

Section 3 Chapter 5 Data Collection and Analysis

Phase one: My role in providing learning support

5:1 Introduction

My role as a Resource Teacher for Travellers (RTT) could be interpreted as having a dual mandate. On the one hand, I was providing learning support for the Traveller children who presented with learning difficulties. In conjunction with this role, I also provided the space and opportunity for Traveller children to explore and critique issues of significance to their cultural identity. Both contexts were equally important dimensions of my research and both were valuable sources of data. In the interests of clarity, I have decided to treat both aspects of my work as separate entities for the purpose of describing and analysing my data. Towards the end of the second year of my research, I was invited by Winnie McDonagh, from Traveller Education and Support Options (TESO), to collaborate with her in organising an after school group for Traveller children. This added another dimension to my research, to the extent of providing further valuable data in relation to the social, cultural and educational needs of Traveller children. Explaining and interpreting this data, in addition to the two sources already outlined, necessitated the creation of a third section in relation to my data collection and analysis. I intend, therefore, to discuss each of these three areas as separate entities in the next three chapters under the following headings:

1. My role in providing learning support.
2. Exploring cultural issues.
3. The after school group.

5:2 My role in providing learning support

Learning support has been a vital component of educational provision for Traveller children for a number of years. It was necessary for two reasons: firstly, many Traveller children had a delayed entry to primary schools, and so needed extra help if they were to be placed in age-appropriate classes, and secondly, Traveller children had high rates of absenteeism, and therefore needed additional help in coping with schoolwork. In order to

alleviate these problems, the Department of Education decided to appoint RTTs to schools that had a minimum of fourteen Traveller children enrolled. The Traveller children would have this extra resource, as well as their entitlement to the usual learning support or resource teaching available to all students. At present, Traveller children tend to begin school at four years of age, which corresponds to the starting time for other children, but the tendency towards absenteeism, for cultural reasons such as attendance at weddings and funerals, continues to exist. For this reason, RTTs continue to provide a valuable service for Traveller children in schools, through helping them to fill the gaps in their education resulting from such absences. From a personal perspective, I view the position of RTT as having a major role to play in encouraging Traveller children to remain in the educational system, in fulfilment of my commitment to lifelong learning (Field 2000) and in accordance with my values of social justice and equality.

The issue of the provision of learning support to children from the Traveller community was a cause of concern to me even prior to taking up the position of RTT. My value of social justice compelled a view that all children should have access to optimum educational resources. The 'Report on The National Education Convention' (Coolahan 1994) suggests that Traveller children are included in entitlement to such resources:

It was suggested that the approach to the education of Travellers should be located within the broader context of respect for human rights. This would incorporate an emphasis on the right of Travellers to access to all levels of the educational system, to consultation, to choice of school as they feel appropriate, and to significantly improved participation rates at all levels.

(Coolahan 1994, pp. 126-7)

My stance on this issue engendered in me a commitment to try to ensure that Traveller children were included in the distribution of educational resources. To exclude them from this process was to deny them an educational right to which, I argued, they had a legitimate entitlement. To illustrate the general lack of educational provision for Traveller children, I wish to refer to an incident that I have outlined in Chapter 2 as one of the reasons that caused me to undertake my research. The incident occurred before I took up the position of RTT, when I was a mainstream class teacher. I had in my class a Traveller

child who had major learning difficulties but was not receiving either learning support or resource teaching. The injustice of this situation was at variance with my value around social justice for all and so I sought to obtain for this child the resources to which she was entitled. The only way in which she could have full access to the necessary resources was through a psychological assessment. However, when the psychologist visited the school to undertake assessments, I was informed that, as there were three other children ahead of her on the list for assessment, and as the psychologist would only assess three children, the Traveller child would not be assessed. I argued that, as the Traveller child had only one year left in the school and as her learning difficulties were greater than those of the other three children, it was imperative that she be assessed, but to no avail. It was counter argued that, as her attendance was irregular and as she probably would not go on to second level schooling, it would be a waste of time and resources having her assessed or allocating her a place in a special class.

I did not accept these arguments as legitimate for a number of reasons. In the first place, I considered that there was a possibility that the child's attendance might have improved if her experience of schooling could have been transformed to a more positive one, through having her needs met in the educational system, and if she could have experienced some measure of success while in school, instead of being labelled a failure and thus being subjected to oppressive and dehumanising practices. Secondly, I have always operated out of an optimistic and life-enhancing stance that considered all my pupils as potential candidates for second level schooling, based on my value around lifelong education, and I hold the same expectations for Traveller children as for other pupils. According to the 'Report on the National Education Convention' (Coolahan 1994), one of the negative aspects of schooling, from a Traveller perspective, is that 'teacher expectations of Traveller children are low, with consequent effects on achievement' (1994, p. 200). It is important, therefore, to have high expectations of pupils, particularly in view of Finnan and Levin's (2000) statement that:

student expectations for their own school experience are shaped both by the explicit and subtle messages that they receive from adult members of the school community.

(Finnan and Levin 2000, p. 91)

Similarly, Dweck (1986) states that students' performances tend to fall in line with teachers' expectations. I suggest, therefore, that it is imperative for teachers to operate out of a logic of expectation that their pupils will all reach their educational potential and will remain in the educational system for as long as possible. My ideology of optimism in this context was justified by the fact that the Traveller child did enrol in a secondary school and remained there for a year and a half. A question that must necessarily remain unanswered is, would she have remained in second level education for a longer period of time, if she had been granted a psychological assessment, and if learning supports had been put in place for her in primary school?

My experience in this incident was an example of my values being denied in my practice. My values of social justice and equality required me to ensure equality of respect and equality of entitlement for all pupils. However, the institutional bureaucracy operational in the school meant that my values could not be translated into practice. In this context, I experienced myself as a 'living contradiction' (Whitehead 1993). I did not think it advisable or productive, from an educational perspective, to inhabit such a paradoxical location continuously. A change was therefore required. I could not contemplate abandoning my values of social justice and equality, which are central to my ontological stance in life, and influence the philosophical principles that determine my way of being in the world. These values serve as points of reference for my interrogation of acts of self, through engaging in reflection in and on my practice, as recommended by Schön (1983), as well as for my interactions and relations with others. To attempt to change them would, I argued, lead to a greater level of contradiction. The only alternative, then, was to try to change my practice. I endeavoured, therefore, to alter my practice to one based on providing equality of entitlement for all pupils. As a result, I was able to theorise my practice as a space for the recognition of the rights of all pupils to equality of respect within the educational system.

The incident that I have outlined here exemplified for me the fact that injustice and inequality can often be embedded in educational institutions (Kenny 1997; Lynch 1999). However, my reflections on this incident enabled me to understand that describing such factors as institutional or structural can detract from the fact that they are perpetrated on human beings, on whom they can have devastating and long-lasting effects. Focusing on institutions as the source of the injustice can also result in blaming the system, rather than the individuals who operate the system, for the inequitable situation. In this context, Young (1990) states:

In saying that power and domination have a structural basis, I do not deny that it is individuals who are powerful and who dominate.

(Young 1990, p. 32)

Blaming the system can remove from individuals any element of responsibility for the injustice, and this can result in prolonging and extending the injustice. Recognising that the situation is in fact the result of human action, or inaction, could be the first step towards bringing about improvement in it, provided that the people involved, who possess the capacity and the potential for change, have the courage and foresight to implement the necessary changes.

As a direct result of my experience in mainstream education as outlined here, and from my sense of outrage at the injustice meted out to the Traveller child, I resolved to become the RTT in my school. I had at that stage formulated the idea that I might be better able to engage in the struggle for justice and equality for Traveller children from this position. I did not experience any difficulty in obtaining the position, as nobody else from the staff expressed an interest in the job. In fact, for the two previous years, a temporary and an untrained teacher, neither of whom remained for the full academic year, filled the job. I also took up the position in the knowledge that, should I wish to relinquish the job for any reason, it would not be easy to do so, if nobody else was willing to fill the position. The rather negative attitude to the job raised my awareness of the low level of esteem that was attached to it and of the fact that the marginalised status accorded to Traveller children, within the schooling system, would probably also extend to the position of RTT.

When I began working with the Traveller children, I became aware that a number of them presented with learning difficulties, and would, therefore, require learning support. Providing learning support represented a new departure for me, as all my previous teaching experience was in mainstream education. However, my ontological stance, which incorporated acceptance of differences in cognitive abilities and levels of achievement, meant that I approached the job with a sense of commitment to discovering the best way of providing a supportive learning environment for the children (Coolahan 1994). I was also conscious that my ethos of respect for others should, in the case of Traveller children, extend to a recognition and appreciation of their separate culture, traditions, identity and history. Initially, I did not have an extensive body of knowledge around these issues, other than incidental items of information garnered from the media or from hearsay. However, through engaging with the relatively small amount of literature available on Traveller issues (for example, O Boyle 1990; McDonagh 1994; Kenny 1997), as well as with the wider corpus of knowledge on other oppressed and marginalised groups worldwide (Goffman 1968; Barth 1969; Freire 1972; Willis 1977; May 1999), and especially through my interactions with the Traveller children and my developing relationships with their parents, I acquired sufficient knowledge of their lifestyle, and of the factors influencing it, both positively and negatively, to enable me to develop an understanding of the importance of valuing their cultural identity (Kenny 1997). Fortified with this knowledge, I felt competent that I could approach my job of teaching the Traveller children in an environment of respect for, and appreciation of, their culture, and that I would also be better placed to recognise, and hopefully minimise, instances of discrimination against them. I was mindful also of Gramsci's (1971) assertion that the teacher:

must be aware of the contrast between the type of culture and society which he [sic] represents and the type of culture and society represented by his pupils, and conscious of his obligation to accentuate and regulate the child's formation in conformity with the former and in conflict with the latter.

(Gramsci 1971, pp. 35-6)

I came to the realisation, therefore, that, in the event of a conflict between the culture of the Traveller children and the culture of the school, I should try to ensure that the Traveller culture was not represented as inferior to, or of less value than, the school culture. To adopt any other stance would result in a denial of my values of social justice and equality for all.

For the purpose of presenting data collection and analysis in this section of my research, I wish to focus on my work with four individual Traveller children. I will outline the interventions I put in place to provide optimum learning opportunities for them, and I will describe the impact of my strategies on their educational achievements, in terms of enabling them to contribute to their own educational process. I will present the information in the form of four vignettes, corresponding to the narratives of my action research initiatives with each of the four Traveller children. In the process of describing my data, I will explain how this provided the evidence to support my claim to knowledge, which I articulate in terms of a practice of social justice as the realisation of equality of respect for all.

5:3 Vignette 1

The incident that I relate here is significant in that it illustrates how I came to a realisation that I was not living to my values of social justice and equality in a particular area of my practice. Having professed a commitment to valuing Traveller culture and identity, I did not appear to have extended this stance to include Traveller children's use of language. Throughout my years of teaching English in mainstream classes, I had always emphasised the importance of the correct usage of the language, as well as the correct enunciation of words. I regarded it as a necessity that children be able to express themselves clearly and in a syntactically accurate manner. However, the incident related here demonstrates how I was compelled to rethink my position on these views. One of the Traveller children, whom I shall call M.T, had had a psychological assessment in the infant school, prior to transferring to the senior school in which I taught. In the assessment she was identified as having major learning difficulties. In devising a programme of work for her, I decided to concentrate initially on her reading skills. My

method of providing support to M.T in the area of reading involved allowing her to read a piece uninterrupted, while I made a note of her errors. I then taught her the correct enunciation for the words, after she had finished reading. On one occasion, when M.T had read 'told' as 'tould', I began to take note of the error. When M.T observed me doing this, she said, rather indignantly, 'I knew that word. That's how we say it.' Though initially taken aback by M.T's comment, I realised that I ought to have had an awareness of the authenticity of her statement. I had often heard Traveller children saying 'tould', 'bould' and 'hould' during reading sessions and had always automatically corrected them, not realising that this phenomenon was a feature of their cultural expression.

My learning from this episode resonates with Labov's (1973) theory that:

an adult must enter into the right social relation with a child if he wants to find out what a child can do.

(Labov 1973, p. 33)

Labov discovered that, when a child from a minority culture was assessed formally by a researcher, he performed poorly, answering in monosyllables, leading to the conclusion that he was, therefore, culturally deprived. However, when a more informal approach was adopted, and when other children from the child's minority culture, with whom the child could interact, were present, the child demonstrated a level of verbal proficiency equal to that of other children in the school. From this and other such observations, Labov formulated his theory of the myth of verbal deprivation, and suggested that:

Before we impose the middle-class verbal style upon children from other cultural groups, we should find out how much of this is useful for the main work of analyzing and generalizing, and how much is merely stylistic – or even dysfunctional.

(Labov 1973, p. 34)

This stance led Labov to question Bernstein's theory of an elaborate code, possessed by the middle-class dominant majority and that enables that group to derive maximum benefit from the educational system. Labov asks: 'Is it not simply an elaborate *style*, rather than a superior code or system?' (1973, p. 34, emphasis in original). In agreement

with this perspective, I resolved to view Traveller children's enunciation of words as an expression of their different cultural norms, rather than as evidence of the use of an inferior or restricted code.

When, as a result of M.T's comment, I reflected on my reason for adopting the practice of correcting her enunciation of certain words, I concluded that it was probably an attempt on my part to encourage the Traveller children to use Standard English, so that they would not appear different to their peers, or be perceived by others as misfits. I was, at that stage, operating out of a mistaken logic of encouraging Traveller children to fit the system, in contrast to my present understanding that the system needs to be altered in order to accommodate Traveller children. I was also mistaken in regarding Traveller children's different enunciation of words as errors, and would share Torrey's (1973) view that they should not be regarded as such, when she says, in relation to black children's use of language:

Although standard English serves as the medium of instruction in reading and other subjects and is the only dialect acceptable as 'correct' in the dominant society, the deviations of many black children from standard forms cannot be regarded as errors. These so-called 'errors' actually conform to discernible grammatical rules, different from those of the standard language, but no less systematic.

(Torrey 1973, p. 67)

I realised, therefore, that I needed to adopt a more critical pedagogic stance in relation to curriculum implementation, in view of Apple's (1996) assertion that 'education is deeply implicated in the politics of culture' (1996, p. 22). Apple goes on to explain the need for a critical perspective in this context:

The curriculum is never simply a neutral assemblage of knowledge, somehow appearing in the texts and classrooms of a nation. It is always part of a *selective tradition*, someone's selection, some group's vision of legitimate knowledge. It is produced out of the cultural, political and economic conflicts, tensions and compromises that organize and disorganize a people.

(Apple 1996, p. 22, emphasis in original)

It would be reasonable to infer from this view that the selection of legitimate knowledge would not emanate from an ethnic minority group, possessing no hegemonically recognised cultural or economic capital (Bourdieu, cited in Robbins 2000), but from the dominant majority in society. It would appear all the more necessary, then, for educators to be alert to the potential for oppressed minority groups to be further disempowered by the imposition on them of official, dominant forms of knowledge.

A conversation between Shor and Freire (1987) illustrates the fact that my misunderstanding in relation to best pedagogic practice for the oppressed and marginalised was not unique. Shor (Shor and Freire 1987) admits that, early in his teaching career, he began teaching correct usage to working class students because he wanted to transfer his own knowledge to them, not understanding at the time how to situate education in their experience. Grammar and correct usage were the ladders Shor had used to reach the pinnacle of intellectual study, and he mistakenly thought that this should be the way forward for his students too. Freire (Shor and Freire 1987) describes how he avoided this pitfall in his early teaching career:

I learned that beauty and creativity could not live with a slavish devotion to correct usage. This understanding taught me that creativity needed freedom. So I changed my pedagogy as a young teacher towards creative freedom.

(Shor and Freire 1987, p. 20)

I too had learned, through my interaction with my Traveller pupil, M.T, that rigidity in promoting a correct form of speech could be stultifying and could inhibit creativity. I became aware of the importance of attending to difference, of recognising the situatedness of each individual child and of valuing what each child brings to the teaching/learning situation. This learning provided the groundwork for my theorising of my practice of social justice as the acceptance, recognition and encouragement of diversity.

Further reflection on this incident yielded other significant implications of my misguided method of improving the educational standards of Traveller children. I came to a

realisation that the Traveller children's different enunciation of certain words was an integral part of their cultural tradition. In correcting their enunciation of certain words, I was inadvertently conveying to them the message that their manner of speaking was somehow deficient. In this context, I was running the risk of succumbing to the theory of cultural deprivation. According to Keddie (1973), the term cultural deprivation was used to refer to the complex of variables believed to be responsible for retarding a child's progress at school. Keddie explains that the term became a euphemism for saying that working-class and ethnic groups have cultures which are at least dissonant with, if not inferior to, the 'mainstream' culture of the society at large:

Culturally deprived children, then, come from homes where mainstream values do not prevail and are therefore less 'educable' than other children. The argument is that the school's function is to transmit the mainstream values of the society and the failure of children to acquire these values lies in their lack of educability. Thus their failure in school is located in the home, in the pre-school environment, and not within the nature and social organization of the school which 'processes' the children into achievement rates.

