions to the fullness of all the others.

(Boon 1972, p. 137)

This quotation captures the essence of diversity as a positive response to multiculturalism, and as an acceptance of the equal value of the various cultures in a spirit of interculturalism.

A cogent argument for the concept of diversity is articulated by Gillborn (1995), influenced by West (1990):

The distinctive features of the new cultural politics of difference are to trash the monolithic and the homogeneous in the name of diversity, multiplicity and heterogeneity; to reject the abstract, general and universal in light of the concrete, specific and particular; and to historicize, contextualize and pluralize by highlighting the contingent, provisional, variable, tentative, shifting and changing.

(Gillborn 1995, p. 70)

I would endorse the sentiments expressed here, and suggest that Lévi-Strauss and West, as well as Boon and Gillborn, have made a significant contribution to the theory of diversity. However, where I differ from these theorists is that I have tried to realise the theory in my living practice of working with an ethnic minority group that has been variously described as different, inferior or deviant. The value that I attach to the distinct Traveller culture, which underpins my claim to have promoted it as equally valid with the dominant culture, is evident throughout the data that I have presented in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. This in turn supports my claim that I have not left these ideals simply at the level

of rhetoric, but have translated them into actual practice, where they can have an influence in the lives of real people.

8:9 Pedagogical Issues

Pedagogical issues are of relevance to my research findings from the point of view that my research focuses on the educational opportunities of Traveller children, or more precisely on equality of educational provision for these children. My aim in the area of pedagogy was to ensure that Traveller children were not discriminated against in the competition for scarce educational resources in primary school. At the same time, I sought to ensure that no barriers were put in the way of Traveller children's entitlement to participate in second level education. In the process of achieving these aims, I have developed a theory of practice that values all children equally and that has the potential for the elimination of educational inequity. My claim to have made some progress in the realisation of these aims is evident in the data presented in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, on which I will elaborate in the remainder of this chapter.

I have always associated the idea of education with concepts of freedom and liberation (Rogers and Freiberg 1997), and therefore if the educational provision for some children is not consistent with these ideals, I perceive it as signifying that there is something contradictory and inadequate in their experience of the educational system. My understanding of freedom in pedagogical terms is of a multi-dimensional concept, ranging from freedom to learn according to one's abilities and in harmony with one's cultural beliefs and practices, to freedom to express one's opinions and to make decisions that will determine the trajectory of one's future life-chances. My value of pedagogical freedom was realised in my practice when I altered my approach to the teaching of reading to suit the educational needs of N (see Chapter 5). In this initiative, I was demonstrating my learning around the importance of rejecting a policy of making the child fit the system, and of engaging instead in a practice of altering the system to accommodate the child's educational needs. Daniels and Garner (1999), in relation to influencing change in order to achieve inclusion, suggest that:

There remain tensions and dilemmas – between the focus on changing individuals to fit existing systems, and changing systems in order that endemic and often subliminal practices of exclusion and marginalisation are avoided.

(Daniels and Garner 1999, p. 1)

My experience of having changed my practice in this way, and of witnessing the benefits to N, both in pedagogical terms, through her improved learning, and in personal terms, through her increased self-confidence and self-belief, has indicated to me that it is well worth the effort of trying to overcome any difficulties in the process of developing a more emancipatory model of education. Allowing N agency in relation to her own learning also helped to reduce her sense of exclusion and marginalisation. My intervention in this incident enabled me to achieve a unity of theory and practice, which is not always possible in the area of education. It is often the case that, while the theory supports the idea of attending to each child's individual educational needs, in practice children are treated as if they were a homogeneous group. For example, the 'Revised Curriculum for Primary Schools' (1999) recommends that education should be about:

enabling the child to live a full life as a child and to realise his or her potential as a unique individual,

(Ireland, DES 1999, p. 7)

but until individual teachers are willing to put this aspiration into practice by attending to the cultural differences among their pupils, it will remain at the level of rhetoric.

A further aspect of my conceptualisation of pedagogical freedom relates to freedom of choice and of opinion. The incident involving a change in my approach to teaching with N is illustrative of a change in my practice that reflects the exercise of freedom of choice. I contend that the freedom to choose and to make decisions for oneself can be empowering for pupils. It can help to minimise the powerful/powerless dichotomy that often characterises teacher/pupil relationships and result in more equitable power relations. In relation to Freire's theory of education as the practice of freedom, Glass (2001) refers to:

the dialectical interplay between the way in which history and culture make people even while people are making that very history and culture.

(Glass 2001, p. 16)

I submit that this is what occurred in N's improved learning situation, where her history and culture formed the basis for my new pedagogical approach, and this in turn led to the creation of more emancipatory and innovative practices, resulting in a transformation in the quality of educational provision for N.

A similar liberating and transformative tendency can be detected in the incident in Chapter 6, in which some of the Traveller children, in a follow-up to a role-play on the value of education as perceived by the Traveller community, participated in a discussion on the views expressed in the role-play. They were, thus, active participants in the dialectical situation, not mere objects of history and culture. They were defining the pedagogical situation in terms of their real, living cultural beliefs and values. This is evident from the fact that they placed greater value on the Traveller cultural practice of nomadism, which necessitated occasional absences from school, than they did on the dominant society's view of the importance of regular school attendance. They would, therefore, appear to be living out in practice the ideals expressed by Freire (1994), cited in Glass (2001):

I cannot understand human beings as simply *living*. I can understand them only as historically, socially and culturally *existing*....I can understand them only as beings who are makers of their 'way', in the making of which they lay themselves open to or commit themselves to the 'way' that they make and that therefore remakes them as well.

(Glass 2001, p. 17, emphasis in original)

I suggest that, in providing the space for Traveller children to articulate their historic, social and cultural beliefs in the context of pedagogical issues, I was enabling the conditions for their attainment of a level of human existence commensurate with the Freirean concept of ontological vocation, which Freire (1972) suggests is to be 'more fully human' (1972, p. 40).

In Chapter 5, I have described my struggle to ensure that J received a psychological assessment as an initial step towards having her educational needs met. In the process, I had to overcome institutional resistance, which was based on a belief that J's irregular attendance, and the assumption that she was unlikely to progress to second level schooling, were reasons to deny her priority of assessment. These issues are cultural in origin, and I would suggest that educational institutions, instead of using them as reasons to discriminate against Traveller children, should consider such issues in relation to curriculum and textbook provision, which could result in positive discrimination, and the achievement of a practice of social justice, to the advantage of an oppressed minority group. The Report on The National Education Convention (Coolahan 1994) recommends an approach to the education of Travellers that would ensure a greater measure of justice and equality for Traveller children, were it to be realised in practice:

It was suggested that the approach to the education of Travellers should be located within the broader context of respect for human rights. This would incorporate an emphasis on the right of Travellers to access all levels of the education system, to consultation, to choice of school as they feel appropriate, and to significantly improved participation rates at all levels. However, it would also involve an emphasis on quality issues, such as the need for culturally appropriate materials and texts, and, across the curriculum, an intercultural approach to the education of all children – one which would include celebration of the culture of Travellers and other nomadic peoples.

(Coolahan 1994, pp. 126-7)

These are lofty and noble sentiments, but compelling evidence of the immense gap that continues to exist between rhetoric and practice. My research is a testament to the existence of this dichotomy, for, if the ideals mentioned in the Report had been realised in practice, my research would have required a different focus. The suggestion regarding the right of Travellers to consultation is ironic, given that Travellers were not invited to participate in the convention, even though every other group, no matter how remote or tenuous its connection to education, was either consulted or invited to make a submission. This omission is acknowledged in the Report:

Before commencing our discussion on the education of Travellers it was noted and regretted, that Travellers had not been invited as a group to the convention.

