

Section 1 Chapter 1 Background

1:1 Introduction

In this introductory chapter of my thesis, I outline the background to my research. I give my reasons for undertaking my research in the area of Traveller education, stating what I wished to achieve in this context and why it was important for me to do so. These discussions enable me to explain why maintaining the status quo in terms of educational provision for Traveller children was not an option, and why I opted instead to try to influence the quality of their educational experience. In the second part of this chapter, I describe the different foci of the research as follows:

- The central focus of my research is around my attempts to ensure that the cultural identity of Traveller children is valued, on an equal basis with that of the dominant majority group, within the educational system.
- From this initial concern, I extend the focus to include some of my other aims, such as trying to provide a more positive and democratic educational experience for Traveller children, through attempting to ensure that this experience is framed within principles of social justice and equality, which also constitute two of the ontological values underpinning my research.
- I focus on my own learning, which resulted from my consciousness of my own educational growth and development, both at a personal and professional level, through the process of continuous reflection on my practice, commensurate with the action research methodology that I used in carrying out my research.
- A significant issue with which I engage in this chapter relates to the manner in which I was able to make my claim to have generated my living theory of a practice of social justice.
- Finally, I explain how I have transformed my ontological values of social justice and equality into living critical standards of judgement to test the validity of my claim to knowledge.

The third section of this chapter is devoted to an explicit articulation of the aims and purposes of my research, in terms of what I wanted to achieve, why I wanted to achieve it, and how I proposed to fulfil these aims and purposes.

1:2 Background to my research

A deep sense of dissatisfaction with existing educational provision for marginalised children in my place of work, as well as a strong conviction that it was possible to influence an improvement in the situation, were the factors that inspired me to undertake my research. In agreement with, among others, Connell (1993), Kenny (1997) and Lynch (1999), I value the rights of all children to equal entitlement in the area of educational provision. However, when this right was being denied in my practice, I experienced myself as a living contradiction in terms of Whitehead's (1993) explanation of this phenomenon. One incident, that raised my awareness of how my values were being denied in my practice, occurred when I worked as a mainstream class teacher, prior to taking up my current position as Resource Teacher for Traveller children (RTT). I had in my new class a Traveller child who had major learning difficulties, and who was not receiving any learning support or resource teaching. When I enquired from the school authorities as to why this was the case, I was informed that the child's mother had not signed the consent form that was required in order to obtain a psychological assessment, and without parental consent, the child could not be assessed for a placement in a special class. I arranged a meeting with the Traveller child's mother shortly afterwards, and when I explained that a psychological assessment could provide the extra resources needed to help with her daughter's learning difficulties, she readily agreed to sign the consent form.

The Traveller mother's willingness to sign the form at my request led me to question how she had been approached initially for her permission, and how it was deduced that she had refused this permission. The likely explanation was that the form was simply sent home, which was the normal practice for communicating with other parents, ignoring the widely acknowledged fact that most Traveller parents have problems in the area of literacy, as it wasn't common practice for their generation to attend primary school for

any significant length of time. MacAongusa (1993) refers to the lack of formal education among Traveller parents, and suggests that those parents are now anxious that their children should have a better opportunity of participating in the educational system. McDonagh (2000) mentions that some Traveller parents are reluctant to send their children to school because of the negativity and discrimination that they themselves suffered while at school, and she also suggests that the parents' attendance at primary school was for a relatively brief period of time, often as a result of the sense of alienation that they experienced while in school. I have come across other similar situations since the incident that I have described here, where Traveller parents were unaware of events occurring in school through the school's inappropriate method of communicating the relevant information to them. It would appear to be a necessity, therefore, that schools should factor in to their policies and practices the need to recognise this aspect of Traveller culture through endeavouring to make personal contact with Traveller parents, instead of engaging in the evidently futile exercise of sending home letters that cannot be read or acted upon. This latter practice can appear to be demoralising and demeaning from the point of view of the Traveller community, as it reinforces their positioning, by the dominant group, as inferior because of their lack of literacy skills. It can also lead, on the part of the school authorities, to the mistaken assumption of a lack of interest, or of a refusal of permission, by Traveller parents, when letters sent home remain unanswered.

The incident that I have outlined here also compels me to question the claims of some educational institutions that they treat all their pupils equally, since their practice of communicating with parents appears to discriminate against a minority group within the school population. This situation has wider implications in the fact that Irish society is becoming increasingly multicultural, resulting in many non-national children appearing within the educational system. In one school, for example, there are three hundred pupils who are foreign nationals, and this represents one third of the school population (Walshe 2005). Frequently, the parents of these pupils are non English-speaking, which raises the question of how schools can best communicate with the parents. It appears to be opportune, therefore, for educational institutions to review their policies and practices for interaction with parents, to ensure that the methods of communication are respectful of

the differing circumstances of the Irish indigenous minority group, as well as of other newly arrived ethnic minority groups.

My problem, with regard to obtaining resources for my Traveller pupil who had learning difficulties, did not end, however, on having obtained permission from the child's mother for the assessment. When eventually the educational psychologist arrived in my school to assess the children, I was informed by the school authorities that, as there were three children on the waiting list from the previous year and the psychologist could only assess three pupils per school each year, the Traveller child would not be assessed. I argued that the Traveller child had much lower scores in attainment tests than the other three children and was also much older than they were, and so she would not have another opportunity of being assessed, but to no avail. It was pointed out to me that the Traveller child's attendance tended to be erratic, that she would not be progressing to second level schooling and that, therefore, it would be a waste of space to allocate her a place in the special class. While accepting that choices have to be made when there is a scarcity of resources, I contend that the selection method used in this instance was unjust. The reasons given were at variance with my educational values around providing equal opportunities for all children. Consequently, I submit that educational criteria, such as obvious learning difficulties, discovered through teacher observation, or low scores on attainment tests, and not attendance rates or future educational direction, should be the deciding factors in selecting children for assessment. This could result in a fairer system, and would not privilege settled children over Traveller children.

I have a further difficulty with the reasons given for non-assessment in that, while the Traveller child's attendance was irregular, this was due to occasional trips to England, from where the family originated. This tendency to travel is an aspect of the practice of nomadism, which Travellers claim is an intrinsic and essential part of their culture. McDonagh (1994) describes nomadism as a salient feature of Traveller culture, as well as a signifier of the separate cultural identity of the Traveller community. It is an injustice, therefore, to use this cultural practice to deny a Traveller child access to a psychological assessment. In the process, culture itself is being pathologised, within a deficit model of

social formation, and therefore being used as a weapon in an attempt at enforced socialisation into the dominant culture. Furthermore, I would suggest that the statement that the child would not progress to second level schooling is both negative and prescriptive, as well as constituting a denial of my educational values. I have always considered it appropriate, as an educator, to operate out of a positive and optimistic framework that sets no boundaries to a child's educational possibilities, regardless of cultural or social background. I would suggest that there is an onus on me to have high expectations of all my pupils and to encourage them all towards lifelong education. Ironically, the following year the Traveller child did in fact enrol in a second level school, which she attended for a year and a half. Dare I suggest that, if proper support systems were put in place for her in primary school, she may have remained for a longer period of time in second level schooling? A combination of the sense of frustration that I felt at being unable to secure for this Traveller child the learning support that she so obviously needed, the sense of anger at such blatant injustice by the dominant, and therefore culturally legitimated, institution (Bourdieu 1971) towards a member of an ethnic minority group, and the sense of loss at not being able to live out my value of equal educational opportunity for all, acted as the catalyst that spurred me to undertake research into finding ways of ensuring more socially just and equitable educational provision for Traveller children.

It was my reflection on the incident related here that initially led me to question the attitudes and practices adopted by educational institutions in their manner of accommodating marginalised groups. O Boyle (1990) has written about the sense of alienation from the educational system that is experienced by many Traveller children, due in part to the fact that the Traveller culture operates out of a different values system to that of the dominant culture within schools. Bernstein (2000) identifies three interrelated rights that schools ought to promote in order to comply with democratic principles:

- (1) The right to individual enhancement.
- (2) The right to be included socially, intellectually, culturally and personally.
- (3) The right to participate.

(Bernstein 2000, p. xx)

I would endorse Bernstein's view of the importance of the implementation of these rights as a strategy towards the achievement of equal educational opportunity for all pupils. Prior to the experience of having my value of equality denied in my practice, I had assumed that the principle of equality would automatically apply in the area of education, based on the following factors. I live in a country that espouses democratic principles, and would have expected that the application of these principles in the context of educational provision would have included the concept of equality of opportunity in this area. Bunreacht na hÉireann/The Irish Constitution (1937), guarantees the right of all children to education (Article 42), and since it doesn't state that some children have greater entitlements than others in this area, there is a presumption of implied equality. The 'Revised Primary School Curriculum' (Ireland, Department of Education and Science/DES 1999) suggests 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' (1999, p. 7). Again, one could interpret this objective as applying to all children, indiscriminately. The 'Guidelines for Traveller Education in Primary Schools' (Ireland, DES 2002) outline the policy on Traveller education:

This policy has as its central aim the meaningful participation and highest attainment of the Traveller child so that, in common with all the children of the nation, he or she may live a full life as a child and realise his or her full potential as a unique individual, proud of and affirmed in his or her identity as a Traveller and a citizen of Ireland.

(Ireland, DES 2002, p. 5)

In this instance, the policy states explicitly that Traveller children are to receive educational provision equal to that of settled children. The affirmative tone of the rhetoric in these policies created in me the expectation that all children would in fact be given equal educational opportunities. However, the personal experience I have outlined above illustrates the reality that a considerable lacuna exists between policy and practice in this area. Consequently, I decided to take up the position of RTT in my school so that I could endeavour to reduce the gap between theory and practice by ensuring that Traveller

children received equal educational opportunities through equality of access to appropriate and necessary resources.

The presence of a number of Traveller children in my school initially alerted me to the need for a recognition and acceptance of the different cultures present in school settings. Apple (1996) recognises the importance of an educational system that accepts and values cultural difference:

A democratic curriculum and pedagogy must begin with a recognition of 'the different social positionings and cultural repertoires in the classroom, and the power relations between them'.

(Apple 1996, p. 33)

My current stance on this issue is that I value an intercultural approach to education, where all cultures are accepted and recognised as being equally valid and worthy of inclusion in the formation of the school ethos. I would argue that any position other than this could result in the culture of the majority group within school settings being accorded a privileged status, while the culture of minority groups would then be seen as inferior. The message that this situation could communicate to minority groups is that they are less deserving of consideration by educational institutions, with significant repercussions for their sense of self-worth and self-esteem, and thus reducing their potential to benefit from the educational system. The lack of a cultural fit between the home and school environments would also impact negatively on the educational opportunities of minority groups, as they would be deprived of what Bourdieu, according to Robbins (2000)), refers to as cultural capital, which bestows on its possessors the ability to obtain maximum benefit from the educational system. Those most likely to lack this cultural capital, such as Traveller children, those with learning difficulties and socially disadvantaged children, are consequently at risk of marginalisation, alienation and oppression.

A further concern in relation to Traveller education was the low participation rate of Traveller children in second level schooling. In my last year as a teacher in mainstream

education, six Traveller children completed their primary schooling. Two of the six transferred to a local secondary school, two others did not attend any second level school, the fifth child stayed in a secondary school for just six months and the sixth, the child for whom I struggled in vain to obtain a psychological assessment, remained in a secondary school for a year and a half. Now, two years later, only two of the six still remain in the educational system. I suggest that this level of participation is unacceptable, and that a similar statistic in relation to the settled community would cause a public outcry, and would result in calls for speedy action to be taken to remedy the situation. The realisation, that the low level of Traveller children's participation in second level schooling fails to constitute a crisis in educational circles, creates a conflict in relation to my values around social justice and equality for all, for it reveals the existence of double standards in relation to access to second level education. The norm appears to be that it is expected that settled children should continue their education beyond primary school, but that there is no such expectation in relation to children from the Traveller community. In view of this lack of expectation on the part of educators, it would be extremely difficult to motivate Traveller children to remain in the educational system, for, as Finnan and Levin (2000) conclude:

Student expectations for their own school experience are shaped both by explicit and subtle messages that they receive from the adult members of the school community and by the trust placed in education by their community. Examinations of the chronic school failure of indigenous ethnic and racial minority students point to the development of an oppositional culture among such students. They see in their community the results of years of inequity, and they develop an opposition to all avenues to mainstream success.

(Finnan and Levin 2000, p. 91)

There is a need, therefore, for a change in attitude on the part of educators if expectations are to be raised in relation to the retention of Traveller children in the educational system. Consequently, I made a conscious decision to encourage Traveller children, at every opportunity, to give serious consideration to the idea of continuing on to second level schooling.

The reluctance of Traveller children to attend secondary schools may be partly due to cultural reasons, such as the fact that they do not have a tradition of attending school beyond primary level. In previous generations, the Traveller cultural tradition of marriage at a young age, sometimes as young as fourteen or fifteen years of age, would have precluded their attendance at second level schooling. McDonagh (1993) explains that, in earlier times, preparation for their roles in married life usually began at around twelve years of age. It is no longer common practice for children from the Traveller community to marry at such a young age, but the legacy of early school leaving may have survived. However, I would suggest that their lack of participation in postprimary school could equally result from factors such as their sense of marginalisation and alienation from an educational system that does not appear to value their culture or identity, and that makes no overt attempt to retain them within the schooling system. Bernstein (2000) alludes to the difficulties marginalised groups experience in trying to gain acceptance in educational institutions:

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

(Bernstein 2000, p. 14)

Schools, therefore, can often be sites of confusion and of conflicting values from the perspective of Traveller children, resulting in experiences of schooling that tend to be alienating rather than inclusionary.

