A Living Theory of a Practice of Social Justice:

Realising the Right of Traveller Children to

Educational Equality

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Abstract

A living theory of a practice of social justice: realising the right of Traveller children to educational equality.

Bernie Sullivan

This thesis is an articulation of my living theory of social justice that evolved through undertaking research in the area of educational provision for Traveller children. It demonstrates how my embodied values of social justice and equality compelled me to engage in social and educational practices that refused to privilege some children at the expense of minority or marginalised groups. I explain how I transformed these values into the living critical standards of judgement by which I wish my work to be evaluated.

Through using a self-study approach, within an action research methodology, I was able to reflect on my practice, with a view to learning how to improve it. This process contributed to an enhancement of my personal and professional development, and enabled me to theorise my practice as a form of emancipatory education. My emergent living theory of practice, therefore, incorporates a theory of social justice that reflects an ethos of equality of respect for all. It goes beyond traditional propositional theories of justice in that it has evolved from the lived reality of social practices in an educational institution.

I explain how I arrived at an understanding that a practice of inclusion is more appropriate for a living theory of justice than one of assimilation, which often seeks to deny difference, or integration, which frequently attempts to eliminate difference. A practice of inclusion that is grounded in an intercultural ethos may take account of individual differences and transcend normative institutional hegemonic structures and discourses that are grounded in a logic of domination.

Through developing my living theory of social justice as equality of respect for all, and as the recognition and acceptance of diversity, I became aware of the possibility that a process of inclusion could have a greater probability of success in achieving sustainable social evolution if it originated from the marginalised space. In this context, my research could have significance for other marginalised groups, as well as for the Traveller children in whose interests the research was undertaken.

Introduction

A passionate belief in the right to social justice and equality for all people, irrespective of social class, race, gender or ethnicity, fuelled my research, which is the subject matter of this thesis. While cognisant of the difficulties, or perhaps even the near-impossibility, involved in trying to achieve a reasonable level of equality in all spheres of life, I feel strongly that it is worth striving for equal opportunities in the area of educational provision. The rationale behind this aspiration is my conviction, like Russell (1932) and Dewey (1966), of the importance of education as a lifelong process that has the capacity to confer on participants liberatory and life-enhancing experiences. I am concerned, therefore, that if some people are denied the opportunity of participating on an equal basis with other participants in the educational system, they will automatically be deprived of its long-term benefits, thus perpetuating the negative influence of their unequal treatment by educational institutions. This issue becomes especially relevant in the context of formal schooling, where there ensues a further problematic arising from the realisation that when a school treats its minority pupils unjustly, this also affects the quality of education offered to the other pupils. As Connell (1993) says:

> An education that privileges one child over another is giving the privileged child a corrupted education, even as it gives him or her a social or economic advantage.
>
> (Connell 1993, p. 15)

It could be seen, therefore, as serving the interests of all the pupils, whether they comprise the dominant majority or an ethnic minority, if the structures, procedures and climate of the school are premised on principles of equality and social justice. The process of endeavouring to live to such principles in my educational practice enabled me to generate a living theory of the practice of social justice as equality of respect for all. I explain the concept of a living theory of practice shortly. I chose to focus on equality of respect because of my conviction that it is a fundamental value that could inform practices of equality, such as equality of access and equality of

participation. Furthermore, equality of respect is frequently absent from pedagogic practices, as noted by Lynch (1999): 'Equality of respect is rarely shown for minority and marginalised cultures and traditions within mainstream education' (1999, p. 18).

The idea of equality, or of a form of levelling, evokes memories of a poem, entitled 'Death the Leveller', that I recall reading in an anthology of poetry from my secondary school days. At that time I was fascinated by the metaphor of the awesome power ascribed to death, which was portrayed as an instrument capable of reducing all to equal status. Now, having reflected on this idea from my current perspective, I have come to the conclusion that equality achieved in death is of little practical value and that what should be aimed at is some measure of educational equality during life, when it can be savoured and enjoyed, and when it can bestow a sense of self-worth and self-esteem on its beneficiaries. Among those who would benefit from some modicum of equality during their lifetime are those who are currently educationally marginalised, such as the socially disadvantaged, Traveller children and those with learning difficulties. I work as a Resource Teacher for Traveller children (RTT), and so my research is concerned with the quality of education offered to Traveller children within the schooling system.

Traveller children belong to an ethnic minority group who exist mainly on the margins of Irish society. Boldt *et al*. (1998) confirm the marginalised status of the Traveller community when they state 'Travellers have become recognised as a distinct group, although they remain marginalised to a large extent in Irish society' (1998, p. 8). Some Traveller children have learning difficulties, and there is also a tendency by the settled community to relegate the Traveller community to the lowest social class. The marginalisation that is frequently the experience of the Traveller community is apparent in the following extract from Dwyer (1974):

> For generations they have lived on the fringe of society, tolerated by some, rejected and despised by many, accepted fully only by a few.
>
> (Dwyer 1974, pp. 92-3)

O'Reilly (1995) describes the low esteem in which Travellers are often held when he refers to 'the long history of racism and rejection which has been the experience of all Travellers' (1995, p. 7). The implications of these additional categories of disadvantage for my research were that it became a multilayered and multifaceted enquiry into how to enable Traveller children to overcome some of the constraints on their learning that were positing education as a negative and oppressive experience for them. Instead, I proposed a view of education as including the possibility of transforming Traveller children's alienating experiences into life-enhancing and affirming practices, in fulfilment of my commitment to the achievement of social justice for all.

In this thesis, I am claiming that through my research I have generated my living educational theory of practice (Whitehead 1993), which is grounded in the transformative potential (McNiff 2000) of valuing Traveller children's culture and identity within the educational system. In describing my theory as a living theory, I wish to differentiate it from traditional propositional forms of theory. The latter are usually articulated in an abstract, conceptual form, whereas my living theory, which is grounded in my embodied values of social justice and equality, is communicated not solely in linguistic form but is also manifested as lived experience. I offer my understanding of my process of coming to know as I generate my living theory through the educative relationships that I formed with my Traveller pupils. In so doing, I claim that I have transformed, while still incorporating, linguistic analysis in order to reflect the human reality of my work. In the process, I have incorporated insights from conceptual theories into my living form of theory.

My aim of valuing Traveller children's culture and identity within the educational system is in sharp contrast to the current position in Irish educational institutions, where Traveller children, in common with other minority groups, are expected to adapt to a ready-made system in which the cultural norms of the majority group within the educational system are dominant. This situation can result in the marginalisation of Traveller children, and can engender in them feelings of

alienation and oppression. I offer evidence of this situation throughout my thesis. Conaty (2002) articulates the need for a change in the status quo when she writes of:

> the urgent need for change in the education system so that schools may adapt to the needs of the marginalised as opposed to the expectation that the marginalised must always adapt to the needs of the school.
>
> (Conaty 2002, p. 25)

It is also likely that the sense of exclusion experienced by Traveller children, as a result of their marginalised status, is one of the causes of their irregular attendance at school. It may be reasonable to assume that, by acknowledging the value and importance of Traveller culture, schools have the potential to change Traveller children's experience of education to a more positive and life-enhancing one. At a more immediate and practical level, such a stance by educational institutions could result in an improvement in the attendance rates of Traveller children at school, as well as an increase in the prospect of their progressing to second level schooling. I would regard such improvements as providing positive outcomes, from the point of view that, under the conditions of such affirmative action, Traveller children would no longer feel alienated from the educational system, and could begin to reap its benefits and to prosper from its potential to provide them with emancipatory experiences. These expectations are grounded in my values around people's entitlements to enjoy opportunities for self-fulfilling, liberatory and life-affirming educational practices.

One of my initial concerns around the issue of Traveller education, which surfaced when I worked as a mainstream class teacher, prior to taking up my position as RTT, and that inspired my current research programme, was that many Traveller children did not transfer to second level schooling, a situation that I found difficult to accept as it was in conflict with my values around equal educational opportunities for all (Sullivan 2000) and with my commitment to the concept of lifelong learning (Field 2000). In seeking to find ways of encouraging Traveller children to remain in the educational system, I developed an awareness of how institutions can operate to deny

marginalised groups the resources to which they are entitled (Macedo and Bartolomé 2001), such as the services of a learning support teacher or resource teacher. I realised also that there was little or no recognition of the fact that Travellers have a separate culture, and a separate identity, from that of the majority within the school setting. Gillborn (1995) recognises the link between culture and identity when he refers to ethnicity as 'a people's sense and expression of a particular cultural identity' (1995, p. 84). Both Willis (1977) and Fagan (1995) describe how an educational system that reproduces the inequalities of society, and replicates its class system, contributes to the problem of early school leaving. I would argue that the lack of a fit between the culture of the school and the culture of the Traveller community has a similar effect on the retention of Traveller children in the educational system. I suggest that, by accepting the reality, and the value, of Traveller culture and thereby contributing to Traveller children's sense of cultural identity, schools can be instrumental in encouraging these children to remain in the educational system. The achievement of this outcome would reflect some progress in the fulfilment of my values around the importance of lifelong education.

In arguing for the recognition and acceptance of a separate cultural identity for Traveller children in educational institutions, I am attempting to live according to my ontological values of acknowledging difference and diversity. Such a stance would provide a positive framework for the legitimation and validation of the contributions Traveller children make to their specific educational experiences. All too often, the concept of difference can be interpreted as meaning deviance, and as constituting a negative force, or as existing outside of the boundaries of a normative perspective. At a time when Irish society is becoming increasingly multicultural, as indicated by the continuing influx of children of foreign nationals into primary schools in recent years, it is imperative that a more open and more generous attitude towards diversity should prevail. The phenomenal increase in the numbers seeking asylum in Ireland can be gauged from Tormey and Haran's (2003) statement, based on statistics from the 'National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism' (2001), that the numbers have risen 'from just thirty-nine applications in 1992 to ten thousand nine

hundred and twenty in 2000' (2003, p. 26). In spite of this dramatic increase, the furthest some institutions will move in the direction of diversity, is to agree to treat all cultures the same, as is evident from their policies of multiculturalism and integration, which I argue is not treating them equally. It is subscribing to the metaphor of the melting pot, which does not grant recognition to the separate identities of the various cultures, but seeks to reduce them all to one common state, in a mistaken belief that the achievement of consensus is the ideal situation. This situation is at variance with my wish, in agreement with Berlin (1997) and Kristeva (2002), to value each group's culture and identity as equally valid, and so I submit that my practice of accepting and acknowledging diversity and difference is more congruent with principles of social justice and equality than a system that fails to grant recognition to the concept or the reality of difference. In this account of my research, therefore, I demonstrate how my living theory of social justice as the recognition of difference evolved from my educational practice that was grounded in my ontological values of justice and equality for all. Through this process, I am developing a different form of living theory (Whitehead 1989) that is grounded in my own capacity to theorise my practice, as I wish to work with a form of theory that has the potential for democratic involvement inherent within itself.

From these original concerns evolved my desire to improve the quality of the educational experience offered to Traveller children within the primary school system. I opted to become the Resource Teacher for Traveller children (RTT) in my school, as I envisaged that this would afford me the opportunity of working more closely with the children and of ensuring that they were not overlooked in the area of access to extra educational resources to which they have a legitimate entitlement. I formed a view that I would be able to live out my ontological values around equality and social justice by endeavouring to ensure that these principles formed the framework for the equitable accommodation of Traveller children within the educational system. Taking up this position would also provide me with the possibility of redefining the role of the RTT, from one that simply supplemented the learning support system in the school by providing this resource for Traveller

children, to a more proactive one that ensured a high profile for Traveller issues and a greater awareness of Traveller culture. Through the expansion of my role in this manner, I would be able to generate my own living theory of Traveller education and to reconceptualise the experience of education as a positive and enabling influence in the lives of Traveller children, rather than an oppressive and alienating one.

In undertaking my research into the issues that I have outlined here, I chose to use a self-study practitioner-based approach, within an action research framework, as outlined by McNiff (2002). This methodology enabled me to investigate my own practice in order to improve it. I reflected on my practice and in my practice, as suggested by Schön (1983), which resulted in ongoing cycles of reflection and action that are significant features of an action research methodology. The learning that emerged from the reflective process contributed to the achievement of improvements in my practice, the evidence base for which is contained in Chapter 5. Engagement with this process also enabled me to explain how I hold myself accountable for my practice, and to justify my actions in terms of my values of justice, equality and respect for all. I explain how these ontological values transform into the standards of judgement by which I wish my claims to knowledge to be assessed (Whitehead 2000). With regard to the use of ontological values, I am using this term relationally to link my way of being with my values. I acknowledge that these terms are often understood to be discrete. However, I understand them to be relational. In this context, I will demonstrate how my action, in providing a more positive and affirmative experience of education for Traveller children, was the outcome of the lived realisation of my value of social justice. As my research involved me in engaging in a critique of current educational provision for marginalised groups, and in positing a more democratic and more liberatory educational experience for them, it contains elements of a critical emancipatory approach, such as that recommended by McKernan (1996) and Kincheloe (2003). In the process of creating my own living educational theory, therefore, I incorporate the principles of emancipatory action research within this framework.

The methodology that I chose for my research differs from the traditional social scientific approach, as manifested also in the structure of the thesis, in that it does not offer a chapter devoted specifically to a literature review (see Whitehead and McNiff 2006). In self-study practitioner research, the process of identifying a research topic is not dependent on establishing a gap in the research literature, as the research question often emerges from a practitioner's commitment to improving practice. The relevant references to the literature are interwoven throughout the thesis, in a coherent and integrated fashion. I demonstrate my critical engagement with the literature, therefore, through my in-depth discussions of the various issues as they occur throughout the thesis, and I explain how I have incorporated insights from existing propositional theories-in-the-literature in the development of my own living theory of practice. Because of the particular relevance of concepts of social justice and equality to my research, I examine these issues in detail in Chapter 3, as well as weaving them into other relevant chapters.

Outline of the main ideas in this thesis

This report on my research gives an account of my self-study and of how I challenged normative educational systems on the basis that they were prejudicial and discriminatory towards an ethnic minority group, namely Traveller children. Because of my values around equality and social justice I sought to develop a theory of education as an inclusive and intercultural force that valued all children equally. I use the term 'intercultural' rather than 'multicultural' on the basis of Kenny's (1997) distinction between the two terms: 'intercultural' suggests that the cultures of all groups are of equal validity, whereas 'multicultural' can be interpreted as presenting the dominant culture as the norm, and ethnic minority cultures as exotic. Fitzgerald (2003) makes a similar argument in favour of an intercultural approach, on the basis that in a multicultural setting, the minority group strives for integration and the superiority of the dominant group is affirmed, whereas an intercultural ethos suggests that both cultures can learn from each other. In promoting a model of education as inclusive and intercultural I hoped that the Traveller children would experience a

sense of belonging and a sense of self-worth that would enable them to conceive of education as a positive and life-enhancing possibility.