(Keddie 1973, p. 8)

There was, therefore, the possibility that I was implying that the culture of the Traveller children was of less value than that of the dominant majority who spoke Standard English. This possibility occurred in a context in which I had professed a policy of valuing Traveller culture and identity, and of trying to achieve equality and social justice for Traveller children within the educational system. Obviously, there existed a lack of congruence between my stated policy and the reality of my practice. I was clearly not living out my values in my practice in this instance. I concluded, therefore, that as a prerequisite to trying to promote a respectful, value-laden, intercultural model of education, I ought first of all to examine my own practice to ensure that I, as agent of my own pedagogic practice, was not experiencing myself as 'a living contradiction' (Whitehead 1989), where the values that I espoused were not providing the framework for my practice, or were not reflected in my practice. I also came to an understanding of the need for greater synthesis between theory and practice in order to avoid situations of conflict between them.

My reflections on this incident required that, in keeping with my action research methodology, I should begin another cycle of planning, acting, observing and reflecting. I resolved, therefore, to discontinue the practice of correcting the Traveller children's enunciation of certain words, since this was a cultural feature and I had given a commitment to valuing their culture. I also realised that having their mode of expression constantly devalued must be an oppressive and dehumanising experience for Traveller children. As a result of my reflections on this matter, I developed an increased awareness of the use of language by the Traveller children and realised that there were many instances where they substituted their own words for Standard English words, for example 'vessels' for dishes or ware, and 'rack' for comb. As I became more accepting of their different vocabulary, the Traveller children became freer and less inhibited in their use of their own words, as, for example, when G said, 'I cleaned the vessels for my mammy' (field notes, 21 March 2002, item 5a). Gradually, my classroom developed into a space where their culture and language could be expressed in an atmosphere of freedom, acceptance and respect. This situation is reflected in the fact that the Traveller children began to inform me in advance of impending absences from school for cultural practices, as when M.T said, 'I won't be in school next week because we are all going to Mullingar for my cousin's wedding' (field notes, 13 June 2002, item 5b). The evidence for my more positive and emancipatory pedagogic practice can also be seen in Chapter 6, where I describe the cultural project undertaken by the Traveller children, in which they engaged, without any inhibitions, in my classroom. My learning from this incident is reflected in the fact that I became more aware of the interconnectedness between language and culture, and would concur with Durie (1999), who emphasises:

the importance of language rights as one aspect of the right to culture, and as an important aspect of cultural identity.

(Durie 1999, p. 73)

I became conscious, too, of the fact that, when I professed an ideology of respect and appreciation for Traveller culture, this should automatically extend to the use of language.

5:4 Vignette 2

This second incident from my practice recounts my experience of a situation similar to that which was responsible for my decision to take up the position of RTT. The narrative that I am about to relate indicates, therefore, why it is not sufficient to achieve justice in one particular incident; what is needed is a change in institutional systems, in order to avoid repetition of the injustice. Freire (1972), arguing that the oppressed are not marginals waiting to be integrated into the dominant society, states:

The solution is not to integrate them into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become 'beings for themselves'.

(Freire 1972, p. 61)

Freire's statement illustrates what I was attempting to achieve in my practice, through transforming it into a space for the acceptance and recognition of diversity, in opposition to a seemingly monocultural educational system, in fulfilment of my values of social justice and equality. Apple and Beane (1999) also make the point that, in situations of injustice, rather than trying to deal with the effects of the injustice, what is needed is systemic change:

Democratic educators, seek not simply to lessen the harshness of social inequities in schools, but to change the conditions that create them.

(Apple and Beane 1999, p. 13)

However, I decided that I could best serve the cause of justice by engaging in the struggle on behalf of individual Traveller children initially, in the hope that significant changes at institutional level would gradually ensue.

The story that I relate here involves a Traveller child, C, who came to me for learning support at the same time as M.T. C had transferred to my school, from another school in the area, in September 2001, the year I began working as RTT. She was a quiet, introverted child, difficult to engage in oral communication at first, but with similar learning difficulties to M.T, which was the reason that I decided to take them together. Gradually, as C and I got to know each other better and as she gained confidence, I

learned that the reason for her transfer to my school was that she had had a psychological assessment in her previous school, which had recommended that she be placed in a special class, and she did not want to take up such a placement. My understanding of Traveller culture led me to interpret this stance as a wish not to be stigmatised as a 'slow learner', which could impact negatively on her marriage prospects later in life.

The norm in C's previous school was for a child to remain in the special class for most of the school day, joining a mainstream class only for brief periods, such as for religion or physical education. In my school the situation was somewhat different. A child spent most of the school day in a mainstream class, being withdrawn to the special class for learning support once or twice a day. This situation may have been more acceptable to C, though perhaps fortunately from her point of view, given her antipathy to being placed in a special class, there was no vacancy in the special class in my school. Concerned that she was in need of extra resources, I asked the learning support teacher if she could fit C into her schedule but she said she could not accommodate her. With a sense of *déjà vu*, I recalled the story of the Traveller child in my mainstream class two years previously and the unsuccessful struggle I engaged in to try to obtain resources for her, and wondered if I was going to experience a similar struggle in this case.

My concern around this situation was that C appeared to be denied a resource to which she had a legitimate entitlement. I could not reconcile this denial with my values of social justice and equality. The situation could also be viewed as discriminatory, as it is unlikely that a 'settled' child would be treated so dismissively. A settled child's parents would often be aware of the child's learning difficulties, and may also have the confidence to approach the school to discuss the child's needs. Traveller parents, on the other hand, can often be unaware of the extent of their children's learning difficulties, and consequently would be unlikely to approach schools to request extra resources for their children. They would also be reluctant to visit schools because of their own negative experiences of the educational system. In conversation with me, C's mother remarked:

When I was in school, Travellers were just left sitting at the back of the class and ignored. We didn't learn anything at school.

(field notes, 19 November 2001, item 5c).

It would appear from these remarks that Traveller parents' experiences of schooling were similar to those of parents from the lowest socio-economic groups, as indicated by Drudy and Lynch (1993):

Low-income parents in semi-skilled and unskilled working-class jobs, or those who are unemployed, are most likely to have found their own schooling to be unrewarding and alienating, and to have experienced failure.

(Drudy and Lynch 1993, p. 155)

My sense of disempowerment, through being unable to access the resources required by C, crystallised for me an understanding of the constant state of powerlessness to which the Traveller community is generally reduced. In an educational context, therefore, it is important that teachers endeavour to redress this imbalance of power by striving to provide a more equitable experience of education for Traveller children. It was my sense of personal responsibility in this regard that inspired this research and that increased my awareness of how I needed to live out my values of social justice and equality in my educational practice. The experience of living to these values resulted in the development of my theory of democratic practice as the realisation of principles of justice and equality for all.

For most of the school year 2001-2002, I continued to provide learning support for M.T and C, being the sole source of such support in C's case. In the last term, I learned that resource hours had finally been sanctioned for five children for whom there was no space in the special class. To my dismay, C was not among the five, despite the fact that two of the five children had only been assessed a short time previously, placing them, in my concept of equality, lower down the list of priority than C. I argued the case for C's inclusion in this scheme and eventually I was informed that she could share a resource slot with one of the five children, which, while not ideal, was at least a step in the right direction. At the beginning of the next school year, September 2002, C was given a place

in the special class, an event that I believe would not have occurred had I not intervened on her behalf in the incident of the allocation of resource hours.

In September 2002, which was the start of their final year in primary school for M.T and C, I decided to focus on the area of spelling with both girls. I reasoned that an ability to spell some of the basic words was a prerequisite to making progress in reading and writing, skills in which they would need some proficiency, if they were to feel confident about continuing on to second level schooling. None of the older members of the families of either M.T or C had attended school beyond primary level, and so I realised that they would need a lot of encouragement, as well as a positive perspective on the educational process, if they were to progress to second level schooling. My reason for wishing to see them continue with their education springs from my commitment to the idea of lifelong learning (Field, 2000), and, influenced by Dewey's (1966) theories, to my view of education as a process of growth leading to personal fulfilment and emancipation. In this context, therefore, I considered it imperative that M.T and C be given every opportunity to develop learning strategies that could contribute to prolonging their stay in secondary school.

However, having embarked on a programme of spelling from the standard spelling book used in the school, an early appraisal of this system revealed that neither girl was making much progress, in spite of the fact that the words were not difficult, consisting mainly of four-letter words (see Appendix G). When I reflected on the reasons for the failure, I thought that it could be due to the fact that the words appeared as meaningless entities to the children, totally unconnected to their lives and therefore of little interest to them. Convinced of the futility of continuing with a programme that was evidently not engaging the interest of the children and that had failed to motivate them, I decided that I would have to find an alternative method. This decision was commensurate with my chosen methodology, which involved action research cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting. My reflections led me to consider an alternative strategy in the planning stage of my second cycle. Conscious of the need to link spelling to writing, and

not to view it simply as an end in itself, I asked M.T and C to suggest a theme around which we could construct a spelling list to use as a basis for written work

The first topic they chose was Christmas and the words they wished to learn to spell included 'presents', 'turkey', 'computer' and 'reindeer'. They made a much better effort at spelling these words compared to their attempts at spelling the much easier words in the spelling book (see Appendix H). They then wrote stories on the topic of Christmas, incorporating the words they had learned to spell. We continued the process with their next choice of subject, which was Halloween, with similar results. This format formed the basis of our work for the rest of the year, with the children choosing their spelling lists and then constructing their written work around these lists. The fact that the children chose their own spelling seemed to be a motivating factor for them in learning the spelling. This in turn provided the stimulus to engage in the writing process, as previously efforts to get them to write were met with the response, 'We can't write because we don't know how to spell.' The special class teacher, impressed by the enthusiasm of M.T and C with regard to learning spelling and amazed at their ability to learn more difficult words, remarked:

I don't know what magic you worked with M.T and C. Every day, when they come to me, they want to spell the words they are doing with you, and they say to me, 'These are much harder than the words we do with you'. I wish they would work as hard for me.

(field notes, 6 December 2002, item 5d)

At the 'Critical Debates in Action Research' seminar at the University of Limerick in June 2003, I referred to the new approach I had adopted in teaching spelling to M.T and C (see Sullivan 2003). As a result, another presenter at the conference commented that my work was reminiscent of the work of Ashton-Warner with Maori children in New Zealand. On the recommendation of the other presenter, I read Ashton-Warner's (1963) book, based on her experience of working with the Maori children. In relation to the difficulty faced by Maori children as they attempt to adjust to the culture of the dominant majority group, Ashton-Warner writes:

However good a book is it can't supply the transitional needs unless it is in sympathy with the Maori children, has incident which they understand and temperament which they sense.

(Ashton-Warner 1963, p. 70)

I could readily identify with Ashton-Warner's method of teaching the children to read through using words from the children's own experience, or organic words. Her system reinforced for me the theory that I had already formulated from my own intervention in the area of spelling, namely, that children from ethnic minorities are not well served by being coerced into learning from textbooks that have been standardised to suit the dominant majority in schools, and that do not reflect the cultural identity of minority groups.

A comparison between the teaching/learning paradigm utilised in my first attempt at teaching spelling to M.T and C, and that which characterised the second approach, revealed a major shift in epistemological focus. The former was based largely on a rote learning approach, characteristic of a behaviourist methodology as propounded by Skinner (1954), according to which the stimulus to learn was externally imposed, and to a lesser extent, Gagné (1970), who at least acknowledged the equal importance of the learner's internal motivation. The learners were perceived as having a passive role, which in my context was reflected in the fact of M.T and C memorising spellings from a standard textbook, thus placing the locus of their learning outside of their own experience. The second approach that I adopted was a constructive one, containing elements similar to Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social constructivism, where the children had an active role to play in contributing to their own learning by choosing the spellings they would learn. The success of the second method enabled me to theorise from my practice that children learn more successfully when they are active agents in their own learning process. The active agency of the Traveller children in the process of knowledge creation provided the internal motivation to learn, which was in complete contrast to the external stimulus required in the passive behaviourist approach.

5:5 Vignette 3

A third child for whom I provided learning support from September 2001 was J, who had joined my school six months previously. I recount J's story here because it represents for me the most compelling account of injustice and oppression that I have encountered in my practice. Before I had begun my work as RTT, a decision had been taken that, because of her learning difficulties, J should repeat third class. When I began working with J, I realised that she was two years older than the other children in the class. I found it difficult, therefore, to accept that the decision to have her repeat a class was taken in her best interests. In my experience, keeping a child back in this manner because of her learning difficulties rarely produces any improvement in her ability to learn and only reinforces her lack of success in academic areas, as well as attributing her failure to something lacking in herself or some culpability on her part, all of which could have negative consequences for her sense of self-esteem and self-worth. I also had concerns that a child, who was two years older than her peers, would experience difficulty in fitting in, and could be perceived by the other children in the class as a misfit, thus impacting negatively on the development of her social skills. A further apprehension that I had was that J would be fourteen years of age when she finished primary school, as opposed to the normal age of twelve. This could have serious repercussions for the length of her stay in second level schooling, should she choose that option, and I had high expectations that she would, as her twelve-year-old sister had just started secondary school. At this time, the norm for Traveller children who made the transition to secondary school was to remain until fifteen or sixteen years of age. In that context, J could be expected to receive, at most, one or two years of second level schooling. The 'Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community' (Government of Ireland 1995) appears to have similar concerns in this area also, when it recommends that 'Only in exceptional circumstances should Traveller children be retained in primary school after their twelfth/thirteenth year' (1995, p.181).

J was already receiving help from the learning support teacher before I began working with her. This support consisted in working through a phonics programme, with the aim of improving J's reading and writing skills. As it appeared to be school practice to use a

phonics approach, I decided to use this programme initially with J. I considered that it might be educationally beneficial to J, if I were to reinforce the work of the learning support teacher. However, having engaged with the phonics programme for a number of weeks, I concluded that it was not a successful intervention, as it did not appear to be meeting J's learning needs. My reflections on the initiative, as noted in my reflective diary, produced the following evaluation:

1. J appeared to have significant difficulty in the area of auditory discrimination.
2. I queried, therefore, how useful it was to base her learning on a phonics approach, which comprises an auditory learning style.
3. Perhaps, then, I should look for an alternative approach that would enable me to teach to J's learning strengths.

(reflective diary, 3 December 2001)

My reflections resulted in a decision to engage in another cycle of planning, acting, observing and reflecting, in accordance with my action research methodology. My revised strategy evolved from my view that a multisensory approach, combining visual and auditory skills, may be more beneficial than a singular one, particularly when the singular one did not appear to be having any success. I also wished to avoid a situation where J might become disheartened at her lack of progress while using the phonics approach. I resolved, therefore, to abandon the phonics approach, since J would continue to receive practice in that skill from the learning support teacher, and to concentrate on other methods such as a whole word approach or a contextual approach.

When I discontinued the phonics approach and began to spend more time in reading stories with J, I recorded in my diary that there was a noticeable change in her demeanour. She no longer appeared bored while we worked and seemed to enjoy the stories we read, for, though she could not read all the words, which I readily supplied to avoid breaking the flow of the narrative, she could understand the content, and could appreciate the humour in some of the stories. My reflection, noted in my reflective diary,

on the change in J's manner led to the realisation that the didacticism of the phonics method could have had a negative and oppressive impact on J. I also doubted the potential of an exclusive focus on a singular approach, with no apparent success rate, to motivate a child to learn. While acknowledging that a phonics approach has a role to play in the teaching of reading and that it undoubtedly works for some children, I suggest that imposing it on a child, for whom it did not appear to be working, was not good practice, given that there were other more enjoyable and more stimulating methods of teaching reading available. I considered that I was justified, therefore, in dispensing with school practice through discontinuing the teaching of phonics to J, and in focusing instead on trying to foster in her a love of reading.

In September 2002, a year after I had begun working with J, I reviewed her situation and concluded that, while she was happier in school and enjoyed our reading sessions, I could not say that she had made much academic progress. I reasoned that a psychological assessment could be helpful, as it might pinpoint the specific areas that were causing her difficulty, thus providing me with a clearer focus on how I could best help her. At that time, the school psychologist had moved to another area and was not replaced until February 2003. When the new psychologist visited the school, she was given a list of five children for assessment. To my dismay, J's name was not on the list, and when I inquired as to why she had not been included, I was told that the psychologist had said that the tests were culturally unsuited to Traveller children and would not provide a true reflection of their ability. I replied that this should not be used as an excuse to avoid granting them an assessment, but that allowances could be made for any cultural bias. I also pointed out that these tests were culturally unsuited to Irish children in general, having been standardised on English children, yet this fact was never used to deny assessment to other children. At the next staff meeting I again expressed my disappointment that J was not included in the list for assessment. When the issue of cultural bias was again put forward as the reason for J's exclusion, I pointed out that this could be in breach of the Equality Act (2000), which specified 'membership of the Traveller community' as one of the grounds on which discrimination was not permitted. A week later, I was informed that J was third on the list for assessment. On reflection on

this situation, I found it disturbing that a Traveller child could only receive her due entitlement through a reference to legal implications. It does not augur well for the achievement of an educational system that is grounded in principles of social justice and equality.