(Coolahan 1994, p. 200)

My research evolved from an original concern around the lack of participation in second level education by Traveller children. Because of my view of education as a lifelong pursuit, as well as an experience of freedom and liberation, it struck me as unjust and inequitable that a minority group should feel alienated and excluded from this process. I also found it problematic that educational institutions would set boundaries to the life-chances of Traveller children by accepting it as a *fait accompli* that these children would not progress to second level schooling. I resolved, therefore, in my role as RTT, to encourage the children, at every opportunity, to continue their education beyond primary level. Consequently, my actions were always undertaken within a framework of expectation that Traveller children, in common with settled children, would progress to second level schooling. I have maintained throughout my research my commitment to the idea that teachers should have high expectations of all their pupils, including Traveller children. This is especially significant in view of the negative experience of education for many Travellers, as described by Coolahan (1994):

For Travellers schooling is experienced as alien from their culture. It has not been easy for them to see the linkages between what happened in school and in the home. They have also found in many cases, that teacher expectations of Traveller children are low, with consequent effects on achievement.

(Coolahan 1994, p. 200)

When the opportunity to get involved in an after school group for Traveller children, for the express purpose of encouraging transfer to second level schooling, presented itself, I viewed it as a further prospect for the realisation of my ideals in this area. I have recounted in Chapter 7 the success of this venture at various levels. Through their participation in the after school group, the children were enabled to reflect critically on their experience of education at primary school, they engaged in problem solving through investigating how to deal with problems they might encounter at secondary school, they experienced empowerment through the absence of any sense of exclusion or marginalisation during their time working with the group and, when settled children

joined the group, they experienced authentic inclusion on equal terms with the settled children.

In view of the above, I think I can say with justification that I have lived out my values of equality and social justice in my practice of working with Traveller children, and that I have enabled them to experience education as a positive and life-affirming force. I have exposed the Traveller children to the real possibility of continuing to second level education, as evidenced by the fact that all six children who finished at primary school in June 2004 have transferred to secondary school, a unique achievement in the history of our school. I suggest that perhaps the greatest influence on the children in terms of the successful inclusion of Traveller and settled children in the after school group was that Winnie McDonagh and I modelled this ideal in our practice, in which we cooperated in an equal partnership based on mutual respect and reciprocity, in our facilitation of the group. I would describe our relationship as exhibiting the characteristics of an 'I-Thou' model of encounter, as proposed by Buber (1958). It was a relationship based on cooperation and collaboration, with no issues around power and control. As such, it could be said to resonate with Somekh's (2002) theory that 'collaboration is about celebrating difference and strengthening one's own sense of identity' (Somekh 2002, p. 96). Winnie and I each represented one of the groups of children who participated in the after school group, and I submit that the working relationship that we exemplified had a positive influence on their interactions in the inclusional group. As evidence of our relationship of mutuality and reciprocity, I wish to have Winnie's voice represented here also, and so I will include an extract from her evaluation of the after school group, in which she appears to share my view of our relationship:

Having Bernie Sullivan, Resource Teacher for Travellers, involved with the group has been another very positive element of the group and programme. As Resource Teacher for Travellers, Bernie already had formed a good and trusting relationship with the Traveller children and this came across very positively in the sessions, without impinging negatively in the after school setting. The group and programme has benefited a lot by having her presence and I have formed a good working and supportive relationship with Bernie, which works very well.

(Winnie McDonagh, June 2004, retained in research archive, item 8j)

I submit that, through ensuring that difference was a quality to be recognised and accepted in the after school group, in terms of the diversity both of the children participating and of the adult involvement, I was fulfilling one of the living standards of judgement that I have identified for the assessment of my research. The after school group also contributed to the fulfilment of another standard of judgement, through raising awareness of Traveller culture and identity within the school setting. The endorsement from Winnie of the quality of my relationship, both with her and with the Traveller children, is evidence of my personal and professional development over the past four years. It is indicative of the value I place on forming relationships based on equality of respect and dignity for all human beings, consistent with my commitment to values of social justice and equality. In forming such relationships, I suggest that I was exercising an educative influence on the learning of my Traveller pupils, whom I hoped would continue to benefit from developing similar relationships in their future lives. I submit that the evidence of my relationship with Winnie and the Traveller children that I have presented here, together with the comment of R's mother, N, that I was enabling R to experience her cultural identity (Chapter 6) could exemplify the education of social formations (Whitehead 2004). My involvement in the after school group is already having an influence outside of the school situation to the extent that another school principal has approached Winnie to ask if one of her staff could participate in the after school group in her school (Chapter 7), in the same way as I have done for the past two years.

8:10 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to provide an interpretation of the findings resulting from the data collection phase of my research. I want to emphasise that what I have presented here is my understanding of the findings, and that I perceive this understanding to be tentative rather than conclusive. I am open to the possibility that others may interpret the data differently. In agreement with Kincheloe (2003), I suggest that:

As teacher researchers, we can display our findings and argue for their value, but always with one hesitation, a stutter, a tentativeness – never as the truth.

(Kincheloe 2003, p. 150)

However, in view of the fact that my research was a self-study and that, therefore, I was an active agent taking responsibility for the research programme, I claim justification in putting forward my interpretation of the data collected. I suggest, then, that I have provided evidence of the achievement of improvements in my own practice and in the educational experiences of Traveller children. In the process, I have enabled the transformation of their experience of education, from one of marginalisation and oppression to one of positive and life-enhancing practice. Through securing for Traveller children their just entitlements in the area of extra educational resources, I was able to live to my values of social justice and equality. In the process, I have developed a living theory of my practice of social justice as equality of respect for all. Through my personal commitment to valuing Traveller culture, and through my efforts to enhance its value and ensure for it equal recognition throughout the school community, I was able to develop my living theory of social justice as the acceptance of diversity. I contend, therefore, that I have fulfilled the standards of judgement that I identified in Chapter 1, that my research has begun to have an influence at the macro level of the school, and to have begun to have an influence on the education of the social formations of teacher colleagues, in the manner that I have indicated in this chapter. I will engage in further explication of these matters in my final chapter, on the significance of my research.

Section 4 Chapter 9 Reflections on the research, its significance and potential implications

9:1 Introduction

My research was undertaken with the aim of trying to achieve a transformative influence on my educational practice, as well as on the educational opportunities of my Traveller pupils. I had hoped that engaging in my research would enable me to improve my practice in a manner that would benefit both my pupils and me. My expectation was that the process of implementing these improvements would, in turn, lead to the development of my new living theory of my educational practice. I also aimed to develop a form of educational theory that could have significance in the area of educational provision for other disadvantaged and marginalised pupils. Through locating my research within the living theory form of action research (Whitehead 2000), I was able to fulfil the aims of the research. My living theory, therefore, was grounded in my study of my practice, creating a link of interconnectedness between my living theory and my living practice. Having engaged with the theories in the literature, I then studied my educational practice in the light of the insights gained from the literature, and from this process emerged a new living theory of my practice. In this context, my research represented a unity of theory and practice, rather than a study of two separate entities. The new form of theory that evolved from my practice could have significance both for the community of educational practitioners and for the community of educational researchers and scholars.