In my research I show how, through facilitating the children to create and celebrate their own ways of knowing, I enabled them to take ownership of that knowledge, and how this resulted in an improvement in their learning, as well as in the emergence of a more confident attitude in their approach to learning. In the process, I came to a realisation of the value of enabling children to contribute to their own learning, as opposed to presenting them with a body of ready-made facts to be assimilated. Freire (1972) is highly critical of the system of transferring knowledge from institutions to students in a manner that views the students as passive consumers of knowledge, which he describes as a 'banking' system of education, where 'the scope of action allowed to students extends only as far as receiving, filing and storing deposits of knowledge' (1972, p. 58). Shor (1993) endorses Freire's theory of education, when he says:

> Traditional education orients students to conform, to accept inequality and their places in the status quo, to follow authority. Freirean critical education invites students to question the system they live in and the knowledge being offered them, to discuss what kind of future they want, including the right to elect authority and to remake the school and society they find.
>
> (Shor 1993, p. 28)

A Freirean approach to education, therefore, appears to offer a more emancipatory and more participatory understanding of pedagogy. Consequently, I subscribe to this approach as being commensurate with my view that children should have an active role in their own learning and that this would enable them to perceive knowledge as a living, evolving force, produced through the interaction of pupils and teacher in an educative relationship. I would agree with Dewey (1966) when he states that 'education is not an affair of telling and being told, but an active and constructive process' (1966, p. 38).

A further positive outcome of encouraging Traveller children to become knowledge creators, rather than recipients of knowledge already constituted, was the resultant empowerment of the children. In the hierarchical systems that normally operate in educational institutions, the possessors of knowledge were often the power holders, who could exercise their authority and control over the learning situations in the institutions. Foucault (1980) makes an explicit connection between knowledge and relations of power. In support of this view Nias (1989), in agreement with Abercrombie (1981), mentions that there are 'two largely unchallenged assumptions about knowledge: that those in authority possess it and that learning therefore passes downward' (1989, p. 171). I suggest, therefore, that in facilitating the positioning of the Traveller children as contributors to their own learning process, I also engendered a shift in the hierarchical power base. Positioned as knowledge creators, the children became power holders able to exercise control over their own learning. Such empowerment has considerable potential as a means towards the achievement of self-determination, not only for the Traveller children, but also for all disadvantaged and marginalised groups within the educational system. Challenging the epistemological perspectives underpinning educational provision could, therefore, have significant implications for existing power relations in schools.

Issues of knowledge, power and control are, therefore, central to my research. Bernstein (2000) recognises the effects that these concepts can have on the school environment when he refers to pedagogic discourse as:

> a carrier of power relations external to school, a carrier of patterns of dominance with respect to class, patriarchy, and race.
>
> (Bernstein 2000, p. 4)

Notwithstanding the importance of these issues, however, perhaps the most significant conceptual framework within which my research is located is that of social justice. I suggest that the importance of the realisation of social justice as an ideal to be systematically pursued cannot be overstated. Its presence as an active force in institutions could help to eliminate many of the inequalities currently perpetrated

against the marginalised. My conception of social justice is of a principle that values the dignity and humanity of all people and that recognises the right of all to equal treatment. In the context of education the achievement of this right would require major changes to the current system, which tends to reproduce the inequalities of society in general (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). What I proposed, therefore, in my research was to develop a living theory of education as a process of transformation, rather than as reproduction, based on my understanding that this approach contains a greater possibility of achieving equality for all.

The essential differences between the Traveller community and the settled, or dominant, society appear to result from the dominant society's response to the existence of the separate culture and identity of the Traveller people. Problems arise when the settled community perceives these differences as signifiers of inferiority and define their treatment of Traveller people in terms of their own perceived superiority. A central theme of my research was my effort to change this perception of Travellers from 'different and inferior' to 'different and equal'. To achieve such a stance required promoting the concept of Travellers as an ethnic, nomadic group with its own economic system, cultural norms and social structure. In the context of education, Traveller children would then be perceived as belonging to an ethnic minority group with its own distinctive lifestyle, and its own valuable cultural identity. This situation has immense potential for the transformation of the dominant perception of Traveller children – from a position of being regarded as an inferior sub-culture within the school system to becoming a highly visible cultural force deserving equal recognition with the dominant cultural group. Lynch (1999) describes the devastating effects of having one's culture denied in educational settings:

> If one's cultural traditions and practices are not a valued part of the education one receives, if they are denigrated or omitted, then schooling itself becomes a place where one's identity is denied or one's voice is silenced.
>
> (Lynch 1999, p. 17)

However, while recognising the relevance of the concept of culture to my research, I am, nevertheless, aware of a sense in which Traveller culture could be perceived as a barrier to achieving the aims and purposes of my research. This caveat becomes particularly pertinent in relation to the fact that education beyond primary school level has not traditionally been a priority in Traveller culture. In my discussion of the concept of culture, I engage with Bourdieu's (1977) theory of the 'habitus', or system of inherited and reproduced dispositions. According to this theory, the social structures operating within a group's habitus contribute to maintaining a stance of homogeneity and conformity. Therefore, if the Traveller community's habitus does not include a tradition of progressing to second-level schooling, it would appear as though, in encouraging them to remain in the educational system, I am attempting to counteract the effects of their traditional habitus. I wish to clarify this apparent anomaly by stating that my main concern is to raise Traveller children's awareness of the fact that there are other options besides their traditional ones, and then to allow them to make their own choices, with the benefit of informed consciousness of the possibilities available to them, and without posing any threat to their cultural identity. I endeavoured throughout my research to ensure that priority was given to the acceptance and recognition of the value of Traveller culture, and also took care to avoid lending support to any initiative that might result in a denial of that culture.

I have mentioned the values of equality and social justice as being the forces that inspired my research and therefore as forming theoretical frameworks within which I located my work. It is these values that caused me to seek equal access to educational resources for Traveller children and to promote the idea of the validity of Traveller culture and identity in educational settings. These values also helped me to formulate the criteria and standards of judgement by which I judged the success of my work. In this undertaking, I was utilising the idea of Whitehead (2000), when he states that values emerge in practice as the living critical standards by which we make judgements on our practice. The standards of judgement that I identified in this manner are contained in Chapter 1.

I am claiming that my research demonstrates that I have improved the quality of educational experience for Traveller children by ensuring equal access to extra educational resources for them, by encouraging them to regard themselves as knowledge creators instead of passive recipients of others' knowledge and by allowing them to make choices around their own learning. In implementing these strategies, I was operating out of my values base of social justice and equality. In this sense, I show how my ontological values transformed into my living critical standards of judgement. My research also demonstrates how I ensured that factors, such as irregular attendance at school or non-transference to second-level schooling, were not used as excuses to deny Traveller children access to learning support or resource teaching during their primary schooling. Through my work with an after school group, in which Traveller and settled children cooperated in a spirit of intercultural inclusion, as I explain in Chapter 7, I fulfilled my commitment to the acknowledgement of diversity.

Among the contextual issues relevant to my research is the fact that I, as a practitioner researcher, could potentially bring certain biases and prejudices into my account of my work. The fact that I am aware of this possibility, and that any personal biases are mostly to do with my strong commitments to issues such as equality, social justice, cultural identity, knowledge creation, empowerment and freedom of choice, and to discovering how these principles can best be applied for the betterment of humanity, helps, in my opinion, to minimise any potential negative influences from them. Griffiths (1998) recognises the importance of acknowledging bias in research:

> Bias comes not from having ethical and political positions – this is inevitable – but from not acknowledging them. Not only does such acknowledgement help to unmask any bias that is implicit in those views, but it also helps to provide a way of responding critically and sensitively to the research.
>
> (Griffiths 1998, p. 133)

In making explicit the possibility of partiality of perspective, I suggest that my awareness around this issue helps contribute to a reduction in the potential for undue bias. Andereck (1992) expresses a similar view:

> The researcher may not expect to be absent of personal biases, but an awareness of these biases is the first step in their control.
>
> (Andereck 1992, p. 49)

I contend that a stance of neutrality would be almost impossible to achieve, as every researcher is approaching the research from some particular perspective. In this context, then, I suggest that foregrounding one's personal stance can result in a reduction of the effects of bias. Griffiths (1998) also argues that a stance of neutrality can be misleading:

> A stance of neutrality claims that it is the only possible representation of truth and knowledge, just because it is (it claims) neutral. But bias comes precisely from that representation, because it has the effect of hiding, not eliminating, partiality.
>
> (Griffiths 1998, p. 134)

I suggest that continuous reflection on my actions, during the course of my research, helped to maintain a critical stance in relation to my practice, which contributed to ensuring a balanced perspective overall.

It may seem as though I am overly biased in favour of the Traveller children, through seeking extra educational resources for them, and that this could be in conflict with my stated commitment to social justice and equality for all children. My reply to this apparent anomaly is, that what I am seeking for Traveller children is a level of equality of treatment through access to the same resources as other children, and to which Traveller children have a legitimate right – a right that did not appear to have any prospect of being implemented in my context until I took up the position of RTT and actively pursued my aims of achieving equality and social justice for Traveller children. There are theories in the literature to support the idea of giving more resources to the less well off in society, for the purpose of creating a more equitable

situation. McLaren (1995) and Finnegan (2000), for example, favour the idea of exercising a preferential option in favour of disadvantaged groups, while Rawls (1971) suggests that an unequal distribution of goods, to benefit the less well off, is justified. I contend, in the light of such views, that my actions aimed at achieving greater resources for Traveller children could not be construed as unjust or inequitable.

The significance of my research

My work could be seen to be significant because it initially led me to question the quality of educational provision being offered to Traveller children, which resulted in the discovery of a considerable lacuna in this area. I discovered that the educational service provided to Traveller children was not on a par with that provided to other children, particularly in the area of learning support and resource teaching. Of significance also is my realisation that the separate cultural identity of the Traveller children must be explicitly and unequivocally acknowledged so that they can participate in the educational system on an equal basis with the majority group. Aronowitz and Giroux (1986) indicate what would be required in order to achieve such an emancipatory practice of education:

> Teachers would have to develop forms of knowledge and social classroom practices that validate the experiences students bring to school. This means confirming such experiences so as to give the students an active voice in institutional settings that traditionally attempt to silence them by ignoring their cultural capital. This demands acknowledging language forms, style of presentation, dispositions, forms of reasoning and cultural forms that give meaning to student experiences.
>
> (Aronowitz and Giroux 1986, p. 156)

The nature of the requirements identified here suggests that the task of achieving this situation could be a long and arduous struggle. Nevertheless, the articulation of my thoughts on the importance of recognising pupils' cultural identities, and the achievement of their realisation in my practice, helped me to generate a living theory of the transformative potential of valuing the culture and identity of Traveller

children within the educational system. This living theory could equally have significance for the achievement of positive and life-enhancing influences, as consequences of valuing the particular circumstances of other disadvantaged or marginalised groups in educational institutions.

My research could have significance for colleagues to the extent of creating in them an awareness of the fact that children should be selected for learning support or resource teaching on the basis of educational attainment. Traveller children should not be excluded from this process, either because they are deemed to be irregular attendees, or because there is a perception that they may not progress to second-level education. The exclusion of Traveller children in this manner is tantamount to placing the onus of responsibility for the exclusion with the Traveller community. It also creates the impression that school authorities have low expectations of Traveller children, in contrast to the views of Bhopal *et al*. (2000), who stress the importance of all teachers having high expectations for Traveller children. Consideration needs to be given to the possibility that Traveller children might attend school more regularly, and might also continue to secondary schooling, if their educational needs were being met, through improved access to learning support and resource teaching. This realisation led me to conclude that a more equitable situation could result from the use of educational criteria, such as the extent of children's learning needs, as the deciding factors in granting access to extra educational resources. The significance of these insights lies in their potential to influence other teachers towards providing a more equitable and more positive educational experience for marginalised or disadvantaged children.

I submit that my work has implications for Traveller education in general, and that it also has the capacity to inform policy in this area. My research demonstrates the importance of including all participants in the educational system on an equal basis, and shows the need to incorporate this ideal as a principle of practice, as well as using it as the foundation for informing policy. I agree with Young (1990) when she argues that social equality

refers primarily to full participation and inclusion of everyone in a society's major institutions, and socially supported substantive opportunities for all to develop and exercise their capacities and realise their choices.

<div align="right">(Young 1990, p. 173)</div>

My living theory of the value of enabling children to be knowledge creators, rather than recipients of knowledge, and of the significance of their subsequent empowerment, has potential implications for the implementation of a more emancipatory model of education for all educationally marginalised groups – the socially disadvantaged and those with learning difficulties, as well as Traveller children. McLaren (1995) describes the conditions for such a model as a form of cultural politics:

To conceptualize curriculum as a form of cultural politics is to acknowledge the overriding goal of education as the creation of the conditions for social transformation through the constitution of students as political subjects who recognize their historical, racial, class, and gender situatedness and the forces that shape their lives and are politically and ethically motivated to struggle in the interest of greater human freedom and emancipation.

<div align="right">(McLaren 1995, p. 38)</div>

The sense of self-esteem and self-worth of these marginalised groups could also be enhanced through the process of enabling them to take ownership of their own learning, an opportunity that is not usually provided for them in the educational system, which, as Apple (1996) says, is deeply implicated in the politics of culture. Apple argues that:

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.

<div align="right">(Apple 1996, p. 22, emphasis in original)</div>

I suggest that this selection process is normally carried out by those possessing cultural, political and economic capital (Bourdieu, cited in Robbins 2000), that is, by

the dominant majority, and that minority groups are rarely consulted in this regard. My research, which seeks to alter this hegemonic situation, has significance for those whom educational institutions traditionally tend to exclude.

In relation to practice, my research has significance for educational practitioners through demonstrating the transformative potential of engaging in practices that are grounded in social justice and equality, and that are aimed at the improvement of the educational provision for marginalised children. My research has significance for conceptualisations of educational theory as a result of the emergence from my practice of a living theory of social justice as the acceptance and recognition of the separate cultural identity of an ethnic minority group. Of significance also, in relation to conceptualisations of theory, is the development of my living theory of justice as the acknowledgement of diversity, which evolved from my practice of recognising and accepting difference as I generated a living theory of inclusionary practice, through my involvement in an after school group, of which I give an account in Chapter 7.

Overview of the chapters

In this introduction I have given a brief outline of my research, stating the main ideas and theories contained in the thesis. I detail the main arguments and indicate how I arrived at these conclusions. I give an account of the ontological values that informed my research and show how these values are inextricably linked to the conceptual frameworks within which I conducted my research. I demonstrate how these values transformed into the living critical standards of judgement by which I assess the validity of my work. In this final section of the introduction I will provide a brief outline of the contents of the various chapters of my thesis.

Chapter 1 contains an account of the background of my research, detailing the factors that formed the genesis of my research questions. It describes the reasons why I undertook the research, in terms of what I wanted to achieve and why I wanted to achieve it. In this section also I focus on the issues that aroused in me sufficient

concern to want to change the status quo in my educational institution. I describe how my ontological values of social justice and equality made it untenable for me to collude in a system that was responsible for the denial of these values. Finally, I demonstrate how carrying out my research enabled me to generate my own living theories of the transformative potential of valuing Traveller children's culture and identity within the educational system, and of positing Traveller education as a positive and enabling force.

I give a description of the various contexts relevant to my research in Chapter 2. My personal context in terms of my teaching career, my values around equality and social justice, my specific interest in the children from the Traveller community and my passionate commitment to improving the quality of educational experience offered to Traveller children, are all factors that impinge on my research. The background to the Traveller way of life, with reference to how this evolved from their cultural heritage and how it differentiates their cultural traditions from those of the settled community, forms an important contextual aspect of my work. In the area of policy context relating to the Traveller community, I trace the development from the policies of the 1960s, which described Travellers as 'itinerants' and delineated them variously as vagrants or as poverty-stricken, to the policies of the 1980s, which for the first time described them as 'Travellers', having consulted the Travellers themselves as to how they wished to be named. I discuss the fact that this more enlightened view of the Traveller community still remains largely at the level of rhetoric, and show how, through the process of my research, I attempted to translate it into living practice.

