

## **Section 2 Chapter 3 Issues of Social Justice and Equality**

### **3:1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I discuss two issues that are central to my research: social justice and equality. My reason for deciding that these issues merited discussion in a separate chapter was the realisation that they constitute the foundations on which my ontological stance in life is based. Social justice and equality are two of my ontological values, and as such they become the living standards by which I judge the quality of my work, as I have explained in my Introduction. Principles of social justice and equality, or more specifically, what might appear to some critical observers as a lack of evidence of the practical application of these principles in educational institutions, were the impetus that inspired me to undertake my research into Traveller education. They are also important elements in the process of ensuring that Traveller children are enabled to benefit to the same extent as other children from the educational system, and to make choices around their own educational trajectories. My research account, therefore, could be interpreted as the narrative of my investigation into how, in the interest of social justice, the opportunities that are currently available to the majority of children in the educational system, could also be extended to children from minority groups. The process of engaging in this investigation has enabled me to theorise my living educational practice as a site for the promotion of social justice as the practice of inclusion, and as equality of respect for all pupils. Principles of social justice and equality are, then, pervasive and intrinsic to my account of my research for the following reasons:

1. They serve as the core values underpinning my research and informing my ontological commitments to living a life grounded in these values.
2. They constitute significant conceptual frameworks within which my research is located.
3. They provide the basis for the articulation and validation of my claims to knowledge, which emerge from my living educational practice of these principles.

I propose, therefore, in this chapter, to explain the relevance to my research of issues of social justice and equality, both at the theoretical level, in relation to the theories in the literature, and at the level of practice, in relation to living theories that emerged from my practice as the lived reality of social justice and equality. I recognise that there are other approaches to equality, but these did not resonate with me. I subscribe to the idea of radical egalitarianism as explicated by Baker (1998), which he argues is a broader concept than either basic or liberal egalitarianism.

### **3:2 My understanding of social justice**

Social justice is often interpreted in distributive terms as meaning that all people should be treated in an equitable manner in relation to receiving whatever social benefits are available in life. There are many situations in life where equality is not an inherent condition, or may not even be possible. Sometimes, it can appear as though state institutions and government legislation are biased in favour of the more well off in society, and that they often contrive to exacerbate the oppression of those in the lowest social group. Such practices can result in those at the bottom of the social ladder suffering the effects of injustice and inequity. This is the situation in which members of the Traveller community often find themselves, and because the injustice can result from legal impositions, Travellers can feel powerless to act against it. To illustrate how this can occur, I will refer briefly to the hopelessness and despondency that currently characterise the experiences of many Traveller men, and indicate the legislative and bureaucratic constraints that reduced them to this level of existence. In exposing this type of legally-based injustice, I will explicate how incidents such as these contributed to my stance that social systems need to be grounded in principles and practices of social justice if they are to provide positive and life enhancing experiences for all.

I have explained in Chapter 2 the importance of cultural practices, such as travelling from place to place, often for the purpose of trading and engaging in scrap metal collecting, to the Traveller community. Owning a horse is also part of the lifestyle of many Travellers, dating back to the time when the horse was the only mode of transport for them, and is a practice that seems to have persevered, even when motorised transport became their

chosen mode of travel. However, legislation enacted over the past ten years has curbed these traditional activities of Travellers and largely deprived them of their sense of independence and self-sufficiency. The Casual Trading Act (Government of Ireland 1995) has excluded many Travellers from trading at markets and fairs because of the introduction of licensing fees and excessive documentation. The act also requires them to have a permit to collect scrap metal. As literacy levels tend to be low among adult Travellers, they often have difficulty in acquiring the necessary documentation, and many just abandon the attempt. The Control of Horses Act (Government of Ireland 1996) requires that horses be licensed and have accommodation that complies with the regulations, which means that Travellers can no longer let their horses graze on waste land, as they traditionally did. As the majority of Travellers do not own any land, they could not continue to keep horses. The final piece of legislation that impinges greatly on the lifestyle of Travellers is the Housing (Miscellaneous) Act (Government of Ireland 2002), to which I have already referred in Chapter 2, and which gives power to local authorities to remove instantly any temporary Traveller encampments in their areas, without the necessity of obtaining a court order, as had previously been the norm in such situations. The enactment of these various pieces of legislation could be construed as institutional racism, in the terms described by Tormey and Haran (2003), who outline one of the mechanisms through which institutional racism against Travellers is practised in Ireland:

Legislation, policy making and provision can be developed without account being taken of their potential impact on a minority cultural group such as the Travellers. In this way, policy and practice can develop in a manner that only reflects the 'Settled' community's culture and identity and can therefore be inappropriate for the Traveller community.

(Tormey and Haran 2003, p. 30)

All the changes in lifestyle that I have outlined here have taken their toll on Traveller men, in particular, since it is their means of livelihood that has been most affected by such changes. Many of them lack the skills to find employment within the settled community, though the majority have no desire to take that route anyway, as they value the independence that their traditional lifestyle provided. The lack of an occupation has

left many of them feeling depressed and turning to alcohol, and in some cases to drugs, which is a new phenomenon among Travellers. N, the mother of R, one of the Traveller children in my school, remarked in conversation with me:

The men are locked in their culture. They haven't been able to change, like the women have. But then, they never had to go around begging. The women want change, for the sake of their children. A lot of the young men, up to about thirty-five years, suffer from depression, and get drunk a lot. The men should be approached, because they have a lot to offer. They should be asked how they would like to see things changing. At the moment they are full of anger and resentment.

(field notes, 28<sup>th</sup> June 2004, item 3a)

The increase in cases of depression in young Traveller men has been paralleled by an increase in the number of suicides among them. Until recently, suicide was relatively unknown in the Traveller community. The freedom to practise their traditional lifestyle, their sense of self-sufficiency and independence, and the spirit of family solidarity appeared to cushion them against the feelings of despair and hopelessness that have recently begun to overwhelm some of the young Traveller men. The manner in which they have been reduced to this situation is symptomatic of what Durkheim (1960) refers to as 'anomie', which can occur in times of severe economic depression, leading to individuals being suddenly reduced to a lower social position than they had previously occupied. Durkheim (1960) describes the life changes with which such individuals are forced to contend:

They must reduce their demands, restrain their wants, learn to control themselves even more than before. The social process of remolding them to fit into the conditions of their new life and of teaching them to exercise this unwanted additional self-restraint cannot be completed overnight. Consequently, they are not adjusted to the situation which is thrust upon them.

(Durkheim 1960, p. 455)

The individuals in Durkheim's account appear to have started from a more secure and more solid background than that of the Traveller men. I suggest, therefore, that when Durkheim states that:

anomie itself would not be a regular and constant factor in determining suicide rates, though it may well account for variations from time to time,  
(Durkheim 1960, p. 457)

it is highly likely that anomie could be a factor in the increased suicide rates among Traveller men.

McInerney (2004) reports that there have been three suicides in a period of eighteen months in one small community of Travellers, and fifteen deaths by suicide over a period of three years in one Health Board region. She quotes a Traveller woman, who says:

If they (young people) want to get into a pub with settled people, they have to deny they're a traveller. They have to deny their identity. And nobody should have to do that. That's not good for the mind.

(McInerney 2004, p. 13)

A seventeen-year-old unemployed Traveller youth tells McInerney that he wanted to do traditional Traveller work, but cannot now do that, adding that 'he wasn't reared to believe in working for someone else. Traveller men want to be their own boss' (2004, p. 13). It is hardly surprising, therefore, that young Travellers appear to have lost their sense of direction, to be caught in a crisis of identity and to be fearful about their future. I suggest that many of their problems result from the various government acts passed in the last ten years, which curtail their freedom and independence, deprive them of work opportunities and prevent them from engaging in their cultural practices. In short, they have been subjected to unjust and inequitable policies and practices. It may be argued that the government had good reasons for introducing the various pieces of legislation, but I fail to see the justification for reducing an ethnic minority group to a state of powerlessness, desperation and oppression, bereft of the means of making a living in ways that are commensurate with their culture, and confined to a state of dependency and despondency. It is a situation that is completely contrary to my values of social justice and equality for all, since it allows no space for human dignity.

The Traveller community is not unique in suffering from depression and suicidal tendencies as a consequence of oppression. Ryan (1999) writes of a similar phenomenon among the Innu, the native people of the Quebec-Labrador peninsula in north-eastern Canada. He describes the injustice meted out to the Innu youth, who are expected to conform to the norms of the majority Canadian culture, and are constantly compared unfavourably to these norms. The result can be devastating, as Ryan indicates:

As supposed shortcomings were publicly and privately revealed, students themselves came to accept the notion that they were less than worthy – even stupid. Combined with other negative characteristics of the Innu and what they represented, in the media and elsewhere, and other difficult conditions under which many Innu lived, the effects on young people in some cases were devastating. In 1988, for example, twenty-one teenagers in a community of about eight hundred attempted to commit suicide.

(Ryan 1999, p. 117)

Like Travellers, the Innu have also experienced major upheavals in their traditional nomadic lifestyle and consequently in their economic situation. Bureaucratic decisions were taken in the interest of economic progress, but without any regard for their effect on an indigenous minority group, whose cultural identity has been denied in the process. It would appear, then, that the actions, which produced financial gain for the majority but at the expense of destroying the lifeworld of a minority group, were not grounded in principles of social justice and equality. If they had been so grounded, some acknowledgement and valuing of the minority's right to engage in their traditional way of life would have been evident.

There are other factors that can also contribute to situations of injustice and inequality. For example, people can be born into different social groups, resulting in those born into a higher socio-economic group having greater financial advantages than those born into a lower socio-economic group. This inequality can have major repercussions in that it can persist throughout life and can permeate all areas of existence, where goods and services can be bought by those with the capacity to pay for them, thus adding to the privileges enjoyed by those from the higher socio-economic groups. In this context, Rawls' (1971)

theory of the distributive paradigm of social justice is relevant. Rawls states that the principles of social justice:

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

(Rawls 1971, p. 4)

However, while it may be appropriate to consider the division of material social goods within a distributive framework of social justice, the concept of justice itself does not appear to fit into the category of goods that can be shared out in numerical fashion. Justice can be perceived as a quality in relationships that can lead to just practices. Similarly, relationships that reflect injustice can result in unjust practices. Young (1990) suggests that:

contemporary philosophical theories of justice tend to restrict the meaning of social justice to the morally proper distribution of benefits and burdens among society's members.