I believe in the value of an inclusive model of education predicated on an intercultural ethic that gives equal status to all cultural groups. I suggest that the positive experience of having their culture acknowledged and legitimated in educational institutions has the potential to enable Traveller children to appreciate the value of their own culture, and could demonstrate to them that their culture need not be a barrier to participation in the educational system. Acceptance and legitimation of their culture in schools could also empower Traveller children to push out the boundaries that currently limit their learning potential and, consequently, their life-chances. In agreement with Berlin (1997), I subscribe to a view that recognises the value and the dignity accorded to the human

condition through the realisation of concepts of diversity and pluralism. I aimed, therefore, in my research, to promote a pluralistic environment in the school that would emancipate Traveller children by removing the barriers to their learning resulting from the positioning of the culture of the majority group as the only legitimate one in schools.

1:3 Focus of my research

My overall research aim is to show how I am generating my living theory of practice that is grounded in my capacity to create democratically-informed relationships. In my practice, I am struggling to achieve social justice for marginalised children. I am also focusing on my own learning, as I reflect on my efforts to encourage Traveller children to speak for themselves, and to provide the intellectual and physical resources that will enable them to develop the confidence to do so. Through engaging in this practice, I claim that I am creating a living theory of practice that is grounded in my ontological values of justice and equality. The focus on my practice and the focus on my learning from my practice are not separate spheres of enquiry, but are integrated, in the sense that they are embedded in one another, and are transformational. My research, therefore, focuses on the following issues:

- My research is located within conceptual frameworks of social justice, equality, respect for all and democratic freedom, and so it requires an engagement with these issues in terms of their significance in achieving the aims and purposes of the research.
- The relevance of concepts such as marginalisation, oppression, alienation and exclusion to my research, in relation to how these concepts tend to define the educational experiences of Traveller children, necessitates a specific focus on these topics.
- My research account represents a self-study of my educational practice, and consequently it demands a concentration on the processes that led to an enhancement in my learning in the course of undertaking my research.
- Finally, the significance that I attribute to my research requires a focus on the outcomes and findings of the research, in terms of how my research can

contribute to educational practice and to a reconceptualisation of educational theory.

From a background of experiencing how Traveller children were often relegated to a position of disadvantage and exclusion by the structurally embedded prejudices and biases inherent in educational institutions, as exemplified in the Background section of this chapter, evolved my desire to achieve improvement in this situation. A focus of my research, therefore, was my attempt to combat the negative and demoralising effects of discriminatory practices on the educational opportunities and life-chances of Traveller children. I posited instead a view of education as a more positive and inclusive experience that would engender in Traveller children a sense of belonging and of ownership of the process of education. Aronowitz and Giroux (1986) acknowledge the necessity of empowering students and of confirming their histories and possibilities:

Schools should be regarded as sites around which a struggle should be waged in the name of developing a qualitatively better life for all. Teachers would have to develop forms of knowledge and classroom social practices that validate the experiences students bring to school. This means confirming such experiences so as to give students an active voice in institutional settings that traditionally try to silence them by ignoring their cultural capital.

(Aronowitz and Giroux 1986, pp. 155-6)

Towards the achievement of this goal, I facilitated the creation of a space in my classroom where Traveller children could give voice to their concerns around their experiences of schooling, an initiative that I outline in Chapter 6. I hoped that, in the process, Traveller children might discover a personal advantage in, and attach a personal value to, prolonging their stay in the educational system, and might also perceive some benefit in adopting a commitment to lifelong education.

My firm belief in the rights of all people to self-identity and to self-determination compelled me to focus on ways of encouraging Traveller children to develop a higher level of self-esteem and self-worth that would be reflected in greater confidence in making choices for themselves in the area of education. Such emancipatory practice

could empower the Traveller children by giving them a voice and enabling them to name their world, a necessary condition for freedom from oppression, according to Freire (1972), who suggests that the oppressed must name their world, and that any attempt to name it for them is to treat them as objects, rather than subjects, in the world. My commitment to a view that a more emancipatory ethos could result from the achievement of equality of educational opportunity for all encouraged me to focus on efforts at transforming the culture of the school in which I work in relation to promoting equal access to educational resources for all pupils. This policy of focusing on equality of educational opportunity resulted in the challenging of the normative systems operating within the institution, whenever these did not appear to be based on principles of equality or social justice. An example of the affirmative action that I took in pursuance of this policy appears in Chapter 5.

The achievement of a living theory of practice that was grounded in social justice and equality was a central focus of my research. In working towards this aim, I succeeded in providing Traveller children with a space in which they could explore aspects of their cultural identity, which I explain in Chapter 6. The initiative described there provided them with the opportunity of experiencing their culture and identity as valued, however briefly, within the educational system. In this way, I hoped to narrow the gap between the cultures of home and school, in view of Connell's (1993) assertion that 'nine out of ten educational sociologists emphasize the importance of some cultural match between the school and the home' (1993, p. 29). In an attempt to achieve a more widespread acceptance of Traveller culture within the school community, I focused also on seeking to ensure that principles of social justice would in future inform the school ethos, in the hope that these principles would then inform practices that would reflect values of respect for all individuals, irrespective of social class, race, religion or ethnicity. To this end, I succeeded in overcoming bureaucratic obstacles in order to enable another Traveller child to receive a psychological assessment, which I detail in Chapter 5.

Because of their minority position within the hierarchy of the schooling system, Traveller children could be regarded as a relatively powerless group. Since they do not share the

culture of the dominant majority, whose beliefs and practices form the basis and the framework for the knowledge created in educational institutions, Traveller children's knowledge is not valued or legitimised by the dominant community. The dilemma resulting from the contested nature of educational knowledge, and the ensuing struggles around relations of power, is elucidated by Apple (1996):

the decision to define some groups' knowledge as the most legitimate, as official knowledge, while other groups' knowledge hardly sees the light of day, says something extremely important about who has power in society, what counts as knowledge, the ways in which it is organized, who is empowered to teach it, what counts as an appropriate display of having learned it, and – just as critically – who is allowed to ask and answer all these questions, are part and parcel of how dominance and subordination are reproduced and altered in this society.

(Apple 1996, p. 22)

Traveller children cannot be included in these epistemological discourses unless provision is made to take into account their cultural situatedness and an attempt made to value the contribution they can make from their specific vantage point. In my research, therefore, I focused on ensuring that Traveller children were enabled to contribute to the process of knowledge creation, and have indicated how this was achieved in Chapter 5. In view of Foucault's (1980) theory of the interconnectedness of knowledge with relations of power, I envisaged the positioning of Traveller children as knowledge creators as contributing to their empowerment, a situation that is in contrast with the usual perception, in dominant educational discourses, of their knowledge as inferior, resulting in its status as subjugated knowledge.

A significant focus of my research relates to the process of my own learning and to the growth in my knowledge resulting from my learning, which evolved through my engagement in a self-study of my educational practice. This process enabled me to develop an epistemology of my practice that contributed to the framing of my claim to knowledge. My claim to knowledge is twofold, incorporating my living theory of practice as the acknowledgement of diversity and the acceptance of difference, and my living theory of social justice as equality of respect for all. In testing my claim to knowledge, I focus on certain standards of judgement that I wish to be used in assessing my research.

These standards of judgement are grounded in my ontological values of social justice and equality. I am engaging in this process as a consequence of locating my research in the new scholarship of educational enquiry. This new paradigm was first mooted by Boyer (1990), who wrote about a new scholarship of teaching, and the idea was further developed by Schön (1995), in suggesting that the new scholarship required a new epistemology. Zeichner (1999) approved of the idea of a scholarship of teaching, in relation to the professional learning of teachers. Whitehead (1999) developed the idea of a scholarship of educational enquiry and, in response to Schön's call for a new epistemology, Whitehead (2000) suggests a new living form of epistemology that grounds the standards for judging one's educational practice in the values that underpin that practice. The standards of judgement, therefore, that I wish to be used in judging my claim to knowledge, and which evolved from my embodied values, include:

- Have I made a difference for good in the lives of Traveller children by influencing the quality of their educational experience?
- Have I contributed to the emergence of more socially just and equitable educational practices?
- Is there evidence in my thesis that I have exercised a preferential option in favour of an oppressed and marginalised minority group?
- Have I increased awareness of the importance of Traveller culture and identity within the school setting?
- Have Traveller children experienced their culture as valuable, valued and valid, within the educational system?
- Have I enabled the voices of the marginalised to be heard in educational settings?
- Is there evidence of my own learning through the process of undertaking my research?
- Have I ensured that difference is a quality to be recognised and accepted, rather than an excuse for the practice of marginalisation and oppression?
- Is there evidence to support my claim to have developed a living theory of practice as the acknowledgement of diversity?

- Is there evidence to support my claim to have generated a living theory of social justice as equality of respect for all?

The standards of judgement that I have outlined here are additional to the university requirement that a thesis should make an 'original contribution to the field of study by generating new knowledge.' I submit that my thesis meets this criterion, as well as fulfilling the standards of judgement that I have outlined here. My claims to have developed a theory of practice as the acknowledgement of diversity, and to have generated a theory of social justice as equality of respect for all, evolved from my practice of providing a space for the recognition and valuing of Traveller culture, and from the organising of an after school group that created a space of equality of participation for Traveller and settled children. The evidence to substantiate these claims will be produced as the thesis progresses, particularly in Chapters 8 and 9, which consider, respectively, the findings and the significance of my research.

My research was conducted within the framework of an action research approach, such as that proposed by McNiff *et al.* (2003), which necessitated continuous reflection on my actions. Throughout my research, therefore, I focused on the insights and on the enhanced learning that resulted from my reflections. This process enabled me to monitor my practice for the purpose of ascertaining what improvements had been achieved in my practice, as well as determining whether the quality of the educational experience of Traveller children had been enhanced. Through ongoing critical reflection on my practice as a Resource Teacher for Travellers, I focused on attempting to transform a capacity for prejudice into a possibility for inclusion, and on explaining how this could have a positive influence on the educational opportunities and life-chances of Traveller children. Like Dewey (1966), I subscribe to the view that 'the education process is one of continual reorganizing, reconstructing, transforming' (1966, p. 50) in order to achieve growth and development for all.

1:4 Aims and purposes of the research

In this section I intend to give a more explicit and in-depth account of my aims and purposes in undertaking my research, through clarifying the rationale that inspired me at the outset to engage in the research, as well as outlining the vision that helped to sustain it through all its vicissitudes and struggles. Conscious of the fact that it can be a mammoth task to try to achieve all one's aims in any venture, nevertheless, I realised that the broad focus of my research, together with the multiplicity of perspectives involved, suggested that a number of aims and intentions were implicit. I will, therefore, summarise the main aims at this point, before going on to elaborate on the most salient ones. The aims can be categorised under two headings: (1) issues of theory, and (2) issues of practice. However, the two issues are inter-related, as the theory itself takes the form of practical theorising of my practice, and so theory and practice are integrated in my research. In this manner, I am attempting to overcome the traditional dichotomy of theory/practice as separate entities, by showing how practice is a form of theorising, and theory is a form of practice.

(1) Issues of theory

- To generate a living theory of the practice of social justice as equality of respect for all.
- To develop a living theory of the practice of inclusion as the acceptance of difference.

(2) Issues of practice

- To achieve improvement in Traveller children's educational experiences.
- To achieve improvement in my educational practice.
- To promote the idea of lifelong learning for all.
- To achieve equality of educational opportunity for Traveller children.
- To have my values of social justice and equality realised in my practice.
- To encourage the development of self-esteem and self-worth in Traveller children.
- To enable the voices of the marginalised to be heard in educational settings.

- To promote an intercultural approach, that values all cultures equally, in educational institutions.
- To promote a pluralistic environment that recognises diversity.
- To extend the positive and democratic practices experienced in the educational system to other social areas.

The initial aim that motivated me to undertake my research was a desire for improvement in a number of areas. In the first place, I wished to achieve improvement in the educational experiences of Traveller pupils, who, like other disadvantaged groups, tended to be marginalised by the dominant majority within the educational system. This aim arose out of my commitment to social justice, which compelled me to seek equal opportunities in the area of educational provision for Traveller children. I also aimed to bring about improvement in my educational practice, through the process of critical reflection in and on my practice, as recommended by Schön (1983). My self-reflection revealed the need for improvement in two areas of practice:

- (1) My practice of encouraging Traveller children to enunciate words according to the rules of Standard English, thereby ignoring their culturally based speech patterns.
- (2) My practice of using the standard curriculum, which is based on the dominant culture, in the areas of reading and spelling with Traveller children.

In Chapter 5, I provide evidence to demonstrate how I influenced a transformation in the two situations mentioned here, thus achieving the desired improvement in practice. Consequently, as well as achieving improvement in my practice of educational provision for Traveller children, through a recognition of their cultural situatedness relative to the standard curriculum, I achieved a concurrent improvement in Traveller children's educational experience as more equitable in the fact of recognising their separate cultural identity.

A number of my aims can be linked to my values of respect for all, social justice, equality and democratic freedom. My commitment to lifelong learning (Field, 2000), which I view as a right for all people, not just a privilege for a chosen few, was the impetus that informed my aim to encourage Traveller children to continue their education to second level. I perceived in this initiative the possibility of achieving equality of educational opportunity, through the initial steps of securing equality of access and equality of participation. My vision of lifelong education for all has begun to be realised in my practice, in the fact that in September 2004, all six Traveller girls who completed their primary education in my school, transferred to secondary schools, and are still in the system a year later. This situation is in contrast to the one I outlined in the Background section in this chapter, where only two out of the six Traveller children, who completed their primary schooling in the year before I took up the position of RTT, remained in second level a year and a half later.