In the preceding chapters, I have outlined the progress of my self-study research as I strove to bring about a change in Traveller children's traditional experience of education as a marginalising, exclusionary and oppressive practice (O Boyle 1990; Kenny 1997), and in its place to create a vision of education as a positive, emancipatory and life-enhancing process (Rogers and Freiberg 1994). I have explained how my commitment to living out my values of social justice and equality in my educational practice enabled me to transform that practice into one of social and emancipatory pedagogy (Freire 1972). I have demonstrated how this process resulted in the development of a living theory of my

practice as a space for the promotion of more positive and liberatory educational experiences. I have explained how my living theory of practice incorporates my living theory of justice as the lived reality of equality and respect for cultural diversity. In this final chapter, therefore, I wish to discuss the significance of my research in terms of the following two claims to knowledge:

1. My claim to have made a contribution to new educational practices.
2. My claim to have contributed to a new form of educational theory.

The process of engaging in my research resulted in an enhancement in my personal and professional development. I suggest that such an outcome is consistent with a self-study practitioner research methodology (McNiff and Whitehead 2005), and therefore I propose to outline how an increase in self-knowledge and self-awareness resulted from my research, and thus contributed to the significance of the research at a personal level. Hamilton and Pinnegar (1998) consider a study of the self to be an important aspect of the research process:

Concomitant with the support of personal theorizing is the recognition that knowing and understanding the self is an essential aspect for generating change and developing new knowledge.

(Hamilton and Pinnegar 1998, p. 241)

I suggest, then, that the process of developing living theories from my practice was linked to the process of my self-development, and that both processes were integral aspects of my research.

The process of my self-development occurred through my critical reflection on my educational practice and through the subsequent explanations of my practice that I offer in this thesis, and that could be interpreted as explanations of a self, in terms of Spivak's understanding of this phenomenon:

We take the explanations we produce to be the grounds of our action; they are endowed with coherence in terms of our explanation of a self.

(Spivak 1988, 104)

In this context, my explanations of a self are grounded in my values of social justice, equality and democratic freedom. As I have stated consistently throughout this thesis, these values form the living critical standards of judgement for evaluating the validity of my research. In living in the direction of these values, which I contend to have demonstrated through the data and evidence that I have produced in this written account of my research, I suggest that my story can be seen as the articulation of my values and of my living educational theory (McNiff 2006). My embodied values, then, can be transformed into living critical standards of judgement for evaluating both my educational practice and the form of living theory that evolved from my practice. In this sense, my research could be said to have coherence in form and content, through the underpinning of both aspects by my ontological and epistemological values, as I engaged in the process of meaning-making in the narrative of my research.

9:2 My claim to have made a contribution to new educational practices

Among the discriminatory practices that I have mentioned in the course of my research was the denial to Traveller children of extra resources in the area of education. This included not being accorded due priority in receiving psychological assessment, and not being allocated resource teaching to which they were entitled (see Chapter 5). Further oppression could be seen to have resulted from the imposition of a curriculum and textbooks based on the cultural norms of the dominant majority, thereby ignoring the relevance of the separate cultural identity of the Traveller community to the area of educational provision. Durie (1999) describes the effects on Maori children of having their culture denied in the educational system:

The exclusion of Māori language and culture from the school contributed significantly to the poor performance of Māori children in Aotearoa/New Zealand schools. Walker (1990) described such schooling as ‘demanding cultural surrender, or at the very least suppression of one’s language and identity. Instead of education being embraced as a process of growth and development, it became an arena of cultural conflict’.

(Durie 1999, p. 71)

The problem of seeking to acquire recognition for a minority culture is not, then, specific to the Traveller community. May (1999) suggests that it is common to many indigenous groups:

All that many indigenous peoples are now asking is that due respect and recognition may also be accorded to their own linguistic and cultural practices – invariably alongside that of the majority group rather than in place of it.

(May 1999, p. 2)

Implicit in this statement is a notion of a peaceful coexistence between majority and minority cultures. Said (2002) appears to be arguing for a similar stance when he speaks of ‘a sincere willingness for coexistence, a firm belief in respecting the rights of others’ (2002, p. 197). However, in my context, at a conceptual level, there appeared to be a perception that the Traveller community, having chosen to reside on the periphery of settled society, should be left in that space of marginalisation, and so little effort was made by educational institutions to encourage a more participative approach to education, such as continuing to second level schooling.

My values of social justice and equality, which inform my educational practice, include an understanding that all people are of equal worth and deserve to be treated accordingly. This stance led me to challenge a system that privileged those born into a situation of relative advantage, while at the same time subjecting those not so fortunate to less preferential treatment. Accordingly, I sought to improve what I perceived to be an unjust situation through trying to ensure that Traveller children were not subjected to discriminatory or oppressive treatment. In pursuing this aim, I concur with Griffiths’ (1998) view that improvement is an aim of educational research:

Educational research is for the improvement of the education of children and students; what constitutes that improvement is always uncertain, and will remain so; however, it is worthwhile struggling for justice and knowledge, even though they remain fallible and uncertain.

(Griffiths 1998, p. 83)

The linking of improvement with justice in Griffiths' statement is significant in terms of my research, from the perspective that my aim of achieving improvement in my practice was grounded in my value of social justice. My search for improvement necessitated examining my own educational practice, with a view to changing whatever needed to be altered in order to create a more just and equitable situation for my Traveller pupils. I also harboured the hope that any improvement in my practice could influence the learning of others in wider social and institutional practices.

As a result of undertaking my research, I changed my practice to one of acknowledging and accepting the legitimacy of the Traveller children's different vocabulary and manner of enunciating words, in contrast to my initial practice of trying to persuade them to adopt the nuances of Standard English (see Chapter 5). My present stance on such a practice is that it is grounded in the myth of verbal deprivation (Labov 1973). Labov alerts us to the dangers inherent in this theory:

The myth of verbal deprivation is particularly dangerous, because it diverts attention from the real defects of our educational system to the imaginary defects of the child.

(Labov 1973, p. 22)

The concept elucidated here is part of a wider discourse of 'the myth of cultural deprivation' (Keddie 1973), a theme with which I have engaged in Chapter 5. The main purpose of this theory is to locate the educational failure of working-class or ethnic children within their culturally-deprived homes, thus exonerating educational institutions of any responsibility for the failure of such children within the schooling system. Cummins (2003) paints a vivid picture of the manner in which social institutions engage in unjust and oppressive practices that are constitutive of what Ryan (1971, cited in Derman-Sparks 2002) refers to as a 'blame the victim' policy:

In virtually every country histories of education reveal a systematic and usually intentional process whereby dominant groups have organized the structure of educational provision in ways that construct the human differences that children bring to school – differences in race, class, culture, gender, language – as deficits that are invoked as explanations of these children's poor academic performance.

(Cummins 2003, p. 41)

It was my reflection on the indignant reaction of M.T, when I corrected her enunciation of a word in a reading lesson, which created in me an awareness of the lack of respect, and of the absence of a sense of valuing of culture, inherent in my original practice in this area. Furthermore, I concluded that there was some merit in hooks's (1994) assertion that, from the perspective of the marginalised or oppressed, Standard English was the 'language of conquest and domination, the oppressors' language' (1994, p. 168). Therefore, to impose it on a minority group would only compound their sense of oppression and inferiority. Freire, in conversation with Shor (Shor and Freire 1987), considers the imposition of Standard English as a form of elitism and suggests that it should instead be called 'upper-class dominated English' (1987, p. 45).

The theories of both hooks and Freire appear to be grounded in the discourse of colonialism, according to which the imposition of Standard English could be interpreted as a form of cultural imperialism. Capra (1997) denounces such imperialism, which he says is based on a hierarchical system, as opposed to a network arrangement that would value human beings as part of the web of life:

Patriarchy, imperialism, capitalism and racism are examples of social domination that are exploitative and anti-ecological.