(Young 1990, p. 8)

She argues that, instead, the focus should be on concepts of domination and oppression, which are at the root of injustice. It would appear, then, that the Traveller community is frequently subjected to unjust treatment in the form of institutionalised domination and oppression. This is manifested in the manner in which oppressive laws have been enforced against Travellers, as I have already explained, and in the inequitable treatment of Traveller children in the educational system, of which I provide several examples throughout my research account. In agreement with Young (1990), therefore, I suggest that, if a concept of justice is to challenge current practices of institutionalised domination and oppression, it should 'offer a vision of a heterogeneous public that acknowledges and affirms group differences' (1990, p. 10).

### **3:3 Social justice and education**

The injustices that characterise society in general are frequently found in various social institutions, such as educational institutions. While the inequities may be evident to

anyone with a commitment to social justice, what is perhaps not so clear is what one can do to bring about a more equitable situation. In the realisation that realistically one cannot alter the class system according to which society is ordered, I focus instead on systems that may have the potential for change, such as educational institutions. Some educational theorists, who subscribe to a view of schools as sites of social reproduction (for example, Bourdieu and Passeron 1977), would question the capacity of educational institutions to influence a transformation in social structures. However, in this account of my research, I provide examples to demonstrate how I have succeeded in bringing about changes in social structures and practices through the process of education. In Chapter 5, I provide the data to illustrate how I obtained extra educational resources for a Traveller child in fulfilment of my commitment to social justice for all, and in Chapter 6, I recount how I enabled Traveller children to experience their culture as valued and valuable within the schooling system. I submit that these achievements represent the beginning of a movement towards social transformation (McNiff 2002) that is grounded in a practice of social justice.

In theory, it should be possible to ensure that social justice acts as a guiding principle in the provision of educational services, provided that all involved in the provision are in agreement that this is the best way of achieving fairness and equality for those at the receiving end. In accordance with the Education Act (Government of Ireland 1998) education is available to all, not on an invitational basis but as a compulsory regime for all children between the ages of six and sixteen. One would expect, then, that all children would be treated equally within the educational system. However, this is not always the reality. While all children have equal access to educational provision at primary school level, as required by the Education Welfare Act (Government of Ireland 2000), very often the equality ends here. Many schools seem to think that, in accepting all applicants, they are demonstrating non-discriminatory practices, and that this fulfils their obligation to treat all children equally. They do not, therefore, perceive the need for continuity of the concept of equality, to ensure that it extends to equality of participation, opportunity or outcome. In my practice of working with Traveller children, I have succeeded in transforming the concept of equality into the lived reality of this concept, through my

efforts at ensuring for Traveller children equal access to learning support and resource teaching, as I outline in Chapter 5. My educational practice, then, could be perceived as providing a space for the achievement of equality, through my recognition of the diverse needs of Traveller children within the educational system, in terms of Lynch and Lodge's (1999) explanation of this phenomenon:

Those for whom equality involves respect for difference rather than simply distribution have, however, created a space in which the voices of young persons can be heard. Even though they did not create these spaces to hear young people especially, the spaces and cracks which are open allow their voices to be heard.

(Lynch and Lodge 1999, p. 219)

One educationalist, who supports the idea of a living system of education so that every child can learn and achieve, is Zappone (2002), who recommends a framework that includes a description of the process and overall objective of achieving equality in children's educational provision. She emphasises that she is describing a process, rather than a static reality, which would involve educationalists in the dynamism of substantive change. Zappone suggests that 'achieving equality in children's education requires a living system that:

- Supports common ways of learning
- Accommodates diverse capacities, cultures, learning paths and achievement outcomes
- Enables communal solidarity or 'sticking together'
- Reduces inequalities of resources between social groups and geographical communities'.

(Zappone 2002, p. 82)

I would argue that my educational practice represents the living realisation of these principles, in relation to the achievement of a more equitable educational provision for Traveller children. I present my data in support of this claim in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. I would also contend that, through the transformation of the concept of equality into lived reality in my practice, I have moved from an abstract form of theorising to a living

practical form of theorising, which seems to be what Lynch (1999) is suggesting, when she says:

Theories of egalitarian change need to be grounded in the lifeworld of the marginalised. Yet, as long as egalitarian-oriented academics remain as ‘detached’ intellectuals, psychologically, socially and geographically removed from those about whom they write (the ‘Other’, in every sense), they are clearly not in a position to develop transformative theories informed and developed by the knowledge and experience of those directly exposed to inequality.

(Lynch 1999, p. 27)

In remaining at the level of rhetoric, Lynch (1999) is locating herself among the egalitarian-oriented academics who remain as detached intellectuals. In contrast, I contend that I have moved beyond a strictly propositional form of theory to engage in a living form of theory. Through presenting an account of my practice, as I do in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, I demonstrate how I have transformed that practice into a more socially just one, by living in the direction of my ontological values of justice and entitlement. The significance of my work, therefore, can be judged in terms of its contribution to new practices that reflect principles of social justice and equality, and also in terms of its contribution to new forms of theory that can be shown as the living out of the values that inform my work.

In the absence of a practice of equality in educational institutions, the usual practice is that children from minority groups, such as socially disadvantaged children, children from ethnic minorities and children with learning difficulties, are enrolled in schools on the same basis as the majority of children, but thereafter very little effort is made to ensure that their differences do not result in inequitable or discriminatory treatment. If these children are subjected to inequality or discrimination in school, their experience of education can be one of alienation and marginalisation. Their experience of education tends to be, therefore, in sharp contrast to Dewey’s (1966) view of education as ‘a fostering, a nurturing, a cultivating process’ (1966, p. 10). Their educational experience also represents a contradiction of McLaren’s (1995) belief that, in order to ensure some level of equality, ‘teachers need to give the marginalized and the powerless a preferential

option' (1995, p. 138). In the case of a child who is socially disadvantaged, belongs to an ethnic minority group and also has learning difficulties, which is the position of some Traveller children, the negative effects of this multilayered disadvantage on their educational experience can be onerous and oppressive.

When Traveller children present themselves in schools they tend to encounter a culture that differs in many ways from their home culture. The school culture usually reflects the aims, ideals, opinions and customs of the majority of those whom the school serves. Shor (1993), influenced by Freire's theories in this context, refers to the inequality and injustice inherent in an educational system grounded in domination:

From a democratic point of view, Freire sees society controlled by an elite which imposes its culture and values as the standard. In schooling, this imposed standard is transferred by required syllabuses, mandated textbooks, tracking and standardized examinations.

(Shor 1993, p. 28)

For those children who share the cultural values of the school, education can be a liberating, life-enhancing and fulfilling experience. They possess what Bourdieu, cited in Robbins (2000), calls cultural capital and this enables them to obtain the maximum benefit from the educational system. On the other hand, for Traveller children, as for other minority groups, the school culture does not necessarily reflect the beliefs, habits or life-views acquired in the home, and so they lack the cultural capital that appears to be a necessary requirement for success in the educational system. Furthermore, their culture is not accorded any value within the school system, which can create in them feelings of inferiority, low self-esteem and a lack of any sense of belonging. Shor (1993) attests to the demoralising effect of such experiences:

Faced with an unfamiliar scholastic culture, denied an anthropological appreciation of their own culture, students become cultural deficits, dependent on the teacher as a delivery system for words, skills and ideas to teach them how to speak, think and act like the dominant elite, whose ways of doing these things are the only ones acceptable.

(Shor, 1993, p. 31)

This inequitable treatment of Traveller children constitutes an injustice towards them on the part of educational institutions. It is, however, an injustice that can be rectified. What is required is a recognition that we do not live in a monocultural society and that this should be reflected in an intercultural approach to education. Kenny (1997) suggests a framework for such an intercultural approach:

Interculturalism is not about teaching fixed cultural content but about allowing space, recognising boundaries and providing markers so that all can 'find' themselves identified in texts, programmes and school ambience.

(Kenny 1997, p. 294)

This approach would give equal value to all the cultures represented in a school's population and could result in the creation of a more just and equitable school environment.

In arguing for an intercultural framework for educational provision, I mean to suggest that the assumptions underpinning this concept should reflect the view that all cultures are of equal value and importance. A stance that gives dominance and a sense of superiority to one culture, as the correct and legitimate one, cannot be considered to be premised on principles of social justice and equality. Said (2002) argues for a multiplicity of cultures, stating that it is highly unlikely that there exists one 'pure' culture, untainted by elements from any other culture:

All cultures, as well as civilizations, are mixed, hybrid, full of elements taken from other cultures. So much so, in my opinion, that it really is intellectually irresponsible to argue as if there were a pure, unmodified culture that is totally at one, self-identified with itself.

(Said 2002, p. 141)

An educational system, therefore, that permits a hierarchical structure in relation to the cultures represented in the system, is creating a situation of inequality in suggesting that some cultures are inferior to the culture of the dominant majority. To counteract such a situation in my practice of working with Traveller children, I operated a policy of promoting Traveller culture as equally valid with the dominant culture, by providing

Traveller children with opportunities for exploring cultural issues, which I document in Chapter 6.

Those who concur with the perspective of monoculturalism may be operating out of an ideology that says that there is only one right way, and that those who do not conform to this view are either mistaken or misinformed. Berlin (2000) refers to the thinking that there can be only one right answer to all true questions as 'monism'. Influenced by the philosophies of Vico and Herder, Berlin proposes a theory of pluralism, as the antithesis of monism, which he explains as follows:

If pluralism is a valid view, and respect between systems of values which are not necessarily hostile to each other is possible, then toleration and liberal consequences follow, as they do not either from monism (only one set of values is true, all the others are false) or from relativism (my values are mine, yours are yours, and if we clash, too bad, neither of us can claim to be right).