I aimed to encourage Traveller children to develop a sense of self-esteem and self-worth, which I believed would help them to benefit from their current participation in the educational system, and could also contribute to retaining them in second level schooling. Drudy and Lynch (1993) warn of the profound implications to the sense of self-esteem and self-identity of children who constantly experience negativity and failure in schools:

Failure at school is construed as a problem of individual incapacity: we blame the victim for the inadequacy of the system, and the victim in turn internalises a sense of personal failure through the continuous experience of being labelled.

(Drudy and Lynch 1993, p. 235)

To counteract such destructive effects and to encourage Traveller children to become more self-confident, I enabled their voices to be heard through providing a space for them to articulate their experiences of discrimination. I describe this initiative in detail, and provide the evidence for it, in Chapter 6. I also enabled the voices of Traveller children to be heard in the public domain, through a forum known as *Dáil na bPáisti*, which provides opportunities for the representation of children's voices on political issues of interest to children at local, regional and national levels. Traveller children from an after school

group, in which I am involved, were asked to represent the Traveller voice at regional level, and, through my encouragement, as I explain in Chapter 7, they articulated their views on the various topics under discussion, and also called for the recognition of Traveller culture, through the teaching of the Traveller language, Cant, within schools. I submit that what occurred in this instance was an example of Freirean critical education, as articulated by Shor (1993):

Traditional education orients students to conform, to accept inequality and their places in the status quo, to follow authority. Freirean critical education invites students to question the system they live in, and the knowledge being offered them, to discuss what kind of future they want, including their right to elect authority and to remake the school and society they find.

(Shor 1993, p. 28)

In providing opportunities for Traveller children to develop greater confidence, I hoped to foster in them the genesis of a desire for self-determination. In agreement with Freire (1993), I subscribe to the view that we can never give up the struggle for self-formation and self-determination. The realisation of this aim would be consistent with my values around emancipatory life choices and democratic freedom as conditions for the achievement of equality of respect and for the recognition of the dignity of all human life. This situation reflects an antithetical stance to the dominant reductionist and essentialist view of Travellers, which regards them as incapable of making decisions around their own lifestyles. The stereotyping of the Traveller community as people lacking the ability to determine the trajectory of their own lifestyles facilitates the making of decisions on their behalf by dominant others, a practice that devalues them as human beings and preserves them in a state of subjugation and dependency.

By enabling Traveller children to experience their formal educational process as more positive and liberatory, I hoped that the sense of optimism and expectation in relation to life-enhancing opportunities would extend to other areas of their lives. Education is but one thread, albeit a significant one, in the tapestry that is woven to form the social fabric of life. It is important, therefore, that the sense of self-worth and self-confidence, acquired by Traveller children through the process of schooling as the experience of

social justice and equality, should transfer to other areas of their lives, so that they can experience transformation in these areas also. The achievement of such transformative practices in wider social areas would support my claim that I have influenced what Whitehead (2004) calls the education of social formations, that is, enabling groups to understand how they can interrogate and transform the normative regulatory principles underpinning their social practices.

My purpose in aiming for an intercultural ethos within my school was to achieve equal status for Traveller culture with the dominant culture. An intercultural stance would value all cultures equally, thus working to eliminate the hierarchical system that promotes the dominant culture at the cost of denying the legitimacy of minority cultures. An intercultural approach would also favour pluralistic ways of living that would accommodate the concept of diversity. Acceptance and recognition of diversity constitute the underpinning ontological values of my living theory of the practice of social justice, which I explicate in Chapter 9, where I discuss the significance of my research in terms of the living theories I have generated from my practice.

1:5 Conclusion

Outlining the background to my research has enabled me to explain my reasons for undertaking my research in the area of Traveller education. It has provided the rationale for my focus on the achievement of educational provision that is grounded in principles of social justice and equality. Transforming the core values of social justice and equality that underpinned my research into living pedagogical standards of judgement has enabled me to establish the living standards of judgement by which I wish my research to be assessed. I have explained the aims and purposes of the research, which are linked to my values and contribute to the web of meaning that is woven through the research process. This web of meaning, however, could not have authenticity without taking into account the historicity of the participants in the research. Glass (2001), in describing Freire's philosophy of praxis, refers to historicity as:

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)

Both the Traveller children and I, as the main participants, were located in a specific time and place during the course of the research, a factor that had a significant influence on the research process. In the next chapter, therefore, I will engage in an explication of the various contexts that appeared relevant to my research and I will outline their influence on the research process.

Section 1 Chapter 2 Contexts

2:1 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the various contexts that appeared relevant to my research. The personal context section contains an outline of the events in my life that contributed to the formation of the ontological values and beliefs that I continue to hold, and that were instrumental in developing my present epistemological and pedagogical commitments. I explain how qualities and habits of mind acquired in one's formative years can have lasting effects that colour the choices and decisions taken in the course of one's life. In the section on locational context, I describe the area in which I work, in terms of the social, economic and educational factors existing in that milieu, and that could be perceived as potential sources of influence on my research. I recount the first appearance of Traveller children in my school, and contrast that experience with the present position of Traveller children in the school. The cultural context section traces briefly the history of the Traveller community, from their mainly nomadic lifestyle in rural Ireland to their present, relatively settled status as urban dwellers. I also offer an explanation for the change in attitude of the settled community towards the Traveller community, a change from previous feelings of pity, empathy or at worst indifference, to more negative attitudes of resentment, dislike or intolerance. In the section on policy context, I outline the various attempts by government agencies to formulate policies for dealing with issues relating to Traveller people. I explain how, in contrast to the frequent oppressive practices of the settled community, official policy has moved somewhat from a view of Travellers as incompetent, poverty-stricken, dependants to a position of regarding them as a separate group, entitled to voice their opinions on matters concerning their welfare. Finally, I discuss official educational policy in relation to Traveller children.

2:2 Personal context

In this section, I wish to uncover the aspects of self that informed and underpinned my self-study of my educational practice. In doing so, I will consider the major factors involved in the social construction of that self. I subscribe to a view that one's stance or perspective on life can evolve from the various influences and experiences one undergoes

during one's formative years. I suggest that whatever social, economic or political contexts inform the development of beliefs and opinions during childhood, can often continue to influence one's worldview and one's attitude to life in adulthood. I consider this to be true whether one, consciously or unconsciously, accepts or rejects the formative influences and values that are brought into play during the formation of concepts. The acceptance and rejection of earlier ideas are both equally valid reactions in the process leading to the development of new theories. It is necessary, therefore, to have an awareness of the possibility that one's personal beliefs and attitudes, acquired during the course of one's formative experiences, could be a potential source of bias. Sugrue (1998), in his analysis of the critically formative influences on student teachers' lives, draws on Holt-Reynolds' (1992) idea of lay theories to explain the influence of personal formative experiences on the tacit beliefs and attitudes that student teachers bring to their professional experiences. Critical reflection on one's practice can enable self-awareness that could alert one to the possibility of tension between personal experience and professional practice. Many advocates of reflective enquiry, for example, Jarvis (2002) and McNiff *et al.* (2003) give such self-awareness a high priority in reflective practice.

In the context of my research, I suggest that my personal and professional development have had, and continue to have, implications for my ontological and epistemological stances. Among the values inculcated in my youth, I recall in particular the maxim that required that all adults be treated with the same respect as one's parents. This value has remained as a core concept of my ontology of practice, and has contributed to my present position of considering all people to be equally deserving of respect and dignity. My commitment to social justice, in all likelihood, has its origin in my experience of seeing how the St. Vincent de Paul Society demonstrated an ethic of care, in an unobtrusive way, for the less well off in the area in which I lived, thus helping to bring about a more socially equitable situation. The values that I developed in my personal life inform the creation of my professional values, and this process is paralleled by the grounding of my professional identity in my personal identity. Clandinin and Connelly (1995) testify to the interconnectedness of the personal and the professional aspects of teachers' identities when they question:

how the embodied, narrative, relational knowledge teachers carry autobiographically and by virtue of their formal education shapes, and is shaped by, their professional knowledge context.

(Clandinin and Connelly 1995, p. 3)

I contend that it is important, therefore, that I document here some of the events from my personal and professional history that have contributed to the forging of my identity, and that have exerted a considerable influence on the formation of the values and principles that sustain my lifeview.

I grew up in a small town in the southwest of Ireland. The primary school I attended was a four-teacher girls' school, adjoining a similar sized boys' school. The secondary school I attended was equally small; there were four teachers when I began but this had increased to six teachers, still unusually small, by the time I finished. From my present perspective, and with many years' experience of teaching in large classes in a big urban school, I can now appreciate the benefits of having been educated in such an intimate and nurturing environment. However, what was even more unusual about the secondary school than its small size was the fact that it was a mixed school, and that it was also a lay school, as opposed to one run by a religious congregation. This was a rare phenomenon in Ireland in the 1960s, though neither my fellow pupils nor I had any realisation of the uniqueness of our school at the time. In fact, in our insular and isolated existence, into which the modern mass media had not yet penetrated, we considered a girls' convent school, four miles away and run by an order of nuns, to be the oddity. It was not until I went to a teacher training college, having completed my Leaving Certificate, and realised that all the other students there had been educated by nuns in convent schools, that it became clear to me that my school was the unusual one. A further interesting feature of my schooling experience was the fact that all students, boys and girls, studied the same eight Leaving Certificate subjects. I am not suggesting that this situation resulted from a conscious decision on the part of the school authorities to promote gender equity, but rather that it was based on economic considerations, which

meant that there was no choice of subjects, due to the small number of students attending the school.

In the thirteen years that I spent at primary and secondary school, there were no Travellers, or 'Tinkers' as they were known at that time, at any stage in either school. Ó Muirheartaigh (2004) has a similar recollection from a period about twenty years earlier, when he says Travellers 'moved about the country in horse-drawn caravans, but I never remember any of their children attending school during their stays in the vicinity' (2004, p. 15). This was not entirely surprising, as at that time Travellers were constantly moving around, mainly for economic reasons, such as to find occasional work, or to attend fairs and festivals, in order to eke out a living. As a result of this nomadic lifestyle, they only stayed for brief periods in any area, so that it was not feasible for the children to attend school. What I now, in retrospect, find incredible is that I cannot recall ever experiencing the voicing of feelings of horror, shock or even surprise, at the fact that Traveller children were almost totally excluded from the educational system, a reaction that I would expect to experience in the event of a similar situation today. However, during my schooldays, it seemed as if this situation was the norm, accepted unquestioningly by all.

My early contact with Travellers, then, was of a limited nature. It was mainly confined to seeing the Traveller women going from door to door seeking alms, whenever they happened to be in the locality. The women usually asked for, and invariably received, the basic essentials for human living, such as tea, sugar, bread and milk. Occasionally the women would have baskets containing religious objects, which they tried to sell. I could not understand at the time why my mother bought some of these items – it certainly was not out of necessity, as she already possessed an abundance of them. Now, as I reflect on these incidents, I realise that it may have been my mother's way of enabling the Traveller women to retain their dignity by earning the money to buy provisions, instead of having to suffer the ignominy of having to beg for them. The most abiding memory that I have from that era is that, when Traveller women called to the door, they never left empty-handed, and this left me with an enduring moral sense of duty or obligation for the welfare of the less well-off in society. At that time, Travellers were deemed ineligible for

social welfare payments, as they did not have a permanent address, and were to a great extent dependent on the generosity of others for the means of survival. I would suggest that my commitment to values of social justice and equality is rooted firmly in these formative experiences of my childhood.

When I first undertook my research in the area of Traveller culture, which led me to explore issues such as institutional prejudice and bias, in terms of their negative influence on the educational experiences of Traveller children, I began to examine my own attitude to the Traveller community. I concluded that tolerance would be a good descriptor of my stance – a tolerance that had grown out of my experience of the attitudes towards Travellers during my childhood. My initial reaction to this standpoint was that it was a comfortable and acceptable response to the Traveller situation. However, deeper reflection on the issue, in conjunction with further study of the matter, helped me to realise that tolerance is insufficient as an antithesis to prejudice. I agree with Crowley (1991) that adopting a standpoint of tolerance will not ensure the achievement of equality and social justice:

one tolerates things that are basically unacceptable, so tolerance has little to do with equity or justice and is not a useful response to racism.

(Crowley 1991, p. 94)

I considered some of the situations in my experience for which tolerance appeared to be a suitable response. I could tolerate a headache, for example, or a nuisance that might be temporary, or for which I could find a remedy. If tolerance, then, is the appropriate reaction to an irritant, I suggest that it cannot also be an adequate characteristic of human relationships. I would argue that human beings deserve greater consideration than is possible through the concept, or practice, of tolerance. I accept that tolerance is an improvement on a situation of prejudice but I do not consider it a sufficient response for the elimination of prejudice. Rawls (1971) appears to suggest that tolerance is a minimal and limited response when he states that ‘an injustice is tolerable only when it is necessary to avoid a greater injustice’ (1971, p. 4). One could interpret this statement as meaning that justice requires a more transformative response than tolerance.