(Capra 1997, P. 8)

The colonisers, in order to establish their own sense of superiority, often tried to assimilate the ethnic minority into their cultural norms by promoting their language, customs and way of life as the legitimate ones. Altbach and Kelly (1978) describe how the justification of this policy was enabled through the colonisers' ascription of the colonised as an underclass that needed to be absorbed into the dominant culture:

Peoples of internal colonies have become termed 'minorities', 'ethnics', or 'lower classes' rather than peoples, nations or cultures. The colonizer, often called the dominant power in the case of internal colonialism, proceeded in many cases to redefine the nature of the colonized group, calling them 'culturally disadvantaged' or an 'underclass'. In assimilation, the cultural/national past becomes rewritten to

show similarities rather than differences, almost beckoning the colonized to become assimilated because it is *his* [sic] rather than the colonizer's way.

(Altbach and Kelly 1978, pp. 23-4, emphasis in original)

In similar fashion, Lyons (1978), drawing on the theories of Carnoy (1974), states that the coloniser justifies his subjugation of others by reasoning that the colonised belong to 'a different category of being' (1978, p. 182). These theories illustrate how colonisers could rationalise their oppressive treatment of minority ethnic groups by denying the right to human dignity of the colonised. This position reflects the situation of the Traveller community, who could be described as being subjected to the injustices associated with internal colonialism, which Lyons (1978) articulates as follows:

Colonialism can even exist within a single country in which one class, ethnic group, race or sex dominates others through certain patterns of behaviour that are identifiable as colonialistic. Some scholars have even coined a special expression for this: 'internal colonialism'.

(Lyons 1978, p. 181)

I suggest that the position of the Traveller community, in relation to the dominant majority group in society, meets the criteria for internal colonialism in the sense that their cultural identity is often denied legitimacy, or regarded as inferior to that of the dominant social group. May (1999) indicates the role of education in achieving such a situation:

Not surprisingly, education – as a key institution of the (colonising) nation-state – has played a central part in the subjugation of indigenous languages and cultures and the related assimilation of indigenous peoples into the dominant or 'common' language and culture of the nation-state.

(May 1999, p. 1)

Brady (1994) makes a similar link between educational regimes that epitomise domination and oppression, and a colonialist mentality:

By refusing to deconstruct their own politics of privilege and location, educators continue to maintain and produce forms of domination and oppression that are deeply rooted in the legacy of colonialism.

(Brady 1994, p. 150)

Freeman (1978) outlines the negative and destructive effects resulting from a situation where the coloniser fails to acknowledge the equal rights to humanity of the colonial subject, who is, therefore, perceived as an object:

The destruction or suppression of the history and culture of the colonized is typical of the colonial relationship. In their place the colonizer imposes his own version of reality. In this version the colonizer plays a central role, makes history and embodies all good things. The colonized becomes invisible or objectified, almost property, a contingent being, in the words of Simone de Beauvoir, 'the other'.

(Freeman 1978, p. 211)

This explication of the subjugated and dominated status of indigenous minority groups strengthens the argument for refraining from an insistence on the use of Standard English by Traveller children in schools, and for an acceptance of the use of Traveller language and cultural practices. Such an achievement would go some way towards minimising the effects of a dominator/dominated and oppressor/ oppressed relationship, and could help to stem the 'obliteration of nationhood through assimilation' (Altbach and Kelly 1978, p. 23).

My awareness, through reflection on my practice and its contexts, of the injustice and oppression resulting from the imposition of Standard English on Traveller children, led me to change my practice to one of acknowledging and recognising as legitimate the Travellers' formation of language. This language emanated from their specific cultural habitus and consisted of significant features, both in enunciation and in vocabulary, that differed from what is generally considered to be the norm. I adopted a stance of accepting without comment their different enunciation of certain words. I noted in my reflective diary that, subsequent to my change in practice, the Traveller children began using in my classroom words from their vocabulary that differed from Standard English, and that they would probably not have felt comfortable using in their mainstream classes (see Chapter 5). I attributed this sense of freedom, that they appeared to experience, to my more emancipatory and more accommodating educational practice, resulting from my decision

to support the idea of a plurality of language patterns in my classroom. In this context, I suggest that I was fulfilling the tenets inscribed in May's (1999) assertion that:

education has now come to be seen as a key arena in which indigenous peoples can *reclaim* and *revalue* their languages and cultures and, in so doing, improve the educational success of indigenous students.

(May 1999, p. 1, emphasis in original)

I submit that this change in my practice represents an improvement in it, since it reflects a more positive and liberatory ethos that accepts and legitimises difference. It enables me to live out my values of social justice and equality in my practice through affirming the culture and language of an ethnic minority group. I regard this as a transformation of my practice, having been freed from what Freire, in conversation with Shor, calls 'a slavish devotion to correct usage' (Shor and Freire 1987, p. 20). Some of the benefits to my Traveller pupils are that they no longer appear to feel that they have to fit rigidly into the system in order to participate in the educational process, or that they have to deny their cultural identity in order to gain institutional acceptance. One example of their more emancipatory experience of the educational system is evident in the opportunity that I provided for Traveller children to engage in projects on their culture and history (see Chapter 6). The more democratic practice, which resulted from these changes in their educational experiences, reflects also a transformation in the lives of the Traveller children, as there now appears to be a space in their educational experience for the expression of their specific language norms.

I suggest that the outcomes of my research, in terms of the achievement of an improvement in my educational practice, have significance for a wider audience than the Traveller children who were the immediate beneficiaries of my self-study research. There are other disadvantaged groups, such as those from working-class backgrounds or various ethnic minorities, who may also be subjected to discrimination by educational institutions on the basis that their language does not meet the required standard, namely that set by the dominant middle-class group. Bernstein (2000) testifies to the effects of such policies on children from minority groups:

Many children of the marginal classes may indeed have the recognition rule, that is, they can recognize power relations in which they are involved, and their position in them, but they may not possess the realisation rule. If they do not possess the realisation rule, they cannot then speak the expected legitimate text. These children in school, then, will not have acquired the legitimate pedagogic code, but will have acquired a place in the classificatory system. For these children, the experience of school is essentially the experience of the classificatory system and their place in it.

(Bernstein 2000, p. 17)

In similar vein, Bourdieu (1977) describes how an individual's habitus or system of dispositions can determine one's ability to benefit from the educational system:

Thus, for example, the habitus acquired in the family underlies the structuring of school experiences (in particular the reception and assimilation of the specifically pedagogic message).

(Bourdieu 1977, p. 87)

It would appear, then, that children who do not possess the codes or habitus favoured and legitimated by the school are considerably disadvantaged. My research, therefore, could have significance for the educational providers to disadvantaged and minority groups, in terms of influencing them to a stance of greater acceptance of the cultural habitus of such groups. In the context of this wider influence, I submit that I am contributing to the education of social formations (Whitehead 2004), in terms of providing possibilities for change and improvement in other social groupings, such as school communities.

A situation of superiority/inferiority in the educational system has implications also in the area of assessment tests, which are usually standardised according to the norms of the dominant majority group in society, and therefore tend to be biased in favour of this group. Children who do not belong to the dominant group are disadvantaged through having to cope with a language that is not part of their traditional habitus. I suggest that it would be advantageous to minority and disadvantaged groups if changes were effected at the level of practice to take account of their culturally specific needs in the area of language usage. As a first step in this process, teachers could reflect on their current

practice to ascertain in what ways minority and disadvantaged groups are being discriminated against through having to participate in a system that does not value their specific culture or language. Once awareness of the problem has been achieved, teachers with a social consciousness would probably experience a need to change their practice to one of accepting and validating the various forms of language their diverse pupils bring to the learning situation. In this way, they would be enabled, as I was, to change their practices to more socially just ones that valued difference and diversity of language. My research, therefore, has significance for the community of practitioners who may be struggling to find a more positive and life-enhancing pedagogic approach that enables them to treat their marginalised, disadvantaged or disabled pupils in a socially just and equitable manner.