(Berlin 2000, p. 13)

Berlin's (2000) theory seems to resonate with that of Said (2002), quoted above, in that both appear to be arguing for diversity – of opinions, cultures and values – as containing the potential for more equitable and more emancipatory conditions of human existence, and for a greater measure of respect for the 'other'. The idea of a plurality of cultural beliefs and practices has had a significant influence on my research, particularly in relation to making my claims to have developed a living theory of the practice of social justice as the recognition and acceptance of diversity, and as equality of respect for all. I explain and justify these claims in Chapter 8, which contains an analysis of my findings, and in Chapter 9, in which I outline the potential significance of my research.

I would argue that it is important that school cultures are premised on principles of justice, not only so that Traveller children and other minority groups can experience a sense of belonging in educational institutions, but also so that the children who form the majority within the school system can develop an awareness of the need for acceptance and inclusion of pupils who are different. Thus, children from both the majority and minority groups can benefit from a more equitable educational system. Little (1975)

refers to the need for the majority group within the educational system to accommodate the diversity provided by minority groups:

The educational experience offered to the majority population should be modified and in some respects radically changed to enable them to cope adequately with the facts of cultural, national and racial diversity. Clearly this implies changes in curricula and teaching methods, not least important eliminating the xenophobia and cultural blinkers that permeate much history, geography and literature teaching.

(Little 1975, p. 78)

Noddings (1992) also recognises the need to involve the majority group in any initiative undertaken to provide a more equitable educational experience for minority groups:

Majority groups need help in understanding and accepting the need of oppressed groups to claim their own literature, art, and theories of oppression and political action.

(Noddings 1992, p. 114)

Often, the inequitable treatment of minority groups may go unnoticed in the endeavour to provide the privileged child with optimum educational advantages. Schools, therefore, have a responsibility to ensure that they do not create a privileged group at the expense of depriving minority groups of their just entitlements in the process.

Minority groups, such as Traveller children, those with special needs and other disadvantaged groups, may require extra resources to redress the balance of their inequitable situation, caused by their marginalised position in school hierarchies. Griffiths (1998), in differentiating between equality and social justice, argues that the granting of extra resources to some groups cannot be described in terms of strict equality. One could conclude from this argument that the diversion of resources to the most disadvantaged in educational terms might be construed as inequitable. Who, though, are the victims of this inequity? One could not consider the relatively advantaged in the educational system to be subjected to inequitable treatment by these measures, which are not designed to deprive them of any benefits, but to try to create a more equitable educational experience for all. I would suggest, therefore, that initiatives such as

affirmative action, positive discrimination or a preferential option, all aimed at improving the situation of the disadvantaged, are measures with the potential to achieve social justice, and, on that basis, acceptable interventions for accommodating the needs of the least advantaged in society. Griffiths (1998), in fact, goes on to say that, while these measures may not conform to principles of equality, they can be justified under the broader frame of reference of social justice, giving the impression that she considers equality to be of less value and importance than social justice. Griffiths goes on to define social justice as including 'the good of each and also the good of all, in an acknowledgement that one depends on the other' (1998, p. 89). This definition contains an inherent implication of equality, and seems to suggest that considerations of the principle of equality are an integral part of any discourse on social justice. Therefore, my stance on this issue is that, in order to promote social justice as a framework for the treatment of marginalised groups within educational institutions, it is necessary, having granted them equality of access to the educational system, to focus also on achieving equality of participation and of outcome for these groups through diverting extra resources to them, if this is what is required in order to provide them with a greater measure of equality.

Social justice may be said to operate in an educational system that provides for its minority pupils the same opportunities that are available to its majority group. This should mean that children from minority groups would be entitled to the same learning support and resources, and would have the same access to the psychological assessments necessary to qualify for these resources, as the majority of children. Lynch (1999) states that, if disadvantaged groups are to be able to participate on equal terms, they 'must have access to the same quality and level of resources' (1999, p. 291). To deny children from minority groups, such as Traveller children, the opportunity of receiving learning support or resource teaching, on the basis that their attendance rates are low or that they may not progress to second level schooling, would appear to constitute unjust treatment of these children, as usually no conditions, other than lack of academic progress, are laid down for resourcing the needs of children from the majority group. It could well be argued that the very conditions, stated here as prohibiting factors for the granting of extra resources to

Traveller children, should in fact be arguments for providing them with as many resources as possible, so that they can obtain the maximum benefit from the educational system during their relatively short time in school. A teacher interviewed by Andereck (1992), in her ethnographic study of Irish Traveller children in a school in the United States, expresses a similar opinion:

Instead of trying to change them, just try to educate them as much as possible for the short time they are with us.

(Andereck 1992, p. 115)

The implementation of such a view would go some way towards fulfilling the obligation of social justice, through facilitating more equitable participation in the educational system by Traveller children, and would also ensure that factors, such as low attendance rates or lack of progression to second level schooling, would not result in unequal treatment by educational institutions.

Equality of outcome is a more difficult concept to assess, as it depends on what the criteria for assessing outcomes are, and who decides on the criteria. The normal criteria are usually based on academic achievements and are set by educational establishments. They are more likely to reflect the capabilities of the majority and, therefore, to discriminate against disadvantaged groups. Assessment tests that reflect the cultural experiences of the majority within the school are consequently biased against those who do not share these experiences. An example of this dichotomy is the fact that in the Traveller culture great emphasis is placed on community spirit and so Traveller children would exhibit good cooperative and collaborative skills, but in schools they are expected to conform to a system based on individual assessment. Kenny (1997) alludes to the fact that, in the Traveller culture, 'family solidarity is preferred to individual achievement' (1997, p. 53), indicating a conflict between the values of educational institutions that promote individual advancement, and the values of the home that are grounded in a strong sense of community. Boldt *et al.* (1998) also refer to the problem caused by a school culture that fosters competition and individuality, as opposed to a home environment that promotes family and community values:

A system, such as the Irish educational system, that is intrinsically competitive and individually goal-oriented will alienate and disadvantage those whose social values and norms are family and community based.

(Boldt *et al.* 1998, p. 25)

A fairer system of assessment of outcomes might result from a move away from academic criteria and the inclusion of other capacities, such as ability in acquiring life skills. Furthermore, outcomes are often determined by the length of stay in the educational system, which tends to reflect negatively on early school leavers, such as Traveller children.

In discussing equality of access, participation and outcome in the area of educational provision, I have been attempting to investigate how, in the interest of social justice, the opportunities that are available to the majority of children could be extended to minority groups also. Griffiths (1998) is concerned with the majority in society in general who are underprivileged, compared to the minority who are privileged, when she writes of:

opening up, from the few to the many, chances of personal fulfilment and the rewards, prizes and enjoyments of living in a society.

(Griffiths 1998, p. 89)

I could adapt this argument as an appropriate one for my stance by suggesting the opening up, from the many, i.e. the majority group in society, to the few, i.e. the minority groups, opportunities for self-fulfilment and self-determination. This view is describing a distributive model of social justice, which can be expressed in quantitative terms, and could be perceived as representing a visible manifestation of the distributive concept of justice, were it to be realised in practice. This view of social justice, however, is not the whole picture, for it fails to take account of attitudes, values, beliefs and opinions that can affect how one perceives justice and equality, as well as how much importance one attaches to them as guiding principles in life. A more positive and life-enhancing practice of social justice might, therefore, result from forming relationships that are embedded in equality of respect and equality of entitlement, and thus more socially just.

If one's ontological stance includes the right of all people to be treated with respect and dignity, then the next logical step is to treat all people with equal respect. A situation of mutual respect can be difficult to achieve in a society where one group is considered inferior and is subject to marginalisation. The marginalised group can be left continuously struggling to acquire the respect that should be accorded to them as a consequence of their humanity. Lynch (1999) expresses the view that a distributive model, propounded by liberal egalitarians such as Rawls (1971), and which focuses on education as product, is not sufficient for the achievement of social justice. She states that what is also required are equality of respect or status and equality of power, which are based on a view of education as process, and therefore more concerned with the quality of the educational experience. However, Lynch acknowledges the difficulty in achieving equality of respect for all pupils in the educational system:

Equality of respect is rarely shown for minority and marginalised cultures and traditions within mainstream education. There is a need to restructure the learning environment so that its hidden curriculum of pedagogic practices does not defeat those egalitarian objectives schools may uphold, either through support programmes for equality of access, participation or outcome, or through curriculum reform.

(Lynch 1999, p. 18)

I suggest that I am achieving in my practice what Lynch (1999) is recommending in theory. In enabling the voices of Traveller children to be heard in describing their experiences of discrimination and oppression, as I outline in Chapter 6, I provided the conditions for equality of respect. In this way, I was contributing to the transformation of the educational experience of Traveller children. The significance of this practice lay in the reality that I was engaging in a new form of theorising through living out the rhetoric of Lynch's (1999) recommendations.

### **3:4 Social justice and the issue of power**

Discussions on social justice need to give some consideration to the issue of power. Foucault (1980) uses the metaphor of power as capillary action to describe how power is

embedded in social relationships among people. However, it is often the reality that these power relations are not based on principles of equality, and that, instead, power appears to be hierarchically structured, with those at the top of the hierarchical structure being perceived as more powerful than those in the lower echelons of bureaucratic institutions. Problems arise when the more powerful use their power to keep the less powerful in a state of oppression and subjection, thus reducing them to a position of powerlessness. To counteract such negative effects of power, the use of power ought to be tempered with justice, so that all will feel equally empowered. In his analysis of Foucault's theories, Rabinow (1991), outlining the connection between justice and power, states

It seems to me that the idea of justice in itself is an idea which in effect has been invented and put to work in different types of societies as an instrument of a certain political and economic power or as a weapon against that power.