I have mentioned some of the conceptual issues that were central to my research. These include equality, social justice, power and control, and interculturalism. Because of the importance I attach to these concepts, which are interwoven throughout my research, I have devoted a separate chapter to a discussion of these themes. Chapter 3, therefore, contains my theories around these issues and a description of how they influenced my work and became integral aspects of my own living theory of practice. I give priority to my central theme of social justice, and

include an example of a practice of injustice, as perpetrated on Traveller men, through the use of the legislative process. I also discuss the views of traditional propositional theorists in my main conceptual areas. In the area of equality and social justice I refer to the ideas of, among others, Rawls (1971), Young (1990), Connell (1993), Drudy and Lynch (1993) and Griffiths (1998). I discuss the democratic, life-enhancing and positive views of Dewey (1966), McLaren (1999) and Zappone (2002), as containing the potential for a greater measure of equality and social justice. My analysis of issues of power and control takes account of the theories of Foucault (1980), Rabinow (1991) and Moss (1998). In proposing an intercultural approach to education, as opposed to a monocultural, oppressive perspective that often predominates in the educational system, I engage with the ideas of Kenny (1997), Berlin (2000) and Said (2002).

Chapter 4 contains an account of the methodology of my research. I explain that, as my research centred on an intention to achieve an improvement in my own educational practice, it necessarily required a self-study approach, which would enable me to interrogate my own actions, where these appeared to be in conflict with my stated values. In my research I critiqued current educational provision for marginalised groups, and sought to provide a more liberatory and life-enhancing educational experience for such groups. My research, therefore, is presented as my own living educational theory, which draws on the ideas of a critical emancipatory paradigm. In this chapter, I also include a description of the research design, outlining details such as data collection methods, ethical considerations and the various research participants. I indicate the extra precautions that I deemed necessary, for example obtaining permission both from the children and from their parents, in view of the fact that the majority of the participants were primary school children.

I devote three chapters to the narrative of my research, to take account of three separate aspects of the research. In Chapter 5, I describe my role in providing learning support for Traveller children who presented with learning difficulties. I outline the manner in which I transformed my practice from curriculum driven to

child centred, through locating a Traveller child's learning in her own culture. This resulted from my learning around the child's failure to learn from the standard curriculum that was based on what was, from her perspective, an alien culture. I also provide an account of how I located the learning of two Traveller children, who had difficulties in learning spelling from standardised spelling books, in their own culture, and demonstrate how this approach proved more successful for them. I also tell of my successful struggle to obtain a psychological assessment for a Traveller child with obvious learning difficulties, who had not been prioritised for such assessment by school authorities.

The data collection and analysis continues in Chapter 6 with an account of the strategies I undertook in order to promote Traveller culture as valuable and valued within the schooling system. The space that I provided in my classroom to enable Traveller children to discuss cultural issues, such as their experience of discrimination and prejudice, was significant in contributing to their empowerment and sense of self-esteem. This initiative influenced my learning around the nature and extent of the bias and prejudice experienced by Traveller children. At the same time, Traveller children were provided with the opportunity of articulating their experience of discrimination, of critically analysing this phenomenon and of rejecting it as a framework for determining their life chances.

Chapter 7 recounts the final stage in my research narrative. It documents the origin of an after school group in which I cooperated with Winnie McDonagh from the organisation, Traveller Education Support Options (TESO). The group began as an initiative to encourage Traveller children to continue to second level schooling, but later expanded to include children from the settled community. The process of this expansion, which could be articulated as representing the interface of two different cultural traditions, provided me with the opportunity of developing a practice of inclusion as the acceptance and acknowledgement of difference and diversity. The after school group also created the opportunity for the voices of Traveller children to be heard in a public forum, when they were invited to participate in Dáil na bPáistí, a

forum that facilitates the expression of children's opinions and brings their views to the attention of public representatives.

In Chapter 8, I discuss the findings of my research, as I draw together the various insights, outcomes and theories that emerged during the research process. My analysis of my findings is categorised under three main strands: structural and organisational issues, conceptual issues and pedagogical issues. I demonstrate how my data provided the evidence to support my claim to have improved the quality of education for Traveller children, and to have achieved a transformative influence in the lives of the children, through having their culture and identity valued in educational institutions. I was, therefore, able to theorise my practice as a space for the promotion of social justice as the recognition and acceptance of diverse cultural identities. Chapter 8 also describes the progress of my own learning as it developed through my experience of working with the Traveller children. It delineates how I was thus enabled to reconceptualise my practice as providing a more democratic and more equitable educational experience for Traveller children. Finally, in this chapter I indicate how, in changing my pedagogic approach in certain areas of my teaching, I demonstrated the transformative potential of more emancipatory pedagogies for enhancing the educational opportunities and life chances of marginalised pupils.

The final chapter of my thesis, Chapter 9, contains my reflections on what I judge to be the significance of my research. I present my claim to knowledge in terms of my contribution to new educational practice and to new educational theory. In relation to practice, I indicate how my living theory of social justice as the valuing of cultural identity may have significance for other practitioners working with marginalised groups. In relation to educational theory, I demonstrate the significance of a living theory of social justice as the acknowledgement of diversity, and explain the educational value of this theory as distinct from, for example, a distributive theory of social justice, such as that proposed by Rawls (1971). I conclude my thesis by revisiting briefly, and drawing together, the various threads that were interwoven to form the fabric of my research.

Conclusion

One final point that I would like to make, before beginning the narrative of my research, is that my account of my research reflects my interpretation and my understanding of my educational practice. It is located in a particular context, at a specific moment in time, and involves an identified group of individuals. The participants in my research were children, whose lives are complex, constantly evolving and producing new meanings. My knowledge, too, is continuously reforming as I incorporate my new learning into my system of meaning. Consequently, were I to undertake similar research again, either with other children or with the same participants, the findings would reflect the individuality, knowledge growth and contextual situatedness of the new research participants. My findings from the present research, therefore, are not generalisable or replicable in other situations, though I contend that my research has the potential to have an educative influence on the learning of other practitioners similarly located. Ideas of generalisability and replicability are the conventional criteria for judging traditional social science research. However, I am arguing for a new living form of theory that engages with new forms of criteria and standards of judgement. I am locating my work within the new scholarship which, as Schön (1995) says, requires new kinds of epistemologies and new standards of judgement. Whitehead (2000) has responded to the call for innovative epistemologies by suggesting that the standards of judgement could be grounded in an individual's embodied values that underpin the research process. I engage with these new epistemologies in formulating my living theories from the lived reality of my educational practice, and ground my living standards of judgement in my ontological values of social justice and equality that are reflected in my practice. I put forward, then, my learning outcomes, my enhanced understanding of my practice, and the theories that I have generated from my practice in the process of engaging in my research, into the public domain in the hope that other educational practitioners may learn, as I did, of the emancipatory and democratic prospect of transforming a potential for marginalisation and oppression into a possibility for inclusion and respect, through following the path of social justice and equality for all.

Section 1   Chapter 1   Background

1:1   Introduction

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

- The central focus of my research is around my attempts to ensure that the cultural identity of Traveller children is valued, on an equal basis with that of the dominant majority group, within the educational system.

- From this initial concern, I extend the focus to include some of my other aims, such as trying to provide a more positive and democratic educational experience for Traveller children, through attempting to ensure that this experience is framed within principles of social justice and equality, which also constitute two of the ontological values underpinning my research.

- I focus on my own learning, which resulted from my consciousness of my own educational growth and development, both at a personal and professional level, through the process of continuous reflection on my practice, commensurate with the action research methodology that I used in carrying out my research.

- A significant issue with which I engage in this chapter relates to the manner in which I was able to make my claim to have generated my living theory of a practice of social justice.

- Finally, I explain how I have transformed my ontological values of social justice and equality into living critical standards of judgement to test the validity of my claim to knowledge.

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

1:2   Background to my research

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

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

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

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

with the parents. It appears to be opportune, therefore, for educational institutions to review their policies and practices for interaction with parents, to ensure that the methods of communication are respectful of the differing circumstances of the Irish indigenous minority group, as well as of other newly arrived ethnic minority groups.

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

 I have a further difficulty with the reasons given for non-assessment in that, while the Traveller child's attendance was irregular, this was due to occasional trips to England, from where the family originated. This tendency to travel is an aspect of the practice of nomadism, which Travellers claim is an intrinsic and essential part of their culture. McDonagh (1994) describes nomadism as a salient feature of Traveller

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

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

identifies three interrelated rights that schools ought to promote in order to comply with democratic principles:

> (1) The right to individual enhancement.
> (2) The right to be included socially, intellectually, culturally and personally.
> (3) The right to participate.
>
> (Bernstein 2000, p. xx)

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

> This policy has as its central aim the meaningful participation and highest attainment of the Traveller child so that, in common with all the children of the nation, he or she may live a full life as a child and realise his or her full potential as a unique individual, proud of and affirmed in his or her identity as a Traveller and a citizen of Ireland.
>
> (Ireland, DES 2002, p. 5)

In this instance, the policy states explicitly that Traveller children are to receive educational provision equal to that of settled children. The affirmative tone of the

rhetoric in these policies created in me the expectation that all children would in fact be given equal educational opportunities. However, the personal experience I have outlined above illustrates the reality that a considerable lacuna exists between policy and practice in this area. Consequently, I decided to take up the position of RTT in my school so that I could endeavour to reduce the gap between theory and practice by ensuring that Traveller children received equal educational opportunities through equality of access to appropriate and necessary resources.

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

> A democratic curriculum and pedagogy must begin with a recognition of 'the different social positionings and cultural repertoires in the classroom, and the power relations between them'.
>
> (Apple 1996, p. 33)

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

learning difficulties and socially disadvantaged children, are consequently at risk of marginalisation, alienation and oppression.

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

> Student expectations for their own school experience are shaped both by explicit and subtle messages that they receive from the adult members of the school community and by the trust placed in education by their community. Examinations of the chronic school failure of indigenous ethnic and racial minority students point to the development of an oppositional culture among such students. They see in their community the results of years of inequity, and they develop an opposition to all avenues to mainstream success.
> (Finnan and Levin 2000, p. 91)

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

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

> the images, voices and practices that the school reflects make it difficult for the children of the marginalized classes to recognise themselves in school.
> (Bernstein 2000, p. 14)

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

I believe in the value of an inclusive model of education predicated on an intercultural ethic that gives equal status to all cultural groups. I suggest that the positive experience of having their culture acknowledged and legitimated in

educational institutions has the potential to enable Traveller children to appreciate the value of their own culture, and could demonstrate to them that their culture need not be a barrier to participation in the educational system. Acceptance and legitimation of their culture in schools could also empower Traveller children to push out the boundaries that currently limit their learning potential and, consequently, their life-chances. In agreement with Berlin (1997), I subscribe to a view that recognises the value and the dignity accorded to the human condition through the realisation of concepts of diversity and pluralism. I aimed, therefore, in my research, to promote a pluralistic environment in the school that would emancipate Traveller children by removing the barriers to their learning resulting from the positioning of the culture of the majority group as the only legitimate one in schools.

1:3   Focus of my research

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

- My research is located within conceptual frameworks of social justice, equality, respect for all and democratic freedom, and so it requires an engagement with these issues in terms of their significance in achieving the aims and purposes of the research.
- The relevance of concepts such as marginalisation, oppression, alienation and exclusion to my research, in relation to how these concepts tend to define the

educational experiences of Traveller children, necessitates a specific focus on these topics.

- My research account represents a self-study of my educational practice, and consequently it demands a concentration on the processes that led to an enhancement in my learning in the course of undertaking my research.

- Finally, the significance that I attribute to my research requires a focus on the outcomes and findings of the research, in terms of how my research can contribute to educational practice and to a reconceptualisation of educational theory.

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

> Schools should be regarded as sites around which a struggle should be waged in the name of developing a qualitatively better life for all. Teachers would have to develop forms of knowledge and classroom social practices that validate the experiences students bring to school. This means confirming such experiences so as to give students an active voice in institutional settings that traditionally try to silence them by ignoring their cultural capital.
>
> (Aronowitz and Giroux 1986, pp. 155-6)

Towards the achievement of this goal, I facilitated the creation of a space in my classroom where Traveller children could give voice to their concerns around their experiences of schooling, an initiative that I outline in Chapter 6. I hoped that, in the

process, Traveller children might discover a personal advantage in, and attach a personal value to, prolonging their stay in the educational system, and might also perceive some benefit in adopting a commitment to lifelong education.

My firm belief in the rights of all people to self-identity and to self-determination compelled me to focus on ways of encouraging Traveller children to develop a higher level of self-esteem and self-worth that would be reflected in greater confidence in making choices for themselves in the area of education. Such emancipatory practice could empower the Traveller children by giving them a voice and enabling them to name their world, a necessary condition for freedom from oppression, according to Freire (1972), who suggests that the oppressed must name their world, and that any attempt to name it for them is to treat them as objects, rather than subjects, in the world. My commitment to a view that a more emancipatory ethos could result from the achievement of equality of educational opportunity for all encouraged me to focus on efforts at transforming the culture of the school in which I work in relation to promoting equal access to educational resources for all pupils. This policy of focusing on equality of educational opportunity resulted in the challenging of the normative systems operating within the institution, whenever these did not appear to be based on principles of equality or social justice. An example of the affirmative action that I took in pursuance of this policy appears in Chapter 5.

The achievement of a living theory of practice that was grounded in social justice and equality was a central focus of my research. In working towards this aim, I succeeded in providing Traveller children with a space in which they could explore aspects of their cultural identity, which I explain in Chapter 6. The initiative described there provided them with the opportunity of experiencing their culture and identity as valued, however briefly, within the educational system. In this way, I hoped to narrow the gap between the cultures of home and school, in view of Connell's (1993) assertion that 'nine out of ten educational sociologists emphasize the importance of some cultural match between the school and the home' (1993, p. 29). In an attempt to achieve a more widespread acceptance of Traveller culture within the school

community, I focused also on seeking to ensure that principles of social justice would in future inform the school ethos, in the hope that these principles would then inform practices that would reflect values of respect for all individuals, irrespective of social class, race, religion or ethnicity. To this end, I succeeded in overcoming bureaucratic obstacles in order to enable another Traveller child to receive a psychological assessment, which I detail in Chapter 5.

Because of their minority position within the hierarchy of the schooling system, Traveller children could be regarded as a relatively powerless group. Since they do not share the culture of the dominant majority, whose beliefs and practices form the basis and the framework for the knowledge created in educational institutions, Traveller children's knowledge is not valued or legitimised by the dominant community. The dilemma resulting from the contested nature of educational knowledge, and the ensuing struggles around relations of power, is elucidated by Apple (1996):

> the decision to define some groups' knowledge as the most legitimate, as official knowledge, while other groups' knowledge hardly sees the light of day, says something extremely important about who has power in society, what counts as knowledge, the ways in which it is organized, who is empowered to teach it, what counts as an appropriate display of having learned it, and – just as critically – who is allowed to ask and answer all these questions, are part and parcel of how dominance and subordination are reproduced and altered in this society.
>
> (Apple 1996, p. 22)

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

is in contrast with the usual perception, in dominant educational discourses, of their knowledge as inferior, resulting in its status as subjugated knowledge.