An area of practice in which I achieved a transformation, and that could have significance for other practitioners, was in relation to obtaining extra educational resources for Traveller children. I do not mean to suggest that I obtained for the Traveller children anything other than their just entitlements, or any more than was being provided for other children within the educational system. My aim was one of 'encouraging Travellers to take full advantage of the educational opportunities which are theirs by right' (Johnson 2003, p. 136). In my context, the problem was that, in the keen competition for scarce resources, a system of prioritising that appeared to discriminate against Traveller children was employed. Other children, who did not have as great a level of learning difficulty, were often given priority on the basis that the Traveller children were irregular attendees and were unlikely to progress to second level schooling (see Chapter 5). I found the form of logic that resulted in this situation problematic from several perspectives. In the first place, it was an overt contradiction of my embodied values of social justice and equality, to discover what I perceived as blatant discriminatory practices against the Traveller children. Secondly, the logic of the particular discourse used to deny them their just entitlements appeared to be grounded in concepts of reductionism and essentialism. It is true that Traveller children did not, until relatively recently, progress to second level schooling. This was partly due to cultural reasons, such as marriage at a young age, but was also the result of prejudice from the settled community (McDonagh, 2000).

However, to stereotype Traveller children by assuming that they will not continue to secondary school, and to try to set boundaries to the trajectories of their lives by fixing their identities in historic spaces, is dehumanising and disrespectful to them. McLaren (1999) describes Freire's (1997) commitment to a profound respect for the cultural identity of students, when he says of the various aspects of cultural identity:

But these things take place in a social and historical context and not in pure air. These things take place in history and I, Paulo Freire, am not the owner of history.
(McLaren 1999, p. 49)

It would appear, then, that attempts to control the historicity of oppressed groups are anti-liberatory and non-transformational, and should, therefore, be avoided. It is indeed the case that attendance rates for Traveller children can be low, but their absences are usually for cultural reasons, such as, attendance at family weddings and funerals, and, therefore, not to be used as weapons with which to discriminate against them. There is also the fact that low attendance rates did not appear to be used to deny psychological assessments to settled children, and so it seems unfair to introduce this criterion into the equation in relation to Traveller children.

Ultimately, in the context of my practice, I rejected the argument for denying priority for assessment to Traveller children as being in conflict with my value of treating all children with equality of respect and entitlement. I suggest that my argument, grounded in my commitment to social justice and equality, that Traveller children's attendance might improve if more resources were provided for them and that they might progress to secondary school if they were affirmed, during their experience of schooling, in the expectation that they would do so, had at least equal validity with that put forward through the dominant educational discourse. I have recounted in Chapter 5 how I succeeded in obtaining a psychological assessment for a Traveller child, and how I obtained resource teaching for both her and another child, despite resistance to the idea of changing what was regarded as the normal practice. I submit that my stance in this instance could have significance as an incentive to other practitioners caught in this dilemma of trying to reconcile their values of social justice and equality with the

traditional dominant norms and practices in use in their educational establishments. I suggest that my experience could encourage them to challenge the status quo in the interests of equal treatment for minority groups.

An area of my research that proved to be a major learning experience for me, and that I suggest could also influence the learning of other professionals involved in similar practices, was the provision of a space within my classroom for the recognition, acceptance and valuing of cultural identity. This initiative had far reaching consequences, including an increase in self-esteem and self-confidence for the Traveller children, the experiencing of their culture as a valuable, valued and valid one, and the opportunity to give expression to their usually silenced voices (see Chapter 6). In the normal classroom situation, minority groups, whether ethnic, disadvantaged or disabled, can often be aware of their marginalised position, through the exclusion of their particular cultural or social habitus, and of the expectation that they should conform to the dominant norms and practices. May (1999) explains the political logic underpinning such a stance:

Only one language and culture can effectively represent the nation-state in its public realm, or so the story goes, although this language and culture are invariably most often the preserve of the dominant ethnic group. Minorities are, in turn, denied rights to their *existing* language and cultural traditions where these differ from those of the dominant ethnic group.

(May 1999, p. 43, emphasis in original)

This situation is allowed to exist by school authorities, either because it contributes to ease of classroom management, or because teachers are unaware of the need to change their practice to take account of specific cultural differences among minority groups. I accept that it was less problematic for me to bring about a change in my practice, as I work outside of mainstream schooling. Nevertheless, I suggest that, once educators can overcome the main stumbling blocks to embracing change, i.e., unwillingness to alter a system that, on the surface, appears to be working satisfactorily, and unawareness of the benefits of valuing equally all groupings within their classes, they will begin to find ways of working creatively to focus on the minority cultures among their pupils. My narrative of my learning experience, and of the benefits of my improved practice, could influence

other teachers to engage in a more democratic form of practice that enables the voices of all their pupils to be heard in educational settings.

In Chapter 7, I referred to the after school group in which I was involved in partnership with Winnie McDonagh. I outlined the working relationship, based on cooperation and collaboration, which informed the practice in which Winnie and I engaged in the conduct of the group. The after school group initially consisted of Traveller children only, but was later expanded to include settled children, a development that proved eminently successful. I attribute the satisfactory merging of the two groups of children, in part to the fact that the role model for this initiative was the working relationship between Winnie and me, a relationship based on mutual respect and reciprocity, reflecting the 'I-Thou' approach developed by Buber (see Sullivan 2005). In Chapter 8, I provided an extract from Winnie's evaluation of my role in the after school group, which corroborated my view of the quality of our working relationship. Our collaborative and reciprocal relationship could be accommodated within Freire's (1972) theory of cultural synthesis, as opposed to cultural invasion, which he explains thus:

In cultural synthesis, the actors who come from 'another world' to the world of the people do so not as invaders. They do not come to *teach* or to *transmit* or to *give* any thing, but rather to learn, with the people, about the people's world. In cultural invasion, the actors superimpose themselves on the people, who are assigned the role of spectators, of objects. In cultural synthesis, the actors become integrated with the people, who are co-authors of the action that both perform upon the world.

(Freire 1972, pp. 181-2, emphasis in original)

I suggest that the learning from our after school group, which exemplified a practice of diversity that was grounded in principles of social justice and equality, could prove valuable to others working to achieve a practice of inclusion among disparate groups, and could thus have a positive effect on wider social formations. In this domain, my practice could influence the education of social formations (Whitehead 2004), by encouraging other groups to bring about a transformation in their social practices.

I have indicated here some of the ways in which my research can influence the work of other educators situated in contexts similar to my own. I have shown how my learning contributed to the development of more emancipatory and more democratic forms of practice that valued cultural diversity, and I would anticipate that my account of my learning process could prove beneficial to the community of fellow educators seeking to achieve improvement in their educational practices. I would hope that, in showing the value of grounding my practice in principles of social justice and equality, I might inspire other practitioners to frame their practices within these principles also, thus enhancing the probability of achieving improvement in their educational practices, as well as achieving a transformative influence in the lives of their pupils. In this context, my learning could have a positive influence on the learning of others.