The assessment, which was undertaken in May 2003, indicated that J was of very low ability and the psychologist suggested that a special school would be the appropriate place for J. I pointed out that I did not think this would be acceptable to J's parents and so it was agreed that a placement in the special class in her present school would be the best option for her. There was no vacancy in the special class, but in September 2003 J was given resource hours four days a week with a temporary, untrained resource teacher. As the assessment had indicated that J also had learning difficulties in the area of Mathematics, it was decided that the resource teacher would provide learning support in English and I would provide learning support in Mathematics, but would continue to read with J on the day she did not have the services of the resource teacher. An interesting feature of J's eventual assessment was the fact that the report had stated that J had exhibited 'an over-reliance on phonics which were failing her.' On reading this, I felt vindicated in my decision to use methods other than phonics-based approaches in teaching her reading. Incidentally, J is the first Traveller child to have had a psychological assessment while attending my school, the other Traveller children with assessments having been assessed either prior to joining my school or while in the adjoining infant school. This is one area in which I have managed to bring about a change in policy and in practice, through insisting that as RTT I should have an input into prioritising children for assessment, in order to ensure that Traveller children are not excluded from the process. In this way, I was beginning to have an influence on the school environment through raising awareness of the need for equality of entitlement for Traveller children. At the same time, I was living to my values of social justice and equality for all.

5:6 Vignette 4

In this final narrative from my research, I illustrate how, in the interest of providing a more socially just experience of education for one Traveller child, I engaged with a form

of curriculum implementation that took cognisance of the child's particular cultural identity. In the process, I became aware of the significance of providing positive experiences of education for Traveller children, in terms of their potential for retaining Traveller children in the educational system. I also came to a realisation that my primary aim was not the achievement of satisfactory results in standardised tests, though if these were to occur, they would be an added bonus, but to create in the children a love of learning and a lifelong interest in reading, which could bring them the same benefits in life that I continue to enjoy. This aim is consistent with my articulation of my values as the grounds for the emergence of my living standards of judgement that I have identified in Chapter 1, by which I wish my research to be assessed. The relevant standards of judgement for this aspect of my research are:

- Have I made a difference for good in the lives of Traveller children by influencing the quality of their educational experience?
- Have I contributed to the emergence of more socially just and equitable educational practices?

What follows, then, is my account of how I attempted to realise these living standards of judgement in my practice of educational provision for Traveller children.

Of the four Traveller children who transferred to my school from the infant school in September 2003, one, N, had been in the special class in the infant school, as a consequence of a psychological assessment while in that school. There was no vacancy in the special class in my school and the learning support teacher was unable to accommodate her in her schedule. N, therefore, became my responsibility and as I tried to discern the gaps that existed in her knowledge, I discovered that, not only did she have very little reading ability, but also she could not identify some of the letters of the alphabet. Having worked on the alphabet with N for about three weeks, I then introduced two-letter and three-letter words, which I felt would be necessary if she were to acquire some of the pre-reading skills needed prior to engaging with the formal reading process. N had made significant progress in this area and so I moved confidently on to four-letter

words, but then the progress came to an abrupt ending. It seemed as if the shutters had come down for N and that she had lost the impetus to learn. My first reaction was one of a combination of disappointment, frustration, and uncertainty as to how to proceed. I realised that, without N's cooperation, there was little to be gained from continuing with the programme. I recalled Polanyi's (1958) statement that:

Into every act of knowing there enters a passionate contribution of the person knowing what is being known and this coefficient is no mere imperfection but a vital component of his [sic] knowledge.

(Polanyi 1958, p. viii)

What was missing, therefore, in my teaching/learning relationship with N was her passionate contribution to the relationship. This would have to be restored to the relationship if N was to make any further progress.

Having reflected on the situation, I decided to seek an alternative approach to the method I had been using with N, as required by the cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting of my action research methodology. Inspiration dawned in the form of a recollection of my strategy in teaching spelling to M.T and C, and of Ashton-Warner's use of organic words with the Maori children. I decided that this might be a suitable occasion for implementing that strategy again, and, as a result, the following conversation took place between N and me:

Me: Why are you having problems with these words?

N: I don't like them.

Me: Why don't you like them?

N: They are too hard.

Me: What words would you like to learn?

N: Baby, (and after a few seconds)... new.

Me: Why do you want to learn those words?

N: Because my mammy is having a baby.

(field notes, 24 November 2003, item 5e)

I wrote out the words 'baby' and 'new' for N and told her these were her words, and this method formed the basis for our daily vocabulary from then on. Each day N would

choose either two or three words that she wanted to learn, which I would write on pieces of paper, thus constructing our own flashcards. The words she chose were the names of her immediate and extended family, as well as items found in the classroom, and toys or hobbies. Eventually she had built up a word bank of approximately a hundred words of varying difficulty. In 95% of cases, N could identify the words the day after they had been introduced, in spite of the fact that they included words such as, 'computer', 'blackboard', 'ballerina' and 'Irish dancing', and taking cognisance of the fact that N had previously described words such as 'this' and 'that' as too difficult for her to learn.

I was satisfied from my observation that N was making progress – minute progress, admittedly, but it constituted improvement nonetheless. However, I was conscious of the fact that this success would probably not be evident in an assessment test, which would seek to judge N's ability on her proficiency in recognising the words, representative of the dominant culture, that she considered 'hard' words. No account would be taken of the fact that she could now identify much more difficult words that emanated from her own cultural background, and of which she could claim ownership. Connell's (1993) critique of assessment tests as being unsuitable for children from working-class or rural backgrounds is equally valid in the case of Traveller children. Connell's critique is twofold, in terms of the content of the testing:

which generally presupposes vocabulary, information, etc. more likely to be found in middle-or upper-class homes than in working class or rural homes,

and in terms of the form of the testing:

abstraction from context, reliance on paper-and-pencil skills, absolute individualism, and a competitive framing of the activity.

(Connell 1993, p. 77)

In view of such an unjust and inequitable system of assessment, I concluded that the issue of standardised assessment tests was not of great relevance to my method of working with N, and that I should continue with my method for the present. In order to reinforce her learning in relation to her own words, I made a booklet for N in which she could draw

a picture and write the appropriate word beside it. When we had completed that stage of the programme, I decided that the next phase would involve making another booklet for N, in which she would write short sentences incorporating her organic words. This of course meant that she would also need to use some of the basic words in learning to read schemes, which she had previously rejected as being too difficult. N did not object to using the words on this occasion, possibly because she now had a purpose in learning them, namely, to construct sentences that included her own words. In this context, because of N's more positive attitude and greater confidence in relation to word recognition, I decided to start her on a more formal reading scheme in the last term of the 2004-2005 academic year, with which she appeared to be coping adequately. At the end of the year, N's mainstream class teacher administered a standardised English assessment test, which revealed that N's score had increased from a percentile of one, at which it had remained static for two years, to a percentile of three. While I have stated my intention not to be overly concerned with standardised test results, nevertheless, the improvement reflected here could contribute to justifying for school authorities the innovative approach I had adopted with N.

In my reflections on my work with N, I asked myself why I had initially tried a traditional method of teaching her words, instead of using the system that I knew to have worked successfully with M.T and C in the area of spelling. I realised that the reason was a certain degree of scepticism on my part that a seven-year-old, with major learning difficulties and with a very limited vocabulary, could be the source of her own learning. What reinforced this view for me was the fact that I had been educated in a system that promoted the theory that knowledge was transferred in a 'top down' format, from teacher to pupil. This paradigm has been aptly described as the 'banking' system by Freire (1972), whereby knowledge is deposited in the learners in a passive manner by the teacher. The pupils have no agency in the process and therefore no sense of ownership of the knowledge. Freire was referring to adult literacy classes in his depiction of teaching/learning and he considered this system to be a cause of oppression in the learners. I suggest that Freire's theories are also relevant to Traveller children who are similarly marginalised and also subjected to oppression, when denied agency in their own

learning. Rogers and Freiberg (1994) use the metaphor of the 'mug-and-jug' to describe the traditional transfer of knowledge theory. They say that traditional teachers might ask:

How can I make the mug hold still while I fill it from the jug with these facts that the curriculum planners and I regard as valuable?

(Rogers and Freiberg 1994, p. 170)

This question highlights the fact that the traditional methodology completely disregards the reality that learners are thinking individuals, capable of making decisions and choices around their own learning processes. Holt (1964), in his discussion of how children fail, argues that schools encourage students to become producers, whose role is to get right answers, rather than thinkers, and suggests that, instead, schools should:

give them a feeling of what it is like to think creatively, originally and constructively instead of defensively and evasively.

(Holt 1964, p. 27)

The lack of creativity attaching to a prescriptive pedagogic approach impinges negatively, not alone on the pupils, but also on teachers, as Haggarty (2004) indicates:

The casualties of this prescription are teachers: instead of learning to teach differently and better, and to relate more effectively to pupils and others as a foundation for that learning, more and more teachers are pressured to teach as they are told.

(Haggarty 2004, p. 593)

I submit that, in changing my approach to the teaching of reading with N, I have learned to teach differently and better, and have resisted the pressure to 'teach as I am told'. In November 2004, I was interviewed by the educational co-ordinator of the local area partnership, an organisation that attempts to combat the effects of disadvantage in the area. She was presenting a paper on 'Social Inclusion and Equality in Education' at a conference, and wished to get a perspective on the Traveller situation in this regard. Having outlined my views on the marginalisation of Traveller children by the educational system, I then referred to my method of trying to overcome N's reading difficulties. Her response was:

Why are all teachers not doing this? Children cannot be taught unless they want to learn. You asked the child what she wanted to learn and you went with her suggestions. I think everyone should be doing this.

(field notes, 25 November 2004, 5f)

My reflection on these comments created in me an awareness that the process of engaging in my research has resulted in new learning for me also, in terms of discovering new approaches to teaching that are appropriate for the diverse learning abilities of my pupils. My learning, therefore, has influenced me in helping my pupils to learn, as we engage in an educative relationship as co-learners, as suggested by Freire (1972).

Kincheloe (2003) critiques a reductionist, technicalising and deskilling approach to teaching as attempting to fill pupils' minds with as many discrete pieces of knowledge as possible. He suggests that advocates of technical standards:

are arrogantly asserting that they undisputedly possess the one correct interpretation of the world and that the job of teachers is to meekly pass this information along to the students.

(Kincheloe 2003, p. 8)

I suggest that my pedagogic approach in teaching N represents a rejection of the technical prescriptive method in favour of a more creative and meaningful contextualised perspective. Even though I would have moved somewhat from the traditional position in my previous work as a teacher in mainstream education, and sought to promote a more democratic atmosphere in the classroom through engaging the children in decision making and in knowledge creation, there was still a reluctance on my part to accept that academically challenged children could make a significant contribution to their own learning. I did not think that their experience was rich enough, or their ability of sufficient capacity, to enable them to provide the foundation for their self-development. However, the manner in which N was able to construct a vocabulary from her own relatively limited experience, which formed the basis for developing her reading and writing skills, has caused me to change my perspective. As a result, I have developed a new conceptualisation of 'teacher' as 'facilitator' (Rogers and Freiberg 1994).

Describing oneself as a facilitator of learning carries certain implications for the traditional teacher/learner dichotomy. The view of the teacher as the one possessing the knowledge, and therefore the power and control over the learner, has no meaning in the context of the facilitation of learning. Instead, ideas of sharing, co-creating, co-operating, respect and freedom hold sway. Responsibility for learning is a joint endeavour. In this paradigm, the quality of relationships in the facilitative process is a key element in promoting growth and development. Rogers and Freiberg (1994) describe individuals who have managed to effect revolutionary changes in their classrooms as:

catalyzers, facilitators, energizers: they give students freedom and life and the opportunity to learn. Most important, they are co-learners with students.

(Rogers and Freiberg 1994, p. 167)

Any system offering such wide-ranging benefits to both teachers and students cannot but appeal to those teachers who have the best interests of their students at heart, and should act as a catalyst to those willing to become facilitators of learning.

This, then, is the relationship that I have now fostered with N: I am a facilitator of her learning. I am enabling her to abstract knowledge from her own experience and to utilise this knowledge as the base on which to construct further knowledge. Her knowledge, when it is grounded in her cultural identity, has value for her and provides a meaningful contextual framework for her learning. N provides the stimulus and the motivation, and I provide the scaffolding, that ensures progress continues. According to Tharp and Gallimore (1988), assisting N's performance in this way can help her to cross her 'zone of proximal development' (Vygotsky 1978), or her potential understanding, reached with appropriate and meaningful support from capable others. My task, therefore, in relation to N, is to ensure that the proper structures are in place to ensure that a constant and consistent supportive framework exists to enable her to reach her potential, and my role is to facilitate this development and to guide N towards eventual independent learning.

5:7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have endeavoured to demonstrate my attempts to live according to my values of social justice and equality. My reflection on my actions, in fulfilment of my action research methodology, raised my awareness of occasions where my values were not reflected in my practice. In my management of these situations, I indicated my capacity for incorporating change and improvement in my practice, so that it became a practice that was commensurate with my espoused values. The four vignettes that I have outlined in this chapter provide data to illustrate the manner in which Traveller children have been consistently deprived of equality of respect and entitlement in the educational system. In fact, it would appear as though little has changed since C's mother attended school. Traveller children may no longer be left at the back of the class in a physical sense, but it could be argued that, metaphorically, they have not moved very far from that position. They are often located at the bottom of the list in regard to priority of access to extra learning resources. I suggest that, in the account of my practice that I have furnished here, I have indicated the measures that I have taken to transform my practice into a space for the recognition of Traveller children's equal entitlement to educational resources, in accordance with principles of social justice. This process enabled me to develop a living theory of practice as the lived reality of social justice. The incidents that I have related in this chapter also serve as signifiers of my learning process through undertaking my research. In this context, they contributed to both my personal and professional development, as they moved my thinking forward towards a more emancipatory educational practice and a more positive educative relationship with my Traveller pupils. In the next chapter, I continue with my data collection and analysis, but this time from a cultural perspective.

Section 3 Chapter 6 Data collection and analysis

Phase two: Exploring cultural issues

6:1 Introduction

In this chapter I continue with the process of describing and analysing my data. Accordingly, I propose to discuss the second dimension to my work with children from the Traveller community, which was the provision of a space wherein they could explore aspects of their culture and traditions. They did not have the opportunity to do this in their mainstream classes, where pedagogic practices were concerned mainly with supporting and consolidating the cultural norms of the dominant settled majority, which were incorporated into the national curriculum for transmission through the schooling process. To compensate for the lacuna in Traveller children's educational experience as a result of this situation, I aimed to facilitate the provision in my classroom of an environment that was conducive to the exploration of issues of identity and culture, in a secure and supportive atmosphere. In the process, I hoped to enable Traveller children to develop a more positive and democratic world view that would influence the trajectory of their future lives. Geertz (1973) refers to the epistemological focus of the concept of culture:

The cultural concept to which I adhere has neither multiple referents nor, so far as I can see, any unusual ambiguity: it denotes a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life.

(Geertz 1973, p. 89)

An engagement with their own cultural history, then, should result in greater understanding for Traveller children of the epistemological assumptions underpinning their life-views. In the process of exploring their cultural history, I hoped to create in Traveller children an awareness of the need for a critical perspective in interrogating the gaze and the attitude of the dominant majority group towards the reality of their cultural difference. In adopting this stance, I was conscious of Bhabha's (1994) assertion that

racial discrimination is not always verbal or overt, but that 'you can see it in a gaze, or hear it in the solecism of a still silence' (1994, p. 218).

My rationale for engaging in discussions on cultural issues with Traveller children stems from my commitment to cultural diversity. I support a view that pluralistic ways of living are commensurate with principles of social justice and equality. Said (1994) promotes the idea of moving beyond a narrow focus on one's own culture to embrace the idea of a multiplicity of cultures:

Merely to urge students to insist on one's own identity, history, tradition, uniqueness may initially get them to name their basic requirements for democracy and for the right to an assured, decently humane existence. But we need to go on and to situate these in a geography of other identities, peoples, cultures and then to study how, despite their differences, they have always overlapped one another, through unhierarchical influence, crossing, incorporation, recollection, deliberate forgetfulness and, of course, conflict.

(Said 1994, p. 401)

It would appear that, in addressing his remarks to colonialist and imperialist regimes, Said is calling on these powers to grant recognition and acceptance to the cultural identities of colonised minority groups. In agreement with this stance, I subscribe to an ideology that values people's rights to engage in a discourse that differs from the norm, and to live their lives according to their own ontological commitments. I acknowledge the right of Traveller people to reject the colonialist mindset that allows the dominant majority to define the boundaries that distort the trajectories of their lives. In providing opportunities in my classroom for Traveller children to give voice to their experiences of discrimination, I contend that I was enabling the possibility of transcending the oppression and negativity of the culture of imperialist and colonialist thinking. Young (1990) indicates the devastating effects of such thinking on a minority group:

To experience cultural imperialism means to experience how the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one's own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one's group and mark it out as the Other.

(Young 1990, pp. 58-9)

In the next section of this chapter, I relate the narrative of my facilitation of Traveller children's voices as they articulate their experiences of an educational system that purports to treat all pupils equally.