A significant focus of my research relates to the process of my own learning and to the growth in my knowledge resulting from my learning, which evolved through my engagement in a self-study of my educational practice. This process enabled me to develop an epistemology of my practice that contributed to the framing of my claim to knowledge. My claim to knowledge is twofold, incorporating my living theory of practice as the acknowledgement of diversity and the acceptance of difference, and my living theory of social justice as equality of respect for all. In testing my claim to knowledge, I focus on certain standards of judgement that I wish to be used in assessing my research. These standards of judgement are grounded in my ontological values of social justice and equality. I am engaging in this process as a consequence of locating my research in the new scholarship of educational enquiry. This new paradigm was first mooted by Boyer (1990), who wrote about a new scholarship of teaching, and the idea was further developed by Schön (1995), in suggesting that the new scholarship required a new epistemology. Zeichner (1999) approved of the idea of a scholarship of teaching, in relation to the professional learning of teachers. Whitehead (1999) developed the idea of a scholarship of educational enquiry and, in response to Schön's call for a new epistemology, Whitehead (2000) suggests a new living form of epistemology that grounds the standards for judging one's educational practice in the values that underpin that practice. The standards of judgement, therefore, that I wish to be used in judging my claim to knowledge, and which evolved from my embodied values, include:

- Have I made a difference for good in the lives of Traveller children by influencing the quality of their educational experience?
- Have I contributed to the emergence of more socially just and equitable educational practices?
- Is there evidence in my thesis that I have exercised a preferential option in favour of an oppressed and marginalised minority group?

- Have I increased awareness of the importance of Traveller culture and identity within the school setting?

- Have Traveller children experienced their culture as valuable, valued and valid, within the educational system?

- Have I enabled the voices of the marginalised to be heard in educational settings?

- Is there evidence of my own learning through the process of undertaking my research?

- Have I ensured that difference is a quality to be recognised and accepted, rather than an excuse for the practice of marginalisation and oppression?

- Is there evidence to support my claim to have developed a living theory of practice as the acknowledgement of diversity?

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

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

My research was conducted within the framework of an action research approach, such as that proposed by McNiff *et al.* (2003), which necessitated continuous reflection on my actions. Throughout my research, therefore, I focused on the insights and on the enhanced learning that resulted from my reflections. This process enabled

me to monitor my practice for the purpose of ascertaining what improvements had been achieved in my practice, as well as determining whether the quality of the educational experience of Traveller children had been enhanced. Through ongoing critical reflection on my practice as a Resource Teacher for Travellers, I focused on attempting to transform a capacity for prejudice into a possibility for inclusion, and on explaining how this could have a positive influence on the educational opportunities and life-chances of Traveller children. Like Dewey (1966), I subscribe to the view that 'the education process is one of continual reorganizing, reconstructing, transforming' (1966, p. 50) in order to achieve growth and development for all.

1:4   Aims and purposes of the research

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

(1) Issues of theory

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

- To develop a living theory of the practice of inclusion as the acceptance of difference.

  (2) Issues of practice

- To achieve improvement in Traveller children's educational experiences.
- To achieve improvement in my educational practice.
- To promote the idea of lifelong learning for all.
- To achieve equality of educational opportunity for Traveller children.
- To have my values of social justice and equality realised in my practice.
- To encourage the development of self-esteem and self-worth in Traveller children.
- To enable the voices of the marginalised to be heard in educational settings.
- To promote an intercultural approach, that values all cultures equally, in educational institutions.
- To promote a pluralistic environment that recognises diversity.
- To extend the positive and democratic practices experienced in the educational system to other social areas.

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

(1) My practice of encouraging Traveller children to enunciate words according to the rules of Standard English, thereby ignoring their culturally based speech patterns.

(2) My practice of using the standard curriculum, which is based on the dominant culture, in the areas of reading and spelling with Traveller children.

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

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

I aimed to encourage Traveller children to develop a sense of self-esteem and self-worth, which I believed would help them to benefit from their current participation in

the educational system, and could also contribute to retaining them in second level schooling. Drudy and Lynch (1993) warn of the profound implications to the sense of self-esteem and self-identity of children who constantly experience negativity and failure in schools:

> Failure at school is construed as a problem of individual incapacity: we blame the victim for the inadequacy of the system, and the victim in turn internalises a sense of personal failure through the continuous experience of being labelled.
>
> (Drudy and Lynch 1993, p. 235)

To counteract such destructive effects and to encourage Traveller children to become more self-confident, I enabled their voices to be heard through providing a space for them to articulate their experiences of discrimination. I describe this initiative in detail, and provide the evidence for it, in Chapter 6. I also enabled the voices of Traveller children to be heard in the public domain, through a forum known as Dáil na bPáisti, which provides opportunities for the representation of children's voices on political issues of interest to children at local, regional and national levels. Traveller children from an after school group, in which I am involved, were asked to represent the Traveller voice at regional level, and, through my encouragement, as I explain in Chapter 7, they articulated their views on the various topics under discussion, and also called for the recognition of Traveller culture, through the teaching of the Traveller language, Cant, within schools. I submit that what occurred in this instance was an example of Freirean critical education, as articulated by Shor (1993):

> Traditional education orients students to conform, to accept inequality and their places in the status quo, to follow authority. Freirean critical education invites students to question the system they live in, and the knowledge being offered them, to discuss what kind of future they want, including their right to elect authority and to remake the school and society they find.
>
> (Shor 1993, p. 28)

In providing opportunities for Traveller children to develop greater confidence, I hoped to foster in them the genesis of a desire for self-determination. In agreement with Freire (1993), I subscribe to the view that we can never give up the struggle for

self-formation and self-determination. The realisation of this aim would be consistent with my values around emancipatory life choices and democratic freedom as conditions for the achievement of equality of respect and for the recognition of the dignity of all human life. This situation reflects an antithetical stance to the dominant reductionist and essentialist view of Travellers, which regards them as incapable of making decisions around their own lifestyles. The stereotyping of the Traveller community as people lacking the ability to determine the trajectory of their own lifestyles facilitates the making of decisions on their behalf by dominant others, a practice that devalues them as human beings and preserves them in a state of subjugation and dependency.

By enabling Traveller children to experience their formal educational process as more positive and liberatory, I hoped that the sense of optimism and expectation in relation to life-enhancing opportunities would extend to other areas of their lives. Education is but one thread, albeit a significant one, in the tapestry that is woven to form the social fabric of life. It is important, therefore, that the sense of self-worth and self-confidence, acquired by Traveller children through the process of schooling as the experience of social justice and equality, should transfer to other areas of their lives, so that they can experience transformation in these areas also. The achievement of such transformative practices in wider social areas would support my claim that I have influenced what Whitehead (2004) calls the education of social formations, that is, enabling groups to understand how they can interrogate and transform the normative regulatory principles underpinning their social practices.

My purpose in aiming for an intercultural ethos within my school was to achieve equal status for Traveller culture with the dominant culture. An intercultural stance would value all cultures equally, thus working to eliminate the hierarchical system that promotes the dominant culture at the cost of denying the legitimacy of minority cultures. An intercultural approach would also favour pluralistic ways of living that would accommodate the concept of diversity. Acceptance and recognition of diversity constitute the underpinning ontological values of my living theory of the

practice of social justice, which I explicate in Chapter 9, where I discuss the significance of my research in terms of the living theories I have generated from my practice.

1:5   Conclusion

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

> the dialectical interplay between the way in which history and culture make people even while people are making that very history and culture.
>
> (Glass 2001, p. 16)

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

Section 1   Chapter 2   Contexts

2:1   Introduction

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

2:2   Personal context

In this section, I wish to uncover the aspects of self that informed and underpinned my self-study of my educational practice. In doing so, I will consider the major factors involved in the social construction of that self. I subscribe to a view that one's

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

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

my personal identity. Clandinin and Connelly (1995) testify to the interconnectedness of the personal and the professional aspects of teachers' identities when they question:

> how the embodied, narrative, relational knowledge teachers carry autobiographically and by virtue of their formal education shapes, and is shaped by, their professional knowledge context.
>
> (Clandinin and Connelly 1995, p. 3)

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

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

Leaving Certificate subjects. I am not suggesting that this situation resulted from a conscious decision on the part of the school authorities to promote gender equity, but rather that it was based on economic considerations, which meant that there was no choice of subjects, due to the small number of students attending the school.

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

My early contact with Travellers, then, was of a limited nature. It was mainly confined to seeing the Traveller women going from door to door seeking alms, whenever they happened to be in the locality. The women usually asked for, and invariably received, the basic essentials for human living, such as tea, sugar, bread and milk. Occasionally the women would have baskets containing religious objects, which they tried to sell. I could not understand at the time why my mother bought some of these items – it certainly was not out of necessity, as she already possessed an abundance of them. Now, as I reflect on these incidents, I realise that it may have been my mother's way of enabling the Traveller women to retain their dignity by earning the money to buy provisions, instead of having to suffer the ignominy of

having to beg for them. The most abiding memory that I have from that era is that, when Traveller women called to the door, they never left empty-handed, and this left me with an enduring moral sense of duty or obligation for the welfare of the less well-off in society. At that time, Travellers were deemed ineligible for social welfare payments, as they did not have a permanent address, and were to a great extent dependent on the generosity of others for the means of survival. I would suggest that my commitment to values of social justice and equality is rooted firmly in these formative experiences of my childhood.

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

> one tolerates things that are basically unacceptable, so tolerance has little to do with equity or justice and is not a useful response to racism.
>
> (Crowley 1991, p. 94)

I considered some of the situations in my experience for which tolerance appeared to be a suitable response. I could tolerate a headache, for example, or a nuisance that might be temporary, or for which I could find a remedy. If tolerance, then, is the appropriate reaction to an irritant, I suggest that it cannot also be an adequate characteristic of human relationships. I would argue that human beings deserve greater consideration than is possible through the concept, or practice, of tolerance. I accept that tolerance is an improvement on a situation of prejudice but I do not

consider it a sufficient response for the elimination of prejudice. Rawls (1971) appears to suggest that tolerance is a minimal and limited response when he states that 'an injustice is tolerable only when it is necessary to avoid a greater injustice' (1971, p. 4). One could interpret this statement as meaning that justice requires a more transformative response than tolerance.

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

> Tolerance is not a contemplative attitude, dispensing indulgence to what has been or what is still in being. It is a dynamic attitude, consisting in the anticipation, understanding and promotion of what is struggling into being.
>
> (Boon 1972, p. 137)

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

human beings. McLaren (1995) appears to share this view of the inadequacy of the concept of tolerance as a framework for the consideration of fellow human beings:

> I'm growing weary of the banner flown by the liberals which announces that we must be merely tolerant of difference. This suggests to me that the 'other' to whom they hope to show tolerance is considered to be quite repugnant.
>
> (McLaren 1995, p. 164)

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

> Thus, many white liberals willingly call and work for cultural tolerance but are reluctant to confront issues of inequality, power, ethics, race and ethnicity in a way that could actually lead to social transformation that would make society more democratic and humane and less racist and discriminatory.
>
> (Macedo and Bartolomé 2001, p. 14)

Dooley (2002) reveals the Irish Department of Justice's interpretation of the concept of tolerance. His newspaper article describes the withdrawal of funding from the Citizen Traveller project, comprising Travellers from four Traveller organisations, because the group had erected billboards featuring the message 'Suddenly, in caring Ireland, to be a Traveller is a terrible crime' (2002, p. 4). This action was taken in response to the new Housing (Miscellaneous) Act (2002), which criminalises trespass, thereby preventing Travellers from camping on roadsides, as they have often been forced to do, due to the lack of transient halting sites. Dooley (2002) reports that the Department of Justice, which had provided the funding for Citizen Traveller, said it was not going to pay for advertisements that branded its policies as racist and that were contrary to the aims of the Citizen Traveller programme, which was designed 'to promote tolerance and understanding between the Traveller and settled

communities' (2002, p. 4). One wonders, therefore, if the Department of Justice's idea of tolerance is of a passive and submissive state, and if the tolerance is only to be a feature of the Traveller behaviour. It appears as though the settled community do not have any obligation to be tolerant of the Travellers' wish to engage in the cultural practice of nomadism, or of their right to have their voices heard and to engage in constructive criticism of oppressive legislation.

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

> Schools should adopt an inclusive, intercultural approach to curriculum development so as to ensure that their School Plan, class programme and teaching materials reflect a positive attitude towards the special customs, traditions and lifestyles of minority groups, including the children of Travellers.
>
> (Ireland, DES 2002, p. 11)

In spite of the affirmative tone of the rhetoric here, Hanlon (2005), quoting from the report 'Achieving equity of access to higher education in Ireland: the case of Travellers' (Mary Immaculate College, Limerick), says that 'many Travellers found it easier not to identify themselves as Travellers in school for fear of discrimination from settled children and teachers' (2005, p. 14). At an ontological level, I suggest that if I were to tolerate a situation where some people are not treated according to

principles of equality and social justice, which form the values base of my framework for action, I am tacitly consenting to that situation, thereby contributing to its inherent injustice.

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

Unlike the two children who had learning difficulties, the third child displayed behavioural difficulties, the resolution of which was both demanding and time-

consuming. At the time I could not understand why this child was constantly engaging in aggressive conflicts with the other children in the class, in which she usually managed to involve the other two Traveller children also. I now realise that her frustration was probably caused through feelings of alienation and exclusion, as a result of not having her culture recognised in school. With hindsight, too, I now realise that my efforts to resolve the situation may have been more concerned with addressing the surface issues than with searching for the underlying causes of the conflicts. My reflections on these past experiences, and my learning from them, have enabled me to ensure that my current research is focused on addressing the fundamental issues underpinning the apparent problems confronting Traveller children. Many of the other children in the class, whom I shall call 'settled' to distinguish them from the Traveller children, were for the most part self-motivated and high achievers who eventually tired of the rows with the Traveller children. One day after school, a deputation of settled children from the class asked to speak with me and issued an ultimatum in words to this effect: 'You have to choose whom you want to teach, the Travellers or us. It is not working out the way things are now. Too much time is wasted trying to sort out the rows. So whom do you want to teach, them or us?' I was taken aback by their sense of frustration, as well as by their 'them and us' divide. I explained that there was not any question of my having a choice, that both they and the Traveller children were equal participants in my class, and that we should all try harder to work together and co-operate with one another.