(Rabinow 1991, p. 6)

It would appear, then, that justice can be an important instrument in the control of power, or at least in attempts to regulate it, and as such it could be useful in operating to the advantage of those traditionally marginalised or oppressed by the use, or abuse, of power.

Issues of justice also impinge on power relationships that are based on inequality, resulting in a dominator/dominated dichotomy. Often the dominated feel powerless and unable to effect any change in the relationship. Moss (1998) describes Foucault's later conception of power as being inclusive of the possibility of resistance. This theory involves a change in ontological focus, from the subject as possessing the possibility of reacting to power, to the subject as also being capable of altering power relationships. Kenny (1997) believes that the resistance manifested by Traveller children in the educational system is a tactic used by them in the struggle to maintain their sense of identity and to alter power relations. This could indeed be true in the case of the teenage Traveller children with whom Kenny conducted her research, for in their culture the Traveller children would be regarded as adults, equal to the other adults in their community, but in the educational system they, like other children, would be seen as subordinates, resulting in a situation of conflict and, consequently, a site of resistance.

Other disadvantaged groups exhibit similar patterns of resistance against dominant forms of power and control in schools. Both Willis (1977) and Fagan (1995) found evidence of oppositional behaviour among working class children towards educational systems that perpetuated inequalities against them. In this manner, they were indicating their rejection of a system, based on middle class values, that conspired to exclude those who did not share these values.

Foucault's concern with ethical issues (Moss 1998) allowed him to recognise the importance of the freedom of individuals to make choices in exercising their capacities and powers. The emancipatory nature of this view contains the potential for autonomy and freedom that would allow for acts of resistance to dominant forms of power. Daniels and Garner (1999) articulate the difficulty in achieving a more equitable situation than a powerful/powerless relationship:

The means by which the boundaries between those who are able to exercise some control over their life, and those who cannot, reflect relations of power. It is the readjustment of these relations of power that is often so difficult – both to conceptualize and to operate. Superficial adjustments may infer power shifts and subsequent redirections of policy and practice. However, all too often observation of actual practices suggests that many adjustments assume a rhetorical position, and lack impact.

(Daniels and Garner 1999, p. 2)

I would argue, therefore, that, for an oppressed people, it is not sufficient to have the possibility of rejecting unjust forms of power; power relations need to be altered so that the oppressed will be shareholders in structures of power, rather than objects of its manifestation as domination or control. The realisation of this situation in practice, which is what occurred during the discussions on cultural issues with Traveller children in my classroom, as I outline in Chapter 6, would reflect principles of social justice and would avoid what Daniels and Garner (1999) refer to as 'systems that announce a commitment to empower, but lack the political will to ensure the rhetoric becomes reality' (1999, p. 3).

Schools are often regarded as sites for social reproduction (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977), but one could question the validity of this role, if the society being reproduced is not based on principles of social justice and equality. Reproduction policies are normally aimed at maintaining the status quo and so can stymie possibilities for change. There may occasionally be a case for preserving things as they are, in the interests of stability, but there must also be an option to alter a state of affairs that indicates an obvious need for improvement and that, by adopting a framework of social justice, could produce greater benefits for all people. Bourdieu (1977) uses the term 'habitus' to describe the transfer of culture from one generation to the next. The reproduction of culture appears to be an instrument for maintaining homogeneity and conformity, but could also have the effect of limiting an individual's potential and of placing boundaries on a person's life trajectory. Robbins (2000) believes that, while the habitus for Bourdieu embodies the attitudes that we inherit, it does not constitute a stimulus that conditions how we must behave. This interpretation allows for a more emancipatory view of Bourdieu's theory of the habitus and appears to introduce an element of choice into the situation. However, it needs to move further along the continuum towards a theory of social transformation (McNiff 2002) that would create the conditions for marginalised and oppressed people to transcend the limits of their inherited positionality, in cultural terms, and to define their cultural identity in accordance with the circumstances of their current or future experiences.

### **3:5 Conclusion**

It would seem, then, that currently the educational system in Ireland does not make adequate provision for minority groups such as Traveller children. On entering school, these children have little choice but to adapt to a different way of life, an alien cultural system and a curriculum that rarely reflects their values or beliefs. They face a constant struggle to fit in and to be accepted. They do not find representations of their own culture in the 'one size fits all' curriculum, and so their identity is not reinforced by their experiences within the educational system. Drudy and Lynch (1993), citing Ó Súilleabháin (1986), suggest that:

The essence of education is becoming, the gradual discovery of what it means to be human, the search for a personal identity, an identity which brings individual autonomy within a community structure.

(Drudy and Lynch 1993, p. 29)

This emancipatory view sees education as a continuously evolving ontological process of discovery, which allows for the formation of an individual's identity within a social structure. However, I would suggest that the educational system is in need of a major overhaul in its thinking and in its policies if this ideal is to be achieved. A good place to start might be to base future developments in education on a foundation of living social justice and equality that would give all, including marginalised groups, a sense of ownership of the process of education, an assurance that all cultures are legitimated within the school structure and a feeling that each person's identity is cherished and valued within the educational system.

In this chapter, I have outlined the significance of social justice in providing a more equitable experience of education for marginalised groups. I have discussed the situation whereby the inequalities of life outside the school are frequently found also within the educational system. I have indicated some of the initiatives that I undertook to enable Traveller children to enjoy a more positive and emancipatory educational experience. All the actions that I took were grounded in my ontological values of social justice and equality. In my next chapter, on the methodology that I employed in my research, I will demonstrate how my choice of methodology was influenced by my embodied values, which informed the regulatory principles governing the conduct of my research.

## **Section 2 Chapter 4 Methodology**

### **4:1 Introduction**

In this chapter I discuss the modes of enquiry with which I engaged in the conduct of my research. My research is an account of a self-study practitioner enquiry into my teaching practice as a Resource Teacher for Traveller children. Self-study enabled me to adopt an interrogative stance as I enquired into my professional practice as an educator. In the course of my research I have asked, and actively sought answers to, questions such as ‘How can I improve the quality of educational provision for children from the Traveller community?’, ‘How can I ensure that Traveller children’s experience of education is a positive and emancipatory one?’ and ‘How can I model my own practice as demonstrating acceptance and respect for other cultures, for other ways of knowing and of being?’ These questions are not meant to serve a rhetorical function, but are pertinent to some of the significant issues that arose during my research, and that are intimately connected to the values of social justice and equality underpinning my research. My realisation of the fact that Traveller children did not seem to be accorded equal treatment with the majority group in educational institutions, that their cultural identity did not appear to be recognised or accepted within the school system, and that their experience of education was often one of marginalisation and oppression, amounted to a denial of my values in my practice (Whitehead 1989). The methodologies that I used were commensurate with my wish to realise my embodied values of social justice and equality in my practice through transforming the Traveller children’s experience of education into a positive and life affirming one, while simultaneously achieving an improvement in my own learning. In the process, I developed a new living theory of practice, which incorporated my living epistemology of practice. I contend, therefore, that, through engaging in my research and in presenting an account of it in this thesis, I have addressed the issue raised by Somekh (2002) when she suggests that epistemology and methodology are interconnected in an action research approach:

The epistemology which underpins action research methodology is distinctive in that it rejects the notion that knowledge can be decontextualised from its context of practice.

(Somekh 2002, p. 90)

However, when the action research takes the form of a self-study, a third dimension, ontology, is included, in the form of the researcher's espoused values and commitments. In this chapter, then, I propose to demonstrate how my choice of methodology was influenced by, and had an influence on, my ontological and epistemological values, in a relationship of interdependence and interconnectedness, and how my ontological, epistemological and methodological values came to be synthesised, transformed and articulated as my living critical standards of judgement.

My primary concern, in relation to methodological issues, was to ensure that my research was conducted within the parameters of a methodology that was commensurate with the form of theory that I was aiming to generate. This form of theory, as I have explained in previous chapters, takes a living form and evolved from my educational practice as the lived reality of social justice and inclusion. As such, it differs from traditional forms of theory that are propositional in nature, and that are rooted in what Marcuse (1972) refers to as a logic of domination. My living form of theory, on the other hand, is grounded in my embodied values of justice and equality, and encourages social practices that are premised on a logic that promotes inclusion and diversity as ways of living to my values. In this context, my research could be adequately accommodated within the living theory form of action research (Whitehead and McNiff 2006). As one of the main aims of my research was the achievement of ongoing improvement in my educational practice, as well as in the quality of educational provision for Traveller children, my research could also be located within a generative transformational approach (McNiff 2002). Other characteristics of my research, such as my commitment to reflective practice and my orientation towards emancipatory principles, necessitated an engagement with the appropriate forms of action research. I will describe the various methodologies that I used and explain their significance in terms of the form of living theory that I was generating.

#### 4:2 My action research methodology

As my research consisted of an enquiry into my educational practice, with a particular emphasis on taking action that could improve that practice, it was conducted within an action research paradigm. In this context, my understanding of action research resonates with a definition of action research that Noffke (1997), citing Corey (1953), says is:

research that is undertaken by educational practitioners because they believe that by so doing they can make better decisions and engage in better action.

(Noffke 1997, p. 317)

Locating my research within the approach to action research articulated here enabled me to engage in continuous cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting, which generally characterise action research approaches. McNiff (2002) elaborates on these cycles to describe her spontaneous, self-recreating system of enquiry as ‘a systematic process of observe, describe, plan, act, reflect, evaluate, modify’ (McNiff 2002, p. 56), but stresses that she does not see the process as linear, but transformational, which allows for greater fluidity in implementing the process. The flexibility and adaptability offered by this system of enquiry were some of the factors that influenced me to engage with an action research methodology. Blaxter *et al.* (1996) recommend having an in-built flexibility in one’s research plans, and offer the following advice to researchers: ‘always be prepared to reassess what you are doing and to change direction’ (Blaxter *et al.* 1996, p. 33). In this context, I outline in Chapter 5 two instances where, having reflected on my current practice, I deemed it necessary to change my pedagogical approach. Because of the uncertainty and unpredictability attaching to teaching and learning situations, I would suggest that a prescriptive or positivist approach might be inappropriate for what can be understood as educational research, rather than education research (Whitty 2005). Elliott (1998) testifies to the complexities inherent in educational processes, due to their dynamic and fluid nature, when he states that:

learning is a dynamic and unpredictable process whose outcomes are not something the teacher can confidently predict or control. His or her responsibility is to establish the curricular and pedagogic conditions which enable pupils to generate personally significant and meaningful learning outcomes for themselves.