The group with whom I implemented this programme consisted of five ten-year-old Traveller children who did not have any learning difficulties, and with whom I had weekly contact for approximately forty minutes. There was, however, one factor that rendered both the implementation and effectiveness of the programme rather problematic, and that was the children's attendance rates. Only two of the children, D and M.E, had what could be classified as regular attendance, and one of these, M.E, left the school a year after I began my research, as her family moved to England. Two other children, J.M and R, attended school for about two thirds of the time, and the fifth child, M, for one third. These low attendance rates placed certain constraints on the progress of my research, for example, in the context of trying to create a group dynamic with, on some occasions, only two children present, and also in the existence of a lack of continuity, where a topic begun one week might not be revisited for a few weeks, while awaiting the return of absent pupils in order to form a viable discussion group. I decided, therefore, not to be overly concerned with measurable achievements. Influenced by Sen's (1992) distinction between the actual achievement and the freedom to achieve, I concluded that the latter concept had more significance for my work. Sen explicates his theory thus:

Achievement is concerned with what we *manage* to accomplish, and freedom with the *real opportunity* that we have to accomplish what we value. The two need not be congruent. Inequality can be viewed in terms of achievements and freedoms, and they need not coincide.

(Sen 1992, p. 31, emphasis in original)

I suggest, then, that what I provided for my Traveller pupils was primarily the freedom to achieve, but I did not exclude the possibility of a real opportunity of actual achievement. I maintained, however, an awareness that the latter could be constrained by certain unforeseeable variables, such as, the non-attendance of the children. Nevertheless, I submit that the group discussions did achieve a measure of success in highlighting some of the problems confronting Traveller children as they try to forge an identity within the educational system, and in enabling them to articulate their understandings of these problems.

Through the process of facilitating the group discussions with Traveller children, I was providing them with the opportunity of engaging in dialogic relationships, which Freire (1972) suggests is necessary for education as the practice of freedom. Dialogue, according to Freire, is the antithesis of the 'banking' system of education, and is, therefore, inconsistent with what Marcuse (1972) refers to as a logic of domination. Freire explains his dialogical approach as follows:

Dialogue is an existential necessity. Dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person's 'depositing' ideas in another, nor can it become the simple exchange of ideas to be 'consumed' by the discussants. Because dialogue is an encounter between men [sic] who name their world, it must not be a situation where some men name it on behalf of others. It is an act of creation; it must not serve as a crafty instrument for the domination of one man by another.

(Freire 1972, p. 77)

My rationale for adopting a dialogic approach with the Traveller children was that it appeared to have the potential to contribute to a more equitable relationship, which in turn could lead to a more equal distribution of power in the relationship. The consequent empowerment of Traveller children would enable them to assert their cultural identity, and to resist the imposition of a colonialist mindset that might seek to construe their culture as inferior. In this context, the influence of power relations on the formation of cultural identity has relevance for my research, and so I hoped that a more even distribution of power in my pedagogic relationships would create the conditions for greater awareness and acceptance of cultural diversity. In fulfilment of this commitment,

then, I sought to develop a relationship that tended more towards a balance of power, rather than an inequitable 'I-them' relationship.

Aronowitz (1993), in reference to Freire's pedagogic approach, says:

He means to offer a system in which the locus of the learning process is shifted from the teacher to the student. And this shift overtly signifies an altered *power* relationship, not only in the classroom but in the broader social canvas as well.

(Aronowitz 1993, pp. 8-9, emphasis in original)

I was conscious of the possibility that such an approach could engender the conditions for reciprocity in my pedagogic relations with my pupils. Freire (1972) also refers to this aspect of dialogic relations:

The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself [sic] taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach.

(Freire 1972, p. 67)

Engaging in reciprocal dialogic relations in this manner with my pupils was also consistent with Buber's (1958) suggestion that relations be based on an 'I-Thou' encounter, rather than on the propositional 'I-it' model, which tends to be less affirming. Learning, then, was a two-way process during this phase of my research. The Traveller children developed a critical consciousness around acts of discrimination by the settled community, as well as an enhanced sense of the value of their own culture and identity. At the same time, I became aware of the need for a critical stance towards the existence of structural prejudice and bias by the educational system towards an ethnic minority group. In this chapter, I will demonstrate the emergence of these learning processes from my educational practice, as I attempted to turn that practice into a space for the fulfilment of my values of social justice and equality.

6:2 Children's experiences of discrimination

One discussion that I had with Traveller children revolved around their experiences of discrimination, and is indicative of the cultural divide between Traveller and settled

children. Prior to the discussion, I was of the opinion that there were no discriminatory practices in my school. The reasons for this view were that the school had a policy of welcoming all pupils, regardless of nationality or ethnicity, and also, I had never witnessed any overt discrimination towards minority group children within the school. However, the children were able to provide actual examples from their experience of incidents where they felt that they were discriminated against by children from the settled community. The incidents consisted mainly of name-calling, in particular being called 'knackers', a term generally recognised as being derogatory towards Travellers. Some of the incidents had occurred in the current school year, but others had taken place a few years previously, yet the children could recall them instantly, indicating that, for the children, they represented real and definitive examples of discrimination. I tape-recorded the conversation with the children, and I include extracts from the transcripts here to illustrate their experiences of discrimination. The tape-recording has been retained in my research archive and a transcript can be found in Appendix A.

M.E: The other day, when we were in the yard, all the other girls called me a knacker.

R: When I was in junior infants' class, a girl – I am not saying any names a girl called me a knacker. She had a big group with her and they kept calling me it.

M: I was out in the yard today and a girl in my class said a word – it wasn't knacker – and I said 'What does that mean?' and she turned away and said to another girl 'Oh, M doesn't know what that means.' The other girl said 'Anyway, she's a knacker.'

Although these Traveller children have been attending school for a number of years, it would appear from these extracts that they have not yet been accepted as equals by the other children. The derogatory nature of the name-calling would suggest that their difference is codified in terms of cultural inferiority and is freely used as a reason to treat them in a disrespectful and dehumanising manner. Yet neither the class teachers nor I had any awareness, from our classroom observations, that there was a problem regarding the acceptance of the Traveller children by the other children. Such lack of awareness appears to be a common feature of racial discrimination, as O Boyle (1990) indicates:

As recent research in Britain has shown, much of the racism in schools is so much a part of the fabric of the daily activity, thought and speech of institutions that it passes unnoticed by all except the victims. Racism in Ireland is equally unconscious.

(O Boyle 1990, p. 129)

From the Traveller children's accounts of their experiences of discrimination, it would appear that the settled children were of the opinion that, once outside the confines of the classroom, the practice of respect for others no longer applied, and that therefore they were free to use such abusive language towards the Traveller children. I am not suggesting that settled children are never verbally abusive to each other in times of conflict, but the fact that the term 'knacker', which is generally known to cause offence and distress to the Traveller community, should be used so freely and so readily by other children, and in a way that emphasises the Traveller difference so negatively, represents a cause for concern.

The culture of antipathy and prejudice towards Traveller children does not appear to be confined to primary schools. Lodge and Lynch (2003) discovered a similar phenomenon in their study of educational equality climates in second level schools in Ireland. They report that a deep-seated prejudice towards Travellers was encountered in most of the schools, in which students experienced fear, resentment and mockery. Lodge and Lynch also found that the use of the term 'knacker' is widespread:

Students referred to them as 'knackers' during the course of focus group discussions and in their classrooms. In some cases, mockery of a particular area or location was related to the fact that some of the people who lived there were Travellers.

(Lodge and Lynch 2003, p. 23)

Other findings of this study related to students' beliefs that Travellers would not be accepted by parents or other students, and that Travellers were not seen as potential friends because connection with a Traveller would result in social rejection. These revelations could have serious implications for my aim to ensure that all Traveller children continue to second level schooling, if these negative attitudes reflect the

reception that awaits them there. However, there is one hopeful aspect in the study, in that where positive attitudes were expressed, they tended to be held by individuals who had been in primary classrooms with Traveller children, and had had no problems with their Traveller classmates. It would appear, then, that Traveller children can have a greater chance of being accepted at second level schooling if their classmates there have had the experience of attending primary schools that included Traveller children.

A further concern that I have is around the probability that the discrimination displayed by schoolchildren towards Traveller children would continue to be part of their practice of living in adulthood, and thus perpetuate the sense of marginalisation and oppression suffered by the Traveller community into the next generation. This situation would reinforce the concept of Traveller difference as a negative experience, and establish the Traveller community permanently in the position of the 'other' (Young, 1990; Giroux, 1993; MacLure, 1996), in a sense that would also define them as inferior. Efforts at inclusion and cooperation between the two groups would remain mainly ineffective as a result, and the promotion of concepts such as diversity and interculturalism would have only a minimal chance of success. Of concern also is the possibility that the discrimination exhibited by the settled children could have racist undertones. The fact that the victims belonged to an indigenous ethnic group, rather than to a separate nationality, does not mean that the incidents cannot be classified as racist. On this position I am in agreement with Gillborn (1995), citing Modood (1992):

Modood (1992) is critical of the emphasis on 'colour racism', arguing that this excludes minority groups whose most dearly felt identity concerns culture not colour.

(Gillborn 1995, p. 74)

In creating the space in my classroom for children from an ethnic minority group to articulate their experiences at the hands of the dominant majority, I believe that I was enabling them to interrogate the system that conspired in their oppression. McLaren (1995) highlights the importance of such pedagogic spaces:

For teachers, the classroom can be transformed into a hybrid pedagogic space where permission is not denied students who wish to narrate their own identities outside of marketplace identities and politics of consumerism, a space where individual identities find meaning in collective expression and solidarity with cultural others, where mimetic Eurocentric time recedes into the lived historical moment of contemporary struggle for identity. Here the imperatives of consumer culture and the hegemony of market identities are challenged by narratives of identity that are underwritten by concern for liberation and social justice.

(McLaren 1995, p. 105)

Here, McLaren is speaking directly to the Traveller experience of forging an identity outside of normative economic structures, which they have traditionally rejected, or ignored, by choosing not to be constrained by their limiting constructs. The provision of a pedagogic space in my classroom for the Traveller children to explore collectively their cultural identity enabled them to experience the solidarity that is a salient feature of their culture. The opportunity to give voice to the narratives of the oppression and discrimination that they had suffered may have resulted in a rarely experienced sense of liberation for them, and also served as a means of promoting my value around the rights of all children to social justice within the educational system. In the process, I was able to theorise my practice as the recognition of cultural diversity.

As a follow up to the discussion on the children's experiences of discrimination, I asked them to reflect on what they thought might be the reasons that led to other children subjecting them to unjust and disrespectful treatment, and these were their replies:

M: They think of us being Travellers and that we like travelling around and that we are always begging stuff off people. But we don't do that. And they call us knackers just to make us sad.

R: They call us knackers because they think we're smelly. But loads of girls in my class think I'm a buffer.

J.M: People call us knackers because they think that we're different, only because we're Travellers. But we're not, we're the same as everybody else.

M: We could call a name to them, because they're not different in anything to us, like they go to shops like us, dress in clothes like us and go to school like us.

D: Some people call us knackers just because they feel like it, trying to hurt our feelings.

R: Some people call us knackers because they've no one else to pick on.

In asking the children to reflect on the reasons for the acts of discrimination towards them, I hoped to raise their awareness of the nature of prejudice from the settled community, and also to enable them to understand that the discrimination was not attributable to any fault or failing on their part. The children's answers indicate that they are acutely aware of the stereotyping of Travellers by the settled community, for example M's remarks that 'they think we are always begging stuff off people, but we don't do that' or R's comment 'they think we're smelly'. The indignation of M's 'but we don't do that' appears justified in view of the fact that none of these children's parents engage in such activity currently, and they regard that aspect of their lives as part of their cultural history, as will be discussed in the cultural project later in this chapter. There is also a perception among the settled population that, because the areas around Traveller sites are often untidy, due to the amount of scrap metal and car parts left lying around, this means that Travellers are unhygienic. However, those who have visited Traveller homes, and I include myself in this group, would say that, in the majority of cases, Traveller women keep their living areas meticulously clean. Such stereotyping of ethnic groups as poverty stricken or unhygienic is not limited to the Traveller/settled situation. Eidheim (1969) reports the discovery of this phenomenon in his anthropological study of the Lappish people in Norway. Even though his experience was that the Lapps had what appeared to him to be 'a craze for cleanliness', nevertheless, 'in local Norwegian native theory, uncleanness is one of the vices of the Lapps' (1969, p. 42). On a similar theme, Freire (1972) refers to the use of myths, imposed on the oppressed by the oppressors, in order to preserve the status quo:

the myth of the industriousness of the oppressor and the laziness and dishonesty of the oppressed, as well as the myth of the natural inferiority of the latter and the superiority of the former.

(Freire 1972, p. 136)

It would appear, then, to be a common ploy, on the part of dominant cultural groups, to ascribe negative attributes to the minority or ethnic group that they wish to dominate, in order to establish their own superiority and to justify their domination.

Both M and R used the phrase ‘they think’, which seems to imply that they are conscious of the fact that settled people have certain misapprehensions in relation to the Traveller community. However, the children’s beliefs that calling them knackers is sometimes done simply to cause hurt, to make them sad or because there is no one else to pick on, introduces a more sinister aspect. This stance indicates a disregard for the humanity and dignity of fellow human beings, as well as disrespect for an ethnic minority group. It demonstrates how the dominant cultural group in society can conspire to keep the minority in a position of inferiority and subservience. Fanon (1967) depicts the dehumanisation and depersonalisation of a colonialist culture in the following quotation:

Because it is a systematic negation of the other person and a furious determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity, colonialism forces the people it dominates to ask themselves the question constantly: ‘In reality, who am I?’
(Fanon 1967, p. 200)

It would appear, then, that colonised or oppressed people are often denied the right to human dignity. Whether this is achieved through a deliberate act of oppression or through ignorance of the rights and entitlements of ethnic minorities is immaterial, as the consequences to the victims of the discrimination are equally devastating. The result for the oppressed group can often be marginalisation, alienation and classification as second-class citizens.

I would interpret M’s use of the words ‘they go to shops like us, dress in clothes like us and go to school like us’ as an example of what Freire (1972) calls cultural invasion, which he describes as a form of economic and cultural domination. In order for cultural invasion to succeed, those invaded need to be convinced of their own inferiority, which will lead them to adopt the values and customs of the invaders:

The more the invasion is accentuated and those invaded are alienated from the spirit of their own culture and from themselves, the more the latter want to be like the invaders; walk like them, dress like them, talk like them.
(Freire 1972, p. 151)

It could be the case, then, that M, in her wish to feel accepted, was aligning herself with the dominant group, in relation to the daily living practices. She was anxious not to appear different, because difference, where Travellers were concerned, was often perceived as inferior.

6:3 The other in the creation of self identity

An interesting feature of my discussion with the Traveller children was the manner in which one child, M, ascribed 'otherness' to the settled community when she said 'they're not different in anything to us, like they go to shops like us, dress in clothes like us and go to school like us'. This created in me an awareness that, while the majority might view the minority as the 'other', from the minority perspective, as in the case of the Traveller child, the majority group can be positioned in the role of the 'other' and therefore perceived as different. From this observation I formed the conjecture that perhaps this situation can only occur when a group is temporarily removed from its minority position, as in the case of M, who was in a group of Traveller children only when she made her 'us' and 'them' distinction. My reflection on this incident led me to conclude that each group in society may need an oppositional group that it can designate as the 'other' in order to establish its own sense of identity. This sense of interdependence between self and other is also evident in MacLure's (1996) statement that 'there is always something absent from the Self that only the Other can provide' (1996, p. 282). In this context, I recollect a conversation I had with Martin Collins, Assistant Director of Pavee Point Traveller Centre, who had posed the question as to why Travellers were treated as second-class citizens by the settled community (Collins, 1994). In correspondence with Collins, I wrote that I thought settled society needed to create an inferior group against which to determine its own sense of superiority. In a follow-up telephone conversation, Collins stated that it was equally true that Travellers needed the existence of the settled community in order to establish their own sense of identity. He added:

Travellers are only conscious of their identity when they come into contact with the settled community, as it is only then that it becomes an issue.

(field notes, 15 January 2003, item 6a)

There are theories in the literature on cultural issues that support this view of the need for an oppositional identity in order to create one's own sense of identity. Smith (2001), citing Bauman (1991), posits the theory of binary oppositions, which, he says:

led to the identification of the other – that which did not fit into the positive side of the binary and had to be subjected to power and control.

(Smith 2001, p. 234)

Among the binaries identified by Bauman and Smith are, deviation as the other of law-abiding, and 'them' as the other of 'us'. These two categories are of particular relevance to the Traveller situation. Travellers were always considered to be living outside the boundaries of the law and various efforts to compel them to abandon their traditional lifestyle, and adopt that of the dominant majority, were undertaken with the intention of forcing them to comply with the legal conventions of the majority (see Chapter 2). Therefore, Travellers were designated as 'deviants', in need of rehabilitation, which could be best achieved through assimilation into the majority culture, resulting in the annihilation of their own culture in the process (Gur-Ze'ev, 2003). The injustice inherent in such a view is evident in Freire's (1972) description of the 'marginal men [sic] who deviate from the general configuration of a "good, organized and just" society':

The oppressed are regarded as a pathology of a healthy society, which must therefore adjust these 'incompetent and lazy' folk to its own patterns by changing its mentality. These marginals need to be 'integrated', 'incorporated' into the healthy society that they have 'forsaken'.