9:3 My claim to have contributed to a new form of educational theory

Through studying my educational practice and working to achieve an improvement in that practice, I came to a realisation of the significance of a living theory of social justice to the outcomes of my research. When, therefore, I was formulating a living theory of practice, it necessarily incorporated my living theory of social justice. Prior to developing my own living theory, I analysed and critiqued some of the theories of social justice in the literature, notably Rawls's (1971) theory (see Chapters 3 and 8). I concluded that, while Rawls's theory was sufficient to explain the distributive elements of my practice, such as acquiring extra educational resources for Traveller pupils, it was not adequate for achieving an understanding, and a realisation, of the equality of respect and recognition of diversity that, for me, were essential aspects of educational provision for a minority group. I sensed the need for a more inclusive living form of theory of justice that reflected a rejection of the lived reality of practices of discrimination and injustice, which had been common experiences for my Traveller pupils. What I wished to achieve was a concept that expressed, in a positive and life-enhancing manner, the qualities of human valuing and nurturing that I felt ought to be the experiences of Traveller children within the educational system. Rogers and Freiberg's (1994) sentiment 'that this person has worth and is valued in his or her separateness and uniqueness' (1994, p. 285) conveys the

ideal that I was attempting to frame, as does Noddings's (1992) admonishment to teachers that we often 'fail to treat the recipients of our care as individuals' (1992, p. 116).

In articulating my living theory of justice, therefore, I took account of the need for more affirmative experiences in the educational lives of the Traveller children, and formulated a living theory of justice as the living practice of equality of respect for all. As such, it did not represent a form of justice that could be distributed equally among people, as in the case of the division of material goods, which appears to be the main tenet of Rawls's (1971) theory of distributive justice. My living theory is more concerned with an attitude or frame of mind, which can be applied to all in equal measure. I contend that justice and equality are not concrete social goods, but are principles that need to be incorporated into living social practices. I suggest that values, such as social justice and equality, by their very nature, cannot be applied sporadically or haphazardly, but must constitute a solid and constant framework for equality of treatment of all groups in society. My living theory of the practice of social justice, therefore, has the potential to influence educational researchers and scholars who are interested in living theories of social justice that impinge on the lives of real people, rather than in abstract theories that remain at a propositional level.

In my practice of working with Traveller children, I endeavoured to adhere to democratic principles as the frameworks within which I operated. I provided a space in my classroom where Traveller children could experience their culture as an accepted and legitimate one, and where they could engage freely in discussions on aspects of their culture, which they did not have the opportunity of doing in their mainstream classes. In this space of openness and acceptance, they could engage in dialogue and have their authentic voices heard, without fear of ridicule. Traveller children experienced a sense of empowerment and emancipation as a result of the democratic and positive atmosphere that prevailed in my classroom (see Chapter 6). In the process, I was able to theorise my practice as a democratic and life-enhancing space for the promotion of equality and respect for all. This living theory of democratic practice is grounded in my living theory of social

justice, which I suggest lends credibility and robustness to both theories, on the basis that issues of democratic principles are intricately linked with those of social justice. My research, therefore, could have significance for educational theorists working in the area of democratic practices, as well as for those involved in generating living theories of social justice.

Linked with my living theory of social justice is a living theory of inclusion as the acknowledgement of diversity. This living theory resulted from my dissatisfaction with the existing models of inclusion that tended to frame educational practices. One such model reflects the usual experience of Traveller children within the educational system, where they are expected to fit in to a ready-made scheme of norms, beliefs and practices emanating from the dominant majority group. In reality, this is a form of assimilation, masquerading as inclusion, and could result in the annihilation of Traveller children's sense of self (see Sullivan 2005). There is little recognition of Traveller children's separate cultural identity, or of their right to self-determination. The aim of such assimilationist practices appears to be the achievement of homogeneity through the suppression of diversity. It was out of a sense of rejection of a policy of assimilation that I established a space within my classroom for the recognition and valuing of Traveller culture (see Chapter 6). Similar considerations motivated me towards the setting up of the after school group (see Chapter 7). Both of these initiatives enabled me to critique models of inclusion that were not based on principles of social justice and equality, and at the same time to formulate my own living theory of inclusion as the recognition of diversity.

Some educational institutions engage in the practice of integration, which they believe to be more empowering and more inclusive than the assimilationist model. A cursory glance at what is involved might indicate that there is some justification for their beliefs, as attempts at integration seek to include all participants on the basis of equality. However, the methodology used to achieve this equality consists in reducing all to a common denominator of sameness, thus seeking to eliminate differences between majority and minority groups. Once again, minority groups, such as Traveller children, are reduced to the status of second-class citizens by being deprived of the right to their separate cultural

identity, in a misguided attempt to grant them equal treatment. Noddings (1992) critiques the policy of treating all pupils the same when she says:

We may also mistakenly suppose that they want to live exactly as we do – that they want the same knowledge, the same kinds of work, the same forms of worship, the same daily customs.

(Noddings 1992, p. 116)

Integration as the practice of inclusion is also problematic from the point of view that it prevents the minority group from enjoying the benefits of community affiliation and cohesion that can result from recognition of their status as a distinct group. The model of integration, therefore, just like the model of assimilation, appears to be inappropriate for achieving a practice of inclusion that is based on equality and social justice. May (1999) indicates the extent of the negative and destructive impact of policies of assimilation and integration on the language and culture of the indigenous Maori population of New Zealand:

Assimilationist policies in education have also contributed significantly to the rapid decline of the Māori language over the course of this century... assimilation was replaced in the 1960s by a brief period of integration...this proved little different in theory or practice from its predecessor. It was less crude than assimilation in its conceptions of culture but a clear cultural hierarchy continued to underpin the model.

(May 1999, pp. 54-5)

Following my rejection of the two usual models of inclusion outlined here, on the basis of their inability to result in an equitable and socially just situation, I turned to my own practice in search of a more suitable model. My reflection on the after school group revealed a process of inclusion that appeared to transcend both the models of assimilation and integration (see Chapter 7). The process to which I am referring was the extension of the group, which initially consisted of Traveller children only, to include settled children. The procedure began in the marginalised space and opened outwards to embrace the new members. This was the reverse of what normally occurs, when the process of inclusion begins in the majority space, with the minority group having little option but to fit in to the space already defined by the norms, beliefs and practices of the majority group, thus

running the risk of being absorbed into the majority group. Connell (1993) makes a cogent argument for a similar approach in relation to the imposition of a hegemonic curriculum that 'condemns excluded groups to continuing exclusion' (1993, p. 38). His strategy, which he refers to as 'inverting hegemony', is as follows:

The strategy seeks ways of organizing the content and method which builds on the experience of the disadvantaged, but generalizes that to the whole system, rather than confining it to an enclave. The strategy thus seeks a practical reconstruction of education which will yield relative advantage to the groups currently disadvantaged. It attempts to turn a defensive, compensatory strategy into a proactive, universalizing strategy. If you wish to teach about ethnicity and race relations, for instance, a more comprehensive and deeper understanding is possible if you construct your curriculum from the point of view of the *subordinated* ethnic groups than if you work from the point of view of the dominant one.

(Connell 1993, pp. 38-9, emphasis in original)

Connell's idea of beginning the process of knowledge creation from the vantage point of the disadvantaged resonates with my living theory of initiating the process of inclusion from the positionality of the marginalised. Beginning the process of inclusion from the point of marginalisation provided the conditions for avoiding the possibility of assimilation, as well as the opportunity for the acknowledgement of the cultural identity of the minority group. The Traveller children originally occupied the space, before it expanded outwards to include settled children, and thus positioned, they were able to avoid some of the negative effects associated with their usual minority status. In the newly constituted group, therefore, they were able to experience their cultural identity as equally valid with that of the settled children, who, for their part, did not appear to be adversely affected by their temporary positionality as the minority within the after school group. This innovative approach enabled me to develop my living theory of inclusion as the acknowledgement of diversity underpinned by values of social justice and equality.