Tolerance can be understood as a passive state, and I would argue that what is required, in order to combat bias and prejudice, is an active force, capable of transforming the negativity of prejudice into a positive and powerful energy. In putting forward this argument, I am also indicating what McNiff (2002) refers to as the transformative potential of my educative relationships with my Traveller pupils to change their negative experiences of education into positive and life affirming ones. When I hear appeals for tolerance as a response to prejudice, whether from the media or from political sources, I am compelled to reject the implicit notion that these two concepts are binary opposites. Instead, I suggest that it would be more beneficial to promote practices that are informed by ideologies that recognise, respect and value the dignity and humanity of all people, and that are predicated on a proactive and positive response to prejudice and bias. Boon (1972), citing Levi-Strauss (1952), seems to reject the idea of tolerance as a passive state:

Tolerance is not a contemplative attitude, dispensing indulgence to what has been or what is still in being. It is a dynamic attitude, consisting in the anticipation, understanding and promotion of what is struggling into being.

(Boon 1972, p. 137)

However, I disagree with his view of tolerance as possessing positive and dynamic qualities, particularly if this description is meant to convey the impression that tolerance can be an appropriate response to the marginalisation and suffering of others. It may be adequate for the contemplation of inanimate objects, such as concepts or qualities, but it does not appear to be capable of achieving the transformative potential required for ensuring equality of respect and dignity for all human beings. McLaren (1995) appears to share this view of the inadequacy of the concept of tolerance as a framework for the consideration of fellow human beings:

I'm growing weary of the banner flown by the liberals which announces that we must be merely tolerant of difference. This suggests to me that the 'other' to whom they hope to show tolerance is considered to be quite repugnant.

(McLaren 1995, p. 164)

A similar stance is adopted by Macedo and Bartolomé (2001), who quote Goldberg as arguing that tolerance 'presupposes that its object is morally repugnant, that it really needs to be reformed, that is, altered' (2001, p. 13). Macedo and Bartolomé claim that those who call for tolerance 'never question the asymmetrical power relations that give them their privilege' (2001, p. 14). Their cogent argument against tolerance as a possibility for achieving social transformation lends support to my view of its inadequacy for achieving social justice and equality:

Thus, many white liberals willingly call and work for cultural tolerance but are reluctant to confront issues of inequality, power, ethics, race and ethnicity in a way that could actually lead to social transformation that would make society more democratic and humane and less racist and discriminatory.

(Macedo and Bartolomé 2001, p. 14)

Dooley (2002) reveals the Irish Department of Justice's interpretation of the concept of tolerance. His newspaper article describes the withdrawal of funding from the Citizen Traveller project, comprising Travellers from four Traveller organisations, because the group had erected billboards featuring the message 'Suddenly, in caring Ireland, to be a Traveller is a terrible crime' (2002, p. 4). This action was taken in response to the new Housing (Miscellaneous) Act (2002), which criminalises trespass, thereby preventing Travellers from camping on roadsides, as they have often been forced to do, due to the lack of transient halting sites. Dooley (2002) reports that the Department of Justice, which had provided the funding for Citizen Traveller, said it was not going to pay for advertisements that branded its policies as racist and that were contrary to the aims of the Citizen Traveller programme, which was designed 'to promote tolerance and understanding between the Traveller and settled communities' (2002, p. 4). One wonders, therefore, if the Department of Justice's idea of tolerance is of a passive and submissive state, and if the tolerance is only to be a feature of the Traveller behaviour. It appears as though the settled community do not have any obligation to be tolerant of the Travellers' wish to engage in the cultural practice of nomadism, or of their right to have their voices heard and to engage in constructive criticism of oppressive legislation.

The relevance of this discussion on tolerance for my research is that, whereas indifference is probably the most common response, tolerance appears to be the most positive response, to the presence of Traveller children in the educational system. It would appear that, while schools do not exclude Travellers in the physical sense, neither do they make a reasonable effort to include Traveller children in a meaningful way into the school community. In my experience, the attitude adopted towards Traveller children tends to be one of passive tolerance rather than proactive inclusion. This attitude can result in the marginalisation and alienation of Traveller children from an educational system that purports to have as its aim the inclusion and integration of pupils from minority groups. The 'Guidelines on Traveller Education in Primary Schools' (Ireland, DES 2002) endorse the following quotation from the 'Report of the Special Education Review Committee' (1993):

Schools should adopt an inclusive, intercultural approach to curriculum development so as to ensure that their School Plan, class programme and teaching materials reflect a positive attitude towards the special customs, traditions and lifestyles of minority groups, including the children of Travellers.

(Ireland, DES 2002, p. 11)

In spite of the affirmative tone of the rhetoric here, Hanlon (2005), quoting from the report 'Achieving equity of access to higher education in Ireland: the case of Travellers' (Mary Immaculate College, Limerick), says that 'many Travellers found it easier not to identify themselves as Travellers in school for fear of discrimination from settled children and teachers' (2005, p. 14). At an ontological level, I suggest that if I were to tolerate a situation where some people are not treated according to principles of equality and social justice, which form the values base of my framework for action, I am tacitly consenting to that situation, thereby contributing to its inherent injustice.

I now return to the narration of the influences that shaped my pedagogical values. Having completed my secondary school education, I spent two years in a teacher training college, as was the norm for student teachers at the time. I then began my teaching career in a primary school in a northwestern suburb of Dublin. I had taken a decision not to take up the offer of a position in a school near my hometown because of the fact that I wanted to

pursue a degree course through attending evening lectures at a university in Dublin, as the qualification offered to primary school teachers at that time was a teaching diploma. The school to which I was appointed was a girls' senior primary school, and my first experience of teaching Traveller children occurred in the 1970s, when in my class of forty-eight pupils there were three Traveller children. One of the children, who had been part of the class before I became their teacher, had learning difficulties, was introverted and appeared reluctant to participate in the activities of the class. The other two Traveller children, who joined the class about a month after I took over, were related to each other, in that one was the aunt of the other. The aunt also had learning difficulties but her niece had a good command of English, both oral and written. In the areas of Irish and Mathematics, however, it was obvious that, like the other two Traveller children, she had missed out on acquiring the basic skills. Traveller children tended at that time to begin school at about seven years of age, to avail of the religious instruction required to receive the sacrament of Communion. When assigned to age appropriate classes, they did not have the opportunity of being taught the fundamental concepts normally acquired in the infant classes. Learning support classes, which could have helped the Traveller children to acquire the skills that they lacked, were not yet a common feature in Irish primary schools.

Unlike the two children who had learning difficulties, the third child displayed behavioural difficulties, the resolution of which was both demanding and time-consuming. At the time I could not understand why this child was constantly engaging in aggressive conflicts with the other children in the class, in which she usually managed to involve the other two Traveller children also. I now realise that her frustration was probably caused through feelings of alienation and exclusion, as a result of not having her culture recognised in school. With hindsight, too, I now realise that my efforts to resolve the situation may have been more concerned with addressing the surface issues than with searching for the underlying causes of the conflicts. My reflections on these past experiences, and my learning from them, have enabled me to ensure that my current research is focused on addressing the fundamental issues underpinning the apparent problems confronting Traveller children. Many of the other children in the class, whom I

shall call 'settled' to distinguish them from the Traveller children, were for the most part self-motivated and high achievers who eventually tired of the rows with the Traveller children. One day after school, a deputation of settled children from the class asked to speak with me and issued an ultimatum in words to this effect: 'You have to choose whom you want to teach, the Travellers or us. It is not working out the way things are now. Too much time is wasted trying to sort out the rows. So whom do you want to teach, them or us?' I was taken aback by their sense of frustration, as well as by their 'them and us' divide. I explained that there was not any question of my having a choice, that both they and the Traveller children were equal participants in my class, and that we should all try harder to work together and co-operate with one another.

In adopting this particular stance in my response to the ongoing disputes in my class, I was articulating my ontological values around peaceful coexistence and harmonious relations among groups operating in close proximity to one another, and perhaps engaging in interactive relationships with one another. The principles reflected in these values could have implications for wider social situations, where relations are strained or hostile. Contemporary approaches to solving international conflicts, such as the situation in the Middle East, are often premised on the idea of separating the feuding societies from each other, thus reinforcing the divisions between them and confirming their status as sites of contestation. Said (2002) critiques such separatist approaches:

The question, I believe, is not how to devise means for persisting in trying to separate them but to see whether it is possible for them to live together fairly and peacefully.

(Said 2002, p. 316)

From my experience of trying to resolve the conflict between the settled and Traveller children in my class, I have formed a view that inclusion, rather than separation, should be the goal of those seeking an equitable and just resolution. Influenced by the ideas of Buber and Arendt, Said (2002) argues for a binational state, underpinned by a concept of peaceful coexistence, as a solution to the conflict in the Middle East:

The essence of that vision is coexistence and sharing in ways that require an innovative, daring, and theoretical willingness to get beyond the arid stalemate of assertion, exclusivism, and rejection. Once the initial acknowledgement of the Other as an equal is made, I believe the way forward becomes not only possible but attractive.

(Said 2002, p. 319)

I suggest, therefore, that my work with Traveller children has significant implications for wider issues of peace research and for the literatures on international relations.

When I first reflected on the incident involving the settled and Traveller children, I experienced an immense sense of failure. It seemed as though I had failed to include the Traveller children in an equitable manner, and that I had failed to encourage the settled children to develop a sense of tolerance, which at the time would have been for me an acceptable standpoint. While tolerance would not achieve the standards of social justice and equality that reflected my educational values, nevertheless, it would have served as a starting point for living in the direction of my values. It would also have provided the scope for transformative leadership in my classroom. In seeking to effect a change in attitudes and actions in my class situation, I was attempting to achieve what Sergiovanni (1992) refers to as:

building a covenant of shared values, one that bonds people in a common cause and transforms a school from an organization into a community.

(Sergiovanni 1992, p. 15)

Sergiovanni goes on to describe this process as a new kind of leadership that is based on moral authority. Leithwood *et al.* (1999), drawing on the ideas of Lees (1995), also support the idea of moral leadership when they argue that 'leadership in a democratic society entails a moral imperative to promote democracy, empowerment, and social justice' (1999, p. 10). In trying to resolve the conflict in my classroom in a manner that was fair, just and respectful of all viewpoints, I was attempting to achieve a practice of moral leadership that reflected my values of social justice and equality.

Reflecting on the incident of conflict between the Traveller and settled children from my present perspective, I can detect some positive elements in the situation. The fact that the

settled children had asked me to choose between them and the Traveller children indicates that they did not perceive themselves as privileged in comparison to the Traveller children. In addition, the complaint from settled children about the amount of time spent in trying to sort out the arguments demonstrates that Traveller children were receiving what settled children considered to be a disproportionate amount of my time. It is clear from these reflections that I was beginning to operate out of an ideology of equality and social justice at the time, even if these principles were at a tacit level and, for the most part, unarticulated. I was also endeavouring to promote, at a subconscious level, the principle of social justice as the practice of inclusion, which is part of my claim to knowledge in my present research, in my efforts to involve both Traveller and settled children on an equal basis in my class.

Incidentally, the Traveller child, who had so much potential but who was a victim of an educational system that did not meet her needs, went on to a second level school, a remarkable event in the 1970s. One factor that enabled her to do so, besides the fact that obviously she or her parents, or perhaps both, perceived a value in education, was probably the fact that there were, at that time, separate Vocational Schools for boys and girls, as Traveller parents are reluctant to send their children to mixed secondary schools. She spent five years in the Vocational School and completed the Leaving Certificate examination. Farrelly's (1994) research on Traveller participation in education testifies to this unique occurrence:

Traditionally, Travellers have not attended second level schooling. One or two secondary schools reported that individual Travellers enrolled but none completed more than first year. There was one notable exception in that one girl completed her Leaving Certificate in the local Vocational School.

(Farrelly 1994, p. 51)

However, the Traveller child then appeared to have reached a crisis point in her life, where she perhaps felt an outsider in relation to the settled community, and at the same time felt that her level of education had alienated her from her Traveller community. This factor has influenced me towards a vision of education for Traveller children that can be encompassed within their culture, rather than educating them out of their culture and, in

the process, creating misfits or boundary dwellers, as described by MacLure (1996). In pursuing this aim, I am conscious of the view of Reiss (1975) around the difficulty of 'preserving identity and achieving academic progress when these two may be mutually exclusive' (1975, p. 93). Nevertheless, I am convinced of the potential for achieving this vision through promoting equality of respect and social justice.

It could be argued that, if education has a liberatory function, as suggested by Stenhouse (1975), the liberation could take the form of freedom from a particular cultural influence, for example, from a culture that is marked by a lack of interest in schooling. In reply to this argument, I want to emphasise that I am educating for a good society, which for me means people coming together on an equal footing, to negotiate their personal and social goals, as outlined by Chomsky (1996). Drawing on the ideas of Russell and Dewey, Chomsky says:

Let me begin by sketching a point of view that was articulated by two leading twentieth century thinkers, Bertrand Russell and John Dewey, who disagreed on a great many things, but shared a vision that Russell called 'the humanistic conception' – to quote Dewey, the belief that the 'ultimate aim' of production is not production of goods, but 'of free human beings associated with one another on terms of equality'. The goal of education, as Russell put it, is 'to give a sense of the value of things other than domination', to help create 'wise citizens of a free community' in which both liberty and 'individual creativeness' will flourish, and working people will be masters of their own faith, not tools of production.

(Chomsky 1996, pp. 75-6)

In this context, I put forward my view of education as providing freedom to participate in the process, rather than freedom from any perceived constraints in cultural norms and practices. In this sense, I am drawing on Berlin's (1969) differentiation between positive and negative notions of liberty. I suggest that these insights that I have developed from my work with Traveller children could have significant implications for the development of what I understand as good social orders in wider contexts also.