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

confirming their status as sites of contestation. Said (2002) critiques such separatist approaches:

> The question, I believe, is not how to devise means for persisting in trying to separate them but to see whether it is possible for them to live together fairly and peacefully.
>
> (Said 2002, p. 316)

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

> The essence of that vision is coexistence and sharing in ways that require an innovative, daring, and theoretical willingness to get beyond the arid stalemate of assertion, exclusivism, and rejection. Once the initial acknowledgement of the Other as an equal is made, I believe the way forward becomes not only possible but attractive.
>
> (Said 2002, p. 319)

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

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

> building a covenant of shared values, one that bonds people in a common cause and transforms a school from an organization into a community.
>
> <div align="right">(Sergiovanni 1992, p. 15)</div>

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

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

Incidentally, the Traveller child, who had so much potential but who was a victim of an educational system that did not meet her needs, went on to a second level school, a remarkable event in the 1970s. One factor that enabled her to do so, besides the fact that obviously she or her parents, or perhaps both, perceived a value in education,

was probably the fact that there were, at that time, separate Vocational Schools for boys and girls, as Traveller parents are reluctant to send their children to mixed secondary schools. She spent five years in the Vocational School and completed the Leaving Certificate examination. Farrelly's (1994) research on Traveller participation in education testifies to this unique occurrence:

> Traditionally, Travellers have not attended second level schooling. One or two secondary schools reported that individual Travellers enrolled but none completed more than first year. There was one notable exception in that one girl completed her Leaving Certificate in the local Vocational School.
>
> (Farrelly 1994, p. 51)

However, the Traveller child then appeared to have reached a crisis point in her life, where she perhaps felt an outsider in relation to the settled community, and at the same time felt that her level of education had alienated her from her Traveller community. This factor has influenced me towards a vision of education for Traveller children that can be encompassed within their culture, rather than educating them out of their culture and, in the process, creating misfits or boundary dwellers, as described by MacLure (1996). In pursuing this aim, I am conscious of the view of Reiss (1975) around the difficulty of 'preserving identity and achieving academic progress when these two may be mutually exclusive' (1975, p. 93). Nevertheless, I am convinced of the potential for achieving this vision through promoting equality of respect and social justice.

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

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

(Chomsky 1996, pp. 75-6)

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

As I reflected on my first encounter with children from the Traveller community, I focused on the question of what were the learning outcomes from that experience that I could utilise in a beneficial way in my current research. A major learning outcome for me was the realisation that the Traveller community had a separate culture and identity, a fact that needed to be recognised and accommodated by educational institutions. My teacher training course had not prepared me for the reality of cultural diversity, as the teaching methodologies to which I was introduced seemed to consider a class as a homogeneous group, making no differentiation either on intellectual or social grounds. The legacy of the dominance of whole-class teaching is reflected in the continuing inability of some educational institutions to cater for those who have different needs. I was just beginning my teaching career when I took the class with the Traveller children and hadn't yet reached the stage of formulating my own educational theories with regard to recognising the individuality of pupils and valuing their cultural identity. Neither had I any realisation of the fact that, if Traveller children had disruptive or aggressive tendencies, that these inclinations

probably stemmed from a sense of frustration at the oppression and alienation caused by the insensitivity and bureaucracy of educational institutions. In my present position, therefore, as RTT, I have been able to operate out of an ethic of care, as recommended by Noddings (1992), and have also been able to transform that sense of caring into social action that contributes to what I understand as a good social order, which is a realisation of the principles of social justice and equality that characterise my educational practice.

2:3   Locational context

The school in which I work and in which I am conducting my research is located in a working-class area in Dublin. When I began my teaching career there, many of the children in the school came from large families. Instances of ten or twelve children in a family were quite common, and one child I taught belonged to a family of seventeen children. There was a certain degree of poverty associated with the area, even though most of the children's fathers were in employment. There was also an interest in education and the majority went on to second level schooling, many to the local Vocational School, which was free of charge, rather than to the more academic, fee-paying secondary schools. The minority who did not progress to second level schools, usually the eldest children of large families, remained in primary school until they reached their fourteenth birthday, when they could legally leave school and find employment in local factories. Over the years, certain changes occurred in these circumstances. Unemployment levels increased due to the closure of some of the traditional workplaces, and this eventually led to the area being designated disadvantaged, in terms of criteria determined by the Department of Education. The number of children per family decreased dramatically, as reflected in a drop in enrolment from 550 to 220 over a number of years. This seems to have been a countrywide trend, as the document 'Education for a Changing World' states:

> The number of students in primary education increased steadily over the period 1965 to 1987 (the peak year) and has been declining since then; it is projected to continue to decline very substantially over the next decade.
> (Ireland, Department of Education 1992, p. 31)

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

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

1. They were situated on the periphery of a housing scheme, on a site near a council rubbish dump.
2. Nobody else lived, or wanted to live, in the vicinity, and so there were no objections to the Traveller community settling there.

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

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

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

discrimination by state agencies, even in a climate where policies might suggest a more reasonable approach, based on a process of consultation, should be taken.

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

I have described my first experience of teaching Traveller children in the 1970s. This was to be my only encounter with Traveller children for a number of years. The reason for this was that another school in the locality, which was further away from the Travellers' site than my school, was given extra resources to cater for Traveller children. One of the concessions they received was an extra teacher for every fourteen Traveller children. The school made excellent use of this concession by integrating the Traveller children into all classes and using the extra teachers to reduce class sizes overall, so that when other schools were struggling with a pupil/teacher ratio of 40:1, this school enjoyed a 20:1 ratio. The Traveller children were provided with transport to and from school, shower facilities when they arrived in school, school uniforms to change into and a hot meal at lunchtime.

While I accept that those who formulated these policies and those who implemented them were well intentioned, I suggest that the thinking behind them was seriously

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

> I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things, my spirit filled with the desire to attain to the source of the world, and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects…the movements, the attitudes, the glances of the others fixed me there, in the sense in which a chemical solution is fixed by a dye.
>
> (Fanon 1992, p. 220)

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

When a change occurred in the above situation, it was as a result of the Travellers' own initiative, rather than a rethink on the part of institutions or policy makers.

Travellers began gradually to assert their right to choose a school for their children, based on the following factors:

1. As Travellers acquired their own transport, they were no longer dependent on the school bus to get their children to school.

2. Traveller parents began to realise that they had a choice around which school their children should attend and that it would be more convenient to send their children to a school nearer to their site, such as my school, than the one to which they had been bussed.

3. When a dispute occurred between two Traveller families, one of the families would transfer the children to my school, in order to avoid contact with the other family.

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

It was my reflection on this somewhat chaotic and unsatisfactory situation, regarding the position of RTT in my school, which led me to make a major change in the direction of my teaching career. I attribute my sense of dissatisfaction to the fact that my educational values around social justice for all were being denied in the current situation. Perhaps an even greater catalyst for change was the particular case of a Traveller child who was in my mainstream class at that time. I have outlined in Chapter 1 my efforts, and failure, to obtain learning support for this child. The only other recourse available to her was the RTT, but in view of the uncertainty and temporality of that position over the two years that she had access to that resource, I

concluded that it was not of significant benefit to her. I reflected also on the fact that this child was probably only one of many that the system had failed. Children with learning difficulties and socially disadvantaged children are often marginalised and excluded in educational terms, but Traveller children who have learning difficulties are doubly disadvantaged. It was my sense of unease at this realisation, and my concern that the educational needs of Traveller children were not being met, that inspired me to take up the position of RTT in my school.

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

> The organization of the curriculum in terms of academic subjects, for the purpose of systematic instruction, is ill-suited to the aim of a general education, because it structures our cultural resources in a form that renders them accessible to the few rather than the many.
>
> (Elliott 1998, p. xii)

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

2:4 Cultural context

One of the ideologies underpinning my research has been a strong desire to secure the recognition of a separate culture and identity for Traveller children in educational settings. Since taking up the position as RTT, I have endeavoured to promote my vision of the equal value of the Traveller culture and the culture of the dominant majority within the school setting. I deem it necessary, therefore, to explicate what I understand by the term 'Traveller culture', where I perceive the points of divergence between the Traveller culture and the culture of the settled community to lie, and why I consider issues connected with Traveller culture to be integral to my research. In this present section, then, I will engage with the concept of Traveller culture, in the course of which I will consider the five models of the different perceptions of Travellers as identified by the Dublin Travellers Educational and Development Group/ DTEDG (1994). I will offer a critique of the models through an interrogation of their appropriateness for the recognition and acceptance of a distinct Traveller culture, as well as an assessment of their capacity to promote social justice and equality. I will then discuss the views expressed in the writings and opinions of individual members of the Traveller community on what they consider to be the

salient aspects of their culture. I will also engage with the concept of ethnicity as it applies to the Traveller community and endeavour to justify my support for the legitimacy of the Travellers' claim to belong to an ethnic group.

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

The only reference to Travellers in school textbooks that I am aware of, consists mainly in such mythologizing of Travellers' origins, and this appears in a history workbook, 'Activity Book for sixth class', rather that in the actual textbook, 'Ages

Ago' (Brennan, 1997). The following extract indicates the type of information provided:

> Travellers did not keep a written account of their own history so we have no definite proof of their origins. One theory is that they are descended from tribes who lived in Ireland before the Celts came. Another theory is that they are descendants of people who were evicted from their homes between 1700 and 1900. They could also be descended from craft workers of the fifth century who travelled from place to place working metal objects. The word 'tinker' (working with tin) was used to describe them. Irish Travellers have their own language, called Gammon or Cant. Many Travellers made their living dealing in horses at the great horse fairs around the country. Travellers today still have a great love of horses.
>
> (Brennan 1997, p. 7)

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

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

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

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

> Outside the households Lappish was a medium of communication within the wider district, but language behaviour is such that Lappish must be regarded as a secret language or code, regularly used only in situations where trusted Lappish identities are involved.
>
> (Eidheim 1969, p. 44)

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

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

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

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

1. The liberal humanist model

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

2. The social pathology model

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

3. The sub-culture of poverty model

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

situation as it appears to hold Travellers themselves responsible for their state of marginalisation.

4. The idealist model

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

5. The human rights model

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

It would appear, then, that the human rights model can be a strategy for the achievement of equality and social justice for the Traveller community. It places Traveller issues within a humanist, rather than a humanitarian, framework and this allows Travellers to act as subjects, rather than objects, in the process of determining the trajectories of their lives. This situation seems to be a reflection of what Freire

(1972) is advocating when he denounces an oppositional view in the following statement:

> A pedagogy which begins with the egoistic interests of the oppressors (an egoism cloaked in the false generosity of paternalism) and makes of the oppressed the objects of its humanitarianism, itself maintains and embodies oppression. It is an instrument of dehumanization.
>
> (Freire 1972, p. 39)

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

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

> Nomadism entails a way of looking at the world, a different way of seeing things, a different attitude to accommodation, to work and to life in general.
>
> (McDonagh 2000, p. 34)

The concept of nomadism, then, is not confined to the act of travelling, but encompasses a whole outlook on life. McDonagh (2000) goes on to explain that Travellers remain Travellers, even when they are not actually travelling, as they retain the mindset of a nomad. He refers specifically to the situation of Travellers, who have been living in houses in a rural town for a number of years and are considered 'settled', but each summer they spend many weeks travelling around. McDonagh refers to such Travellers as 'living contradictions'. His assertion that 'once a Traveller, always a Traveller' is an important concept in view of the fact that Travellers tend to travel less nowadays than they used to, as a result of which they

could be denied the right to their cultural identity on the basis that they have 'settled'. Collins (1994), writing from a Traveller perspective, suggests that the cultural rights of Travellers could also be infringed by the perception of the differences between them and the settled community in terms of 'inferior/superior', instead of 'different but equal' (1994, p. 132).

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

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

(Barth 1969, pp. 10-1)

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

Forum. I suggest, therefore, that the Traveller community meets the criteria for recognition as an ethnic minority group. It also fulfils the requirements of a cultural ethnic group, in Banks' (2001) interpretation of the term:

> A *cultural* ethnic group is an ethnic group that shares a common set of values, experiences, behavioural characteristics, and linguistic traits that differ substantially from other ethnic groups within society. Individuals usually gain membership in such a group not by choice but through birth and early socialization.
>
> (Banks 2001, p. 79, emphasis in original)

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

The reasons for the continuous movement of Traveller families in the past have always been intricately linked to their occupations, though there may have been other minor factors involved also, such as occasional skirmishes with the law. The original name 'Tynker' derived from their occupation as tinsmiths, when they travelled around in search of work making or repairing metal items. This occupation was still common among the Traveller community up to the middle of the twentieth century. Until that time, Travellers tended to operate in rural areas, where there was also the possibility of gaining seasonal employment with farmers. Because of their usefulness in this regard, and because they did not remain for long in a particular area, there were few objections to their temporary encampments. There was also the fact that they tended not to congregate in large groups, but were dispersed throughout the countryside. The mode of transport at that time was the horse-drawn wagon and so more time was spent in travelling to a location than was actually spent in the place. At this point in Traveller history, there did not appear to be any overt anti-Traveller sentiments. Some of the literature from the 1950s and 1960s includes references to

the Traveller community, indicating a degree of acceptance of this minority group. For example, Clifford (1951), in his anthology of poetry, has a number of poems on Traveller themes, such as 'The ballad of the tinker's daughter', which do not display any prejudice or antipathy towards Travellers. MacMahon's (1967) novel, 'The Honey Spike', deals sensitively with the marriage of a young Traveller couple, and displays the author's knowledge of Cant and of Traveller customs. These writers, in considering Travellers as suitable subjects for their literary endeavours, have demonstrated their acceptance of the Travellers as equal members of society. Bewley (1974) indicates that there was a certain acceptance of Travellers during their travelling days:

> They were an accepted people then, performing a useful service. They often brought news from one place to another, before the days of wireless and newspapers.
>
> (Bewley 1974, p. 15)

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

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

> There were substantial occupational changes in the 1950s and 1960s from part dependence on such occupations as handcrafts and scrap dealing to greater

reliance on scrap trading as a profitable way of life needing vans, motors and trailers.

<div align="right">(Dennis 1985, p. 6)</div>

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

> With a persistently hostile society (settled) the traveller must seek a livelihood in occupational niches on the margins of that society.
>
> <div align="right">(Dennis 1985, p. 7)</div>

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

> They are hated because they are an outcast people whom the larger society can turn into an inkblot for their fears and hostilities.
>
> <div align="right">(Greeley 1992, p. xiv)</div>

Local authorities then continued to introduce measures that, whatever the thinking behind them, nevertheless contrived to further alienate and oppress the Traveller community. Attempts to settle Traveller families in local authority housing were

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unsuccessful, possibly due in part to prejudice on the part of settled families in the housing schemes, but due also to the fact that the Traveller families involved felt isolated from their own communities. Some local authorities built small housing schemes specifically for Traveller families, and these were much more successful, especially when families who were related to each other were in the same housing scheme, and when there was space for their trailers so that they could still exercise their option to travel. McDonagh (2000) describes the protests of some residents against the provision of halting sites or group housing for Travellers, because it was claimed that their properties would be devalued by such provision. McDonagh's response is, 'People don't devalue property, attitudes do' (2000, p. 39). Another successful initiative on the part of local authorities was the provision of serviced sites, where Travellers could park their trailers on a permanent basis, and were provided with a water supply, sanitary facilities and refuse collection services. These sites also provoked anti-Traveller responses from some local settled people. Shiel (2003) reports that a Traveller family was prevented from moving from an illegal site to a serviced site, because of fears for their safety following the painting of slogans such as, 'No knackers here' and 'Keep filth out' on the new site. This incident indicates the continuing existence of discrimination and prejudice on the part of the settled community towards Travellers.