(Elliott 1998, p. 101)

It would seem, therefore, that what is needed for educational research is an approach that encompasses aspects such as freedom and creativity, which could lead to improvement and transformation of educational practice. I contend that an action research methodology has the flexibility and transformational capacity to satisfy these criteria, because of its commitment to change through engaging in continuous cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting. An openness to change would appear to be a prerequisite for the generation of a living theory from one's educational practice, given the complexities and contradictions inherent in human relationships. Therefore, an approach that embraces change, such as an action research paradigm, seems appropriate as a framework for my research.

Traditional forms of theory are grounded in a logic of binary divides (Whitehead and McNiff 2006), and so tend to exclude the notion of practitioner research. One can be a teacher, applying other people's theories to one's practice, or one can be a researcher, engaged in research into other people's practices and producing theories from that research. The work of the researcher and that of the practising teacher, therefore, are perceived as two separate activities, where the development of theory, usually of a propositional form, belongs in the domain of the researcher. I do not subscribe to this artificial divide between researcher and teacher, and suggest that there can be a natural progression from an original desire to improve one's educational practice, through adopting a reflective mindset, to generating living educational theories from the process. My experience of undertaking research into my own practice and of generating my living educational theory from my practice provides evidence of the feasibility of the notion of the teacher as researcher. Kincheloe (2003) appears to be arguing the case for teachers to engage in enquiries into their own practices, on the basis that their knowledge of such practices could be superior to that of outside researchers:

Researchers from a positivist background fancy that the environment of the objects they study will stay constant. We know as teachers that the learning environment of the children is constantly changing.

(Kincheloe 2003, p. 80)

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) also support the idea of the teacher as researcher, when they suggest that teachers can generate theories from their enquiries into their practices, in the following view of the teacher:

as a knower and thinker – who did not need ‘findings’ from university based researchers but more dialogue with other teachers that would generate theories grounded in practice.

(Cochran-Smith and Lytle 1999, p.15)

Whitehead (1989) suggests that living theories can emerge from reflective practice, when he states that ‘it is possible to create a living educational theory which can be directly related to practice’ (1989, p. 41). McNiff (1999) also supports the idea that researchers can generate new living theories from within their own educational practices:

One of the purposes of doing research is to generate new theory, which then needs to be tested against existing theory to check the strength of its authenticity in making claims to knowledge and understanding.

(McNiff 1999, p. 44)

It would appear, then, that through adopting an action research methodology, in which researchers can construct their own knowledge by reflecting on their actions, educational practitioners are enabled to theorise their practice, and furthermore that their theorising can take the form of their own living educational theories. An attractive feature of an action research approach for me, therefore, was the fact that theory and practice were not perceived as separate entities, but could be integrated in the research process. Dewey (1966) appears to be arguing for a unity of theory and practical experience in the following extract:

An ounce of experience is better than a ton of theory simply because it is only in experience that any theory has vital and verifiable significance. An experience, a very humble experience, is capable of generating and carrying any amount of theory (or intellectual content), but a theory apart from an experience cannot be definitely grasped even as theory.

(Dewey 1966, p. 144)

In fact, it could be argued that Dewey is claiming that theory has no value outside of its connectivity to practice. Winter (1989) also suggests that theory and practice should be regarded as complementary, rather than oppositional, phases of the change process. He makes a cogent argument for the necessity, and unity, of both entities:

It is this final argument, that practice and theory *need* each other and thus comprise mutually indispensable phases of a unified change process, which presents the strongest case for practitioner action-research – as an activity which represents both a powerful (i.e., rigorous and worthwhile) form of practical professionalism *and* a powerful (i.e., rigorous and valid) form of social inquiry.

(Winter 1989, p. 67, emphasis in original)

In agreement with the arguments of both Dewey (1966) and Winter (1989), I perceived my research to be a continuous process of the fusion of theory and practice. Having opted to undertake my research within an action research framework, I was able to integrate theory and practice in my research by theorising my practice of social justice as equality of respect for all, and my practice of inclusion as respect for diversity. In this manner, I suggest that I was moving beyond abstract theorising, and was incorporating propositional theory into my living form of theory. I discuss these theorising processes in the context of my findings in Chapter 8.

I was also attracted to an action research methodology because of its status as a value-laden approach to research. In view of the fact that the education process is generally regarded as value-laden, it seems reasonable to assume that educational research should also reflect this quality. A value-laden approach has particular relevance for my research, to the extent that my embodied values of social justice and equality underpin my research, and that these values, in turn, inform the living critical standards of judgement for evaluating the research. Carr and Kemmis (1986) appear to be arguing for a value-laden research approach:

In so far as education is a practical value-laden activity, it seems that any educational theory worthy of the name cannot rest content with providing value-

neutral theoretical accounts, but must be able to confront questions about practical educational values and goals.

(Carr and Kemmis 1986, p. 99)

In similar vein, Kincheloe (2003), in supporting the view of educational research as value-laden, highlights the consequent inappropriateness of a positivist approach thus:

Positivist research is of little help to such practitioners (who must make moral decisions about the 'right' thing to do) because it assumes that research exists only to describe and help make predictions and, of course, has no value dimensions. It is unequipped to evaluate educational purposes or to assess various strategies for improving schooling.

(Kincheloe 2003, pp. 80-1)

I would argue that the reflective aspect of an action research methodology, as well as the use of living critical standards of judgement grounded in one's ontological values, would help to overcome some of the difficulties in assessing improvement in areas of education that, according to Kincheloe, are not capable of being accommodated within a positivist approach. I would also suggest that, when writers such as Noffke (1997) and McNiff (1999) highlight the need for a moral dimension to action research, they are in fact arguing for the inclusion of a researcher's personal values, which would underpin the commitment to improvement in the research process.

My research was concerned with improving the situation of Traveller children within the educational system, and so it could be accommodated under the rubric of a moral or value-based paradigm, such as an action research approach. For the purpose of achieving my aim, I attempted to realise my values of democratic freedom, equality and social justice in my practice. A self-study action research approach is a form of research that contains within itself a commitment to social justice. Walker (2002) refers to this quality of action research, when she says:

Action research is a form of professional development which involves continuously shifting between trying to alter a social situation in ways which bring us closer to living out our democratic values, and revising what ought to be done, while simultaneously interrogating what we mean by social justice.

(Walker 2002, p. 149)

In contrast to this approach, a traditional social science methodology positions the researcher as superior to the objects of the research, namely the people on whom the research is being conducted. Similarly, an interpretive approach positions the external researcher as the 'knower', empowered to offer descriptions and explanations for other people's practices, in other words, able to theorise the practices of those who are being researched. In my research, I was deconstructing the binary divide of researcher and research subject/object, and positioning myself as the object of my enquiry, in relation to the Traveller children whose educational experiences I was hoping to influence. This approach can be seen as a more socially just methodology, as it is premised on a concept of equality of respect for all research participants. It is also an approach that enabled the fusion of my ontological and methodological commitments.

Three particular approaches, within an action research paradigm, seemed appropriate to my research: critical emancipatory theory, generative transformational forms and living theory. These approaches are interconnected in that critical forms of theory were overtaken by, and embedded within, living theory in a generative transformational relationship. This demonstrates a generative transformational capacity for transforming forms of theory as well as forms of social practices. In the next three sections of this chapter, I will explain the influence of these forms of theory on my choice of methodology for my research.

### **4:3 Critical emancipatory theory**

As one of the aims of my research was to try to transform the experience of education into a more liberating and emancipatory one for Traveller children, my research methodology incorporated elements of a critical emancipatory form of action research, as it sought to liberate those who suffer repressive and unjust practices (McKernan 1996). McKernan argues for the empowerment of both teachers and students through action research in curricular areas:

The goal is not only to emancipate practitioners but to allow such a strategy to empower students so that they are emancipated as learners.

(McKernan 1996, p. 53)

In pursuance of my wish to achieve greater empowerment of Traveller children as they attempted to define their own identities, I critiqued and encouraged them to critique, instances of institutional prejudice and discrimination encountered by them in the school situation, which forms the subject matter of Chapter 6. This methodological approach coincides with the emancipatory action research model identified by Leitch and Day (2000) who, citing Grundy (1982), describe the purpose of this type of research as:

the emancipation of participants in the action from the dictates of compulsions of tradition, precedent, habit, coercion as well as from self-deception.

(Leitch and Day 2000, p. 184)

As a further measure aimed at emancipatory practice, I attempted to confront 'the oppression inherent in dominant, socially and historically embedded ideologies' (Leitch and Day 2000, p. 185). The implication of the use of these methodologies in my research was that Traveller children should no longer be regarded as second-class citizens, socially and intellectually inferior to the dominant majority within the schooling system. Instead, they should be liberated from their marginalised position and given equal consideration with settled children.

My desire for equality of treatment for Traveller children, and for equality of participation, includes enabling the voices of marginalised people to be heard in educational settings. To deny other people the right to speak or act for themselves, or to attempt to speak or act for them, could be interpreted as a denial of their liberty. Berlin (1969) denounces such a paternalistic approach:

But to manipulate men [sic], to propel them towards goals which you – social reformer – see, but they may not, is to deny their human essence, to treat them as objects without wills of their own, and therefore to degrade them.