(Freire 1972, p. 60)

If this, then, is the interpretation of the particular stance of oppressed people, such as the Traveller community, the options of self-determination and self-actualisation, as signifiers of the practice of social justice and equality, are unlikely to be available to them.

Goffman (1968) includes gypsies, of similar origin to Travellers, among the categories of people considered as social deviants. He describes the general perceptions of these designated deviants as follows:

They are perceived as failing to use available opportunity for advancement in the various approved runways of society; they show open disrespect for their betters; they lack piety; they represent failures in the motivational schemes of society.

(Goffman 1968, p. 171)

This rather cynical interpretation by Goffman of the situation of those who choose to live outside the norms of the dominant society is, unfortunately, often the reality for those thus located. They are generally subjected to the critical gaze of the dominant majority, who perceive them as the inferior 'other'. The 'them' and 'us' binary as it applies to the Traveller community is evident from my discussion with the Traveller children, though the manner in which M reversed the terms indicates the relevance of positionality to the relationship. In a situation where there were only Traveller children present, she was able to position Travellers as 'us' and settled people as 'them'.

Hall (1996) contrasts the traditional concept of identity as 'an all-inclusive sameness, seamless, without internal differentiation' with a view of identity as 'constructed through, not outside, difference' (1996, p. 4). Drawing on the theories of Derrida (1981), Laclau (1990) and Butler (1993), Hall refers to:

the radically disturbing recognition that it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its constitutive outside that the "positive" meaning of any term – and thus its "identity" – can be constructed.

(Hall 1996, p. 4)

This theory is validated in my conversation with Collins, where he stated that for Travellers, identity and culture only become an issue when confronted with the dominant cultural identity of the settled community, in opposition to which it then becomes visible. Collins articulated this theory, not simply from his reading of the literatures around the concept, but from his own lived experience as a Traveller. The truth of this theory is also

evident in the manner in which M refuted what she considered to be the negative aspects of Traveller culture, as perceived by the settled community, for example when she said ‘They think Travellers are always going around begging but we don’t do that’, and her rejection of such stereotypes enabled her to assert her Traveller identity in a more positive and affirming form.

A remark that needs some explication here is R’s comment that ‘loads of girls in my class think I’m a buffer’. In the course of the discussion, I did not hear the final word in the sentence clearly and asked R to repeat it, but she refused, saying that it was a ‘bad’ word. I then recalled coming across the word in a book on Traveller culture, and remembered that it was a derogatory term for a settled person, similar in usage to the word knacker for a Traveller. It is not generally used by Travellers, who are more likely to use the term ‘country person’ when referring to a settled person. Andreck (1992) indicates that Irish Travellers in the United States also use this term, when she quotes a Traveller woman as saying, ‘We aren’t suppos’ to make friends with country people’ (1992, p. 64). What concerns me here, though, is the implication underlying the statement ‘loads of girls in my class think I’m a buffer’, rather than the use of the word ‘buffer’. The statement suggests that R is quite happy to be considered a settled person by the other children in her class, and I wondered what consequences this could have for her identity as a Traveller. Was R suppressing her Traveller identity in an effort to gain acceptance by the majority in her class?

My suspicions were confirmed some weeks later in a conversation I had with R’s mainstream class teacher. This teacher had interviewed R’s mother, N, as part of a project on which she was working. One of the questions she had asked N was, ‘How do you feel about R attending the Resource Teacher for Travellers?’ to which N had replied:

I’m delighted that she’s going, because R is trying to pass herself off as a settled person, but she is learning about her culture from Mrs. Sullivan.

(field notes, 18 June 2002, item 6b)

While it is gratifying to know that my efforts at recognising and promoting Traveller culture are appreciated by a Traveller parent, I am still troubled by the bigger question, namely how to transform a situation, where a child feels she has to conceal her identity in order to be accepted by her peers, into a situation where all cultures are accepted as being equally valid, thus allowing a child to feel comfortable with her identity. In this context, the challenge to maintain one's individual identity within a community is illustrated in Kristeva's (2002) conversation with Lechte, in which she refers to sharing singularities:

Each person has the right to become as singular as possible and to develop the maximum creativity for him or herself. At the same time, without stopping this creativity, we should try to build bridges and interfaces, that is to say, foster sharing. The religious heritage is going to lead us to rethink the idea of sharing, but without repressing singularity. This is the great challenge of the modern world. It is not a question of creating a community in the image of the past; it is a question of creating a new community on the basis of sharing singularity.

(Kristeva and Lechte 2002, p. 162)

Such a positive and self-affirming climate of acceptance, which appears to be grounded in principles of equality and diversity, would provide the conditions for R to be able to participate in the community of the majority group in society, without having to deny or conceal her cultural identity.

The reality, however, can often be less affirming and accepting for minority groups, who can experience their identity as being of less value than that of the dominant majority. Fanon (1992) articulates his experience of having his identity construed as inferior to the dominant one, a concept of identity that he strongly rejects:

I am not a potentiality of something, I am wholly what I am. I do not have to look for the universal. No probability has any place inside me. My Negro consciousness does not hold itself out as a lack. It *is*. It is its own follower.

(Fanon 1992, p. 236, emphasis in original)

An equally devastating experience, for those who do not share the dominant identity, can occur when others try to define their identity for them. This may be done with the best of intentions, as, for example, when members of the majority are dismissive of the cultural

differences of the minority, in an effort to confer on them a sense of belonging. Fanon (1992) explains how such action can deprive a minority group of its sense of identity, in the following impassioned statement:

What is certain is that, at every moment when I was trying to grasp my own being, Sartre, who remained The Other, gave me a name and thus shattered my last illusion...he was reminding me that my blackness was only a minor term...Without a Negro past, without a Negro future, it was impossible for me to live my Negrohood.

(Fanon 1992, pp. 237-8)

One final point that I want to make in relation to the children's views arises from J.M's comment that 'they think we're different, only because we're Travellers. But we're not, we're the same as everybody else'. While I would disagree with the claim of sameness, as it runs counter to my belief in the separate cultural identity of the Traveller community and represents a contradiction of my commitment to diversity, I did not challenge J.M's assertion that Travellers are the same as everyone else, on the basis that I did not think that J.M was referring to issues of culture, beliefs, practices or identity. Instead, I suggest that her statement was a plea for equality of treatment with settled people, based on principles of humanity and social justice, rather than an attempt to deny her cultural differences. J.M's claim of sameness was her device for trying to achieve acceptance by her peers, just as R's strategy of concealing her identity was, and both incidents indicate the level of oppression inherent in educational institutions and the need for a radical change in the policy of promoting education as a monocultural practice.

6:4 Culture and second level schooling

Underpinning my work on Traveller culture and the exploration of related issues, in which I engaged collaboratively with the Traveller children, was the desire to see these children progressing to second level schooling. I was aware that certain factors militated against this wish and that it would be an uphill struggle to achieve it. In the first place, there was the fact that Travellers did not have a history of participation in the educational system beyond primary level (see Chapter 2). Their reluctance to remain in the educational system may have been due to their experiences of marginalisation while in

primary school, and to a general feeling of not belonging, of being outsiders. It may also have had its roots in their specific Traveller culture, which would have regarded twelve-year-olds as adult members of the community, and it would, therefore, be considered inappropriate for them to continue to participate in the schooling process. Their roles from the age of twelve would revolve around learning to deal in scrap-metal or car-parts in the case of boys, and learning the skills of house-keeping in the case of girls. These skills were transmitted from parent to child, and were regarded as a necessary preparation for marriage, which, in the past, usually occurred at around fifteen or sixteen years of age.

I was aware that positing the idea of education as a means to a job, which can prove relatively successful in encouraging children from the dominant majority to remain in the educational system, would not hold any attraction for Traveller children. These children cannot yet envision themselves as participants in the general workforce, perhaps partly because they fear that prejudice from settled people would prevent them from doing so, and partly because it is for them an innovative concept, never having been part of the Traveller tradition. My educational ideology is not premised on a teleological philosophy that views education as a means to a job, preferring instead a paradigmatic perception of education for its own sake and as a lifelong process. In this context, I am in agreement with Dewey's (1966) theory:

Since growth is the characteristic of life, education is all one with growing; it has no end beyond itself. The criterion of the value of school education is the extent to which it creates a desire for continual growth and supplies the means for making the desire effective in fact.

(Dewey 1966, p. 53)

I regard education as vitally important in providing participants with choices that could affect the trajectories of their future lives. Thus, the concept of education as an emancipatory process and one that offers options to students was the model that I wished to present to Traveller children as an inducement to remain in the educational system.

To develop in the Traveller children a consciousness of the value that I perceived as accruing to long-term participation in the educational system, I initiated a role-play situation in which the children were enabled to articulate their arguments for and against partaking in the educational system. The role-play involved three generations of a Traveller family: a girl who does not wish to go to school on a particular day, her mother who tries to persuade her to go by pointing out the value in doing so, and her grandmother who argues that her granddaughter should not be forced to go to school against her wishes. These three roles were played by M, J.M and D. I invited four other Traveller children, G, Di, Ma and M.T, to participate in a follow-up discussion by considering with which of the three arguments they could identify. I made a video recording of the session, which I have retained in my research archive (2003, item 6c). I have included a transcript of the discussion in Appendix B, and I quote some of the pertinent comments here:

G: Her mother is right. She should go to school because she could miss out on her learning and her writing.

Di: I think the girl is right, that we should be able to take days off school. But I also think the mother is right because everyone has a dream to become something but you can't become anything without an education.

Ma: I think the mother is right because in this day and age everyone needs an education to make something of themselves. Not many Travellers make anything of themselves... My granny says if she could live her life over again she would have gone to school... There is no point in us staying at home, because there is nothing for us to do, just depending on others for money and everything. I want to have my own money and be independent.

G's comment that the girl in the role-play should go to school as she could 'miss out on her learning and her writing' indicates that G is aware of the importance of regular attendance at school for achieving literacy skills. G's comment did not come as a surprise to me, as G's attendance at school has always been excellent. Di's statement, on the other hand, exemplifies the dilemma that often confronts Traveller children in the educational system. Di identifies with the girl in the role-play in her need for 'days off' but also recognises the role of education in realising one's dreams. That Di should mention her dreams in this context is significant, in view of McLaren's (1999) reference to Freire's suggestion that the oppressed are denied the possibility of engaging in such dreams:

Freire lamented the brute reality that witnessed the oppressed always living as the detachable appendages of other people's dreams and desires. It seemed to Freire that the dreams of the poor were always dreamt for them by distant others who were removed from the daily struggles of the working class and were either unable or unwilling to recognise the dreams that burned in the habitats of their hearts.

(McLaren 1999, p. 50)

It would appear, however, from Di's comment that Traveller children are quite capable of dreaming their own dreams; what they may need from others, particularly from those engaged in educational provision, are supportive structures and the necessary resources to achieve their dreams.

Perhaps the most insightful comments come from Ma, who not only posits the idea of education as enabling one to 'make something of' oneself, but reinforces this view with the idea that a lack of education can reduce one to a state of unemployment and dependency. Ma mentions the influence of her granny in formulating her views on education, an influence that I can verify as genuine, as this granny is the mother of the child who had completed her Leaving Certificate in the 1970s, when it was rare indeed for a Traveller to enrol in a secondary school, still less to remain there for five years (see Chapter 2). Ma's interest in education featured subsequently in a seminar I attended in Dublin City University (DCU) on 23 March 2004. The title of the seminar was 'Your Child and the Post Primary school – Access, Participation and Outcome', and it was organised jointly by the Visiting Teacher Service for Travellers and DCU Access Service. During a group discussion, Traveller parents were asked to voice their concerns for their children in relation to second level schooling. Many of the comments were of a negative nature, such as that there was no point in Traveller children receiving secondary education as it would not secure employment for them, due to discrimination. In an attempt to introduce a more positive and optimistic note, I commented that Ma was determined, not only to complete her secondary education, but to study accountancy at third level. Ma's mother, A, who was in the group, remarked, 'Ma is getting every encouragement in school to stay on in education from Bernie' (field notes, 23 March

2004, item 6d). While it was encouraging to hear Ma's mother articulating such a positive experience of the educational system, nevertheless, I would argue that the initial impetus that fuelled Ma's ambition came from her home, in the person of her granny, and that my contribution consisted mainly in ensuring that Ma's experience of primary schooling did nothing to counteract her ambition for herself.

I asked the three girls who had participated in the role-play, M, J.M and D, for their views on the opinions expressed by the characters they had played and, like Di, while accepting the value of an education, they also articulated a need for 'days off'. My reflection on their views led to the realisation that there was a cultural basis for these particular views. As I explained in Chapter 2, one of the salient features of Traveller culture is the practice of nomadism, and though not widely engaged in at present, due to the more settled nature of Traveller existence, the Traveller community still retain the option of travelling, should the need arise. They will travel considerable distances for family funerals, weddings and other celebrations and, due to their sense of community, they will travel to these events if any member of their extended family is involved. This strong sense of solidarity also ensures that Traveller children normally accompany their parents to these family gatherings, even at the cost of removing them temporarily from schools. In arguing for days off, therefore, I suggest that Traveller children were reserving a space for the practice of their culture. This has implications for school policies, to the extent that allowances ought to be made for absences of Traveller children that are connected with cultural practices, rather than assuming, as is often the case, that such absences are indicative of a lack of interest in the educational system or in what it has to offer.

Further reflection on the Traveller girls' desire for days off posited the possibility that this stance could also be a form of resistance to the imposition on them of dominant ideologies that promulgated different views from theirs in regard to the value of education (Willis 1977; Fagan 1995). The dominant ideology that sets a high premium on the value of education would regard regular school attendance as of the utmost importance and would be intolerant of transgressors of this maxim. In contrast, the

Traveller community places a higher value on their cultural traits of nomadism and solidarity than on regular school attendance, which positions Traveller children in an oppositional stance in educational institutions. Consequently, they are coerced into a situation of having to resist the bureaucratic attitude that renders their value system as unworthy of consideration. I would suggest that this phenomenon could be described as a positive resistance, often a necessary weapon for the survival of a minority culture in a hostile environment, and of a different category to a form of resistance that simply rejects the idea of education in its totality, an action that has undertones of negativity.

This dichotomy in the discourse on resistance features in some of the theories in the literature. Kenny (1997), for example, at the beginning of her book asks the question, 'Are Traveller children, when they obstruct the agenda of schools, engaging in resistance?' (1997, p. 3). This question suggests a category of resistance that I would describe as negative resistance, for the act of resistance appears to be secondary to the act of obstructing the programme of the school. However, at a later stage Kenny, referring to the Traveller community, speaks of 'the survival of a distinct group despite assimilationist policies' as an act of resistance' (1997, p. 274). Here, the resistance appears to be a positive act, counteracting the negativity of the attempt at assimilation by the settled community. Similarly, Willis (1977) describes the rejection of the educational system by working-class boys as a conscious act of resistance on their part. In choosing to adhere to their own values, rather than adopt the middle-class values offered by their school, they were engaging in a positive act of liberation and of self-actualisation. In her analysis of resistance theory, Fagan (1995) refers to oppositional behaviour as being politically based rather than deviant. She views this type of resistance as a radical act that 'refuses to collude in its own educational suppression' (1995, p. 92). This is also an example of a positive effect of resistance in a situation where to comply with attempts to assimilate or suppress one's culture would amount to a denial of that culture and could, therefore, be regarded as a counter-cultural act of negation.

In view of the possibilities for transformation inherent in acts of positive resistance, I would endorse it as a strategy for Traveller children in their struggle for survival against

dominant forces that seek to assimilate them into the majority culture. I accept that it would be difficult for Traveller children to engage in acts of resistance within their mainstream classes, particularly if there is just one Traveller child in a class. For this reason, I posited my classroom as a space for Traveller children to articulate, in solidarity with one another, their resistance to inequitable and unjust treatment by the dominant majority within the educational system.

6:5 The project on Traveller culture

A core value throughout my research process, and one that is essentially connected to my espoused values of social justice and equality, was my belief in the equal validity of Traveller culture with the dominant culture. This value underpinned my educational practices with Traveller children, as I sought to ensure that they experienced their culture as valued and valuable. I suggest that my stance on this issue resonates with Freire's (1997, cited in McLaren, 1999) proposal of 'a profound respect for the cultural identity of students' (1999, p. 49). McLaren explicates what Freire means by this proposal:

a cultural identity that implies respect for the language of the other, the color of the other, the gender of the other, the class of the other, the sexual orientation of the other, the intellectual capacity of the other; that implies the ability to stimulate the creativity of the other.

(McLaren 1999, p. 49)

I suggest that, in order to be able to stimulate the creativity of the other, it may be necessary to locate the other in a specific time and space. The historical positioning of a group can be best understood through a focus on its cultural identity. In this context, and for the purpose of promoting a more positive view of Traveller culture, I began a project on this topic with six Traveller girls, M, J.M, D, G, Di and R. I did not reveal to them any of the information that I had accumulated in this area, preferring instead to allow them to discover their historical background through discussion with family members, in keeping with the oral tradition that is a feature of Traveller culture. Each child decided on what area she wished to work, and after a period of approximately six weeks, had made considerable progress.