I am claiming that the significance of my living theory of inclusion lies in its potential as a framework for resolving conflictual situations arising from unjust or inequitable relationships between majority and minority groups, or between oppressors and the oppressed. The reality of Traveller children's lived experience of oppression and

marginalisation is played out daily in political situations throughout the world. Two such sites of contestation are the ongoing Republican/Loyalist conflict in Northern Ireland and the Arab/Israeli dispute in the Middle East. I do not mean to suggest that my living theory of inclusion could provide an instant solution to such conflicts, but it could contain valuable learning opportunities for those seeking peaceful resolutions. For example, my living theory indicates the inherent injustice of a solution imposed arbitrarily on a minority group by the dominant majority. It suggests that a policy of inclusion aimed at reconciling differences is unlikely to be successful unless it takes into consideration the views and wishes of the minority or oppressed group. Furthermore, my living theory advocates that, if the process of inclusion actually begins in the space of the marginalised group, it validates that group's position as a legitimate party to the search for an equitable solution. I submit that my living theory of inclusion resonates with what Said (2002) is seeking, as a solution to the Arab/Israeli conflict in the Middle East, when he argues that there is 'a need for new visions of inclusion' (2002, p. 309).

My living theory of inclusion as the acknowledgement of difference, therefore, has significance both for theorists in the areas of peace, justice and conflict resolution, and for social activists engaging with these issues at the level of practice. In terms of theory, I submit that I have demonstrated the need for a concept of inclusion that transcends assimilation, which can reflect a denial of difference, and integration, which often seeks to eliminate difference. Diverse viewpoints need to be accommodated, as the interests of justice cannot be served through imposing the wishes of the dominant majority on the oppressed minority. A policy of inclusion that takes account of diversity appears to have significantly greater potential for achieving equality for all than a monocultural approach that ignores the minority viewpoint. In the area of practice, there is a need for transformative measures to ensure that the concept of inclusion as diversity is realised in actual practices. Such realities are characterised by more emancipatory and more democratic actions that constitute experiences of social justice and equality.

I was able to theorise my practice in the manner outlined in this chapter because the theory evolved from a practice that was the living espousal of my values of social justice

and equality. By grounding my living theory in my study of my practice, I was following the tenets of the new scholarship of educational enquiry, as suggested by Whitehead (1999), and fulfilling the commitment to the idea of teachers as theorists (McNiff and Whitehead 2005). Unlike the traditional technical rational approach to research, which views research and practice as two separate entities, theory and practice are integrated, in a relationship of complementary interconnectedness, throughout my research. Theory informs practice, which generates new theory that in turn feeds back into practice, in a cyclical manner. To relate this process to my research, I will refer to the concept of social justice, which underpinned the research. In my engagement with the literature, I encountered Rawls's (1971) theory of social justice. However, when I applied this theory to my practice, my subsequent reflection on my practice, and my analysis of what was occurring in my practice, revealed to me that Rawls's theory was insufficient to achieve the quality of social justice that I deemed necessary for the equitable and just treatment of all human beings. Consequently, I developed my own living theory of social justice, which evolved from my practice and reflected a new knowledge of that practice. This cycle of phases of theorising and action was enabled through the processes of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, which are essential components of the new forms of scholarship (Schön 1995). These processes involve thinking and acting, as well as the reflective aspect, which constitute an action research approach as defined by Lewin (cited in Schön 1995). Schön (1995) believes that the new scholarship requires a new epistemology to take account of the practitioner's reflections in and on action, which has the potential to produce new knowledge. The new knowledge that emerged in the process of studying my practice and that enabled me to theorise my practice reflects the principles inherent in the new scholarship of educational enquiry (Whitehead 1999).

9:4 Significance for myself

An enquiry into one's own practice is conducive to producing new knowledge about the practice, which can be construed as learning outcomes from the research. In an educational context, the learning from practitioner research can result in improvement in the researcher's own practice, as well as in the quality of educational provision for other participants in the educational endeavour, for example, the school pupils. Ghaye and

Ghaye (1998) attest to the value of a reflective disposition in achieving such improvements:

It is through reflective conversations that a greater sense of self and professional identity can be brought about. Reflective conversations that are empowering enable teachers to name, define and construct their own 'realities': they enable teachers to sustain themselves.

(Ghaye and Ghaye 1998, pp. 22-3)

I suggest that reflective conversations, or self-reflection, can have wide-ranging implications for the educational practitioner. It can, for example, lead to teachers becoming more accountable for their practices, and engaging in reconceptualising their practices. O'Hanlon describes some of the benefits of engaging in school-based enquiry:

The practice of teaching becomes educative when professionals have the opportunity to validate critical theories of teaching in their own school-based enquiry, for example achieved through various investigatory processes often referred to as reflective enquiry, investigatory practice or action research.

(O'Hanlon 2000, p. 149)

However, I suggest that, in conjunction with the process of validating the theories in the literature in their enquiries, teachers can also develop their own living theories from their educational practices, as I have demonstrated in this thesis, and that this can be a further educative experience for them. In fact, in her later writing, O'Hanlon (2002) appears to agree with the concept of teachers developing living theories from their practices:

Theory is not produced by a group of 'intellectuals' or experts who claim the right to generate valid knowledge. In educational research a wide range of techniques, methods and procedures are used, which allows researchers to define their own forms of valid knowledge, and present them as educational theories.

(O'Hanlon 2002, p. 117)

I concur with O'Hanlon in this view, as it resonates with the process of theory generation with which I engaged in the course of my research. I would also agree with her that 'a necessary precondition of action research is a felt need to initiate change or to innovate', and would share her:

profound disappointment to witness research for higher degrees, which has little personal impact on the researcher, except as a purely intellectual exercise for the purpose of an award.

(O'Hanlon 2002, p. 118)

I would suggest that by articulating the growth in one's learning, as a result of engaging in the research, a researcher can transcend the purely intellectual exercise of writing a text simply for the purpose of gaining an award. Ghaye and Ghaye (1998) appear to be in agreement with this broader view of the research process:

Creating the text is one thing; interpreting it and then using it to move thinking and practice forward is something else.

(Ghaye and Ghaye 1998, p. 77)

In fulfilment of my commitment to a more enduring and more meaningful prospect for my research, I propose to discuss in this section the impact that undertaking the research has had on my personal and professional development.

I am aware that, in subjecting my practice to scrutiny as I critique my personal and professional decisions, I am, to a certain extent, placing myself in a vulnerable position. However, I am confident that the benefits of this exercise, in terms of increased self-knowledge and self-awareness, far outweigh any potential disadvantages. I am also encouraged by Dadds and Hart's (2001) conviction of the positive effects of such an undertaking:

Opening one's professional practice to critical scrutiny demands courage, curiosity, fortitude and a willingness to accept that there are always opportunities for further development. It often means that the practitioner researcher renders himself or herself vulnerable to critique, from both self and others. Yet such open attitudes, we believe, signal one of the highest forms of professionalism. Such professionalism deserves fostering and respecting in climates of optimum growth.

(Dadds and Hart 2001, pp. 8-9)

I have stated in Chapter 8 that I consider my research findings to be tentative, rather than final, outcomes, and thus always subject to further improvement and refinement in the

light of engagement with the views and theories of others in the field. I suggest that such an outlook can contribute to continuing growth and development, both at a personal and a professional level, thus ensuring that my learning is ongoing.