(Berlin 1969, p. 137)

Through the inclusion of elements of a critical emancipatory paradigm in my research methodologies, therefore, it was my intention to enable Traveller children to speak for themselves, and to articulate their opinions and concerns around their experiences of discrimination by the majority group in society. They are frequently denied the opportunity of doing so through an educational system that does not recognise or accept their separate cultural identity. Though loath to adopt a stance that might appear to be prescriptive, through suggesting, rather than asking, what people want, and that could seem to be in conflict with my value of equality of respect for all, nevertheless, I subscribe to the emancipatory and life-affirming ethos in Berlin's view of what oppressed people need:

What they want, as often as not, is simply recognition (of their class or nation, or colour, or race) as an independent source of human activity, as an entity with a will of its own, intending to act in accordance with it (whether it is good or legitimate, or not) and not to be ruled, educated, guided, with however light a hand, as being not quite fully human, and therefore not quite fully free.

(Berlin 1969, p. 156)

My rationale for agreeing with Berlin's ideas is that they recognise the right of all human beings to freedom of choice in all the important spheres of life, and they are located within a framework of equality of respect for all. A further justification lay in the fact that, in my practice of working with Traveller children, I avoided any element of coercion or prescription, through enabling the children to express their own opinions and to give voice to their experiences of oppression and discrimination. The evidence of this particular stance is provided in Chapter 6, in which Traveller children recount their experiences of prejudice and discrimination.

#### **4:4 Generative transformational approach**

In the course of my research I have tried to ensure that Traveller children were given equal educational opportunities with the dominant majority within the educational system. This involved endeavouring to ensure that factors such as their separate cultural identity, or their irregular school attendance, were not used as symbolic forms to deny them access to resources such as the services of the learning support or resource teachers.

In the process of trying to bring about an improvement in the educational opportunities of Traveller children, I have generated my own living theory of how a more inclusive and democratic practice of education can have a transformative effect on their lives, as I outline in my research findings in Chapter 8. Walker (2002), drawing on the theories of Richardson (1990), suggests that endeavours that lead to a reduction in inequality and injustice may be described as transformative:

Transformation involves making our societies less unequal and less unjust, it involves transformation of individuals in their social worlds 'such that they have the energy and the expertise to build and defend the structures and procedures of justice'.

(Walker 2002, p. 157)

As a result of the initiatives, which were grounded in my values of social justice and equality, that I undertook in the course of my research, the Traveller children's experience of education has changed from an oppressive and marginalising one to a life-enhancing and more positive one, as I explain in my narration of these initiatives in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. I suggest, therefore, that this aspect of my research is in keeping with a generative transformational approach as outlined by McNiff (2002):

A theory which is interesting and has potential for developing new forms of understanding cannot be static; it has to be developmental, capable of turning into new forms which are already latent within the present form. The theory itself has to demonstrate its own capacity for growth in life-enhancing directions – in one sense, therefore, this has to be a theory which is inherently educational.

(McNiff 2002, p. 55)

In putting forward my theory of my educational practice as inclusionary and transformational, I contend that I have not accepted a view of education as a means of maintaining the status quo, or of being static and passive, which Kincheloe (2003) perceives as characteristics of a positivistic paradigm. Instead, I propose a view of the educational system as being a vehicle for social change, as being in a constant state of flux and as evolving and developing to meet the needs of pupils. I suggest that such a model of education is necessary if education is to have a function as a means of transformation in the lives of the most disadvantaged groups in society.

#### **4:5 Living educational theory**

My focus on effecting an improvement in my practice, together with my aim of generating my own educational theory from my practice, meant that my research could be accommodated within the living educational theory form of action research espoused by Whitehead (1989). The questions that I have formulated for the purpose of my research are similar in form to those suggested by Whitehead as the basis for his living theory form of enquiry: How do I improve my practice? How do I live out my values in my practice? The articulation of such questions suggests a desire to achieve improvement in one's practice, as well as an intention to live in relation to the realisation of one's espoused values in that practice. The requirement to live according to one's values suggests that this particular form of action research has a moral dimension to it.

Whitehead (2000) explains his inclusion of 'I' in his educational enquiries as follows:

The inclusion of 'I' as a living contradiction in educational enquiries can lead to the creation of research methodologies which are distinctively 'educational' and cannot be reduced to social science methodologies.

(Whitehead 2000, p. 91)

This explanation resonates with my particular epistemology of practice, which includes the elements summarised in these three statements:

1. I experience myself as a living contradiction when my efforts to achieve equality of treatment for Traveller children, in fulfilment of my commitment to my value of social justice, are frustrated in my practice.
2. My research is concerned with improvement in a number of areas, for example, in the educational provision for Traveller children, in my practice as an educator and in my learning through the process of engaging in my research.
3. My concern with enabling improvement necessitates continuous cycles of reflection and action, without any intention to produce final answers, but rather to generate a living theory of my practice, and so my research is more easily

accommodated within an educational research paradigm, suggested by Whitehead (2000), than within traditional social science methodologies.

In addition to the explanation that I have quoted from Whitehead (2000) for the inclusion of the 'I' in educational enquiries, I wish to add a further dimension to my use of the 'I' in forming the questions around my research. In placing the 'I' at the centre of my research, I wish to explain how I hold myself accountable for the whole of my research process, including accepting responsibility for the articulation of my initial concerns around the issue of Traveller education, for the progress of the various stages of the research, such as the implementation of new initiatives and the data gathering, and for the articulation and dissemination of the findings, as well as for the indication of the significance of the research.

I also take responsibility for the enhancement in my learning, in terms of both my personal and professional development that occurred during the course of the research. The learning resulting from the process of achieving improvement through research can lead to the production of new knowledge, which can enable the researcher to make a claim to knowledge. As I recount the narrative of my research in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, I will outline how I achieved an improvement in my practice and in my understanding of my practice, as well as in the quality of educational provision for Traveller children, through the process of living out my values as I engaged with that practice. I will also demonstrate how this process enabled me to generate my own living educational theory from my practice, which Whitehead (2000) suggests can result from the positioning of the 'I' as an essential component of educational research:

The inclusion of 'I' in explanations for an individual's professional learning can lead to the creation of 'living' educational theories which can be related directly to an individual teacher's educative influence with his or her students.

(Whitehead 2000, p. 91)

In choosing to locate my research within a living educational form of theory, then, I was opting to create my own living theory that evolved from the educative relationships that I

formed with Traveller pupils, as I sought to influence their educational experiences towards greater levels of participatory and emancipatory action.

#### **4:6 Practitioner research**

The methodologies that I chose to use in my research were consistent with both the values base of the research and the research aims, as I have explained above. They were also commensurate with the form of living educational theory that I was generating from my practice. However, other factors also impinged on my choice of methodology. For example, the fact that I was researching my own practice, with a view to effecting improvement in it, meant that a positivist or empiricist approach, where the researcher is an external observer and carrying out research on others in an objective manner, would not suit the purpose of my research. In this context, I have been influenced by Stenhouse's (1975) distinction between a process model of curriculum, which views the teacher as a practitioner researcher, and an objectives model, which is based on a logic of means/ends. In undertaking my research, I did not set out with a hypothesis that I would aim to accept or reject with scientific certitude, but to engage in an enquiry into a practice in which I was an active participant. In other words, I perceived myself to be a practitioner researcher, seeking to improve the situation in which I was immersed. Leonard (2000), in what appears to be an argument for a merging of the traditionally separate spheres of practitioner and researcher, refers to the benefits of such a merger when he raises the issue of whether:

if practitioners were to be regarded as researchers and researchers came to be regarded as practitioners, their relationships might generate positive power-laden practices which would contribute to the educational development of all participants.

(Leonard 2000, p. 8)

My research as a practitioner, then, could be construed as a personal commitment, not simply to change for its own sake, but to change leading to improvement for self and for other participants in my educational practice. In this context, I could fit the description of an action researcher, as described by McNiff (1999):

Action researchers acknowledge that they are undertaking their research with the aim of improving the quality of life for themselves and others, and that their research will inevitably involve others in a variety of ways: as participants in the research, as validators of its findings, as new researchers who will carry the research forward, and so on.

(McNiff 1999, p. 49)

In similar vein, Bell (1993) makes the point that, in research undertaken by educators, the emphasis should be on greater understanding and improvement of practice. Bell states that practitioner research is:

an approach which has proved to be particularly attractive to educators because of its practical, problem-solving emphasis, because practitioners carry out the research and because the research is directed towards greater understanding and improvement of practice over a period of time.

(Bell 1993, pp. 7-8)

As the features of practitioner research outlined here by Bell (1993) were constitutive of the explicit aims of my research in relation to improvement in my educational practice and in my understanding of my practice, it seemed reasonable to conduct my research within this paradigm. In attempting to achieve my research aims of seeking to improve the quality of educational provision for Traveller children, as well as simultaneously trying to improve my own educational practice, I reached a greater understanding of my practice and of the lifestyle and culture of the Traveller community. I suggest, therefore, that there is merit in Hammersley and Atkinson's (1983) statement that:

as participant observers we can learn the culture or subculture of the people we are studying. We can come to interpret the world in the same way as they do.

(Hammersley and Atkinson 1983, p. 7)

Though I would have preferred if Hammersley and Atkinson had used the phrase 'the people *with whom* we are studying', and I would not consider myself to be a 'participant observer', which would suggest an interpretive, rather than a self-study, methodology, nevertheless, I suggest that the concept elucidated here has relevance for my research. My wish to see Traveller culture valued in educational institutions has led to my acquiring an in-depth knowledge, understanding and appreciation of that culture (see

Chapter 2). I can empathise with the Traveller way of being in the world, which is often constitutive of a sense of internalised oppression, resulting from many years of experiencing the negation of their culture by the dominant majority in society. I have come to this understanding, not simply through observation, but also through critical engagement in cycles of planning, acting and reflecting as a practitioner researcher.

#### **4:7 Reflective practice**

In the process of carrying out my research, I undertook reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, as recommended by Schön (1983), for the purpose of improving practice, and documented my reflections in my reflective diary. This practice is a feature of self-study educational research that I judged to be appropriate for the type of research with which I wished to engage. Habermas (1978) outlines some of the benefits of the reflective process:

Self-reflection is at once intuition and emancipation, comprehension and liberation from dogmatic dependence. Only the ego that apprehends itself in intellectual intuition as the self-positing subject obtains autonomy.