J.M produced a sizeable amount of information on Traveller culture in general, gleaned from her aunt who works in Pavee Point Traveller Centre, which appears to pursue a policy of inculcating pride in Traveller history and culture in its workers. M compared the lifestyle of the past, when Travellers lived in a constant state of abject poverty and dependence, with their present, relatively affluent existence. She wrote:

Nowadays Travellers' lives have changed. Travellers don't need to beg anymore. Some of them have jobs now and they can buy clothes and food. They no longer live in horse-drawn caravans.

(research archive, 2004, item 6e)

D described the occupations of the past, in particular those engaged in by Traveller women, including the making of artificial flowers, which they then sold door-to-door in order to eke out a living, and fortune telling, in which they engaged at fairs and festivals. G wrote about the clothing, including the heavy shawls worn by the women, and the jewellery they loved to display. R's topic was the discrimination suffered by Travellers in the past, including the treatment of Traveller children within the educational system:

Some people did not like Travellers, such as teachers, so they had a hard time at school. People judged by the way Travellers lived and looked, not by what good people they were.

(research archive, 2004, item 6e)

Di provided the art work for the project, drawing pictures of the horses that were such an important part of Traveller culture in their essentially nomadic existence, the barrel-top, horsedrawn wagons, and the roadside camps in which many Travellers lived.

When the children had collected their information, they typed their stories on the computer in my classroom. Occasionally, I detected a reluctance on their part to write on a particular issue, especially if it reflected a view of Travellers as poverty stricken, thus in an inferior position in terms of the settled population. For example, J.M did not want to write about the fact that Travellers were often poorly dressed in the past, or about the fact that Traveller women used to go from door-to-door seeking charity, which she simply referred to as begging. She said, 'If I write that, people will think Travellers are poor and

I'd be ashamed' (research diary, 2004, item 6f). Aware of the Traveller propensity to use 'ashamed' instead of 'embarrassed', I realised that she was not so much ashamed of her heritage as embarrassed that others, more judgemental, might consider it shameful. This knowledge caused me to rethink my original plan for the project, which was for the Traveller children to present their project to their classmates in order to provide them with an understanding of Traveller culture. I had hoped that this would enable the Traveller children to have a voice in their mainstream classes, to achieve a higher status in the eyes of their classmates and to promote their culture as of equal value with that of the majority in their classes. However, in view of the Traveller children's reluctance to highlight certain aspects of their cultural history, I decided that it would be inappropriate to continue with my plan. Whatever benefits were to be gained from pursuing it could be negated if it caused feelings of shame, embarrassment or inferiority to the Traveller children. There was also a risk that presenting the project could give settled children further cause for name calling and discrimination against Traveller children. This was a risk that I could not find any justification for taking, and so I did not pursue my intention of making their project available to their peers.

Having abandoned my original plan for the project, I decided to display it on a notice board in my classroom. Each time the children visited my room, they took great pride in their own work, and also enjoyed reading each other's contribution to the project. The six children involved in the project all transferred to second level schools in September 2004. Four of the children, D, R, G and J.M, who all attend the same secondary school, returned to visit me in May 2005. They expressed surprise and amazement that I still had their project on display. When I asked what they thought I would have done with it, they answered, 'We thought you would have thrown it in the bin'. I assured them that this would never happen, that their project had so much to offer in terms of raising awareness of the richness of Traveller culture and history. Currently, the project remains on display in my classroom, and is available for inclusion in my research archive (2004, item 6e).

In spite of the fact that I was unable to see the project through to its intended end, I contend that it still had many positive outcomes for the Traveller children. They were

enabled to explore features of their cultural history and ethnicity in a secure environment and in solidarity with each other. Tracing and comparing the stories from the lifestyles of their grandparents to their own lifestyles provided opportunities for enhancing and reinforcing their identities as members of the Traveller community. The children also became aware of the embeddedness of discrimination in educational institutions, through learning of their parents' experiences of being left sitting at the back of the classroom and largely ignored, and their own lived experiences of discrimination through derisory name-calling. In the process of engaging in cultural discourse with the Traveller children, my classroom became a site for recognising and valuing Traveller culture, a space where the negative effects of oppression could be, at least temporarily, dissipated and a place where each child could make a contribution as an individual and as a member of the Traveller community.

6:6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explained how I have succeeded in transforming my classroom into a space for the recognition and acceptance of Traveller culture. I have also demonstrated how I have enabled Traveller children to engage in dialogue on issues relating to their culture and identity. I have encouraged them to adopt a critical stance in interrogating the discriminatory attitudes and actions of settled children towards them, and have posited the possibility of positive resistance as a response to discrimination. I do not mean to suggest that I have accomplished all that I wished to achieve in the area of social justice and equality for Traveller children in the educational system. I submit, rather, that I have begun the process. There is still much to be achieved at an institutional level, in terms of more widespread recognition and acceptance of diverse cultures and identities. In the next chapter, I will indicate how I have begun to influence such situations through my work with an after school group that transformed, from an original group of Traveller children, into a mixed group of Traveller and settled children, thus providing the option of a space for the practice of diversity. In the process, I was able to theorise my practice as the lived reality of social justice as the recognition and acceptance of diversity.

Section 3 Chapter 7 Data collection and analysis

Phase three: The after school group

7:1 Introduction

The third phase of my data collection and analysis, arising from the after school group with which I am involved, is the subject of this chapter. This initiative provided the opportunity for social engagement by the Traveller children in a context that was external to the schooling process, even though it was organised through the school and took place within the school building. The significance of this project can be gleaned from the fact that, unlike children from the settled community, Traveller children do not normally participate in extra-curricular social activities organised by the settled community, and therefore socialisation for them occurs either within the extended family situation, or in the context of formal schooling. Accordingly, I viewed the establishment of the after school group as an ideal opportunity for the expansion of the social skills of Traveller children, as well as a potential site for ultimately influencing personal and social transformation in their lives. It would also provide the prospect of promoting my value of equality of opportunity, through enabling Traveller children to engage in after school activities, which have traditionally been available only to settled children.

At the outset, the above aims were the extent of my expectations from the setting up of the after school group, but as the initiative progressed opportunities for more substantial outcomes presented themselves. In particular, the expansion of the initial specifically Traveller group to include settled children, in the second year of operation, created the potential for the forging of intercultural links between Traveller and settled children. Through my involvement in this process, I was strategically positioned to critically examine the customary hegemonic frameworks for the conduct of such mixed groupings, such as an assimilationist approach, that often seeks to deny the existence of cultural differences, or an integrationist model, that may attempt to eliminate these differences. Gundara (2000) indicates the inadequacy of the concept of integration in the following statement:

It involves no change in the social structure and content of education, nor does it reflect the presence of diverse cultural groupings.

(Gundara 2000, p. 50)

Boler and Zembylas (2003) are equally convinced of the inappropriateness of a policy of assimilation:

Liberal individualism also encourages a philosophy of difference that simply wants to deny or erase difference. Those who subscribe to 'we are all the same' embrace – however unconsciously – a commitment to assimilation.

(Boler and Zembylas 2003, p. 113)

My interrogation of assimilationist and integrationist stances also revealed certain shortcomings in their appropriateness for achieving a form of inclusion that is oriented towards valuing the contributions of all, as the assumptions underpinning them did not appear conducive to achieving equality of respect for all participants. Assimilationist and integrationist approaches appear to operate from a basis of trying to deny or erase differences, which led me to reject these models, and to propose instead a concept of inclusion that recognised and accepted difference. Through engaging, therefore, in a practice of inclusion that neither tried to deny that there were differences between the two groups of children, nor tried to portray the group as one homogeneous amalgam, I posited instead a view that the Traveller and settled children represented two diverse groups, and that both were entitled to equality of respect as they cooperated in a single group formation. In this context, I am in agreement with the views of Apple and Beane (1999) when they state that, in democratic schools, diversity should be valued, rather than seen as a problem, and would endorse their description of communities of practice in such schools:

By their very nature, these communities are diverse, and that diversity is prized, not viewed as a problem. These differences enrich the community and the range of views it might consider. The community has a sense of shared purpose – the emphasis is on cooperation and collaboration.

(Apple and Beane 1999, pp. 11-12)

The benefits to all participants in such an encounter can be immeasurable, in terms of an enhancement in the value of each person's cultural contribution, as well as an acceptance of the importance of issues of justice and fairness in educational institutions. As a result of engaging in the after school group from my stance of equality for all, I was able to theorise my practice as a space for the acknowledgement and acceptance of diversity. In this chapter, then, I trace the narrative of how my theory of inclusion as the acceptance and recognition of diversity emerged from my practice that was grounded in my values of social justice and equality.

7:2 Beginning of the initiative

My involvement in the setting up of the after school initiative was the result of a meeting with Winnie McDonagh from Traveller Education Support Options (TESO) in March 2003. Winnie was already facilitating after school groups in three schools in the area – an infant school, a senior primary school and a secondary school – and was assisted in these ventures by her co-workers in TESO. She wished to set up a similar group in my school, and invited me to coordinate the project with her. The purpose of the group was to ensure a smooth transition to second level schooling for Traveller pupils, a purpose that was commensurate with my long-standing concern to see all Traveller children progress to secondary school. Implicit in the purpose of the after school group was the expectation that all would make the transition to secondary school. In this context, our target group consisted of the four Traveller girls in sixth class and the six Traveller children in fifth class. I explained our intention to the Traveller children, and also composed a letter for the parents, informing them about the proposed after school group, and seeking permission for their children to participate. Winnie visited the homes of the children to address any concerns that parents might have. Three of the sixth class pupils (Ma, C and M.T, who already featured in Chapter 6) and four of the fifth class pupils (G, R, J.M and M, who also featured in Chapter 6) accepted the invitation to join the group.

7:3 First year of the after school group

An important feature of the after school group was that it offered the possibility of providing Traveller children with the potential for their own empowerment. Through

participating in group discussions, they could voice their opinions on educational issues of concern to them, and indicate the conditions that could affect their future participation in the educational system. Marcuse (1972) appears to doubt the possibility of dominated people achieving this level of freedom, when he asks:

how can a people who have been the object of effective and productive domination by themselves create the conditions of freedom?

(Marcuse 1972, p. 20)

Marcuse's view appears to be in conflict with Freire's (1972) exhortation to the oppressed to 'name their world', rather than have others name it for them. However, I suggest that both views can be reconciled. Marcuse, in saying that the dominated cannot achieve freedom 'by themselves', does not rule out the possibility that it can be achieved with the help of sympathetic others. In fact, Marcuse appears to be arguing that society should provide the help needed, when he says of society:

it should first enable its slaves to learn and see and think before they know what is going on and what they themselves can do to change it.

(Marcuse 1972, p. 45)

Similarly, Freire does not exclude the possibility of others creating the conditions to help the oppressed to name their world. In this context, I considered my involvement in the after school group as providing the conditions for the voices of Traveller children to be heard, and for their right to have their opinions acknowledged.

In the after school group, then, Traveller children were enabled to construct their own knowledge. This situation represented a change in epistemological focus that contrasted with their usual positioning within the educational system as receivers of the knowledge transmitted by the dominant majority group, which usually reflects the cultural values of that group. I suggest that their participation as knowledge creators helped to contribute to their empowerment, on the basis of the interconnectivity of power and knowledge, as explicated by Foucault (1980). McLaren and da Silva (1993) make a similar connection in the following statement:

Knowledge is always indexical to the context of the knower and the known. In other words, knowledge is always implicated in relations of power and power is distributed laterally and historically, which is to say unequally among groups differentiated by race/ethnicity, gender and class.

(McLaren and da Silva 1993, p. 72)

By altering the method of knowledge construction in the after school group, I suggest that the power relations were also altered, thus creating the potential for a more equitable power/knowledge situation.

The children could also develop a critical consciousness of their own normative positioning as 'other' in the educational system. As there were no settled children in the original group, the Traveller children did not experience themselves as an inferior minority, which they often did in the usual schooling system, as evidenced by their experiences of discrimination (see Chapter 6). There was not, therefore, any need for them to hide their identity, or to refrain from telling their stories. McLaren and da Silva (1993) explain the importance of students' being able to tell their own stories:

Student voices are codified and emplotted in stories and in the often vivid descriptive accounts of their lives that students piece together from their daily experiences. The stories students bring into the classroom often reflect the ethos and spirit of the community and, if not its collective memory, then the structured silences that make up its repressed consciousness.

(McLaren and da Silva 1993, p. 72)

The after school group, then, served a valuable function in providing the space for the affirmation of Traveller children's cultural identity, through facilitating the telling of their stories.

To fulfil the aims and objectives of the group, the children were facilitated in:

1. The development of skills aimed at building up self-esteem and self-confidence, on the basis that this would help to retain Traveller children in the educational system.

2. Reflection on their experience of beginning primary school, as this experience could be replicated in starting at second level schooling.
3. The exploration of concepts such as friendship and relationships, including a discussion around what qualities they would value in a friend, with implications for how they would choose a friend in secondary school.
4. Critical reflection on their experience at primary level with a view to considering whether there was any aspect of that experience that they would wish to change.
5. Awareness of the options available to them should they encounter problems, whether or not of a discriminatory nature, in their secondary schools.

The contributions during group discussions of two of the girls in particular, C and M.T, were impressive, and are worthy of analysis here, considering that these were the two pupils who had such difficulty in remembering even the simplest of spellings (see Chapter 5), and who both had undergone psychological assessments that indicated a low level of intellectual ability. C's contribution occurred during the discussion on friendships and relationships. In response to a question as to whether these two concepts were the same or different, all the other girls were in agreement that they were the same, but C insisted that they were different, explaining her position as follows:

C: You can be friendly with someone, but that doesn't mean that you have to be in a relationship with that person. And you can be in a relationship with someone, like someone in your own family, but you might not be good friends with that person.

(research diary, 2003, item 7a)

The other children then began to consider the question from the point of view of C's explanation and conceded that she had made a valid point. In terms of the benefit to C from this incident, I would describe it as contributing to the enhancement of her self-esteem and self-confidence. This can be corroborated in the response of C's mainstream class teacher, who, when I related this incident to her, expressed her astonishment and said, 'C never contributes to any discussion in class. She is so quiet. I just cannot get a word out of her' (field notes, 2003, item 7b). I did not find the teacher's comments surprising, considering C was in a minority of two Travellers in a class of twenty four, a

situation that someone as shy and reticent as C would find extremely threatening and not conducive to active participation or ultimately to confidence building.

The incident relating to M.T occurred when the children were writing down their reflections on whether, in retrospect, there was anything they would have done differently during their time in primary school. Unable to express her thoughts in writing, M.T engaged in the following dialogue with me:

M.T: I would have been nicer to someone.

Me: Do you mean someone in your class?

M.T: Yes, everybody hates her. Nobody wants to sit beside her or play with her.

Me: So why do you wish you were nicer to her?

M.T: Because I don't think it's fair, the way everyone in the class is ganging up on her.

(research diary, 2003, item 7c)

I was aware of the identity of the child to whom M.T was referring, and was aware also that this child was often the author of her own exclusion and ostracism by her classmates through her antisocial behaviour. However, what concerns me here is M.T's sense of regret at having participated in what she considered the unfair treatment meted out to the other child. Like C, M.T was one of two Traveller children in a class of twenty six and, like C, she kept a low profile within the classroom, a situation that could be interpreted as a manifestation of internalised oppression, caused by her marginalised status as a Traveller and as someone with learning difficulties. My reflection on this incident caused me to wonder, did she collude in the ostracism of the other child through a wish to align herself with the majority, thus removing herself from the state of marginalisation by placing the other child in that position, or did she feel voiceless and powerless to do anything other than agree with the hegemonic decisions of her classmates? I am more inclined to accept the latter explanation, in view of the fact that M.T was obviously unhappy at the treatment of the other child, but did not feel free to express her feelings around this in her class situation. However, in the less threatening and less inhibiting atmosphere of the after school group, where she could experience being in a majority situation, she felt empowered to reveal her true feelings on the subject and to articulate

the denial of her values of justice and fairness. Her own experience of discrimination and alienation would have sensitised her to a feeling of empathy towards the other child, which her other classmates would not have experienced, and therefore would probably never have questioned their campaign of exclusion and dehumanisation of the other child.

The two incidents to which I have referred here exemplify the nature and scope of the discussions that occurred in the after school group. I submit that they reflect the fact that the aims of the initiative were achieved. They are indicative of the manner in which the self-esteem and self-confidence of the children were enhanced. They also demonstrate that the children were encouraged to reflect critically on their educational experiences. I suggest that these successful outcomes of the after school group contain the potential to contribute to the retention of Traveller children in the educational system, thus fulfilling the original purpose of the group, as well as promoting my aim of ensuring that all Traveller children should continue to second level schooling.

7:4 Second year of the project

At the end of the six weeks of the after school group, I was asked by TESO to submit an evaluation of the project. Consequently, I was informed that sanction for the project had been granted for the next school year. In September 2003, I met with Winnie to plan the programme for the coming year. We decided that, as we would be operating for the whole school year, we could afford to broaden our horizons and include a variety of activities, such as art and craft and cookery. The three sixth class pupils had now progressed to second level, the four fifth class pupils were now in sixth, and so we invited the four Traveller girls who had just moved up to fifth class to join the group. Two of them, S and K, accepted the invitation to participate in the group, leaving our number at six for the coming year.