However, plans to settle all Traveller families in special housing schemes or serviced halting sites, within a specified time frame, have yet to be implemented. The Traveller Accommodation Act (Government of Ireland 1998) required local authorities to draw up a four-year plan for accommodating Traveller families in their areas. Although most local authorities complied with this request and produced a Traveller Accommodation Programme for the period 2000-2004, very few have implemented the programmes in full. This is evident from the number of Traveller families still camped at the side of a road, living in appalling conditions, and waiting to be accommodated by their local authorities. Transient sites were also to be provided, and the failure to do so has resulted in controversy each summer when Travellers begin to move around the country and, in the absence of these sites, settle

temporarily on public or private property, to the annoyance of the local inhabitants. The Housing (Miscellaneous) Act (Government of Ireland 2002), which empowered local authorities to remove Travellers from unauthorised sites without acquiring a court order, has caused hardship for many families. According to the Government, the act was intended to prevent large numbers of Travellers, on the move during the summer months, from camping illegally on parks or open spaces. However, Pavee Point Newsletter (2004) recounts a number of incidents where individual Traveller families, encamped in the same place for at least a year, while waiting to be accommodated by the local authorities, were moved on under the new legislation. This new legislation is particularly oppressive in view of the fact that it was enacted before many of the local authorities had even begun to implement their Traveller Accommodation Programmes.

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

gardening services (Liégeois 1987). According to Andereck (1992), Irish Travellers in the United States engage in similar occupations:

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

Some of the other major differences between Traveller and settled people are described by McDonagh (1993), who elucidates in particular the reasons that Traveller children tend not to avail of second level education. Writing from her own experience as a member of the Traveller community, she explains that traditionally Travellers married at a young age, and so at twelve years of age they began preparing for an event that they knew would occur within a few years. Girls were instructed in how to look after a household by their mothers and boys were initiated into the occupation of their fathers, in clearly defined roles. The idea that someone who was preparing for marriage would also attend school was incomprehensible to the Traveller community, as the children were receiving instruction at home in the skills needed for their future existence. Even though the legal age for marriage has been raised since McDonagh wrote about Traveller marriage customs, Travellers still regard twelve-year-olds as adults, capable of making their own decisions, and so the question of whether to remain in the educational system is often left to the children themselves. The difference in status for Traveller children, whereby at home they are regarded as adults but in school are perceived as children, can impact negatively on their sense of identity, and can alienate them further from the educational system, particularly at second level. Other marriage customs that still survive among the Traveller community are arranged marriages and marriages between cousins. It could be argued that the reason these practices continue to be prevalent is the relatively settled status of Travellers currently, which reduces their opportunities for meeting other Travellers, outside of their extended families.

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

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

> It is a lifestyle based on ways of being that are undefinable and intangible, and on ways of doing which may be variable and ephemeral.
>
> (Liégeois 1987, p. 75)

My understanding of Traveller issues, gained through my learning around the nature of Traveller culture and identity, provides a framework within which to base my approach to the teaching of Traveller children. I have learned that any efforts on my

part to encourage Traveller children to remain in the educational system must take account of the cultural factors that tend to discourage them from doing so. I realise that Traveller parents need to understand that participation in second level schooling does not necessarily mean that their children will reject their own cultural norms. A teacher who participated in Andereck's (1992) research on Irish Travellers in America appears to share this view:

> Each generation goes to school a little longer. Maybe they will all finish eighth grade in the future – but they will still be Irish Travellers. Education won't change that.
>
> (Andereck 1992, p. 115)

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

2:5 Policy context

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

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

> Major changes in sedentary society, particularly in farm operations, had led to increased squalor for Travellers and to their migration to towns and cities. Mechanisation decimated the need for rural casual labour; plastic eliminated the need for tin utensils; motor drive vehicles reduced the need for draft horses on farms and made distant shops accessible. Horse traders, blacksmiths, tinsmiths and door-to-door traders became redundant.
>
> (Kenny 1997, p. 90)

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

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

> All efforts directed at improving the lot of itinerants and at dealing with the problems created by them, and all schemes drawn up for these purposes, must always have as their aim the eventual absorption of the itinerants into the general community.
>
> (Government of Ireland 1963, p. 106)

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

> It saw us as the problem. It didn't see us as people with accommodation problems. It certainly didn't see us as people with a distinct culture.
>
> (McDonagh 2000, p. 38)

The problem, therefore, can only be resolved by assimilating the deviant group into the majority group. This interpretation of the Traveller situation is a manifestation of how the dominance of one culture in society can exclude alternative cultures, whose ways of life diverge from the norm. It does not recognise Travellers as an ethnic minority group with the same entitlement to human rights as the dominant majority group in Irish society. The use of the word 'itinerants', i.e. vagrants, which has criminal connotations, to describe Travellers contributes further to the devaluing and dehumanising of the Traveller community. Travellers had to rely on their own resources of resilience and resistance in order to frustrate the government's attempt to assimilate them into the settled society. One may, therefore, consider the fact that Travellers are still a vibrant and visible presence in Irish society to be an indication of the strength and persistence of their struggle against the efforts to annihilate their cultural identity.

Twenty years after the first policy had been formulated the 'Report of the Travelling People Review Body' (Government of Ireland 1983) was published. On close reading, one finds grounds to suspect that this second document was produced in reaction to the abysmal, though perhaps appropriate, failure of the policies contained in the first document. The 1983 document appears to be an improvement on the previous one, both in terms of the thinking behind it and of the tone adopted throughout. One notable change, which is apparent in the titles of the two documents, is that the Travelling people are now called 'Travellers', which had long been their

preferred denominator. The report also appears to give recognition to Traveller wishes in regard to housing, as one of its objectives aims 'to provide within a relatively short number of years a house for all Traveller families who desire to be housed' (1983, p. 15). However, it soon becomes apparent that the recognition of Travellers' rights to self-determination remains at a superficial level, for the statement continues:

> Travellers who are not so accommodated cannot hope to receive an adequate education. Nor can they avail of services such as health and welfare which are of such significance in the lives of all people.
>
> (Government of Ireland 1983, p. 15)

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

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

> When we talk about the Travelling community, it's not just a question of whether they want housing or whether they would prefer serviced halting sites. It's that they want their culture recognised, they want their dignity respected, they want to be full citizens of this country. I think that the most important things are that there's real space for the Travelling community, for their own culture, for their self-development and self-expression; that we have space for them and that we value them; and that the other things like the appropriate kind of houses, services and facilities are provided to the best of one's ability as a nation. But perhaps the most important thing is that we value them as a distinct community within our larger community.
>
> (DTEDG 1994, pp. 26-7)

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

The 'Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community' (Government of Ireland 1995) goes much further than previous policies in recognising the distinct nature of Traveller culture and identity. An example of the more positive, emancipatory and respectful nature of the Report lies in the practice of writing the word 'Traveller' with a capital 'T'. Nevertheless, it still did not include an explicit recognition of Traveller ethnicity. In this context, 'Intercultural Education in the Primary School' (Ireland, Department of Education and Science/DES 2005) surpasses all previous documents in suggesting that Travellers are a distinct ethnic group.

The Employment Equality Act (Government of Ireland 1998) ensures equality of opportunity for all job applicants. The Equal Status Act (Government of Ireland 2000) performs a similar function in relation to the provision of goods and services.

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

2:6   Educational policy context

Traveller children were not a prominent feature of primary schooling prior to the 1970s, apart from brief appearances at seven years of age to prepare for the sacrament of Communion, and at twelve for Confirmation. Not surprisingly, therefore, there was no mention of Traveller education in the new curriculum for primary schools, 'Curaclam na Bunscoile' (1971), though perhaps one could construe the statement that a curriculum must be 'sufficiently flexible to meet the needs of children of widely varying natural endowment and cultural background' (Rialtas na hÉireann/Government of Ireland 1971, p. 13) as constituting an oblique reference to Traveller children. By the late 1980s, there was a significant increase in the number of Traveller children enrolled in primary schools. The Irish National Teachers' Organization (1992) states that in 1963 there were 114 Traveller children attending primary school, and that this had increased to 4200 by 1989, which represented approximately 75% of Traveller children of primary school age. This situation could be attributed to different factors, for example, the fact that Travellers were more settled, which made it easier for the children to attend school, and school attendance officers could monitor their attendance more easily. As a result, the document 'Education for a Changing World' (Ireland, DES 1992), in a section entitled 'Meeting the Educational Needs of Travellers', states:

1   The Department will take up with the Colleges of Education the matter of providing a module on travellers and traveller culture in the pre-service education of teachers.

2   The Department will draw up guidelines for publishers so that material on travellers' culture can be included in schoolbooks.

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

The pressing need for schools to provide literature that reflects Traveller culture can be gleaned from the following anecdote. In September 2002, an eleven-year-old Traveller girl enrolled in sixth class in my school. She had already attended various other schools, for brief periods, both in England and in Ireland. In spite of her irregular school attendance, she had excellent reading skills. She had not, however,

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

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

> Irish education reflects the historical and cultural roots of Irish society and seeks to give children an appreciation of the continuity of the Irish experience and of their relationship with it.
>
> (Ireland, DES 1999, p. 26)

If some children, such as Traveller children, do not share the historical and cultural traditions of the dominant group in Irish society, then it appears reasonable to assume

that they cannot experience the continuity provided by the primary education system. There is also a suggestion in the introduction that acquiring a knowledge of the Irish language 'would deepen a child's cultural awareness and enable the child to express a sense of national and cultural identity' (1999, p. 27). I suggest that recognition of the Cant language by educational institutions would have a similar effect on Traveller children's sense of identity.

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

> the meaningful participation and highest attainment of the Traveller child so that, in common with all the children of the nation, he or she may live a full life as a child and realise his or her full potential as a unique individual, proud of and affirmed in his or her identity as a Traveller and a citizen of Ireland.
>
> (Ireland, DES 2002, p. 5)

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

> have a common ancestry, share fundamental cultural values and traditions, have a language of their own, and are seen by themselves and others as distinct and different.
>
> (Ireland, DES 2002, p. 7)

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

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

(Ireland, DES 2002, p. 10)

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

2:7   Conclusion

The various contexts that I have discussed in this chapter – personal, locational, cultural, policy and educational – provide a comprehensive backdrop to my research. My engagement with these issues enabled me to create the historical and contextual frameworks within which my research is located. Through the process of outlining the relevant contextual factors, I was able to relate the inherent themes to the values and concepts that underpinned my research. The most salient and consistent concept interwoven throughout the chapter is the idea of social justice as a necessary condition for the equal treatment of all people in society. However, many of the incidents that I have alluded to in this chapter illustrate the manner in which the Traveller community has been consistently denied social justice by the various social institutions. I have highlighted the fact that Travellers have rarely been consulted or included in the decision-making around their own life-choices. Such a stance is

inconsistent with my values of social justice and equality, and so I would endorse Greeley's (1992) proposal for an appropriate perspective on this issue:

> The appropriate stance, it seems to me, toward groups like the Travelers is to respect their right to be who and what they are and to listen to them with generosity and openness to see what we might learn from them.
>
> (Greeley 1992, p. xv)

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

> Until an oppressed people know who they are, or who they might be when all the wrongs are righted and all the rights are won, their struggle against these wrongs and for these rights will be less than effectual.
>
> (Kenny 1997, p. vii)

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

Section 2 Chapter 3 Issues of Social Justice and Equality

3:1 Introduction

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

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

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

3:2   My understanding of social justice

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

I have explained in Chapter 2 the importance of cultural practices, such as travelling from place to place, often for the purpose of trading and engaging in scrap metal collecting, to the Traveller community. Owning a horse is also part of the lifestyle of

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

> Legislation, policy making and provision can be developed without account being taken of their potential impact on a minority cultural group such as the Travellers. In this way, policy and practice can develop in a manner that only reflects the 'Settled' community's culture and identity and can therefore be inappropriate for the Traveller community.
> (Tormey and Haran 2003, p. 30)

All the changes in lifestyle that I have outlined here have taken their toll on Traveller men, in particular, since it is their means of livelihood that has been most affected by

such changes. Many of them lack the skills to find employment within the settled community, though the majority have no desire to take that route anyway, as they value the independence that their traditional lifestyle provided. The lack of an occupation has left many of them feeling depressed and turning to alcohol, and in some cases to drugs, which is a new phenomenon among Travellers. N, the mother of R, one of the Traveller children in my school, remarked in conversation with me:

> The men are locked in their culture. They haven't been able to change, like the women have. But then, they never had to go around begging. The women want change, for the sake of their children. A lot of the young men, up to about thirty-five years, suffer from depression, and get drunk a lot. The men should be approached, because they have a lot to offer. They should be asked how they would like to see things changing. At the moment they are full of anger and resentment.
>
> (field notes, 28th June 2004, item 3a)

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

> They must reduce their demands, restrain their wants, learn to control themselves even more than before. The social process of remolding them to fit into the conditions of their new life and of teaching them to exercise this unwanted additional self-restraint cannot be completed overnight. Consequently, they are not adjusted to the situation which is thrust upon them.
>
> (Durkheim 1960, p. 455)

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

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

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

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

> If they (young people) want to get into a pub with settled people, they have to deny they're a traveller. They have to deny their identity. And nobody should have to do that. That's not good for the mind.
>
> (McInerney 2004, p. 13)

A seventeen-year-old unemployed Traveller youth tells McInerney that he wanted to do traditional Traveller work, but cannot now do that, adding that 'he wasn't reared to believe in working for someone else. Traveller men want to be their own boss' (2004, p. 13). It is hardly surprising, therefore, that young Travellers appear to have lost their sense of direction, to be caught in a crisis of identity and to be fearful about their future. I suggest that many of their problems result from the various government acts passed in the last ten years, which curtail their freedom and independence, deprive them of work opportunities and prevent them from engaging in their cultural practices. In short, they have been subjected to unjust and inequitable policies and practices. It may be argued that the government had good reasons for introducing the various pieces of legislation, but I fail to see the justification for reducing an ethnic minority group to a state of powerlessness, desperation and oppression, bereft of the

means of making a living in ways that are commensurate with their culture, and confined to a state of dependency and despondency. It is a situation that is completely contrary to my values of social justice and equality for all, since it allows no space for human dignity.

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

> As supposed shortcomings were publicly and privately revealed, students themselves came to accept the notion that they were less than worthy – even stupid. Combined with other negative characteristics of the Innu and what they represented, in the media and elsewhere, and other difficult conditions under which many Innu lived, the effects on young people in some cases were devastating. In 1988, for example, twenty-one teenagers in a community of about eight hundred attempted to commit suicide.
>
> (Ryan 1999, p. 117)

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

There are other factors that can also contribute to situations of injustice and inequality. For example, people can be born into different social groups, resulting in

those born into a higher socio-economic group having greater financial advantages than those born into a lower socio-economic group. This inequality can have major repercussions in that it can persist throughout life and can permeate all areas of existence, where goods and services can be bought by those with the capacity to pay for them, thus adding to the privileges enjoyed by those from the higher socio-economic groups. In this context, Rawls' (1971) theory of the distributive paradigm of social justice is relevant. Rawls states that the principles of social justice:

> provide a way of assigning rights and duties in the basic institutions of society and they define the appropriate distribution of the benefits and burdens of social cooperation.
>
> (Rawls 1971, p. 4)

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

> contemporary philosophical theories of justice tend to restrict the meaning of social justice to the morally proper distribution of benefits and burdens among society's members.
>
> (Young 1990, p. 8)

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

practices of institutionalised domination and oppression, it should 'offer a vision of a heterogeneous public that acknowledges and affirms group differences' (1990, p. 10).