As I reflected on my first encounter with children from the Traveller community, I focused on the question of what were the learning outcomes from that experience that I

could utilise in a beneficial way in my current research. A major learning outcome for me was the realisation that the Traveller community had a separate culture and identity, a fact that needed to be recognised and accommodated by educational institutions. My teacher training course had not prepared me for the reality of cultural diversity, as the teaching methodologies to which I was introduced seemed to consider a class as a homogeneous group, making no differentiation either on intellectual or social grounds. The legacy of the dominance of whole-class teaching is reflected in the continuing inability of some educational institutions to cater for those who have different needs. I was just beginning my teaching career when I took the class with the Traveller children and hadn't yet reached the stage of formulating my own educational theories with regard to recognising the individuality of pupils and valuing their cultural identity. Neither had I any realisation of the fact that, if Traveller children had disruptive or aggressive tendencies, that these inclinations probably stemmed from a sense of frustration at the oppression and alienation caused by the insensitivity and bureaucracy of educational institutions. In my present position, therefore, as RTT, I have been able to operate out of an ethic of care, as recommended by Noddings (1992), and have also been able to transform that sense of caring into social action that contributes to what I understand as a good social order, which is a realisation of the principles of social justice and equality that characterise my educational practice.

2:3 Locational context

The school in which I work and in which I am conducting my research is located in a working-class area in Dublin. When I began my teaching career there, many of the children in the school came from large families. Instances of ten or twelve children in a family were quite common, and one child I taught belonged to a family of seventeen children. There was a certain degree of poverty associated with the area, even though most of the children's fathers were in employment. There was also an interest in education and the majority went on to second level schooling, many to the local Vocational School, which was free of charge, rather than to the more academic, fee-paying secondary schools. The minority who did not progress to second level schools, usually the eldest children of large families, remained in primary school until they

reached their fourteenth birthday, when they could legally leave school and find employment in local factories. Over the years, certain changes occurred in these circumstances. Unemployment levels increased due to the closure of some of the traditional workplaces, and this eventually led to the area being designated disadvantaged, in terms of criteria determined by the Department of Education. The number of children per family decreased dramatically, as reflected in a drop in enrolment from 550 to 220 over a number of years. This seems to have been a countrywide trend, as the document 'Education for a Changing World' states:

The number of students in primary education increased steadily over the period 1965 to 1987 (the peak year) and has been declining since then; it is projected to continue to decline very substantially over the next decade.

(Ireland, Department of Education 1992, p. 31)

There appeared to be a corresponding increase in disposable family income, probably due also to the fact that some of the mothers now began to take up employment. However, there was not an obvious increase in interest in education, and various social problems began gradually to manifest themselves. At present, many children belong to single-parent families, and this tends to militate against them in terms of social, economic and educational disadvantage. It would appear, therefore, that there is a greater level of social deprivation currently in the area than there was when I first began teaching there.

This description of the area in which I work sets out the local background into which Traveller families first began to settle in the 1970s. The extended family of the two girls, who had at that time joined my class, settled beside a river, where they would at least have a water supply. When two of their teenage girls drowned in the river, the Travellers moved to another, less suitable, site. Gradually, other families joined them in the new site. These settlements were for the most part unimpeded and unchallenged, either by the authorities or by local residents, for the following reasons:

1. They were situated on the periphery of a housing scheme, on a site near a council rubbish dump.

2. Nobody else lived, or wanted to live, in the vicinity, and so there were no objections to the Traveller community settling there.

In addition, the site was on the boundary between the city and county limits, and there was a lack of clarity in regard to actual ownership of the land, a factor that worked to the Travellers' advantage to a certain degree, for example, in being able to retain some measure of security of tenure on the site. However, the lack of clarity in relation to ownership of the site also meant that both the city and council authorities could abrogate their liability for providing basic facilities, such as water and electricity supplies, for the occupants of the site.

The refusal to accept responsibility for the particular area, in which the Travellers were located, did not extend to every situation, as the following recent occurrence illustrates. At six o'clock on the morning of October 5th 2004, a combined force of city and council officials, police and Customs and Excise personnel blocked the road leading to the Traveller site, effectively denying the Travellers access to schools, shops and other facilities, except through taking a seven-mile detour. The reason given for this action was that Travellers were engaging in illegal and antisocial activities. While the Travellers readily admitted that a small minority of their community was involved in such activities, they strenuously objected to the arbitrary actions of the authorities that seemed to hold all responsible for the behaviour of a few. Travellers reacted to this situation by holding protest marches that caused traffic chaos on major roads adjacent to their site. As a result, officials met with representatives of the Traveller community and a compromise was reached, whereby the roadblock was moved to a position further along the road, beyond the Traveller site, thus restoring access to all local facilities for the Traveller community. This resolution of the conflict raises the issue of whether the hostile situation could have been avoided, if the authorities had consulted with the Traveller community prior to taking their unilateral action. Their failure to do so has had negative implications for relationships between Travellers and local authorities, in that there now exists an atmosphere of distrust and suspicion between the parties to the dispute.

The above incident raises serious questions about the treatment of an ethnic minority group by bureaucratic institutions. One critical question that needs to be asked is, would the authorities have closed the road in such an arbitrary fashion, if anyone else, other than Travellers, lived on the road, and would have been inconvenienced by its closure? I suggest that the answer to this question is in the negative, on the grounds that there are many areas in urban districts where criminal and antisocial activities are regular occurrences, but I do not recall any instance of a road being closed as a deterrent to such behaviour. One can conclude, therefore, that the Traveller community was specifically singled out for such oppressive treatment, and that this incident is evidence of the fact that Travellers can be subjected to inequality and discrimination by state agencies, even in a climate where policies might suggest a more reasonable approach, based on a process of consultation, should be taken.

It would appear, then, that there was initially a degree of tolerance towards the Traveller community in the area in which they settled, at least as long as they remained on the periphery and did not encroach on the housing developments of the settled population. Implicit in this stance is an apparent acknowledgement that living beside a dump was an acceptable situation for Traveller families, designating them as second-class citizens. Their boundary location in the physical sense acted as a metaphor for their marginalisation in other spheres of their lives. Wright's (1998) discussion of Giroux's (1992) ideas on border politics, where borders are construed as negative barriers to 'keep the Other out' (1998, p. 71), appears to be an appropriate space for the location of the Travellers' experiences. However, Giroux's solution of border crossing could be counterproductive if it resulted in the dissolution of borders and the consequent assimilation of Travellers into the dominant social group, through a process of imperialist colonisation of their cultural beliefs and practices.

I have described my first experience of teaching Traveller children in the 1970s. This was to be my only encounter with Traveller children for a number of years. The reason for this was that another school in the locality, which was further away from the Travellers' site than my school, was given extra resources to cater for Traveller children. One of the

concessions they received was an extra teacher for every fourteen Traveller children. The school made excellent use of this concession by integrating the Traveller children into all classes and using the extra teachers to reduce class sizes overall, so that when other schools were struggling with a pupil/teacher ratio of 40:1, this school enjoyed a 20:1 ratio. The Traveller children were provided with transport to and from school, shower facilities when they arrived in school, school uniforms to change into and a hot meal at lunchtime.

While I accept that those who formulated these policies and those who implemented them were well intentioned, I suggest that the thinking behind them was seriously flawed. This thinking evolved from a view of the Traveller families as belonging to a subculture of poverty and as objects for charitable benevolence. There were other options available that could have enabled a more positive portrayal, and a more life-enhancing view, of the Traveller community. For example, an approach based on affirmative action would have been more conducive to ensuring self-respect and dignity for all. Rawls's (1971) idea of positive discrimination, and McLaren's (1999) suggestion of exercising a preferential option in favour of the disadvantaged, could also have been invoked as frameworks for accommodating the needs of the Traveller children. Instead, through using the subculture of poverty approach, Traveller parents were deemed incapable of making decisions about their children's education, and every effort seems to have been made to keep them in a dependency mode. I reject this depiction of the Traveller community, as this view represents a denial of my values around the dignity and humanity of all individuals. It is also a contradiction of my belief in the right of all people to self-determination. I suggest that it was as a response to a situation such as I have described here that Freire (1972) stated, 'to alienate men [sic] from their own decision making is to change them into objects' (1972, p. 73). Fanon (1992) paints a vivid picture of the sense of utter helplessness and despair that resulted from his experience of being treated as an object in the world:

I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things, my spirit filled with the desire to attain to the source of the world, and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects...the movements, the attitudes, the

glances of the others fixed me there, in the sense in which a chemical solution is fixed by a dye.

(Fanon 1992, p. 220)

In this context, I recognise and defend the right of all people to agency in determining the trajectories of their lives.

When a change occurred in the above situation, it was as a result of the Travellers' own initiative, rather than a rethink on the part of institutions or policy makers. Travellers began gradually to assert their right to choose a school for their children, based on the following factors:

1. As Travellers acquired their own transport, they were no longer dependent on the school bus to get their children to school.
2. Traveller parents began to realise that they had a choice around which school their children should attend and that it would be more convenient to send their children to a school nearer to their site, such as my school, than the one to which they had been bussed.
3. When a dispute occurred between two Traveller families, one of the families would transfer the children to my school, in order to avoid contact with the other family.

As the number of Traveller children enrolled in my school increased, the school was entitled to appoint a RTT. At first, this was on a shared basis with the adjoining infant school, but the following year there were sufficient numbers to warrant a separate appointment to my school. The first appointee was an untrained person who left after six months to undertake a teacher-training course. She was replaced by a temporary teacher until the end of the school year. The following year nobody applied for the position and, two months into the school year, an untrained person was once again appointed, who stayed for six months.

It was my reflection on this somewhat chaotic and unsatisfactory situation, regarding the position of RTT in my school, which led me to make a major change in the direction of my teaching career. I attribute my sense of dissatisfaction to the fact that my educational values around social justice for all were being denied in the current situation. Perhaps an even greater catalyst for change was the particular case of a Traveller child who was in my mainstream class at that time. I have outlined in Chapter 1 my efforts, and failure, to obtain learning support for this child. The only other recourse available to her was the RTT, but in view of the uncertainty and temporality of that position over the two years that she had access to that resource, I concluded that it was not of significant benefit to her. I reflected also on the fact that this child was probably only one of many that the system had failed. Children with learning difficulties and socially disadvantaged children are often marginalised and excluded in educational terms, but Traveller children who have learning difficulties are doubly disadvantaged. It was my sense of unease at this realisation, and my concern that the educational needs of Traveller children were not being met, that inspired me to take up the position of RTT in my school.

The change in direction in my teaching career resulted also in a change in focus in relation to what my priorities were in terms of educational outcomes. As a mainstream teacher at the upper end of the primary school, I was involved every second year in preparing children for entrance tests to second level schools. At this level, teacher effectiveness was judged, by parents and colleagues, by the number of pupils who managed to get into the top stream in second level schools. My own job satisfaction was similarly determined and much of my work had a high academic focus. It could be said, therefore, that I was exercising 'a preferential option for the advantaged' (Finnegan 2000, p. 158). Now, however, with my realisation of the prevalence of inequalities and injustices in educational institutions, came an awareness of the need to focus on promoting the interests of the marginalised groups in my school, rather than on increasing the academic achievements of those already relatively privileged. I have also learned, in my new role, that placing the children, rather than the curriculum, at the pivotal point in the educational system, can be a liberating and positive experience for me. Elliott (1998)

alerts us to the danger of too narrow a focus in educational terms, where the emphasis is on a subjects-focused, rather than on a child-centred, curriculum, when he says:

The organization of the curriculum in terms of academic subjects, for the purpose of systematic instruction, is ill-suited to the aim of a general education, because it structures our cultural resources in a form that renders them accessible to the few rather than the many.

(Elliott 1998, p. xii)

My research, therefore, is located around the emerging insights and perspectives gained from my position as RTT, and around the sense of equality and partnership that I have tried to bring to the relationships that I have formed with the Traveller children. The significance of educative relationships that are based on principles of mutuality and reciprocity first became apparent to me in the course of my research on time management, during my studies for my Masters degree in Education (Sullivan, 2000). The process of undertaking that research enabled me to achieve a transformation in my thinking and in my practice, to the extent that I began to view my pupils as active agents, capable of contributing to, and making decisions around, their own learning situations. The critical stance that I adopted in coming to these views also informs my current thinking on issues concerning Traveller children, and enables me to focus on the implications of these issues for future theories of educational practices.

2:4 Cultural context

One of the ideologies underpinning my research has been a strong desire to secure the recognition of a separate culture and identity for Traveller children in educational settings. Since taking up the position as RTT, I have endeavoured to promote my vision of the equal value of the Traveller culture and the culture of the dominant majority within the school setting. I deem it necessary, therefore, to explicate what I understand by the term 'Traveller culture', where I perceive the points of divergence between the Traveller culture and the culture of the settled community to lie, and why I consider issues connected with Traveller culture to be integral to my research. In this present section, then, I will engage with the concept of Traveller culture, in the course of which I will consider the five models of the different perceptions of Travellers as identified by the

Dublin Travellers Educational and Development Group/ DTEDG (1994). I will offer a critique of the models through an interrogation of their appropriateness for the recognition and acceptance of a distinct Traveller culture, as well as an assessment of their capacity to promote social justice and equality. I will then discuss the views expressed in the writings and opinions of individual members of the Traveller community on what they consider to be the salient aspects of their culture. I will also engage with the concept of ethnicity as it applies to the Traveller community and endeavour to justify my support for the legitimacy of the Travellers' claim to belong to an ethnic group.