It was my understanding that the group would continue to operate as a facility specifically for Traveller children, but events dictated otherwise, and it became necessary to alter the composition of the group so as to include settled children also. The change in status was reflected specifically in the ethos of the group, which was transformed from a

site for the validation and legitimation of Traveller culture, to a space for respecting and valuing an intercultural approach (Kenny 1997). This occurrence was a significant event in terms of my research, as it represented the catalyst that enabled me to theorise my practice as the acceptance and recognition of diversity. Through the process of undergoing a transformation from a monocultural group to a diverse cultural group, I was able to substantiate my claim to have developed a living theory of the practice of diversity through living to my values of social justice and equality.

I will explain briefly the factors that led to this occurrence. The group dynamic was excellent when all six girls were present, but this was a rare occurrence. Often there were only three in the group and on those occasions we questioned the viability of the group. Just before Christmas 2003 Winnie made the suggestion that we should perhaps open up the group to settled children. Initially, I had reservations about this proposal, being aware that the Traveller children viewed the group as their special space for openly expressing their cultural beliefs and practices, and where power relationships of dominator/dominated were not an issue. Nevertheless, conscious of the need for a greater dynamic within the group, and in the expectation that there might be a greater opportunity for the practice of my values of equality and social justice in a mixed setting of Traveller and settled children, I agreed to try out Winnie's suggestion. However, neither Winnie nor I was prepared for the reaction of the Traveller children when we put the proposal to them. There was unanimous resistance to the idea at first. On the next occasion that we broached the subject, I had the following conversation with J.M, one of the sixth class pupils who were still resisting the idea, in contrast to the fifth class girls who were now seeing it as a possibility.

Me: Why don't you want other children to join the group?

J.M: I don't want any of the girls in my class in it.

Me: Why not?

J.M: They'd laugh at us. They'd make fun of the way we talk.

Me: But they are used to the way you talk. They don't laugh at the way you talk in class.

J.M: Sometimes they do.

(research diary, 2004, item 7d)

I realised from this dialogue with J.M that the Traveller children had legitimate fears around the issue of settled children joining the group, based on their previous experiences of working with these children in classroom situations. Winnie and I endeavoured to allay their fears by pointing out that the after school group was operating in a different context to the classroom situation, and that we had a code of practice, the rules of which had been composed by the Traveller children themselves at the first group meeting, that would ensure respect for each person's contribution within the group. This would not allow for devaluing or belittling of any individual's participation in the group's activities. The children consequently felt more reassured and said they were willing to give the experiment a try, but they requested the right of veto on who should join the group. We could not guarantee them this right, but promised that, if any settled children agreed to join the group, and there was no certainty that they would, we would inform the group as to who they were, prior to their joining.

Further reflection on my conversation with J.M led me to realise that institutionalised discrimination was more prevalent than I had believed. My taped discussions on discrimination with the Traveller girls revealed their experiences of it in the schoolyard (see Chapter 6). Now, in response to my statement 'They don't laugh at the way you talk in class', J.M had said 'Sometimes they do', indicating its presence in the classroom also. This realisation created in me an awareness of the invidious and pervasive nature of institutional discrimination. I suggest that the reason for the other children's derision of the Traveller children's mode of speech was not that it was not Standard English, for neither was their own speech, but that they spoke with a different accent, and used idioms that were more common in rural areas than in the urban setting in which they were located. The other children appeared to be intolerant of difference and wished the Traveller children to conform to their speech patterns. This was a most effective way of silencing the voices of the Traveller children and contributing to their sense of oppression. McLaren and da Silva (1993) refer to such institutional oppression as follows:

Students in classroom settings are *always already* inscribed in institutional, cultural and social systems of domination, oppression and power/knowledge relations that reify and demonize the Other in essentialist ways.

(McLaren and da Silva 1993, p. 65, emphasis in original)

It is difficult, in the reality of such blatant oppression and domination, to envisage the oppressed becoming subjects, rather than objects, as suggested by Freire (1972), in their own educational process. I came to a realisation, therefore, that the space I provided, both in my classroom and in the after school group, was of vital importance in valuing and legitimating Traveller voices.

I had reason to recall this issue of the Traveller mode of speech when, in February 2004, I was asked by the Home/School/Community coordinator to give a talk on Traveller education to a group called Parents in Education. These parents had left school without any qualifications, and had now returned to the educational system to pursue a course of study that would lead to accreditation from the National College of Ireland. At that time, they were completing a module on various aspects of the educational system, including pre-school education, learning support in English and Mathematics, and the Traveller community's experience of education. In the question and answer session following my input, one parent commented:

I think Travellers are the same as everyone else now. They are dressed the same and they don't look any different. It's only when they speak you would know they were Travellers.

(field notes, 2004, item 7f)

I do not wish to give the impression that this parent was in any way prejudiced towards Travellers. In fact, from some of the other comments she passed, for example, 'There is a Traveller child in my daughter's class and she is just the same as the other children' and 'I know a Traveller woman who had a job for a while and I think that's great' one could form the opinion that she was kindly disposed towards Travellers. My reason for highlighting her first comment here is that she articulated the Traveller mode of speech as a point of difference between Traveller and settled communities, and thus seemed to lend credibility to J.M's concerns that if settled children, who were also conscious of, and

even emphasised, this divide, were allowed to join the after school group, there was certainly a possibility that they would laugh at the way Traveller children speak.

7:5 Introduction of settled children to the after school group

Four fifth class pupils from the settled community were invited to join the group in January 2004 and two accepted the invitation. R.D attended her first after school group meeting on Wednesday February 4th and A the following week. From the outset, both girls adapted very well to the format of the group and there was no evidence of disharmony between Traveller and settled girls. In terms of what they contributed to the group, I discerned a lightness of tone, which could be interpreted as emanating from the fact that these two girls were not laden down by the shackles of oppression. Their presence in the group resulted in a more positive and optimistic atmosphere, as the Traveller girls willingly joined in their carefree banter. One of the cultural differences between the two groups reveals itself here, namely that in the Traveller culture, the girls would be regarded as adults, with certain responsibilities, whereas in the settled culture, they would be regarded as children, not yet ready for adult-type responsibilities.

R.D and A were both in the same fifth class as the Traveller child, S, who had joined the group the previous September and who had been in my school for just a year at that stage. S had great difficulty in settling in and was involved in many rows with the other children, all of which she regarded as acts of discrimination against her. My involvement in settling some of these incidents caused me to consider S as the embodiment of internalised oppression, which I define in terms of a condition identified by Kenny (1997):

Giroux theorises about how domination, rooted in social and economic conditions, ‘reaches into the structure of personality itself’, so that human beings participate in their own oppression.

(Kenny 1997, p. 65)

In the case of S, the internalised oppression manifested itself in frequent outbursts of outward aggression. I was concerned that, like the boy who cried wolf too often, S might

not be listened to eventually, and might lose credibility in any future incidents of legitimate discrimination. S had difficulty with reading and writing processes, but could argue her case orally quite convincingly. This phenomenon would appear to be congruent with Drudy and Lynch's (1993) assertion in relation to working-class children:

There may well be cultural discontinuities between the home or community and the school for certain categories of working-class children. However, in no sense has it been proved that there is any deficit in the linguistic skills of these children. Recent research suggests that such children have verbal skills well in excess of their performance levels in school and on standardised tests, and that the schools themselves are inhibiting forces.

(Drudy and Lynch 1993, p. 154)

There were several occasions on which S demonstrated that she possessed excellent verbal skills. On one occasion, when she had persuaded the other Traveller child in her class to corroborate her version of an incident that occurred in their mainstream class, I sensed the other child's unwillingness to be coerced into a position of opposition to her classmates, and said to her 'Had you any problem in your class last year?' S immediately replied, 'I know what you are saying. You are saying there was no problem until I came to this school. You are saying it is all my fault.'

I noted in my reflective diary my sense of unease and disquiet resulting from S's comments. Initially, I could not rationalise these feelings, as I could not discern any denial of my values of equality and social justice in my approach to solving the problem. Yet, I was conscious of the fact that it was my question that had elicited S's response and that therefore responsibility for the ensuing situation lay with me. Deeper reflection revealed to me that I was positioned in a paradoxical situation between my sense of loyalty to colleagues, some of whom in their analysis of this conflict had labelled S a troublemaker, and my espoused values of care and concern for all Traveller children. My question to the other Traveller child was meant to be supportive of her, but was interpreted by S as aligning myself with the institutional perception of herself as a second-class citizen, voiceless and powerless to name her oppression. I was disturbed to think that the previous good relationship that I had with S might now have suffered a

setback. I would have to work hard to restore our relationship to the 'I-thou' model recommended by Buber (1958), rather than the disempowering 'I-it' that I believe to have been S's experience in our last encounter. While my relationship with S might have met the criteria of 'acceptance' in Buber's terms, it did not seem to meet his condition of 'confirming', which Murphy (1988) explains:

The act of confirming involves the 'personally making present to the other', confirming what he wishes, thinks or feels. It means being able to perceive every reality from the standpoint of the other. It is distinguished by Buber from 'acceptance' of the other though ultimately the act of confirming includes acceptance as well. While the latter is mainly an affirmation of the other's reality, the act of confirming requires that the educator or therapist be prepared to struggle with the other, to wrestle with him against himself. It is concerned with stimulating the process of growth in the other and can embrace the entire polarity of authentic and inauthentic tendencies present in him. It is founded on a deep regard for the other's worth and potentiality, on a willingness to discover what he can become and to assist towards its fulfilment.

(Murphy 1988, p. 102)

In order to achieve the high standards of personal engagement outlined by Buber, I would need, in any future encounters with S, to locate myself in the position of her otherness, which would enable me to perceive her reality and to engage with her in the struggle to authenticate her process of growth and becoming. I would also need to be more self-reflective 'in practice', as well as 'on practice' (Schön 1983), so that in my sensitivity to one child's needs, I would not be insentient of another's requirements, and would therefore be less likely to engender feelings of negativity or worthlessness. Hartog (2004), citing McPhail (2001), articulates the type of moral sensibility that I suggest could be a useful framework for my future actions:

Understanding how and why individuals may be affected in particular ways by your actions is one thing but entering into the anxiety, pain, fear, despair and hatred that another sentient human being experiences as a result of your actions is far more disturbing and disrupting.

(Hartog 2004, p. 310)

An analysis of my encounter with S in the context of the sentiments expressed here convinced me that I had, albeit unwittingly, caused hurt and disappointment to S, and that

this was the reason for my own initial anxiety and apprehension around the incident. I resolved, therefore, to choose my words more carefully and to endeavour to achieve a greater awareness of the various levels of discourse at play in any future discussions with S around issues of conflict in the classroom. It was in the context of this conflictual background that Winnie and I first mooted the idea of settled children joining the after school group, and so it was with a certain degree of incredulity that I noted that S was the least resistant of the Traveller children to the idea. When it materialised that the two children who had accepted the invitation to join the after school group were from S's class, I entertained the hope that they and S might become friends and that this friendship would permeate the classroom situation also, thus reducing the number of rows involving S and her classmates. My hopes were realised in the fact that, as noted in my reflective diary, there were only two instances of conflict with S in the six months since R D and A joined the after school group, compared to numerous incidents in the previous year. This was one of the major benefits, in terms of conflict resolution, resulting from the opening up of the after school group to settled children.

7:6 When the minority group is temporarily in the majority position

I wish to refer briefly to some of the implications arising from a situation in which a group that is normally positioned as a minority group, as are Traveller children within the educational system, can find itself transformed temporarily into a majority position. My reflection on such an occurrence came about as a result of the following incident. I presented a paper (Sullivan 2004) at the American Educational Research Association annual meeting in San Diego in April 2004, in which I referred to the problems confronted by Traveller children as they strove to contend with their marginalised position within the educational system. In an interactive discussion I was asked by a participant whether settled children would be faced with the same difficulties, if placed in a class where the majority were Traveller children. At the time, I could not give a definite answer, as I was unsure of the implications of the hypothesis. With the benefit of my reflection on my experience of the situation in the after school group, pursuant to the introduction of the two settled children, I now believe that the two situations, the normal school one in which the Traveller children are in the minority and the temporary after

school group, or hypothetical one, where they are numerically in the majority, are not analogous. The theory with which I was presented was based on a false premise that assumed the difference between Traveller and settled children to emanate from the fact that Traveller children are in a minority position numerically. However, with the realisation that the difference is based on concepts of domination and oppression, it is obvious that it is of little consequence whether the number of Travellers is greater or lesser than the number of settled children. The settled children still belong to the dominant group in society, irrespective of the number of Traveller children in their class, which could explain how the two settled children integrated so well into the after school group: they were self-confident and secure in the knowledge that they belonged to the dominant majority. One only has to look to Freire (1972) for evidence of how a group that is numerically in the majority can be subjugated and oppressed by a smaller but dominant group that wields an unequal share of the power in the relationship, and is thus viewed as constituting a minority group. Giddens (2001) refers to the use of the term minority in this manner as a 'non-literal way of referring to a group's subordinate position within society, rather than its numerical representation' (2001, p. 248).

I had, nonetheless, certain reservations as to whether it would be appropriate for the after school group to reach a stage where settled children outnumbered Traveller children. My concern stemmed from the fact that an initiative that had begun as a space for the recognition and acceptance of Traveller culture, and that had progressed to a practice of the inclusion of settled children, might develop into a situation where Traveller children were once again in the minority. As this situation represented the starting point for the after school group, of which one of the aims was to try to counteract the usual minority status of Traveller children within the schooling system, it could appear as though we were going around in a circle, rather than moving forward. I voiced my concern to Winnie, who said that this was in fact the situation in an after school group that she operated in another school, where settled children in the group outnumbered Traveller children. I asked what effect this had on the group, and Winnie replied:

The dynamic of the group is different. The Traveller children do not speak or act like Traveller children while they are in the group. They behave just like the other children. Their cultural difference is not obvious at all.

(field notes, 21 April 2004, item 7g)

I considered my concerns around the majority/minority issue to be justified in the context of Winnie's experience in her other after school group. Nevertheless, I realised that there was a distinct possibility that the after school group could reach the stage where Traveller children would be in the minority, if an insufficient number of Traveller children exercised their option of joining the group and, consequently, more settled children had to be recruited to maintain the viability of the group. I resolved, therefore, to monitor such an eventuality in order to ensure that a minority positioning for Traveller children would not result in their culture being ignored or reduced to a status of inferiority.

7:7 Cultural divide

One incident that occurred in the after school group is worthy of note in terms of the issues it raised. On this occasion there were five girls present, three Traveller girls (G, J.M and S) and the two settled girls (R.D and A). R.D had asked J.M how she and G were related to each other, and this was how the conversation continued:

J.M: We're double cousins.

R.D: What's that?

J.M (to me): They wouldn't know what that is, would they?

Me: Probably not.

J.M: They don't have that thing, do they?

Me: Not really. It would be very rare.

J.M: So there's no point in talking to them about it.

Me: You could try explaining to them what it is.

J.M: Well, if your father was married to someone, and if his brother was married to her sister, and if they had children, well, you'd be double cousins with them.

R.D: I still don't know what you mean.

(field notes, 10 March 2004, item 7g)

Once again, the cultural divide between the Traveller and settled communities is apparent in this conversation. Because of their strong sense of belonging in the extended family and community networks, Travellers know exactly where they are positioned in this

system. It is this firm sense of rootedness in family and community that gives Travellers their most positive and grounded sense of identity. They do not need, as settled people often do, genealogical services in order to construct a family tree. Traveller children can identify their third cousins, a concept that would probably be a source of confusion for many settled children. Inherent in the above conversation also is the notion of endogamy, or intermarriage, which is a common feature of the Traveller way of life, but relatively unknown in the settled community. Giddens (2001) suggests that endogamy is practised among minority groups 'in order to keep alive their cultural distinctiveness' (2001, p. 249). McDonagh (2000) describes the importance of travel in providing marriage opportunities within the extended family:

Getting together with other members of the family also serves many practical functions, for example, finding suitable marriage partners. Some Traveller parents arrange their children's matches (preferably within the extended family).

(McDonagh 2000, pp. 34-5)

One would have expected a decrease in this practice, in line with the adoption of some of the settled community's norms by the Traveller community on becoming more settled, but the opposite seems to have occurred. The decrease in the practice of nomadism has resulted in fewer opportunities for young Travellers to socialise with their counterparts in other areas, thus limiting their choice of marriage partners. Marriage between first cousins is, therefore, still a regular feature of Traveller culture. 'Pavee Point Newsletter' (July 2003) carried a report of a lecture on consanguinity, or cousin marriage. This is an indication of the prevalence of intermarriage within the Traveller community, and of the community's desire for information on the implications of this practice. Such practice is, however, not normally part of the experience of the settled community, whose members have ample opportunity for wider social interaction, hence R.D's lack of familiarity with the phenomenon of 'double cousins'.

7:8 The question of identity

My reflection on the conversation between R.D and J.M raised questions for me as to the nature of my own identity. Prior to this, I had been concerned mainly with the structure

and formation of Traveller identity, neglecting to consider how my identity might change in the process. In agreement with Hall (1996), I suggest that:

the concept of identity does *not* signal the stable core of the self, unfolding from beginning to end through all the vicissitudes of history without change.