3:3   Social justice and education

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

In theory, it should be possible to ensure that social justice acts as a guiding principle in the provision of educational services, provided that all involved in the provision are in agreement that this is the best way of achieving fairness and equality for those at the receiving end. In accordance with the Education Act (Government of Ireland 1998) education is available to all, not on an invitational basis but as a compulsory regime for all children between the ages of six and sixteen. One would expect, then, that all children would be treated equally within the educational system. However, this is not always the reality. While all children have equal access to educational provision at primary school level, as required by the Education Welfare Act

(Government of Ireland 2000), very often the equality ends here. Many schools seem to think that, in accepting all applicants, they are demonstrating non-discriminatory practices, and that this fulfils their obligation to treat all children equally. They do not, therefore, perceive the need for continuity of the concept of equality, to ensure that it extends to equality of participation, opportunity or outcome. In my practice of working with Traveller children, I have succeeded in transforming the concept of equality into the lived reality of this concept, through my efforts at ensuring for Traveller children equal access to learning support and resource teaching, as I outline in Chapter 5. My educational practice, then, could be perceived as providing a space for the achievement of equality, through my recognition of the diverse needs of Traveller children within the educational system, in terms of Lynch and Lodge's (1999) explanation of this phenomenon:

> Those for whom equality involves respect for difference rather than simply distribution have, however, created a space in which the voices of young persons can be heard. Even though they did not create these spaces to hear young people especially, the spaces and cracks which are open allow their voices to be heard.
>
> (Lynch and Lodge 1999, p. 219)

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

- Supports common ways of learning
- Accommodates diverse capacities, cultures, learning paths and achievement outcomes
- Enables communal solidarity or 'sticking together'

- Reduces inequalities of resources between social groups and geographical communities'.

(Zappone 2002, p. 82)

I would argue that my educational practice represents the living realisation of these principles, in relation to the achievement of a more equitable educational provision for Traveller children. I present my data in support of this claim in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. I would also contend that, through the transformation of the concept of equality into lived reality in my practice, I have moved from an abstract form of theorising to a living practical form of theorising, which seems to be what Lynch (1999) is suggesting, when she says:

> Theories of egalitarian change need to be grounded in the lifeworld of the marginalised. Yet, as long as egalitarian-oriented academics remain as 'detached' intellectuals, psychologically, socially and geographically removed from those about whom they write (the 'Other', in every sense), they are clearly not in a position to develop transformative theories informed and developed by the knowledge and experience of those directly exposed to inequality.
>
> (Lynch 1999, p. 27)

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

In the absence of a practice of equality in educational institutions, the usual practice is that children from minority groups, such as socially disadvantaged children,

children from ethnic minorities and children with learning difficulties, are enrolled in schools on the same basis as the majority of children, but thereafter very little effort is made to ensure that their differences do not result in inequitable or discriminatory treatment. If these children are subjected to inequality or discrimination in school, their experience of education can be one of alienation and marginalisation. Their experience of education tends to be, therefore, in sharp contrast to Dewey's (1966) view of education as 'a fostering, a nurturing, a cultivating process' (1966, p. 10). Their educational experience also represents a contradiction of McLaren's (1995) belief that, in order to ensure some level of equality, 'teachers need to give the marginalized and the powerless a preferential option' (1995, p. 138). In the case of a child who is socially disadvantaged, belongs to an ethnic minority group and also has learning difficulties, which is the position of some Traveller children, the negative effects of this multilayered disadvantage on their educational experience can be onerous and oppressive.

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

> From a democratic point of view, Freire sees society controlled by an elite which imposes its culture and values as the standard. In schooling, this imposed standard is transferred by required syllabuses, mandated textbooks, tracking and standardized examinations.
>
> (Shor 1993, p. 28)

For those children who share the cultural values of the school, education can be a liberating, life-enhancing and fulfilling experience. They possess what Bourdieu, cited in Robbins (2000), calls cultural capital and this enables them to obtain the maximum benefit from the educational system. On the other hand, for Traveller children, as for other minority groups, the school culture does not necessarily reflect

the beliefs, habits or life-views acquired in the home, and so they lack the cultural capital that appears to be a necessary requirement for success in the educational system. Furthermore, their culture is not accorded any value within the school system, which can create in them feelings of inferiority, low self-esteem and a lack of any sense of belonging. Shor (1993) attests to the demoralising effect of such experiences:

> Faced with an unfamiliar scholastic culture, denied an anthropological appreciation of their own culture, students become cultural deficits, dependent on the teacher as a delivery system for words, skills and ideas to teach them how to speak, think and act like the dominant elite, whose ways of doing these things are the only ones acceptable.
>
> (Shor, 1993, p. 31)

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

> Interculturalism is not about teaching fixed cultural content but about allowing space, recognising boundaries and providing markers so that all can 'find' themselves identified in texts, programmes and school ambience.
>
> (Kenny 1997, p. 294)

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

In arguing for an intercultural framework for educational provision, I mean to suggest that the assumptions underpinning this concept should reflect the view that all cultures are of equal value and importance. A stance that gives dominance and a sense of superiority to one culture, as the correct and legitimate one, cannot be considered to be premised on principles of social justice and equality. Said (2002)

argues for a multiplicity of cultures, stating that it is highly unlikely that there exists one 'pure' culture, untainted by elements from any other culture:

> All cultures, as well as civilizations, are mixed, hybrid, full of elements taken from other cultures. So much so, in my opinion, that it really is intellectually irresponsible to argue as if there were a pure, unmodified culture that is totally at one, self-identified with itself.
>
> (Said 2002, p. 141)

An educational system, therefore, that permits a hierarchical structure in relation to the cultures represented in the system, is creating a situation of inequality in suggesting that some cultures are inferior to the culture of the dominant majority. To counteract such a situation in my practice of working with Traveller children, I operated a policy of promoting Traveller culture as equally valid with the dominant culture, by providing Traveller children with opportunities for exploring cultural issues, which I document in Chapter 6.

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

> If pluralism is a valid view, and respect between systems of values which are not necessarily hostile to each other is possible, then toleration and liberal consequences follow, as they do not either from monism (only one set of values is true, all the others are false) or from relativism (my values are mine, yours are yours, and if we clash, too bad, neither of us can claim to be right).
>
> (Berlin 2000, p. 13)

Berlin's (2000) theory seems to resonate with that of Said (2002), quoted above, in that both appear to be arguing for diversity – of opinions, cultures and values – as containing the potential for more equitable and more emancipatory conditions of human existence, and for a greater measure of respect for the 'other'. The idea of a

plurality of cultural beliefs and practices has had a significant influence on my research, particularly in relation to making my claims to have developed a living theory of the practice of social justice as the recognition and acceptance of diversity, and as equality of respect for all. I explain and justify these claims in Chapter 8, which contains an analysis of my findings, and in Chapter 9, in which I outline the potential significance of my research.

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

> The educational experience offered to the majority population should be modified and in some respects radically changed to enable them to cope adequately with the facts of cultural, national and racial diversity. Clearly this implies changes in curricula and teaching methods, not least important eliminating the xenophobia and cultural blinkers that permeate much history, geography and literature teaching.
>
> (Little 1975, p. 78)

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

> Majority groups need help in understanding and accepting the need of oppressed groups to claim their own literature, art, and theories of oppression and political action.
>
> (Noddings 1992, p. 114)

Often, the inequitable treatment of minority groups may go unnoticed in the endeavour to provide the privileged child with optimum educational advantages.

Schools, therefore, have a responsibility to ensure that they do not create a privileged group at the expense of depriving minority groups of their just entitlements in the process.

Minority groups, such as Traveller children, those with special needs and other disadvantaged groups, may require extra resources to redress the balance of their inequitable situation, caused by their marginalised position in school hierarchies. Griffiths (1998), in differentiating between equality and social justice, argues that the granting of extra resources to some groups cannot be described in terms of strict equality. One could conclude from this argument that the diversion of resources to the most disadvantaged in educational terms might be construed as inequitable. Who, though, are the victims of this inequity? One could not consider the relatively advantaged in the educational system to be subjected to inequitable treatment by these measures, which are not designed to deprive them of any benefits, but to try to create a more equitable educational experience for all. I would suggest, therefore, that initiatives such as affirmative action, positive discrimination or a preferential option, all aimed at improving the situation of the disadvantaged, are measures with the potential to achieve social justice, and, on that basis, acceptable interventions for accommodating the needs of the least advantaged in society. Griffiths (1998), in fact, goes on to say that, while these measures may not conform to principles of equality, they can be justified under the broader frame of reference of social justice, giving the impression that she considers equality to be of less value and importance than social justice. Griffiths goes on to define social justice as including 'the good of each and also the good of all, in an acknowledgement that one depends on the other' (1998, p. 89). This definition contains an inherent implication of equality, and seems to suggest that considerations of the principle of equality are an integral part of any discourse on social justice. Therefore, my stance on this issue is that, in order to promote social justice as a framework for the treatment of marginalised groups within educational institutions, it is necessary, having granted them equality of access to the educational system, to focus also on achieving equality of participation and of outcome for these

groups through diverting extra resources to them, if this is what is required in order to provide them with a greater measure of equality.

Social justice may be said to operate in an educational system that provides for its minority pupils the same opportunities that are available to its majority group. This should mean that children from minority groups would be entitled to the same learning support and resources, and would have the same access to the psychological assessments necessary to qualify for these resources, as the majority of children. Lynch (1999) states that, if disadvantaged groups are to be able to participate on equal terms, they 'must have access to the same quality and level of resources' (1999, p. 291). To deny children from minority groups, such as Traveller children, the opportunity of receiving learning support or resource teaching, on the basis that their attendance rates are low or that they may not progress to second level schooling, would appear to constitute unjust treatment of these children, as usually no conditions, other than lack of academic progress, are laid down for resourcing the needs of children from the majority group. It could well be argued that the very conditions, stated here as prohibiting factors for the granting of extra resources to Traveller children, should in fact be arguments for providing them with as many resources as possible, so that they can obtain the maximum benefit from the educational system during their relatively short time in school. A teacher interviewed by Andereck (1992), in her ethnographic study of Irish Traveller children in a school in the United States, expresses a similar opinion:

> Instead of trying to change them, just try to educate them as much as possible for the short time they are with us.
>
> (Andereck 1992, p. 115)

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

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

> A system, such as the Irish educational system, that is intrinsically competitive and individually goal-oriented will alienate and disadvantage those whose social values and norms are family and community based.
>
> (Boldt *et al.* 1998, p. 25)

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

In discussing equality of access, participation and outcome in the area of educational provision, I have been attempting to investigate how, in the interest of social justice,

the opportunities that are available to the majority of children could be extended to minority groups also. Griffiths (1998) is concerned with the majority in society in general who are underprivileged, compared to the minority who are privileged, when she writes of:

> opening up, from the few to the many, chances of personal fulfilment and the rewards, prizes and enjoyments of living in a society.
> (Griffiths 1998, p. 89)

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

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

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with the quality of the educational experience. However, Lynch acknowledges the difficulty in achieving equality of respect for all pupils in the educational system:

> Equality of respect is rarely shown for minority and marginalised cultures and traditions within mainstream education. There is a need to restructure the learning environment so that its hidden curriculum of pedagogic practices does not defeat those egalitarian objectives schools may uphold, either through support programmes for equality of access, participation or outcome, or through curriculum reform.
>
> (Lynch 1999, p. 18)

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

3:4   Social justice and the issue of power

Discussions on social justice need to give some consideration to the issue of power. Foucault (1980) uses the metaphor of power as capillary action to describe how power is embedded in social relationships among people. However, it is often the reality that these power relations are not based on principles of equality, and that, instead, power appears to be hierarchically structured, with those at the top of the hierarchical structure being perceived as more powerful than those in the lower echelons of bureaucratic institutions. Problems arise when the more powerful use their power to keep the less powerful in a state of oppression and subjection, thus reducing them to a position of powerlessness. To counteract such negative effects of power, the use of power ought to be tempered with justice, so that all will feel equally empowered. In his analysis of Foucault's theories, Rabinow (1991), outlining the connection between justice and power, states

> It seems to me that the idea of justice in itself is an idea which in effect has been invented and put to work in different types of societies as an instrument of a certain political and economic power or as a weapon against that power.
>
> (Rabinow 1991, p. 6)

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

Issues of justice also impinge on power relationships that are based on inequality, resulting in a dominator/dominated dichotomy. Often the dominated feel powerless and unable to effect any change in the relationship. Moss (1998) describes Foucault's later conception of power as being inclusive of the possibility of resistance. This theory involves a change in ontological focus, from the subject as possessing the possibility of reacting to power, to the subject as also being capable of altering power relationships. Kenny (1997) believes that the resistance manifested by Traveller children in the educational system is a tactic used by them in the struggle to maintain their sense of identity and to alter power relations. This could indeed be true in the case of the teenage Traveller children with whom Kenny conducted her research, for in their culture the Traveller children would be regarded as adults, equal to the other adults in their community, but in the educational system they, like other children, would be seen as subordinates, resulting in a situation of conflict and, consequently, a site of resistance. Other disadvantaged groups exhibit similar patterns of resistance against dominant forms of power and control in schools. Both Willis (1977) and Fagan (1995) found evidence of oppositional behaviour among working class children towards educational systems that perpetuated inequalities against them. In this manner, they were indicating their rejection of a system, based on middle class values, that conspired to exclude those who did not share these values.

Foucault's concern with ethical issues (Moss 1998) allowed him to recognise the importance of the freedom of individuals to make choices in exercising their

capacities and powers. The emancipatory nature of this view contains the potential for autonomy and freedom that would allow for acts of resistance to dominant forms of power. Daniels and Garner (1999) articulate the difficulty in achieving a more equitable situation than a powerful/powerless relationship:

> The means by which the boundaries between those who are able to exercise some control over their life, and those who cannot, reflect relations of power. It is the readjustment of these relations of power that is often so difficult – both to conceptualize and to operate. Superficial adjustments may infer power shifts and subsequent redirections of policy and practice. However, all too often observation of actual practices suggests that many adjustments assume a rhetorical position, and lack impact.
>
> (Daniels and Garner 1999, p. 2)

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

Schools are often regarded as sites for social reproduction (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977), but one could question the validity of this role, if the society being reproduced is not based on principles of social justice and equality. Reproduction policies are normally aimed at maintaining the status quo and so can stymie possibilities for change. There may occasionally be a case for preserving things as they are, in the interests of stability, but there must also be an option to alter a state of affairs that indicates an obvious need for improvement and that, by adopting a framework of social justice, could produce greater benefits for all people. Bourdieu (1977) uses the term 'habitus' to describe the transfer of culture from one generation to the next. The reproduction of culture appears to be an instrument for maintaining homogeneity and

conformity, but could also have the effect of limiting an individual's potential and of placing boundaries on a person's life trajectory. Robbins (2000) believes that, while the habitus for Bourdieu embodies the attitudes that we inherit, it does not constitute a stimulus that conditions how we must behave. This interpretation allows for a more emancipatory view of Bourdieu's theory of the habitus and appears to introduce an element of choice into the situation. However, it needs to move further along the continuum towards a theory of social transformation (McNiff 2002) that would create the conditions for marginalised and oppressed people to transcend the limits of their inherited positionality, in cultural terms, and to define their cultural identity in accordance with the circumstances of their current or future experiences.

3:5   Conclusion

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

> The essence of education is becoming, the gradual discovery of what it means to be human, the search for a personal identity, an identity which brings individual autonomy within a community structure.
> (Drudy and Lynch 1993, p. 29)

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

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marginalised groups, a sense of ownership of the process of education, an assurance that all cultures are legitimated within the school structure and a feeling that each person's identity is cherished and valued within the educational system.