Initially, I would like to explore, and explode, some of the myths pertaining to the origins and history of the Traveller community. A common view among the general population, which I consider to be a misconception, is that Travellers are descended from people who were displaced from their lands during the famine in Ireland in the late 1840s. This was the view of Traveller origins to which I subscribed, prior to undertaking my research and discovering the fallacy of this view. Public opinion seems to vary as to whether those made homeless at the time of the famine left voluntarily in search of food, or were evicted for non-payment of rent. I am not disputing the fact that some people may have adopted a nomadic lifestyle at this point in history; I am, however, rejecting the notion that this event constitutes the origins of the Traveller community. Evidence to support my viewpoint can be found in the writing of McDonagh and McVeigh (1996), which is based on their visit to a Traveller site in South Carolina. Here, they found Travellers of Irish descent, living much the same lifestyle as Travellers in Ireland, and acquainted with the Cant language of Irish Travellers. The ancestors of these American Travellers had left Ireland in the late 1840s and early 1850s, and were obviously enculturated into the Traveller lifestyle at that stage, which would contradict the view that Travellers only began their nomadic existence at that period in history. Another belief, which I also consider to be mistaken, is that Travellers were dispossessed of their lands during the various plantations that occurred under British rule, and were forced into a life of nomadism. It would be reasonable to assume that, if this were the case, they would have rejected the enforced nomadic lifestyle, and quickly reverted to a settled lifestyle at the first opportunity.

The only reference to Travellers in school textbooks that I am aware of, consists mainly in such mythologizing of Travellers' origins, and this appears in a history workbook, 'Activity Book for sixth class', rather than in the actual textbook, 'Ages Ago' (Brennan, 1997). The following extract indicates the type of information provided:

Travellers did not keep a written account of their own history so we have no definite proof of their origins. One theory is that they are descended from tribes who lived in Ireland before the Celts came. Another theory is that they are descendants of people who were evicted from their homes between 1700 and 1900. They could also be descended from craft workers of the fifth century who travelled from place to place working metal objects. The word 'tinker' (working with tin) was used to describe them. Irish Travellers have their own language, called Gammon or Cant. Many Travellers made their living dealing in horses at the great horse fairs around the country. Travellers today still have a great love of horses.

(Brennan 1997, p. 7)

However, while the number of people travelling around the country may have increased during the events I have outlined here, there is ample evidence that authentic Travellers can trace their history back as far as the twelfth century. For example, Liégeois (1987), in detailing the history and origins of Gypsies and Travellers throughout Europe, states that in Ireland the name Tinkler or Tynker was given to a group of nomads in the twelfth century. This piece of documentary evidence is crucial to the Travellers' claim to ethnicity, as it fulfils one of the requirements for recognition as an ethnic group, namely that the group must have a long shared history. This condition was included in the definition of an ethnic group by the House of Lords in the Race Relations Act in Britain (1976, cited in O Connell 1993). Also, I suggest that the continuous usage of the term 'Tynker' from the twelfth century to the twentieth century, with only a slight change in spelling to 'Tinker', is further evidence of the Travellers' historic links to the past.

The Race Relations Act (1976, in O Connell 1993) mentions that the existence of a common language, which did not necessarily have to be peculiar to the group, could also be a relevant characteristic of an ethnic group. From an anthropological perspective, Ní Shúinéar (1994) quotes Barth (1970) as considering a separate language to be a

characteristic of an ethnic group. This requirement is met by the existence of the Cant language of the Traveller community, also known as Gammon or Shelta. Both Ó Baoill (1994) and Binchy (1994) describe various features of Cant, such as the fact that its vocabulary is derived from Irish but that its syntactical structures are based on the English language. Ó Baoill states that this feature suggests that the Cant language was created at a time when its original speakers were bilingual, dating it to sometime in the last 350 years or so. Binchy claims that some of the Cant words were formed from pre-aspirated Irish, a feature of the Irish language prior to the twelfth century. I suggest that it can be argued that this is further evidence of the Travellers' origins dating back to at least the twelfth century. Binchy also mentions that a community of Irish Travellers in America, whose ancestors left Ireland in 1848-1850, still speak the same Cant as the Travellers in Ireland, even though no contact was maintained over the years between the two communities. This would appear to be the same community visited by McDonagh and McVeigh (1996), to whom I have already referred.

Cant is an oral language, possibly intended as a secret means of communication for Travellers, and is passed on by parents to their children. Travellers are not unique among ethnic groups in using a secret language. Eidheim (1969) found a similar phenomenon in his anthropological study of the Lappish people in Norway, in relation to which he says:

Outside the households Lappish was a medium of communication within the wider district, but language behaviour is such that Lappish must be regarded as a secret language or code, regularly used only in situations where trusted Lappish identities are involved.

(Eidheim 1969, p. 44)

Some of the linguists that I have quoted in the previous paragraph do not refer to Cant as a language, preferring to designate it as a register, a dialect, a creole or a pidgin. However, for my purpose, which is to demonstrate that Travellers have their own additional method of communication, separate from that of the dominant or host culture in which they live, I choose to refer to it as a language. To follow the example of the linguists would, in my view, be engaging in reductionism, a practice that would not advance the Travellers' right to ethnic status. In her recent research on Cant, Browne

(2004) suggests that Cant is in danger of becoming extinct, due in part to increased participation by Travellers in the educational system. She states that, while Traveller parents have a good knowledge of Cant, they are less inclined to pass it on to their children. I would suggest that this may be as a result of less contact time between parents and children, due to increased attendance at school. When Traveller children were educated at home by their parents and taught the life skills needed for survival in their culture, Cant would have featured in this process. It could also be the case that Traveller parents do not perceive any advantage to their children in having a knowledge of Cant in the modern world. Andreck (1992) points to a similar decline in the use of Cant among Travellers in America, when she says, 'Young Travellers are not as fluent as previous generations and often know only a few phrases or words' (1992, p. 22).

The Traveller children whom I teach have a knowledge of Cant, though they do not publicise the fact, and do not appear to be familiar with the term 'Cant', calling it instead 'Traveller language'. The fact that Cant is an oral language, and that its practitioners, therefore, would not have a need to utilise reading or writing skills, has important pedagogical implications for my work with Traveller children. I have noticed that the children have oral communication skills in excess of their reading aptitude, that many of them are reluctant readers, and that it is even more difficult to motivate them to undertake written exercises. I contend that the realisation of the effects of cultural constraints on educational progress has profound significance for teachers working on literacy with Traveller children. A further implication of the fact that their language is an oral one is that the Travellers were unable to produce written evidence of their long history, as proof of their ethnicity, and had to depend on other sources for this legitimation.

I will now discuss the five models for understanding the Traveller situation, as identified by the Dublin Travellers Education and Development Group (DTEDG) (1994).

1. The liberal humanist model

The first model suggested by DTEDG is the liberal humanist model, which suggests that Travellers are individuals and no different from anybody else. This might appear to place Travellers in a positive light, and to regard them as equal to settled people. However, on closer scrutiny, this model seems to place too much emphasis on individualism, and to neglect the social aspect of the construction of identity. I suggest that, while this model appears to be based on principles of equality, in denying the reality of difference to Travellers, it is thereby denying them the opportunity for recognition of their separate culture and identity. I reject this model on the grounds that it is unlikely to achieve social justice and equality for Travellers.

2. The social pathology model

The social pathology model sees Travellers as social misfits and dropouts. This model views Travellers as constituting a problem, as being responsible for their own marginalisation. Travellers are, therefore, a pathology of society, in need of rehabilitation, which can be achieved by assimilation into the dominant society. I reject this model, as one that treats Travellers as objects of the charitable benevolence of the settled community. This model contrives to keep the Traveller community in a dependency mode, and can be seen, consequently, as a dehumanising approach.

3. The sub-culture of poverty model

The third model is the sub-culture of poverty model, which is premised on a concept of Traveller difference as consisting in economic poverty. It suggests that Travellers themselves, through passing on values and attitudes from one generation to the next, perpetuate their state of poverty. This reductionist model is an inadequate representation because it treats Travellers as passive victims, and it does not take account of the material wealth of some Travellers. I reject this view of the Traveller situation as it appears to hold Travellers themselves responsible for their state of marginalisation.

4. The idealist model

The idealist model sees Travellers as belonging to a special or exotic group. Travellers are idealised and treated as though they have come from an idyllic and carefree past. This characterisation ignores the reality of the oppression of Travellers. It creates relationships that are patronising, rather than mutually respectful. I contend that this model is insufficient as a descriptor of the Traveller situation, on the grounds that it fails to consider Travellers on an equal basis with the settled community.

5. The human rights model

The final model, the human rights one, is premised on the view that Travellers have a right to equal treatment in society. It accepts and recognises Traveller difference, and locates this difference in the reality of their existence as an identifiable minority ethnic group. This model, therefore, appears to take account of the fact that Travellers have been regarded as subordinate to the dominant majority group, and consequently have been subjected to oppression and discrimination. I suggest that the acceptance of the human rights model is crucial to the empowerment of Travellers. It is the only interpretation of the Traveller position that allows for the process of self-determination by the Travellers.

It would appear, then, that the human rights model can be a strategy for the achievement of equality and social justice for the Traveller community. It places Traveller issues within a humanist, rather than a humanitarian, framework and this allows Travellers to act as subjects, rather than objects, in the process of determining the trajectories of their lives. This situation seems to be a reflection of what Freire (1972) is advocating when he denounces an oppositional view in the following statement:

A pedagogy which begins with the egoistic interests of the oppressors (an egoism cloaked in the false generosity of paternalism) and makes of the oppressed the objects of its humanitarianism, itself maintains and embodies oppression. It is an instrument of dehumanization.

(Freire 1972, p. 39)

The paternalism, oppression and dehumanization that Freire critiques are features of the first four models for interpreting the Traveller situation, but are absent from the human rights model, which suggests that it is a more appropriate framework for accommodating Traveller issues.

Defining Travellers as a nomadic ethnic group illuminates what constitutes the main difference between the Traveller and settled communities, namely the concept of nomadism. Nomadism has always been a feature of Traveller culture, from the nomadic Tynkers of the twelfth century referred to by Liégeois (1987) to the present-day Traveller families. McDonagh (2000) describes the theory of nomadism from the Traveller perspective:

Nomadism entails a way of looking at the world, a different way of seeing things, a different attitude to accommodation, to work and to life in general.

(McDonagh 2000, p. 34)

The concept of nomadism, then, is not confined to the act of travelling, but encompasses a whole outlook on life. McDonagh (2000) goes on to explain that Travellers remain Travellers, even when they are not actually travelling, as they retain the mindset of a nomad. He refers specifically to the situation of Travellers, who have been living in houses in a rural town for a number of years and are considered 'settled', but each summer they spend many weeks travelling around. McDonagh refers to such Travellers as 'living contradictions'. His assertion that 'once a Traveller, always a Traveller' is an important concept in view of the fact that Travellers tend to travel less nowadays than they used to, as a result of which they could be denied the right to their cultural identity on the basis that they have 'settled'. Collins (1994), writing from a Traveller perspective, suggests that the cultural rights of Travellers could also be infringed by the perception of the differences between them and the settled community in terms of 'inferior/superior', instead of 'different but equal' (1994, p. 132).

Barth (1969) outlines the characteristics that define an ethnic group from an anthropological perspective. He says that the term ethnic group is generally understood to designate a population which:

1. is largely biologically self-perpetuating
2. shares fundamental cultural values, realized in overt unity in cultural forms
3. makes up a field of communication and interaction
4. has a membership which identifies itself, and is identified by others, as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order.

(Barth 1969, pp. 10-1)

According to Jenkins (1996), Barth subsequently revised his criteria for ethnic identity and defined them only in relational terms, such as group identification and categorisation by others. I contend that the Traveller community satisfies both the original and revised requirements for ethnic recognition. The tendency towards intermarriage, often among close relatives, ensures there is little infiltration by outside groups. The cultural values of nomadism, solidarity and community spirit have remained constant through many generations. The Cant language is still in existence, even if it is not practised as widely as in former generations. Finally, Travellers have always identified themselves as such, and have been recognised by others as a separate group. If this were not the case, there would be no need for a discourse on Travellers, or no need for the various organisations that comprise either Travellers or settled people, or both, all engaging in the struggle to achieve equality for Travellers, such as DTEDG, Pavee Point Centre, Irish Traveller Movement, Promoting Attitudinal Change Towards Travellers and Irish Traveller Women's Forum. I suggest, therefore, that the Traveller community meets the criteria for recognition as an ethnic minority group. It also fulfils the requirements of a cultural ethnic group, in Banks' (2001) interpretation of the term:

A cultural ethnic group is an ethnic group that shares a common set of values, experiences, behavioural characteristics, and linguistic traits that differ substantially from other ethnic groups within society. Individuals usually gain membership in such a group not by choice but through birth and early socialization.

(Banks 2001, p. 79, emphasis in original)

The Irish Government, while accepting that Travellers satisfy the requirements that I have outlined here, have consistently stopped short of according them the status of an ethnic group, opting instead to describe them as a separate minority group. However, there are signs of a movement in this position in the recent publication 'Intercultural Education in the Primary School' (Ireland, Department of Education and Science/DES 2005).