(Hall 1996, p. 3, emphasis in original)

Accepting, then, that identity is fluid, I had assumed that, while I might not always have agency in relation to this fluidity, I would at least have, at some level of consciousness, an awareness of any processes of change that impacted on my sense of identity. What is relevant, therefore, to this discussion is J.M.'s positioning of me when she said, 'They wouldn't know what that is, would they?' and 'They don't have that thing, do they?' Clearly, J.M. was not including me in the 'they', which referred to the two settled children. I do not know if she would have included me in the 'us' of her Traveller status, but my inclination is to think that this interpretation may be slightly incongruous from her point of view. In a similar vein, a nine-year-old Traveller child, Ca, said to me, as she was preparing to leave my classroom, 'Do you ever feel ashamed to be a Traveller?' (research diary, 2005, item 7h). On this occasion, I interpreted the question as meaning 'I am ashamed to be a Traveller', which seemed to confirm my view that Ca, just like S from the after school group, is the embodiment of internalised oppression. In this context, I tried to reassure Ca that being a Traveller was not something to be ashamed of, though I doubt the effectiveness of my words in raising her self-esteem. Ca, who lives in a house among settled people in an area some distance from the school, had often told me of the name-calling, verbal abuse and discrimination to which she was usually subjected when she tried to play with neighbouring settled children. She told me that this was the reason that she did not attend school in the area in which she lived, but chose instead to attend my school, where she had a number of cousins. It was a constant struggle, therefore, to try to boost her self-image and to create in her a sense of pride in her cultural identity. Perhaps, then, her question was in a sense an attempt to align herself with an identifiable sympathetic other. My reflection on these two incidents led me to ask, where was I positioned in such situations? If I did not fully belong in either camp, was I located somewhere in between? My own immediate response to this dilemma is to assert that I do

indeed occupy a space on the continuum between these two polar positions, but an analysis of some of the theories in the literature on identity may be helpful in producing an alternative perspective on this question.

Grossberg (1996), in his description of identity, theorises the concept of hybridity as a 'third space':

Images of a '*third space*' (as in Bhabha) see subaltern identities as unique third terms literally defining an 'in-between' place inhabited by the subaltern. Images of *liminality* collapse the geography of the third space into the border itself; the subaltern lives, as it were, on the border. In both of these variants of hybridity, the subaltern is neither one nor the other but is defined by its location in a unique spatial condition which constitutes it as different from either alternative.

(Grossberg 1996, p. 91, emphasis in original)

While in agreement with Grossberg in relation to hybridity being 'neither one nor the other' and as being uniquely located in a spatial condition of difference, I do not see that space as being positioned on the border, at least not in any permanent or static sense. Also, a border location indicates the possibility of detachment and disconnectedness from the two alternatives, and this does not reflect my position, which I would see as a possible point of connection between the two polar positions. I would posit my space as a location of flexibility and fluidity, as a point of mediation between the two alternatives, which is why I prefer to describe it as a continuum, rather than a border space. Grossberg (1996) goes on to suggest the idea of 'border crossing' that resonates with the theories I have put forward here:

Closely related to the two figures of hybridity is that of the '*border crossing*', marking an image of between-ness which does not construct a place or condition of its own other than the mobility, uncertainty and multiplicity of the fact of the constant border crossing itself.

(Grossberg 1996, pp. 91-2, emphasis in original)

This image of the border crosser as unconstrained by time or space, neither static nor limited by boundaries, fits the emancipatory and creative vision that I hold for such a position. It is also a concept of identity that I suggest can be crucial to the implementation

of policies of inclusion and equality, and to the achievement of an intercultural ethos, in the integrated after school group, with the potential to permeate the classroom environment eventually.

The concept of the border crosser also features in the work of Giroux (1993), who regards it as a necessary condition for the understanding of Freire's work in terms of its historical and political importance. Giroux elaborates on his interpretation of the idea of the border crosser thus:

Becoming a border crosser engaged in a productive dialogue with others means producing a space in which those dominant social relations, ideologies and practices that erase the specificity of the voice of the other must be challenged and overcome.

(Giroux 1993, p. 178)

The space, therefore, that I provide for Traveller children to give voice to their cultural practices and beliefs must not be one where their voices risk being silenced by the dominant discourses. By becoming a border crosser, as opposed to a border dweller, I can help to reduce this risk and ensure that the space they inhabit is an authentic opportunity for social engagement and ultimately for social transformation. Spivak (1988) makes a strong argument for not remaining in the marginalised space, on the grounds that it would be extremely difficult to interrogate the dominant political stance from that space, and suggests:

the deconstructivist can use herself (assuming one is at one's own disposal) as a shuttle between the center (inside) and the margin (outside) and thus narrate a displacement.

(Spivak 1988, p. 107)

The discussion of border crossing, as contributing to the formation of identity, has implications for discourses of self and other. Bhabha (1994) suggests that subjectivities can be constructed in the in-between spaces of liminality:

These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating the strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself.

(Bhabha 1994, pp. 1-2)

The in-between space, or third space, constitutes the location for the continuous formation and conceptualisation of identity. It is a space of hybridity, where cultural diversity can find articulation. Bhabha (1994) also designates the in-between space as the location for the struggle against colonialist oppression:

The ambivalent identification of a racist world turns on the idea of man as his alienated image; not Self and Other, but otherness of the Self inscribed in the perverse palimpsest of colonial identity.

(Bhabha 1994, p. 44)

I would deduce from this idea that the in-between, hybrid or border crossing space is the location of neither self nor other, but of otherness of the self. Bhabha appears to be arguing for a similar stance:

It is not the colonialist Self or the colonised Other, but the disturbing distance in-between that constitutes the figure of colonialist otherness.

(Bhabha 1994, p. 45)

I suggest, then, that this is the space that I occupy in my relationship with my Traveller pupils. The in-between space of hybridity and border crossing is neither the location of a unified self, nor of an oppositional other, but of otherness to a self that is eminently positioned to monitor interactions between these two locations in an effort to avoid the effects of colonialist or imperialist relations. In adopting this stance, I would argue that I was best placed to identify, and reject as unjust or inequitable, instances of oppression towards Traveller children. d'Entrèves and Benhabib (1996) seem to ascribe a similar possibility to a position of otherness:

The invocation to alterity is meant to alert us to the processes of exclusion, marginalization, silencing and repression that operate inconspicuously within the apparently neutral attempt to articulate meaning and to rationally reflect upon it.

(d'Entrèves and Benhabib 1996, p. 26)

Besides providing a space from which to interrogate dominating and oppressive processes, I contend that the stance of otherness should also facilitate the recognition and acceptance of difference. In this respect, I would question the potential of Habermas's theory of communicative action, which promotes the idea of consensus, to achieve a situation that takes account of the reality of diversity. Bernstein (1996) articulates the theory of communicative action as follows:

first, as signifying actions that operate through explicit or implicit intersubjective consensus about norms, values and practices; and secondly, as signifying actions which are geared explicitly to establishing norms, truths and the like through dialogically achieved consensus.

(Bernstein 1996, p. 261)

My rationale for rejecting this theory is grounded in my values of social justice and equality. The attempt to realise these values in my practice has led me to conclude that a stance of consensus is more likely to accommodate the norms and practices of the dominant majority in society, and to leave the wishes and desires of minority groups for the most part unsatisfied and unfulfilled. Oppressed groups would not have the opportunity to transgress in order to critique dominant structures, which hooks (1994) claims is necessary for the achievement of education as the practice of freedom. A policy of consensus, then, appears to be aimed at achieving a homogeneous and uniform society, which would deprive alternative voices of the opportunity of being heard. This view represents a denial of my values of social justice and equality, since it does not acknowledge the reality of diversity in the lifeworlds of all people.

In critiquing the norms of the dominant majority that refuse to acknowledge the reality of cultural diversity, I suggest that my identity can also be articulated in terms of the external-insider in Banks' (2001) typology of cross-cultural researchers. Banks describes this phenomenon as follows:

The external-insider was socialized within another culture and acquires its beliefs, values, behaviour, attitudes, and knowledge. However, because of unique experiences such as personal experiences within an outside culture or community or marginalization within the culture into which he or she was socialized, the individual questions many of the values, beliefs, and knowledge claims within the community in which he or she was socialized.

(Banks 2001, p. 175)

Thus, the external-insider occupies a unique position in being able to adopt a broader perspective that allows for the acceptance and recognition of the two cultures in which he or she is involved. I suggest that such is my positioning, in that, while belonging to the dominant majority in society, I endeavour to ensure that the Traveller culture, of which I now have a greater understanding and for which I have the utmost respect, is ascribed equal acknowledgement in my educational practice.

7:9 The influence of the after school group on the education of wider social formations

Aware of the fact that changing the situation within my classroom would not necessarily produce social transformation on a wider scale, I harboured a hope that eventually my influence would permeate at least the school culture, if not social structures beyond the confines of the school. Mindful of Huberman's (1992) view of the value of 'tinkering' within one's own classroom, nevertheless, I am attracted to Apple's (1996) suggestion of the need for expanding the social influence:

All educators (one would hope) are deeply committed to making schools better places to be. Efforts to improve the curricula and teaching that goes on in these institutions continue to be crucial. Linking them to larger democratic struggles, to social movements that aim to overcome gender, class, and race inequalities inside and outside the school, is now more important than ever.

(Apple 1996, p. 107)

I would support Apple's view that improvements within the school can also influence situations outside the classroom. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) argue that schools are sites of social reproduction, which could be interpreted as suggesting that change must first occur in society, and then be reflected in the educational system. I would argue that

it is also possible for the reverse to occur, that change can originate within schools and can then be successfully extended to external social systems. As Apple (1996) claims:

schools are not separate from the wider society, but are part of it and participate fully in its logics and socio-cultural dynamics. Struggling in schools *is* struggling in society.

(Apple 1996, p. 107, emphasis in original)

To the extent, then, that schools are part of the social fabric, I contend that they are capable of effecting social transformation. I will now refer to an incident that indicates how the after school group succeeded in influencing an event that was external to the school situation.

This was when a significant opportunity for the expansion of the social influence of the after school group presented itself in the form of an invitation to participate in Dáil na bPáisti. This forum was established as a way of allowing children to give voice to their opinions on various topics of importance to them, a summary of which would be presented to the Minister for Children. Delegates to the forum were elected, firstly through their respective schools, and at the next stage through a cluster of schools. Pavee Point Traveller Centre pointed out to the organisers that, under this system, minority groups, such as Travellers, would have little chance of being represented at the forum. Consequently, a number of places were reserved for minority groups, which was how the after school group received an invitation to participate. Winnie and I decided to take the three Traveller children who had been part of the group last year, and were now attending second level schools, and three from the present group to the conference.

Dáil na bPáisti took place in the conference centre in Croke Park in Dublin on 22 May 2004. There were delegates from counties Dublin, Meath and Wicklow. The first topic that the children were asked to discuss was education. The settled children in the group to which four of the Traveller children and I were assigned, were articulate and were willing to give feedback from the group. However, I felt that, unless one of the Traveller children was afforded the opportunity of giving feedback to reflect the Traveller view on

education, it would defeat the purpose of our presence at the conference. I decided that J.M could best represent this view, but when I requested her to do so, she gave the same response, 'I'd be ashamed (embarrassed)', as when I first asked her to write about her cultural traditions (see Chapter 6). However, this time I persevered with my request, on the basis that, unless Traveller children could overcome their feelings of shame or embarrassment, their voices would not be heard. My strategy was successful, as eventually J.M agreed to my request. In the event, one of the settled children gave feedback on the general educational issues discussed in our group and then J.M presented hers, which consisted of the lack of participation by Travellers in the educational system in the past, their increased willingness to participate at present, the absence of their cultural practices in the process of schooling, and a recommendation for the teaching of Cant, the Traveller language, in schools. The other two Traveller children were in the group to which Winnie had been assigned and one of these, Ma, an extremely confident and articulate girl, gave feedback from her group, but it consisted of general issues and did not reflect the particularity of the Traveller perspective, which, I would suggest, made J.M's contribution all the more valuable and significant.

The second topic for discussion at the conference was the subject of drug and alcohol abuse. On this occasion, J.M, her confidence boosted by her successful delivery of feedback in the first session, did not need any prompting from me to agree to give feedback on the dangers associated with drug-taking, while one of the settled children would report back on strategies for avoiding drug-taking. However, what took me completely by surprise was the unanticipated offer from C and G to share the feedback with J.M. They both took a section of J.M's report and presented it, together with J.M, at the feedback session. Admittedly, the quality of the feedback may not have been of the same standard as that of some of the settled children, but that is not the important issue here. For me, the significant factor was that four of the six Traveller children whom we had taken to the conference had availed of the opportunity to have their voices heard in a setting that had as its audience more than fifty settled children and about twenty-five adults. I felt that, after almost three years of working with Traveller children, I was now

reaching the stage of fulfilling my aim of enabling their usually marginalised voices to be heard in the public domain.

The significance of that momentous realisation did not finish there. The following day, a national Sunday newspaper carried a brief account of the Dáil na bPáisti forum. The article referred to the general issues raised at the conference and ended with the sentence:

There was also a call for the Irish Travellers' language, Cant, to be taught to children from the travelling community at primary level.

(Burke 2004, p. 6)

This was an exact quotation from J.M's feedback on the session on education, the only specific quotation from the conference, in an article of just one hundred and fifty words. The following day, I made two enlarged photocopies of the article, one for the staff notice board, on reading which staff were suitably impressed, and the other for J.M, who proudly displayed it in her classroom to the admiration of all her classmates.

Our after school group came to an end shortly after the Dáil na bPáisti event, and I thought it appropriate that we were finishing on such a successful note. Just as at the end of the previous year, I completed an evaluation of the year's work for TESO. I mentioned the successes of the venture, such as the inclusion of settled children in the group and how this impacted on matters in terms of the dynamics of the group. I referred also to the participation of some members of the group in Dáil na bPáisti, and indicated the potential that this could have for achieving a higher profile for Traveller issues in the public domain. I had one critique of our year's work, and it was that we had not focused specifically on the transition to secondary school, which had been the original purpose of our group. It could be argued that, in reality, we had achieved far more, and we had certainly provided the girls with opportunities for developing self-esteem and self-confidence, which would benefit them in the transition to secondary school, but I was conscious of the fact that we could also have managed to focus directly on our original aim, if we had not lost sight of it amid the other exciting and significant events in which we had become involved. I recommended, therefore, that if we were to proceed with the

group the following year, we should set aside the last term, from April to June, for a particular focus on the transition to second level schooling, as we had done in our first year.

7:10 Conclusion

I do not think I can overstate the importance of the after school group in effecting social transformation in the lives of Traveller children. In the first instance, it enabled them to socialise with each other in a school setting, thus transforming their view of school as an instrument of alienation and marginalisation to a concept of school as part of the fabric of society. When the Traveller children were comfortable with this panorama, we moved one step further in introducing settled children to the group. Having overcome their initial fears and resistance around this groundbreaking idea, the Traveller girls adapted well to the inclusion of the two settled girls. The process of socialisation continued as both groups interacted with each other and confirmed their status as equal members of the group. There was no 'them and us' divide in undertaking group activities, which reflected a spirit of cooperation and collaboration. At this stage, I would be in favour of other settled children joining the group, but whether it should reach a situation where settled children outnumbered Traveller children, I am not at all certain. I am conscious of the fact that I have argued the point that the dominator/dominated divide is not based on numerical superiority, but I would suggest that Traveller children, who are numerically in the minority in classroom situations, need to have a numerical majority in the after school group to give them a sense of security, as well as the experience of being temporarily in a majority position.

My in-depth reflection on what occurred in the opening up of the after school group to settled children produced an interesting interpretation of the various levels of interaction at play here. Initially, the group was enacted as a space for the socialisation of an ethnic minority community, traditionally located in a position of marginalisation and alienation. From within that space of exclusion came the move to include those from the majority, who traditionally occupied the space of dominance and power. The generosity of spirit reflected in the act of inclusion emanated from the margins and became a reciprocal

element in the successful merging of the two components of the new group. In the process, power was diffused, as the relationship became one of equality and friendship. The after school group, then, exemplified a form of inclusional practice that was grounded in principles of social justice and equality, which supports my claim to have developed, through the exercise of my educative influence, a living theory of inclusion as the practice of diversity.

In the context of this analysis, I would suggest that what occurred in the after school group was an example of social transformation, which, if replicated in other such groups, could have a major effect on more widespread social formations. There is a real possibility of such an occurrence, in that Winnie informed me that she had been asked by the principal of the other senior primary school, in which she operated an after school group with the help of a fellow-worker from TESO, if a teacher from her school could become involved with the after school group in the next school year. I would argue that there is some justification for suggesting that my successful involvement in the after school group, which was unique in our area in terms of teacher involvement, influenced that principal's request. I would also claim justification in foreseeing wider social implications, in terms of social transformation in the lives of both Traveller and settled communities, arising from the originality of my participation in the after school initiative. In the next chapter, as I outline the findings from my research, I will provide the evidence to support the claims that I have made here.

I