(Habermas 1978, p. 208)

Critical reflection on one's actions enables the assessment of those actions, in terms of their effectiveness in achieving the aims of the research. It can also prove to be a useful medium for determining the learning and the outcomes resulting from the research. I agree with Elliott's (1991) statement that:

improving practice, when viewed as the realisation of the values which define its ends into concrete forms of action, necessarily involves a continuing process of reflection on the part of practitioners.

(Elliott 1991, p. 50)

Carr and Kemmis (1986) consider self-reflective enquiry by practitioners as leading to improvement in their practices, as well as in their understandings of their practices. They articulate their interpretation of reflective practice as follows:

Action research is simply a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices and the situations in which the practices are carried out.

(Carr and Kemmis 1986, p. 162)

It would appear, therefore, that any attempt to improve practice should be grounded in a process of constant reflection on that practice, if there is to be a successful outcome in terms of achieving improvement as specified in the stated aims of the research.

Ghaye and Ghaye (1998) indicate the significance of the reflective process to the achievement of improvement in educational practice:

Critical reflection on practice is essentially where teachers acquire a language, a set of arguments, skilfulness and power to transform the existing order of things so as to improve the quality of children's educational experiences.

(Ghaye and Ghaye 1998, p. 18)

I concur with Ghaye and Ghaye in their view of the transformative potential of critical reflection on practice to result in an improvement in that practice. In support of this view, I wish to cite an incident outlined in Chapter 5, where my reflection on my practice of encouraging a Traveller child to use Standard English, created in me an awareness that this was an oppressive act, denying the validity and legitimacy of her cultural practices in relation to her mode of speech. My reflection enabled me to change my practice to one of accepting and legitimating the Traveller child's cultural speech patterns, thus transforming her educational experience into a more positive and life-enhancing one, and also changing my practice to a more emancipatory and creative one. Ghaye and Ghaye (1998) go on to connect this form of rigorous critical reflection to Whitehead's (1993) living theory form of research:

Through systematic and rigorous kinds of reflection-on-practice teachers are able to construct meaningful theories-of-action which are in a 'living' form (Whitehead, 1993). They are living in the sense that they are made up of reflective conversation and actual teaching episodes, created through retrospective thinking about practice and public validation of the accounts of it.

(Ghaye and Ghaye 1998, p. 18)

#### **4:8 Influence of methodology on criteria and standards of judgement**

Because my research consisted of a self-study of my particular educational practice, it did not appear that the normative criteria used to assess other forms of research could be applied to my form of qualitative research. The main criteria usually used to judge traditional types of research are generalisability and replicability. As my research is concerned with my learning through the process of engaging in reflection on my educational practice, it would not make sense to try to generalise from this particular situation. Neither would my research findings be replicable in other situations, which would each have their own particular circumstances as determinants in reaching conclusions. This is not to say that other practitioners engaged in research in similar practices could not benefit from my research, or could not be influenced by the learning outcomes resulting from my research process. Lomax (1994) shares my sense of dissatisfaction with the use of traditional criteria for judging action research, and also suggests that the findings may have the potential for wider significance:

Generalisation in the sense that an experiment replicated in exactly the same controlled conditions will have the same results a second time round seems a nonsensical construct in the hurly burly of social interaction. However, I do believe it important that action research projects have an application elsewhere, and that action researchers are able to communicate their insights to others with a useful result.

(Lomax 1994, p. 118)

Having decided, therefore, that the traditional criteria were inappropriate for assessing educational action research, it became necessary to propose alternative means of assessment.

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) argue that 'the standard academic criteria for validity are meaningless for transformative action research' (1999, p. 18) and suggest that there should be alternative ways to construct criteria for validity. Winter (2002) makes the point that arguments have been made for the use of criteria evolving from the research in order to judge its quality:

some proponents of action research emphasise that the uniqueness of each project means that each report must suggest its own criteria for judgement (see Clarke *et al.* 1993), or that the value of the work resides in the practice improvements or enhanced group morale it engenders in the particular context during the time-span of the project (Lomax 1994).

(Winter 2002, p. 145)

Winter (2002) goes on to suggest that ‘persuasiveness’ or ‘authenticity’ might be used as criteria to judge the value of action research reports, stating that:

a research report has ‘authenticity’ (epistemological validity and cultural authority) insofar as it gives direct expression to the ‘genuine voice’, which ‘really belongs to’ those whose life-worlds are being described.

(Winter 2002, p. 146)

Lomax (1994) also includes authenticity as a criterion for judging action research:

In terms of criteria for judging action research it seems that the transparency of the research process and the authenticity of the research claims are key criteria.

(Lomax 1994, p. 119)

As my research account explains, and provides data for, my efforts to enable the voices of Traveller children to be heard in educational settings, I suggest that my research report meets the criterion of authenticity as explicated by Winter (2002).

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) reject the idea that traditional criteria should be used in judging their ‘narrative inquiry’ form of action research, in relation to which they say:

Like other qualitative methods, narrative relies on criteria other than validity, reliability, and generalisability. It is important not to squeeze the language of narrative criteria into a language created for other forms of research.

(Connelly and Clandinin 1990, p. 7)

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) go on to state that ‘each inquirer must search for, and defend, the criteria that best apply to his or her work’ (*ibid.*). While agreeing with the concept outlined here, nevertheless, I have been influenced in particular by Whitehead’s

(2000) idea that living standards of judgement, grounded in a researcher's ontological values, can be used for assessing a living educational theory form of action research. These standards of judgement differ from traditional criteria, in that they are not externally imposed but emerge from the research process. They are directly linked to the embodied values of the researcher, and these values also underpin the research. There appears, therefore, to be a greater sense of coherence to research that displays an overt connection between the ontological values of the researcher and the living critical standards of judgement used in assessing the research. In articulating the standards of judgement for evaluating my research, I used my core values of social justice and equality. These standards of judgement are outlined in Chapter 1.

#### **4:9 Requirement of equality in my methodology**

In seeking to promote equality of participation, through enabling the voices of marginalised groups to be heard, I wished to create a sense of the equal validity of the opinions of the marginalised. I do not subscribe to a view that prioritises some voices over others, as, for example, in a positivist research paradigm, where the voice of the researcher is frequently granted greater legitimacy than the voices of other participants. This approach can be oppressive, and does not appear to be premised on principles of social justice, which, I would argue, should confer equal recognition on all research participants, rather than privileging the perspective of the dominant voice. Polanyi (1958) indicates the conflictual nature of inequality of participation:

How can we claim to arrive at a responsible judgment with universal intent, if the conceptual framework in which we operate is borrowed from the local culture and the motives are mixed up with the forces holding on to social privilege?

(Polanyi 1958, p. 322)

I chose, therefore, not to locate my research within a positivist research framework that operates out of the ontological and epistemological assumptions that some people are superior to others, and can speak on behalf of others. Instead, I chose to adopt an action research methodology that would enable me to claim originality and to exercise my personal judgement with universal intent. In establishing my right, as a thinking person,

to make my own decisions, I am also accepting responsibility, in accordance with my values of social justice and equality, for encouraging the children whom I teach to exercise the same right. With regard to granting equal recognition to others, Polanyi (1958) states:

Having decided that I must understand the world from my own point of view, as a person claiming originality and exercising his personal judgment responsibly with universal intent, I must now develop a conceptual framework which both recognises the existence of other such persons and envisages the fact that they have come into existence by evolution from primordial inanimate beginnings.

(Polanyi 1958, p. 327)

I suggest that the conceptual frameworks, which would provide for others the freedom of thought and speech that I claim for myself, need to be grounded in my ontological values of justice and equality. In this context, I would be able to live in the direction of my embodied values, and would also be able to fulfil my ontological and epistemological commitments, both to myself and to my pupils.

#### **4:10 Research design**

When I began my research, I had intended involving a group of six Traveller children in the process. However, I soon realised that I could not confine my enquiry to this group exclusively. My values around inclusiveness and the importance of a sense of community, as well as the fact that I wished to improve the quality of educational provision for all Traveller children, compelled me to rethink my original plan and to expand the focus of my research to include all fourteen children for whom I was Resource Teacher. This decision was justified by the fact that some of the children, whom I had not initially included, provided valuable insights that enhanced my research. I was also concerned that, since I wished to improve my practice, this improvement should be reflected in the whole of that practice, rather than in a specific part of it. I was conscious of the advice of research theorists regarding the danger of undertaking too large-scale a project. However, I felt that two aspects of my particular situation would provide a safeguard against this risk. Firstly, the children came to me in small groups, which were eminently manageable from a research point of view, and secondly, I was

focusing on specific areas for my research, such as the children's experiences of discrimination and their attitudes to education, which would limit the scope of the research somewhat. The group, then, consisted for the most part of fourteen children, though not the same fourteen throughout the research. In the second year one child moved on to secondary school and one child joined the group from the infant school, but she moved to England after two months, thus reducing the group to thirteen for the remainder of that year. In the third year four children left, three to go to secondary school and the fourth said she was going to attend a second level school in the North of Ireland, though I have no evidence that she did. Five children moved up from the infant school, bringing the number in the group once more to fourteen.

In 2001, when I first decided that my work with Traveller children was to form the nucleus of my research, I began to collect data from my practice. Through observation and through dialogue with the children, I noted instances of unjust or inequitable treatment of Traveller children and, in an effort to live out my values of justice and equality in my practice, encouraged them to resist such treatment. I also tried to promote a more positive and emancipatory model of education for the Traveller children through enabling them to have a sense of ownership of their own educational process, as well as a sense of belonging in the educational system. I continued with these initiatives for a period of three years. This does not mean that I then discontinued my efforts on behalf of Traveller children, merely that I stopped collecting data for my research, as I had set myself a three-year time frame for data collection. Throughout this time I kept a reflective diary in which I documented the progress of my research, as well as my thoughts and reflections on it. Thus, in the course of my data collecting I was able to engage in cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting as recommended by Carr and Kemmis (1986) and McNiff (2002). I also took notes of conversations with, for example, Traveller parents and teaching colleagues, which I describe as 'field notes' throughout my research account.