The reasons for the continuous movement of Traveller families in the past have always been intricately linked to their occupations, though there may have been other minor factors involved also, such as occasional skirmishes with the law. The original name 'Tynker' derived from their occupation as tinsmiths, when they travelled around in search of work making or repairing metal items. This occupation was still common among the Traveller community up to the middle of the twentieth century. Until that time, Travellers tended to operate in rural areas, where there was also the possibility of gaining seasonal employment with farmers. Because of their usefulness in this regard, and because they did not remain for long in a particular area, there were few objections to their temporary encampments. There was also the fact that they tended not to congregate in large groups, but were dispersed throughout the countryside. The mode of transport at that time was the horse-drawn wagon and so more time was spent in travelling to a location than was actually spent in the place. At this point in Traveller history, there did not appear to be any overt anti-Traveller sentiments. Some of the literature from the 1950s and 1960s includes references to the Traveller community, indicating a degree of acceptance of this minority group. For example, Clifford (1951), in his anthology of poetry, has a number of poems on Traveller themes, such as 'The ballad of the tinker's daughter', which do not display any prejudice or antipathy towards Travellers. MacMahon's (1967) novel, 'The Honey Spike', deals sensitively with the marriage of a young Traveller couple, and displays the author's knowledge of Cant and of Traveller customs. These writers, in considering Travellers as suitable subjects for their literary endeavours, have demonstrated their acceptance of the Travellers as equal members of society. Bewley

(1974) indicates that there was a certain acceptance of Travellers during their travelling days:

They were an accepted people then, performing a useful service. They often brought news from one place to another, before the days of wireless and newspapers.

(Bewley 1974, p. 15)

Ó Muirheartaigh (2004) refers to the Travellers who visited his home area in the 1930s and 1940s as ‘decent people, with many of the men practising the ancient art of tinkering’ (2004, p. 14), and adds that they were made feel welcome in the homes, where they entertained the inhabitants with stories from their travels around the country.

However, major changes in the lifestyle of the settled community brought about a drastic upheaval in the Traveller economy. The replacement of metal utensils with plastic ones heralded the end of tinsmithing, and the mechanisation of farming reduced the need for seasonal workers. With their traditional sources of income greatly depleted, Travellers began to move to urban areas in search of new economic opportunities in the 1960s. By now they had made the change to motorised transport. Their resourcefulness led them to turn towards scrap metal and car parts as a means of making a living in their new surroundings. Dennis (1985) states that:

There were substantial occupational changes in the 1950s and 1960s from part dependence on such occupations as handcrafts and scrap dealing to greater reliance on scrap trading as a profitable way of life needing vans, motors and trailers.

(Dennis 1985, p. 6)

These new occupations necessitated the use of large areas of land for the storage of old cars and scrap metal and, as extended families tended to co-operate in this work, there were large concentrations of Travellers in certain areas. This greater visibility of Travellers in urban centres was a new phenomenon and constituted a problem in the eyes of the settled community in these areas. Dennis (1985) describes the increasing anti-Traveller bias:

With a persistently hostile society (settled) the traveller must seek a livelihood in occupational niches on the margins of that society.

(Dennis 1985, p. 7)

As feelings of antipathy towards Travellers began to emerge, local authorities were prevailed upon to take action in support of the stance of the settled community. To deter Travellers from settling in urban areas, signs declaring 'Temporary dwellings prohibited' were erected about half a mile outside all towns. The significance of these signs was not apparent to me when I first encountered them in my childhood, but I now realise that this was the beginning of a campaign of exclusion and of denial of their rights to Traveller families. Not only did these exclusionary practices deprive them of their livelihood, they also prevented them from exercising their cultural right to practise nomadism. Such dislike of ethnic minorities, particularly nomadic groups, appears to be widespread, for Greeley (1992) writes of Irish Travellers in the United States:

They are hated because they are an outcast people whom the larger society can turn into an inkblot for their fears and hostilities.

(Greeley 1992, p. xiv)

Local authorities then continued to introduce measures that, whatever the thinking behind them, nevertheless contrived to further alienate and oppress the Traveller community. Attempts to settle Traveller families in local authority housing were unsuccessful, possibly due in part to prejudice on the part of settled families in the housing schemes, but due also to the fact that the Traveller families involved felt isolated from their own communities. Some local authorities built small housing schemes specifically for Traveller families, and these were much more successful, especially when families who were related to each other were in the same housing scheme, and when there was space for their trailers so that they could still exercise their option to travel. McDonagh (2000) describes the protests of some residents against the provision of halting sites or group housing for Travellers, because it was claimed that their properties would be devalued by such provision. McDonagh's response is, 'People don't devalue property, attitudes do' (2000, p. 39). Another successful initiative on the part of local authorities was the

provision of serviced sites, where Travellers could park their trailers on a permanent basis, and were provided with a water supply, sanitary facilities and refuse collection services. These sites also provoked anti-Traveller responses from some local settled people. Shiel (2003) reports that a Traveller family was prevented from moving from an illegal site to a serviced site, because of fears for their safety following the painting of slogans such as, 'No knackers here' and 'Keep filth out' on the new site. This incident indicates the continuing existence of discrimination and prejudice on the part of the settled community towards Travellers.

However, plans to settle all Traveller families in special housing schemes or serviced halting sites, within a specified time frame, have yet to be implemented. The Traveller Accommodation Act (Government of Ireland 1998) required local authorities to draw up a four-year plan for accommodating Traveller families in their areas. Although most local authorities complied with this request and produced a Traveller Accommodation Programme for the period 2000-2004, very few have implemented the programmes in full. This is evident from the number of Traveller families still camped at the side of a road, living in appalling conditions, and waiting to be accommodated by their local authorities. Transient sites were also to be provided, and the failure to do so has resulted in controversy each summer when Travellers begin to move around the country and, in the absence of these sites, settle temporarily on public or private property, to the annoyance of the local inhabitants. The Housing (Miscellaneous) Act (Government of Ireland 2002), which empowered local authorities to remove Travellers from unauthorised sites without acquiring a court order, has caused hardship for many families. According to the Government, the act was intended to prevent large numbers of Travellers, on the move during the summer months, from camping illegally on parks or open spaces. However, Pavee Point Newsletter (2004) recounts a number of incidents where individual Traveller families, encamped in the same place for at least a year, while waiting to be accommodated by the local authorities, were moved on under the new legislation. This new legislation is particularly oppressive in view of the fact that it was enacted before many of the local authorities had even begun to implement their Traveller Accommodation Programmes.

One advantage that the Travellers gained from their more permanent status as a result of their move to urban areas was that they were now eligible for social welfare payments. This, together with the success of their car part enterprise, meant that they were no longer wholly dependent on the charity of the settled population. The relatively settled status of the Traveller families also meant that their children now had the opportunity to attend school. Opportunity, however, did not immediately translate into practice, for it seemed that years of exclusion from the educational system had alienated Travellers from this process, and they were now slow to embrace it (O Boyle 1990). Having managed for years with only the minimum of formal education, it seemed as though they could not envision it as having any value for them. Those who sent their children to school only wanted them to acquire basic skills in reading and writing, and also to receive religious instruction to prepare them for the sacraments of Communion and Confirmation, to which Travellers ascribed greater importance than to acquiring literacy skills (McDonagh 2000). The incentive of participating in the educational system as a means to employment was irrelevant in the Traveller context, as they were never part of the general workforce, preferring to work independently at their original enterprise of scrap metal and car parts, and later branching out to engage in other work such as laying tarmac and providing gardening services (Liégeois 1987). According to Andereck (1992), Irish Travellers in the United States engage in similar occupations:

Originally horse and mule traders, Irish Travelers now earn their living traveling for the majority of the year, spraypainting, asphaltting, or laying linoleum.
(Andereck 1992, p. 5)

Some of the other major differences between Traveller and settled people are described by McDonagh (1993), who elucidates in particular the reasons that Traveller children tend not to avail of second level education. Writing from her own experience as a member of the Traveller community, she explains that traditionally Travellers married at a young age, and so at twelve years of age they began preparing for an event that they knew would occur within a few years. Girls were instructed in how to look after a household by their mothers and boys were initiated into the occupation of their fathers, in

clearly defined roles. The idea that someone who was preparing for marriage would also attend school was incomprehensible to the Traveller community, as the children were receiving instruction at home in the skills needed for their future existence. Even though the legal age for marriage has been raised since McDonagh wrote about Traveller marriage customs, Travellers still regard twelve-year-olds as adults, capable of making their own decisions, and so the question of whether to remain in the educational system is often left to the children themselves. The difference in status for Traveller children, whereby at home they are regarded as adults but in school are perceived as children, can impact negatively on their sense of identity, and can alienate them further from the educational system, particularly at second level. Other marriage customs that still survive among the Traveller community are arranged marriages and marriages between cousins. It could be argued that the reason these practices continue to be prevalent is the relatively settled status of Travellers currently, which reduces their opportunities for meeting other Travellers, outside of their extended families.

A further point of difference between the Traveller and settled communities lies in what constitutes the main expenditure for each. Settled people do not understand why Travellers spend so much money on cars and vans, but just as settled people regard owning a house as a top priority and spend the bulk of their income in acquiring one, Travellers place great value on the means of travel, in fulfilment of their nomadic culture, and so spend large sums of money on acquiring powerful cars and vans, capable of towing their caravans when they decide to travel. I suggest that there is a stronger sense of community and of solidarity in the Traveller culture than in settled society, probably due to the fact that members of extended families usually live in close proximity to each other. Travellers are deeply religious, belonging in general to the Roman Catholic faith, and make annual pilgrimages to religious shrines both in Ireland and abroad, travelling en masse to do so.

In outlining here the main differences between the Traveller culture and that of the settled community, I have set out some arguments, which are rooted in my values of social justice and equality, for the recognition of a separate culture and identity for the Traveller

community. Travellers have organised their own social structures around the extended family and have based their economic structures on their occupational enterprises. They have their own language, which they use as they see fit. They have retained their right to nomadism, and even when they appear to be relatively settled, will exercise their option to travel when circumstances dictate that they do so. Some people who are oriented to a settled lifestyle have difficulty in coming to terms with the uncertainty and transitory nature of this aspect of Traveller culture, but I suggest that Liégeois (1987) describes it aptly when he says:

It is a lifestyle based on ways of being that are undefinable and intangible, and on ways of doing which may be variable and ephemeral.

(Liégeois 1987, p. 75)

My understanding of Traveller issues, gained through my learning around the nature of Traveller culture and identity, provides a framework within which to base my approach to the teaching of Traveller children. I have learned that any efforts on my part to encourage Traveller children to remain in the educational system must take account of the cultural factors that tend to discourage them from doing so. I realise that Traveller parents need to understand that participation in second level schooling does not necessarily mean that their children will reject their own cultural norms. A teacher who participated in Andereck's (1992) research on Irish Travellers in America appears to share this view:

Each generation goes to school a little longer. Maybe they will all finish eighth grade in the future – but they will still be Irish Travellers. Education won't change that.

(Andereck 1992, p. 115)

More importantly, I recognise that Traveller children need to understand the value and importance of education to their lives, since it is they who ultimately make the decision as to whether or not they will continue to second level schools.

2:5 Policy context

In this section, I will outline the main policies concerning the Traveller community that were produced over the past forty years. These policies indicate official attitudes towards an indigenous ethnic minority group during that period. There is an obvious progression apparent, in the understanding of policymakers around issues affecting the Traveller community, from an initial position of trying to impose decisions on Travellers, to a more enlightened situation of recognising that Travellers ought to be included in the decision-making. However, in spite of a more positive and accommodating attitude on the part of bureaucratic institutions towards Travellers, there is one outstanding issue yet to be resolved, namely, the issue of ethnicity. Despite the fact that the Traveller community appears to meet the necessary requirements for acceptance as an ethnic group, as I have outlined in the Cultural context, the Irish Government has never officially recognised this claim. This has long been a source of contention for Traveller organisations, in view of the fact that Travellers in England and Northern Ireland have been accorded the status of an ethnic group.

Until the 1960s, there were no policies dealing specifically with issues concerning the Traveller community. Travellers at that time were not concentrated in urban areas but were dispersed throughout rural Ireland, were constantly on the move, and were for the most part an invisible feature of Irish society. However, changes in economic circumstances, resulting from the switch from tin utensils to plastic ones, and from the increased mechanisation of farming, led to an increase in the number of Travellers settling in urban areas and engaging in new enterprises, such as dealing in scrap metal and car parts. Kenny (1997) describes these changes in Traveller fortunes:

Major changes in sedentary society, particularly in farm operations, had led to increased squalor for Travellers and to their migration to towns and cities. Mechanisation decimated the need for rural casual labour; plastic eliminated the need for tin utensils; motor drive vehicles reduced the need for draft horses on farms and made distant shops accessible. Horse traders, blacksmiths, tinsmiths and door-to-door traders became redundant.

(Kenny 1997, p. 90)

The new activities rendered Travellers more visible, and possibly more of a nuisance in the eyes of the settled community. In particular, the sites on which they both lived and carried out their new occupations of dealing in scrap metal and car parts, were regarded as eyesores, especially by the tourist industry, and resulted in their becoming the focus of attention for policymakers.

The first policy dealing specifically with the Traveller community was the 'Report of the Commission on Itinerancy' (Government of Ireland 1963). The policy content of this document appears to indicate a lack of understanding of the cultural ethnicity of the Traveller community:

All efforts directed at improving the lot of itinerants and at dealing with the problems created by them, and all schemes drawn up for these purposes, must always have as their aim the eventual absorption of the itinerants into the general community.

(Government of Ireland 1963, p. 106)

Such a view of the Traveller community suggests that the authors of the report may have formed an opinion that the Travellers were a pathology of society, or were social misfits or dropouts who have deviated from mainstream society, and thus constitute a problem for that society. McDonagh (2000), in response to this perspective on Travellers, says:

It saw us as the problem. It didn't see us as people with accommodation problems. It certainly didn't see us as people with a distinct culture.