The process of engaging in my research and analysing the outcomes has proved to be a learning experience for me, both in terms of the development of my own thinking and of the importance of achieving optimum educational benefits for my Traveller pupils. I have progressed from an initial position of regarding Traveller children as equal to, meaning the same as, other children to a more enlightened situation of considering them equal to, though different from, others. The process by which I arrived at my present understanding involved me initially in an interrogation of my own capacity for prejudice and bias. However, I suggest that acknowledging one's personal biases can contribute to reducing any negative effects from them, and would agree with Griffiths' (1998) view on this issue:

Bias comes not from having ethical and political positions – this is inevitable – but from not acknowledging them. Not only does such acknowledgement help to unmask any bias that is implicit in those views, but it also helps to provide a way of responding critically and sensitively to the research.

(Griffiths 1998, p. 133)

My reflections on and in my practice (Schön 1983) revealed a lack of congruence between my espoused values of social justice and equality, and my living practice of working with Traveller children, resulting in my positioning as a 'living contradiction' (Whitehead 1989). The mismatch between my values and my practice was evident in my failure to give due recognition to Traveller cultural practices, through an initial mistaken policy of encouraging Traveller children to adopt the system of enunciation of words that conformed to the dominant cultural practice in this area. My reflection on this issue created in me an awareness of the destructive consequences of such a policy, which Polanyi (1958) elucidates as follows:

In learning to speak, every child accepts a culture constructed on the premises of a traditional interpretation of the universe, rooted in the idiom of the group to which

it was born, and every intellectual effort of the educated mind will be made within this frame of reference. Man's [sic] whole intellectual life would be thrown away should this interpretive framework be wholly false; he is rational only to the extent to which the conceptions to which he is committed are true.

(Polanyi 1958, p. 112)

In this context, then, I realised the importance of accepting and validating the cultural experiences that children bring with them from home to the learning situation.

In arriving at this stance, I interrogated my own practice and found it necessary to change aspects of my practice to reflect my acceptance of Traveller children's different enunciation of words, as well as their usage of words peculiar to their Traveller culture. I came to a realisation that, as Traveller culture did not normally receive any recognition either in the school curriculum or in textbooks, I needed to create a space within my classroom where Traveller children could explore aspects of their culture and experience it as being accepted within the schooling system. This democratically constituted space allowed them the freedom to articulate their experiences of discrimination and oppression. In this context, I was ensuring that my practice provided a more meaningful pedagogic environment for Traveller children, which Ghaye and Ghaye (1998) suggest can result from engaging in action research:

Action research is not only about learning: it is about knowledge production and about a commitment to improve practice...the principles and practices of action research can play a significant part in helping us all to establish, sustain and nourish more meaningful work environments.

(Ghaye and Ghaye 1998, p. 69)

When a Traveller child was not succeeding in learning to read, while using words and books from the curriculum, which was based on the dominant culture, my reflections on the situation led me to seek to change the system by providing the opportunity for her to base her reading on her own culture and background, thus reconceptualising the idea of curriculum as a more emancipatory experience grounded in a concept of diversity. My action in this instance reflected my valuing of the lived reality of my pupil's needs over the monocultural curriculum that did not accommodate her needs. My learning from this

incident is reflected in my understanding of the primacy of the lifeworld over the systems-world, in terms of Habermas's explication of these differing foci, and of the relevance of speech acts, which Dallmayr (1996) describes as follows:

Even the most simple of these conveys a will to communicate something about a shared lifeworld and to reach a common understanding about it. It is this intersubjective will to communicate, rather than the subjective will to dominate, which is found in any competent speaker's pre-theoretical grasp of linguistic rules.

(Dallmayr 1996, p. 224)

Dallmayr says that, for Habermas, the lifeworld is a milieu of coexistence, which tends to reinforce its perception as a space for the practice of equality, rather than for what Marcuse (1972) refers to as a logic of domination.

In accordance with my commitment to lifelong learning (Field 2000) and my values around the potential of education as an emancipatory force (Rogers and Freiberg 1994), I recognised the importance of remaining in the educational system for Traveller children. I availed of the opportunity, therefore, to become involved in setting up the after school group to encourage Traveller children to continue to second level schooling. Following the success of the original initiative, as evidenced by the fact that all the Traveller children who completed their primary school education in June 2004 transferred to second level schools, I then moved the project forward to become an intercultural space, with the introduction of settled children, who might also be at risk of dropping out of the educational system, into the group. This group then became the nucleus for the development of my theory of inclusion as the recognition of difference, which evolved as a new form of inclusional practice that was grounded in the acceptance of diversity. In this context, I am claiming that my work contains the potential for the transformation of practice to reflect principles of democratic freedom, social justice and equality.

My personal development, resulting from my interrogation of acts of self as outlined here, consisted in my awareness of my implicit biases, and of the need for change in this area. A similar critical stance towards my place of work revealed the existence of

institutional prejudice, and my efforts to bring about change in this situation reflected a process of professional development. The knowledge and awareness of the procedures at work here emanated from my analysis of the data collected during the course of the research. Kincheloe (2003) regards such self-awareness as an integral aspect of teacher research, when he says: ‘This data analysis aspect of critical teacher research must always be directed towards an understanding of the self’ (2003, p. 109). I suggest that an understanding of the self should, where possible, lead to improvement of the self. In this context, I submit that the improvements in my thinking and in my educational practice, which I have described in this chapter, represented an enhancement in my personal and professional development.

9:5 Conclusion

The improvements in my practice that I have outlined in this chapter are evidence of the transformational processes of my own learning throughout the process of my research. The narrative of my research, therefore, is as much an account of my learning as it is the story of the transcendence of the marginalisation and alienation traditionally endured by Traveller children within the educational system. It also reflects the transcendence of my own capacity for prejudice and bias, which were unacknowledged characteristics of my educational practice, prior to my engagement in critical reflection on my practice. Through the adoption of a more critical stance in my work, I have emancipated my own thinking and, consequently, have been able to engage in a practice of pedagogic freedom that has benefited both me and my pupils. In documenting the process of my learning in this account of my research, I wished to show how I hold myself accountable for implementing improvements in my practice and for accomplishing a developmental transformation in my thinking. The development of my thinking, through the process of engaging in cycles of self-reflection and action, enabled me to theorise my practice. My embodied values of social justice and equality ensured that these principles underpinned the emerging living theories, as well as providing the conceptual frameworks for my research. One of the living theories that emerged from my practice is a living theory of social justice as equality of respect for all. Implicit in this living theory is the notion of acceptance of concepts and practices of diversity and plurality. Interlinked with, and

grounded in, my living theory of justice, is the concept of practice as a democratic, life-enhancing and affirmative space. Such a form of practice could help to contribute to the achievement of equality for all. The final living theory that emerged in the process of my research, and that is also grounded in my living theory of the practice of justice, is the living theory of inclusion as the acknowledgement of diversity. Once again, this living theory has the potential to ensure equality of treatment for all.

In conclusion, I want to emphasise that, while I have mentioned a number of living theories here, they are not separate outcomes of my research, but are all interlinked. Just as theory and practice are integrated throughout my research report, in agreement with the living theory form of action research (Whitehead 1989) within which my research is located, so too are the various living theories that emanated from the research inextricably linked together. The common threads of interconnectedness are the grounding of all living theories in my embodied value of social justice, and the potential of all living theories to achieve my aim of equality of respect for all. Finally, I present this narrative of my research in the spirit of Polanyi's (1958) articulation of some of the dilemmas inherent in the communicative process:

Speaking and writing is an ever renewed struggle to be both apposite and intelligible, and every word that is finally uttered is a confession of our incapacity to do better; but each time we have finished saying something and let it stand, we tacitly imply also that this says what we mean and should mean it therefore also to the listener or reader. Though these ubiquitous tacit endorsements of our words may always turn out to be mistaken, we must accept this risk if we are ever to say anything

(Polanyi 1958, p. 207).