To ensure manageability and coherence for my research, I decided to divide it into three separate, but overlapping, contemporaneous phases. My data, therefore, was collected and analysed in terms of three significant aspects of my research:

1. The provision of learning support to Traveller children with learning difficulties.
2. The exploration of Traveller children's experiences of prejudice and discrimination.
3. An after school initiative aimed at encouraging Traveller children to transfer to second level schooling.

In Chapter 5, I describe how, in my work of providing learning support to some of the Traveller children, I experienced my values being denied in my practice, through failing to demonstrate equality of respect for the cultural norms and practices of the Traveller community. I recount how I became aware, through the process of reflection, of the tension resulting from this denial of my values, and how I subsequently changed my practice to one that recognised and accepted diversity of cultures. The learning resulting from this episode contributed to the development of my claim to knowledge, based on my living theory of practice as the recognition and acceptance of diversity. Chapter 6 documents the provision of a space within my classroom for Traveller children to explore cultural issues. This initiative raised awareness of the injustice inherent in a system that does not grant equal recognition to all cultures, and enabled the theorising of my practice as a location of the representation of equality of respect for all. The final chapter of my data collecting, Chapter 7, provided the opportunity for integrating Traveller and settled children in an ethos of equality and inclusion, without reducing either group to the status of a minority or marginalised position. Through this process, I was able to formulate my living theory of the practice of inclusion as the acceptance of diversity through equality of respect for all people.

#### **4:11 Research participants**

My research is based on my work with Traveller children, whom I wished to consider as equal participants with me in the research process, and not as objects of my research, and

so I sought a form of research that would accommodate my stance on this. Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) describe the features of an action research approach, which appears to be commensurate with my requirements:

It is not research done on other people. Action research is research by particular people on their own work, to help them improve what they do, including how they work with and for others. It does not treat people as objects for research but encourages people to work together as knowing subjects and agents of change and improvement.

(Kemmis and McTaggart 1988, p. 22)

This quotation aptly describes the type of equitable and respectful ethos that I hoped would form the framework for my research. In order to avoid the negative effects of a power-based relationship, which could result from doing research 'on' my pupils, I chose instead to undertake my research 'with' my pupils, an approach that would regard them as co-researchers.

I wished to consider the Traveller children as active agents and empowered participants during the course of my research, a wish that I claim to have fulfilled through enabling the children to articulate and critique their experiences of discrimination in the educational system. I present the data that provides evidence of this claim in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. This concept of active agency on the part of children seems to be what Hopkins (1993) is referring to when he says:

It is entirely within the spirit of classroom research that pupils be involved in the process of improving the teaching and learning situation in their classrooms.

(Hopkins 1993, p. 174)

I sought to conduct my research in a collaborative manner, in a spirit of cooperation and partnership. Many theorists, for example Hitchcock and Hughes (1995), Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) and McNiff (2002) regard collaboration among participants as an essential feature of practitioner-based research. My interpretation and implementation of a collaborative approach to my research was reflected in the recognition of my pupils as co-researchers. I sought to establish with all research participants a relationship based on

mutual respect and reciprocity, in fulfilment of my commitment to values of social justice and equality.

Other research participants included colleagues who were involved in the education of Traveller children. Among these were two mainstream class teachers, whom I had influenced to adopt more culturally appropriate teaching methodologies in their educational provision for one particular Traveller child, as I outline in my findings in Chapter 8. Another colleague, who provided resource teaching for two Traveller children, participated through expressing her view of the progress made in the area of spelling by the two children, which forms part of my data collection in Chapter 5. The members of a validation group, who provided critical feedback on different aspects of my research, could also be numbered among the participants, and their contributions are included in Chapter 8. A critical friend, with whom I discussed some of the issues arising from my research, was a valuable source of critique, particularly in relation to the manner in which she challenged my initial explanation of my theory of inclusion, enabling me to represent my theory in a more intelligible manner. I present an account of this event in Chapter 8. The final participant was Winnie McDonagh, education officer with Traveller Education Support Options (TESO), with whom I collaborated in establishing an after school group, which was the nucleus for the third phase of my data collection, and which played a significant role in enabling me to develop my theory of inclusionary practice. The details concerning the after school group, including the manner of its transformation from a Traveller group to an integrated, inclusive group, are outlined in Chapter 7.

Much of my data is contained in my research diary, in which I recorded the main features of the research, as well as my reflections during the course of the research process. Other incidents, however, such as conversations with colleagues in the staffroom, informal discussions with Traveller parents, and a telephone conversation with Martin Collins, Assistant Director of Pavee Point Travellers' Centre, were written down as soon as possible after the event. These are referred to in the text as field notes. I tape-recorded a conversation with Traveller children on their experiences of discrimination, and video-taped a role play and ensuing discussion on Traveller culture, both of which I transcribed

for the purpose of presenting data (Appendices A and B). All of these sources of data are retained in, and can be accessed from, my research archive.

#### **4:12 Ethical considerations**

Because my research involved school children, I attached great importance to ensuring that the research was conducted within stringent ethical parameters. Besides receiving written permission from my school principal for my research, I also sought and obtained written permission from the children's parents, as well as from the children themselves (Appendices C, D and E). These written permissions have been retained in my research archive. I undertook to observe principles of anonymity and confidentiality in all aspects of my research, as recommended by Robson (1993). In accordance with this undertaking, I have used initials rather than the children's names in my account of my research. I also undertook to use any data collected only for the purpose of this research, in agreement with the guidelines suggested by Blaxter *et al.* (1996), at the end of which the data will be disposed of in a responsible manner. In compliance with ethical considerations, I acknowledged the right of participants to withdraw from the research at any stage, should they wish to do so. Prior to the commencement of my research, I drew up an ethical statement, outlining the principles governing the conduct of the research, for the purpose of safeguarding the rights of all participants, as well as my right to ownership of the research. A copy of this ethical statement is available in Appendix F.

Throughout the research I monitored my actions to ensure that the ethical standards, to which I had subscribed, were maintained. One ethical issue, which surfaced during the course of my research, occurred during the video-taping of a discussion with a group of Traveller children, which I describe in Chapter 6. One child had no objection to participating in the discussion, but was emphatic that she did not want her face to be shown on camera, and so I ensured that her wishes were complied with and that her face was not visible on the video-tape. My action in this instance was commensurate with my ontological commitment to equality of respect for all.

Kincheloe (2003) suggests that a positivist approach to research does not concern itself with ethical considerations:

By focusing on 'what is' rather than 'what should be', positivism ignores ethics as a category of research. A culture of positivism ignores how humans ought to live with one another and tacitly supports forms of domination, hierarchy and control.  
(Kincheloe 2003, pp. 76-7)

As my research attempted to transform 'what is' into 'what should be' through deconstructing relations of domination, hierarchy and control, it is inconceivable that this could be achieved through a positivist approach as described by Kincheloe. In order, therefore, to be able to live out my values of justice and equality in my practice, and to enable me to ensure that ethical principles formed a basis for, and permeated the conduct of, the research, I chose to locate my research within Whitehead's (1989) living educational theory form of action research.

#### **4:13 Research location**

The research took place mainly within my classroom. This was the location of my practice of working with Traveller children. For some of the children I provided learning support in my classroom and sought culturally appropriate ways of doing so. With other children I had conversations on issues such as their experiences of discrimination or their views on education, some of which I audiotaped or videotaped in my classroom. However, in some of our discussions the children referred to incidents that took place elsewhere, for example in their mainstream classrooms or in the schoolyard. As these areas constituted some of the main sites of discrimination as experienced by Traveller children, they necessarily formed part of the research location. Towards the end of the second year of data gathering, I was asked by Winnie McDonagh from TESO to collaborate with her in setting up an after school group for fifth and sixth class Traveller children. The after school group took place in a classroom in the school building. This setting also proved to be a source of valuable data and significant insights for my research. The three separate, but interconnected, areas of the research, therefore, occurred within the location of the school in which I work.

#### **4:14 Conclusion**

I have aimed to show, in my discussion of the various methodological issues with which I have engaged in this chapter, that I did not consider that my research could be contained within the parameters of a single methodology. As I have explained in the Introduction, my research was multidimensional, and such complexity required a multiplicity of approaches to accommodate all aspects of the research. I suggest that the diversity in methodology was commensurate with my ontological commitment to the concept of diversity in my educational practice. To summarise my methodology, then, my research was conducted within an action research paradigm, in particular within a living educational theory approach, while also incorporating aspects of critical emancipatory theory and generative transformational theory. In the course of the research, I engaged in reflective practice as an aspect of a self-study practitioner approach. The wide spectrum of the diverse methodologies within which my research was located contributed to both my personal and professional development as a consequence of undertaking my research.

The developmental nature of my research that I have outlined in this chapter was commensurate with my epistemological and ontological stances. My ideological concept that knowledge is not static but can be created and communicated through a process of dialogue was realised through the quality of the conversations in my classroom with the Traveller children, in which we constructed a view of education as a positive and culturally enhancing experience. In this context, I contend that I have demonstrated a unity of ontological, methodological and epistemological concepts as I engaged in the research process. My values around social justice and equality resulted in enabling the Traveller children to articulate their experiences of injustice and in ensuring that our relationship was based on mutual respect and reciprocity. In holding myself accountable for my practice, I used criteria such as my deep commitment to my espoused values, my openness to change, and my reliance on trust as a basis for my interpersonal relationships with my pupils. I would hope that these criteria would be understood as the grounds for the emergence of living standards of judgement for the evaluation of my research. In the next three chapters, as I recount the narratives of the three interconnected aspects of my

research, I propose to provide the data to indicate the location of the evidence for my claims to knowledge in the process of theorising my educational practice.