(McDonagh 2000, p. 38)

The problem, therefore, can only be resolved by assimilating the deviant group into the majority group. This interpretation of the Traveller situation is a manifestation of how the dominance of one culture in society can exclude alternative cultures, whose ways of life diverge from the norm. It does not recognise Travellers as an ethnic minority group with the same entitlement to human rights as the dominant majority group in Irish society. The use of the word 'itinerants', i.e. vagrants, which has criminal connotations, to describe Travellers contributes further to the devaluing and dehumanising of the Traveller community. Travellers had to rely on their own resources of resilience and resistance in

order to frustrate the government's attempt to assimilate them into the settled society. One may, therefore, consider the fact that Travellers are still a vibrant and visible presence in Irish society to be an indication of the strength and persistence of their struggle against the efforts to annihilate their cultural identity.

Twenty years after the first policy had been formulated the 'Report of the Travelling People Review Body' (Government of Ireland 1983) was published. On close reading, one finds grounds to suspect that this second document was produced in reaction to the abysmal, though perhaps appropriate, failure of the policies contained in the first document. The 1983 document appears to be an improvement on the previous one, both in terms of the thinking behind it and of the tone adopted throughout. One notable change, which is apparent in the titles of the two documents, is that the Travelling people are now called 'Travellers', which had long been their preferred denominator. The report also appears to give recognition to Traveller wishes in regard to housing, as one of its objectives aims 'to provide within a relatively short number of years a house for all Traveller families who desire to be housed' (1983, p. 15). However, it soon becomes apparent that the recognition of Travellers' rights to self-determination remains at a superficial level, for the statement continues:

Travellers who are not so accommodated cannot hope to receive an adequate education. Nor can they avail of services such as health and welfare which are of such significance in the lives of all people.

(Government of Ireland 1983, p. 15)

Implicit in this statement one can detect a desire to see Travellers give up their nomadic lifestyle and become 'settled', in return for basic rights to education, health and welfare. Perhaps the second document is not such an improvement on the first one after all, for while the 1963 publication states openly its intended policy of assimilating Travellers, the 1983 report appears to be attempting to achieve the same aim in a covert fashion. Neither document recognises the ethnic status of the Traveller community, or their right to make choices appropriate to their traditional lifestyle.

In 1990, the DTEDG established Pavee Point Traveller Centre as a base from which to monitor issues concerning Travellers. At the official opening of the centre, the then President of Ireland, Mary Robinson, included in her speech the following extract:

When we talk about the Travelling community, it's not just a question of whether they want housing or whether they would prefer serviced halting sites. It's that they want their culture recognised, they want their dignity respected, they want to be full citizens of this country. I think that the most important things are that there's real space for the Travelling community, for their own culture, for their self-development and self-expression; that we have space for them and that we value them; and that the other things like the appropriate kind of houses, services and facilities are provided to the best of one's ability as a nation. But perhaps the most important thing is that we value them as a distinct community within our larger community.

(DTEDG 1994, pp. 26-7)

Here, at last, the rhetoric accepts unconditionally the right of the Travelling community to have their culture recognised and valued on an equal basis with the settled community. This occurrence is indicative of a change in the political climate, and in political discourse. However, the fact that, fifteen years further on, these rights have not been delivered in practice, reflects the limited power of a president to implement actual change. This is a further example of the reality that theory does not always translate easily or quickly into practice. There is no evidence that the Traveller culture is in fact recognised by the general public, or that the Traveller community is valued as a distinct community. In other words, Travellers have still not been accepted in official circles as an ethnic minority group. Nor have the other services mentioned in President Robinson's speech materialised. Many Travellers continue to live on unofficial sites, in trailers or mobile homes without water or electricity facilities. N, the mother of R, one of the Traveller pupils in my school, remarked in a conversation we had in June 2004, 'my family has been living on this site for twenty-five years now, and we still do not have electricity or a water supply. We do not expect these services for nothing; we are willing to pay for them' (field notes, 28th June 2004, item 2a).

The 'Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community' (Government of Ireland 1995) goes much further than previous policies in recognising the distinct nature of

Traveller culture and identity. An example of the more positive, emancipatory and respectful nature of the Report lies in the practice of writing the word 'Traveller' with a capital 'T'. Nevertheless, it still did not include an explicit recognition of Traveller ethnicity. In this context, 'Intercultural Education in the Primary School' (Ireland, Department of Education and Science/DES 2005) surpasses all previous documents in suggesting that Travellers are a distinct ethnic group.

The Employment Equality Act (Government of Ireland 1998) ensures equality of opportunity for all job applicants. The Equal Status Act (Government of Ireland 2000) performs a similar function in relation to the provision of goods and services. The latter act mentions nine grounds on which discrimination is outlawed, among them being 'membership of the Traveller community'. The Equality Authority investigates complaints brought under both acts. McGee (2002) reports that the majority of complaints brought under the Equal Status Act were initiated by members of the Traveller community, and related mainly to incidents of being refused admission to public houses, restaurants and hotels. In almost all cases, the Equality Authority upheld the claims of Travellers that they were refused admission to these places simply because they were members of the Traveller community. This is evidence of the continued prevalence of discrimination against Travellers in Irish society, but for the first time in their long history, Travellers have some redress in the face of this form of discrimination.

2:6 Educational policy context

Traveller children were not a prominent feature of primary schooling prior to the 1970s, apart from brief appearances at seven years of age to prepare for the sacrament of Communion, and at twelve for Confirmation. Not surprisingly, therefore, there was no mention of Traveller education in the new curriculum for primary schools, 'Curaclam na Bunscoile' (1971), though perhaps one could construe the statement that a curriculum must be 'sufficiently flexible to meet the needs of children of widely varying natural endowment and cultural background' (Rialtas na hÉireann/Government of Ireland 1971, p. 13) as constituting an oblique reference to Traveller children. By the late 1980s, there was a significant increase in the number of Traveller children enrolled in primary

schools. The Irish National Teachers' Organization (1992) states that in 1963 there were 114 Traveller children attending primary school, and that this had increased to 4200 by 1989, which represented approximately 75% of Traveller children of primary school age. This situation could be attributed to different factors, for example, the fact that Travellers were more settled, which made it easier for the children to attend school, and school attendance officers could monitor their attendance more easily. As a result, the document 'Education for a Changing World' (Ireland, DES 1992), in a section entitled 'Meeting the Educational Needs of Travellers', states:

- 1 The Department will take up with the Colleges of Education the matter of providing a module on travellers and traveller culture in the pre-service education of teachers.
- 2 The Department will draw up guidelines for publishers so that material on travellers' culture can be included in schoolbooks.

In relation to the first issue, I have enquired from colleagues who have recently graduated from Colleges of Education as to whether a module on Traveller culture had been provided during their courses. They replied that the only specific reference to the Traveller community occurred in a module on Sociology, where Travellers were included in references to the socially disadvantaged. With regard to the second issue, I have come across just one reference to Traveller culture in a History workbook, which I have quoted in the Cultural context. This brief summary of Traveller culture could be regarded as significant if it were available to all primary school children. However, there are at least three other series of History textbooks from which teachers can choose, and even if some teachers were to select the 'Ages Ago' (Brennan 1997) textbook, there is no guarantee that they would use the workbook containing the reference to Traveller culture. There is an English reader currently in use in primary schools called 'Starry Links' and this includes an extract from the novel 'The Blue Horse' (Conlon-McKenna 1992). The story outlines some of the discrimination suffered by the Traveller community and tends to

portray Traveller culture as a negative experience, though it does provide ample opportunity for discussing issues such as prejudice and bias towards minority groups.

The pressing need for schools to provide literature that reflects Traveller culture can be gleaned from the following anecdote. In September 2002, an eleven-year-old Traveller girl enrolled in sixth class in my school. She had already attended various other schools, for brief periods, both in England and in Ireland. In spite of her irregular school attendance, she had excellent reading skills. She had not, however, read anything other than school textbooks. In her weekly visits to my classroom, I tried to encourage her to read a novel, but to no avail. I used various strategies, at first giving her books at her own reading level, then giving her books at a lower level, thinking their brevity and simplicity would act as an incentive, but each time she came to me, she had read nothing since the previous week. Eventually, I gave her 'The Blue Horse' (Conlon-McKenna 1992), not entertaining much hope that she would read it, as it was a long novel and the print was small. To my surprise, however, when she arrived the following week, she said, 'I'm on page forty-one. I stayed up till eleven o'clock last night reading it. I think it's a great book.' Intrigued as to why she found this book so attractive, I read it also and we had a discussion on the issues raised in the book, such as the discrimination suffered by Travellers in various institutions, and the problems encountered when Traveller women want to settle in an area, while their menfolk want to continue the tradition of nomadism. This incident illustrates the importance of having culturally appropriate materials in schools so that all cultures feel equally welcome to participate in the educational system. The document 'Charting our Education Future' (Ireland, DES 1995) reiterates the policy of including a module on Traveller education in Colleges of Education and of providing appropriate texts and materials for Traveller children in schools, though these aims remain as yet largely unfulfilled.

The 'Revised Primary School Curriculum' (Ireland, DES 1999) does not make any specific reference to Traveller children. In fact, it gives the impression that Irish society is monocultural. In the introduction, under the heading 'Key issues in primary education', it states that:

Irish education reflects the historical and cultural roots of Irish society and seeks to give children an appreciation of the continuity of the Irish experience and of their relationship with it.

(Ireland, DES 1999, p. 26)

If some children, such as Traveller children, do not share the historical and cultural traditions of the dominant group in Irish society, then it appears reasonable to assume that they cannot experience the continuity provided by the primary education system. There is also a suggestion in the introduction that acquiring a knowledge of the Irish language 'would deepen a child's cultural awareness and enable the child to express a sense of national and cultural identity' (1999, p. 27). I suggest that recognition of the Cant language by educational institutions would have a similar effect on Traveller children's sense of identity.

After many years of producing draft guidelines, the DES has finally published 'Guidelines on Traveller Education in Primary Schools', which has as its central aim:

the meaningful participation and highest attainment of the Traveller child so that, in common with all the children of the nation, he or she may live a full life as a child and realise his or her full potential as a unique individual, proud of and affirmed in his or her identity as a Traveller and a citizen of Ireland.

(Ireland, DES 2002, p. 5)

I contend that fulfilling this aim will be a long process, given that it will require the elimination of bias and prejudice on the part of the settled community, as well as the establishment of social structures based on equality and justice. However, the DES acknowledges in the Guidelines that Travellers belong to a distinct social group, meaning that they:

have a common ancestry, share fundamental cultural values and traditions, have a language of their own, and are seen by themselves and others as distinct and different.

(Ireland, DES 2002, p. 7)

In other words, they meet all the requirements for recognition as an ethnic group as laid down in the Race Relations Act in Britain (1976, cited in O Connell, 1993). This implicit recognition of the ethnic status of the Traveller community is a significant change from the assimilationist agenda of both the 'Report of the Commission on Itinerancy' (Government of Ireland 1963) and the 'Report of the Travelling People Review Body' (Government of Ireland 1983). The Guidelines emphasise this change in policy in the following statement:

The perception of Travellers as deprived, disadvantaged and in need of assimilation into a dominant culture is recognised as inappropriate. The policy of the Department of Education and Science emphasises that Traveller culture and traditions must be acknowledged and reflected in the educational system.

(Ireland, DES 2002, p. 10)

In outlining the various policy documents relating to the Traveller community that have been produced over the last forty years, I have traced the significant changes that have taken place in official thinking during that time. A major paradigmatic shift has occurred, from the colonialist assimilationist attitude of the 1960s to the current position of recognising that Travellers belong to a distinct minority group. However, at the moment this change in attitude remains largely at the level of policy, and I suggest that, until it translates into practice in schools, Traveller children will still be regarded as, and will see themselves as, second-class citizens. Only when Traveller culture and traditions are acknowledged and reflected in the educational system will the interests of equality and social justice be served.

2:7 Conclusion

The various contexts that I have discussed in this chapter – personal, locational, cultural, policy and educational – provide a comprehensive backdrop to my research. My engagement with these issues enabled me to create the historical and contextual frameworks within which my research is located. Through the process of outlining the relevant contextual factors, I was able to relate the inherent themes to the values and concepts that underpinned my research. The most salient and consistent concept

interwoven throughout the chapter is the idea of social justice as a necessary condition for the equal treatment of all people in society. However, many of the incidents that I have alluded to in this chapter illustrate the manner in which the Traveller community has been consistently denied social justice by the various social institutions. I have highlighted the fact that Travellers have rarely been consulted or included in the decision-making around their own life-choices. Such a stance is inconsistent with my values of social justice and equality, and so I would endorse Greeley's (1992) proposal for an appropriate perspective on this issue:

The appropriate stance, it seems to me, toward groups like the Travelers is to respect their right to be who and what they are and to listen to them with generosity and openness to see what we might learn from them.

(Greeley 1992, p. xv)

Kenny (1997) makes a similar impassioned plea for the right to justice and self-determination for the Traveller community:

Until an oppressed people know who they are, or who they might be when all the wrongs are righted and all the rights are won, their struggle against these wrongs and for these rights will be less than effectual.

(Kenny 1997, p. vii)

Social justice, therefore, is a key concept to the achievement of equality of respect for all people, in order to ensure that the rights of marginalised groups are not perceived as inferior to those of the dominant majority in society. In this context, I devote the next chapter to a discussion of the main theories in the literature on social justice, and to an examination of how these propositional theories can be incorporated within my living theory of the practice of social justice.