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

Section 2   Chapter 4   Methodology

4:1   Introduction

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

> The epistemology which underpins action research methodology is distinctive in that it rejects the notion that knowledge can be decontextualised from its context of practice.
>
> (Somekh 2002, p. 90)

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

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

used and explain their significance in terms of the form of living theory that I was generating.

4:2   My action research methodology

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

> research that is undertaken by educational practitioners because they believe that by so doing they can make better decisions and engage in better action.
> (Noffke 1997, p. 317)

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

testifies to the complexities inherent in educational processes, due to their dynamic and fluid nature, when he states that:

> learning is a dynamic and unpredictable process whose outcomes are not something the teacher can confidently predict or control. His or her responsibility is to establish the curricular and pedagogic conditions which enable pupils to generate personally significant and meaningful learning outcomes for themselves.
>
> (Elliott 1998, p. 101)

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

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

provides evidence of the feasibility of the notion of the teacher as researcher. Kincheloe (2003) appears to be arguing the case for teachers to engage in enquiries into their own practices, on the basis that their knowledge of such practices could be superior to that of outside researchers:

> Researchers from a positivist background fancy that the environment of the objects they study will stay constant. We know as teachers that the learning environment of the children is constantly changing.
>
> (Kincheloe 2003, p. 80)

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

> as a knower and thinker – who did not need 'findings' from university based researchers but more dialogue with other teachers that would generate theories grounded in practice.
>
> (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 1999, p.15)

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

> One of the purposes of doing research is to generate new theory, which then needs to be tested against existing theory to check the strength of its authenticity in making claims to knowledge and understanding.
>
> (McNiff 1999, p. 44)

It would appear, then, that through adopting an action research methodology, in which researchers can construct their own knowledge by reflecting on their actions, educational practitioners are enabled to theorise their practice, and furthermore that their theorising can take the form of their own living educational theories. An attractive feature of an action research approach for me, therefore, was the fact that

theory and practice were not perceived as separate entities, but could be integrated in the research process. Dewey (1966) appears to be arguing for a unity of theory and practical experience in the following extract:

> An ounce of experience is better than a ton of theory simply because it is only in experience that any theory has vital and verifiable significance. An experience, a very humble experience, is capable of generating and carrying any amount of theory (or intellectual content), but a theory apart from an experience cannot be definitely grasped even as theory.
>
> (Dewey 1966, p. 144)

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

> It is this final argument, that practice and theory *need* each other and thus comprise mutually indispensable phases of a unified change process, which presents the strongest case for practitioner action-research – as an activity which represents both a powerful (i.e., rigorous and worthwhile) form of practical professionalism *and* a powerful (i.e., rigorous and valid) form of social inquiry.
>
> (Winter 1989, p. 67, emphasis in original)

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

I was also attracted to an action research methodology because of its status as a value-laden approach to research. In view of the fact that the education process is

generally regarded as value-laden, it seems reasonable to assume that educational research should also reflect this quality. A value-laden approach has particular relevance for my research, to the extent that my embodied values of social justice and equality underpin my research, and that these values, in turn, inform the living critical standards of judgement for evaluating the research. Carr and Kemmis (1986) appear to be arguing for a value-laden research approach:

> In so far as education is a practical value-laden activity, it seems that any educational theory worthy of the name cannot rest content with providing value-neutral theoretical accounts, but must be able to confront questions about practical educational values and goals.
>
> (Carr and Kemmis 1986, p. 99)

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

> Positivist research is of little help to such practitioners (who must make moral decisions about the 'right' thing to do) because it assumes that research exists only to describe and help make predictions and, of course, has no value dimensions. It is unequipped to evaluate educational purposes or to assess various strategies for improving schooling.
>
> (Kincheloe 2003, pp. 80-1)

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

My research was concerned with improving the situation of Traveller children within the educational system, and so it could be accommodated under the rubric of a moral

or value-based paradigm, such as an action research approach. For the purpose of achieving my aim, I attempted to realise my values of democratic freedom, equality and social justice in my practice. A self-study action research approach is a form of research that contains within itself a commitment to social justice. Walker (2002) refers to this quality of action research, when she says:

> Action research is a form of professional development which involves continuously shifting between trying to alter a social situation in ways which bring us closer to living out our democratic values, and revising what ought to be done, while simultaneously interrogating what we mean by social justice.
>
> (Walker 2002, p. 149)

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

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

4:3   Critical emancipatory theory

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

> The goal is not only to emancipate practitioners but to allow such a strategy to empower students so that they are emancipated as learners.
>
> (McKernan 1996, p. 53)

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

> the emancipation of participants in the action from the dictates of compulsions of tradition, precedent, habit, coercion as well as from self-deception.
>
> (Leitch and Day 2000, p. 184)

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

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

> But to manipulate men [sic], to propel them towards goals which you – social reformer – see, but they may not, is to deny their human essence, to treat them as objects without wills of their own, and therefore to degrade them.
>
> (Berlin 1969, p. 137)

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

> What they want, as often as not, is simply recognition (of their class or nation, or colour, or race) as an independent source of human activity, as an entity with a will of its own, intending to act in accordance with it (whether it is good or legitimate, or not) and not to be ruled, educated, guided, with however light a hand, as being not quite fully human, and therefore not quite fully free.
>
> (Berlin 1969, p. 156)

My rationale for agreeing with Berlin's ideas is that they recognise the right of all human beings to freedom of choice in all the important spheres of life, and they are located within a framework of equality of respect for all. A further justification lay in the fact that, in my practice of working with Traveller children, I avoided any element of coercion or prescription, through enabling the children to express their own

opinions and to give voice to their experiences of oppression and discrimination. The evidence of this particular stance is provided in Chapter 6, in which Traveller children recount their experiences of prejudice and discrimination.

4:4   Generative transformational approach

In the course of my research I have tried to ensure that Traveller children were given equal educational opportunities with the dominant majority within the educational system. This involved endeavouring to ensure that factors such as their separate cultural identity, or their irregular school attendance, were not used as symbolic forms to deny them access to resources such as the services of the learning support or resource teachers. In the process of trying to bring about an improvement in the educational opportunities of Traveller children, I have generated my own living theory of how a more inclusive and democratic practice of education can have a transformative effect on their lives, as I outline in my research findings in Chapter 8. Walker (2002), drawing on the theories of Richardson (1990), suggests that endeavours that lead to a reduction in inequality and injustice may be described as transformative:

> Transformation involves making our societies less unequal and less unjust, it involves transformation of individuals in their social worlds 'such that they have the energy and the expertise to build and defend the structures and procedures of justice'.
>
> <div align="right">(Walker 2002, p. 157)</div>

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

> A theory which is interesting and has potential for developing new forms of understanding cannot be static; it has to be developmental, capable of turning

into new forms which are already latent within the present form. The theory itself has to demonstrate its own capacity for growth in life-enhancing directions – in one sense, therefore, this has to be a theory which is inherently educational.

<div align="right">(McNiff 2002, p. 55)</div>

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

4:5   Living educational theory

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

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

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

<div align="right">(Whitehead 2000, p. 91)</div>

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

1. I experience myself as a living contradiction when my efforts to achieve equality of treatment for Traveller children, in fulfilment of my commitment to my value of social justice, are frustrated in my practice.
2. My research is concerned with improvement in a number of areas, for example, in the educational provision for Traveller children, in my practice as an educator and in my learning through the process of engaging in my research.
3. My concern with enabling improvement necessitates continuous cycles of reflection and action, without any intention to produce final answers, but rather to generate a living theory of my practice, and so my research is more easily accommodated within an educational research paradigm, suggested by Whitehead (2000), than within traditional social science methodologies.

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

I also take responsibility for the enhancement in my learning, in terms of both my personal and professional development that occurred during the course of the research. The learning resulting from the process of achieving improvement through research can lead to the production of new knowledge, which can enable the

researcher to make a claim to knowledge. As I recount the narrative of my research in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, I will outline how I achieved an improvement in my practice and in my understanding of my practice, as well as in the quality of educational provision for Traveller children, through the process of living out my values as I engaged with that practice. I will also demonstrate how this process enabled me to generate my own living educational theory from my practice, which Whitehead (2000) suggests can result from the positioning of the 'I' as an essential component of educational research:

> The inclusion of 'I' in explanations for an individual's professional learning can lead to the creation of 'living' educational theories which can be related directly to an individual teacher's educative influence with his or her students.
> (Whitehead 2000, p. 91)

In choosing to locate my research within a living educational form of theory, then, I was opting to create my own living theory that evolved from the educative relationships that I formed with Traveller pupils, as I sought to influence their educational experiences towards greater levels of participatory and emancipatory action.

4:6   Practitioner research

The methodologies that I chose to use in my research were consistent with both the values base of the research and the research aims, as I have explained above. They were also commensurate with the form of living educational theory that I was generating from my practice. However, other factors also impinged on my choice of methodology. For example, the fact that I was researching my own practice, with a view to effecting improvement in it, meant that a positivist or empiricist approach, where the researcher is an external observer and carrying out research on others in an objective manner, would not suit the purpose of my research. In this context, I have been influenced by Stenhouse's (1975) distinction between a process model of curriculum, which views the teacher as a practitioner researcher, and an objectives model, which is based on a logic of means/ends. In undertaking my research, I did not

set out with a hypothesis that I would aim to accept or reject with scientific certitude, but to engage in an enquiry into a practice in which I was an active participant. In other words, I perceived myself to be a practitioner researcher, seeking to improve the situation in which I was immersed. Leonard (2000), in what appears to be an argument for a merging of the traditionally separate spheres of practitioner and researcher, refers to the benefits of such a merger when he raises the issue of whether:

> if practitioners were to be regarded as researchers and researchers came to be regarded as practitioners, their relationships might generate positive power-laden practices which would contribute to the educational development of all participants.
>
> (Leonard 2000, p. 8)

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

> Action researchers acknowledge that they are undertaking their research with the aim of improving the quality of life for themselves and others, and that their research will inevitably involve others in a variety of ways: as participants in the research, as validators of its findings, as new researchers who will carry the research forward, and so on.
>
> (McNiff 1999, p. 49)

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

> an approach which has proved to be particularly attractive to educators because of its practical, problem-solving emphasis, because practitioners carry out the research and because the research is directed towards greater understanding and improvement of practice over a period of time.
>
> (Bell 1993, pp. 7-8)

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

> as participant observers we can learn the culture or subculture of the people we are studying. We can come to interpret the world in the same way as they do.
>
> (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983, p. 7)

Though I would have preferred if Hammersley and Atkinson had used the phrase 'the people *with whom* we are studying', and I would not consider myself to be a 'participant observer', which would suggest an interpretive, rather than a self-study, methodology, nevertheless, I suggest that the concept elucidated here has relevance for my research. My wish to see Traveller culture valued in educational institutions has led to my acquiring an in-depth knowledge, understanding and appreciation of that culture (see Chapter 2). I can empathise with the Traveller way of being in the world, which is often constitutive of a sense of internalised oppression, resulting from many years of experiencing the negation of their culture by the dominant majority in society. I have come to this understanding, not simply through observation, but also through critical engagement in cycles of planning, acting and reflecting as a practitioner researcher.

4:7   Reflective practice

In the process of carrying out my research, I undertook reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, as recommended by Schön (1983), for the purpose of improving practice, and documented my reflections in my reflective diary. This practice is a

feature of self-study educational research that I judged to be appropriate for the type of research with which I wished to engage. Habermas (1978) outlines some of the benefits of the reflective process:

> Self-reflection is at once intuition and emancipation, comprehension and liberation from dogmatic dependence. Only the ego that apprehends itself in intellectual intuition as the self-positing subject obtains autonomy.
>
> (Habermas 1978, p. 208)

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

> improving practice, when viewed as the realisation of the values which define its ends into concrete forms of action, necessarily involves a continuing process of reflection on the part of practitioners.
>
> (Elliott 1991, p. 50)

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

> Action research is simply a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices and the situations in which the practices are carried out.
>
> (Carr and Kemmis 1986, p. 162)

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

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

> Critical reflection on practice is essentially where teachers acquire a language, a set of arguments, skilfulness and power to transform the existing order of things so as to improve the quality of children's educational experiences.
>
> (Ghaye and Ghaye 1998, p. 18)

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

> Through systematic and rigorous kinds of reflection-on-practice teachers are able to construct meaningful theories-of-action which are in a 'living' form (Whitehead, 1993). They are living in the sense that they are made up of reflective conversation and actual teaching episodes, created through retrospective thinking about practice and public validation of the accounts of it.
>
> (Ghaye and Ghaye 1998, p. 18)

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

Because my research consisted of a self-study of my particular educational practice, it did not appear that the normative criteria used to assess other forms of research could be applied to my form of qualitative research. The main criteria usually used to judge traditional types of research are generalisability and replicability. As my research is concerned with my learning through the process of engaging in reflection on my educational practice, it would not make sense to try to generalise from this particular

situation. Neither would my research findings be replicable in other situations, which would each have their own particular circumstances as determinants in reaching conclusions. This is not to say that other practitioners engaged in research in similar practices could not benefit from my research, or could not be influenced by the learning outcomes resulting from my research process. Lomax (1994) shares my sense of dissatisfaction with the use of traditional criteria for judging action research, and also suggests that the findings may have the potential for wider significance:

> Generalisation in the sense that an experiment replicated in exactly the same controlled conditions will have the same results a second time round seems a nonsensical construct in the hurly burly of social interaction. However, I do believe it important that action research projects have an application elsewhere, and that action researchers are able to communicate their insights to others with a useful result.
>
> (Lomax 1994, p. 118)

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

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

> some proponents of action research emphasise that the uniqueness of each project means that each report must suggest its own criteria for judgement (see Clarke *et al*. 1993), or that the value of the work resides in the practice improvements or enhanced group morale it engenders in the particular context during the time-span of the project (Lomax 1994).
>
> (Winter 2002, p. 145)

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

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

<div align="right">(Winter 2002, p. 146)</div>

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

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

<div align="right">(Lomax 1994, p. 119)</div>

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

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

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

<div align="right">(Connelly and Clandinin 1990, p. 7)</div>

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) go on to state that 'each inquirer must search for, and defend, the criteria that best apply to his or her work' (ibid.). While agreeing with the concept outlined here, nevertheless, I have been influenced in particular by Whitehead's (2000) idea that living standards of judgement, grounded in a researcher's ontological values, can be used for assessing a living educational theory form of action research. These standards of judgement differ from traditional criteria, in that they are not externally imposed but emerge from the research process. They are directly linked to the embodied values of the researcher, and these values also underpin the research. There appears, therefore, to be a greater sense of coherence to

research that displays an overt connection between the ontological values of the researcher and the living critical standards of judgement used in assessing the research. In articulating the standards of judgement for evaluating my research, I used my core values of social justice and equality. These standards of judgement are outlined in Chapter 1.

4:9   Requirement of equality in my methodology

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

> How can we claim to arrive at a responsible judgment with universal intent, if the conceptual framework in which we operate is borrowed from the local culture and the motives are mixed up with the forces holding on to social privilege?
>
> (Polanyi 1958, p. 322)

I chose, therefore, not to locate my research within a positivist research framework that operates out of the ontological and epistemological assumptions that some people are superior to others, and can speak on behalf of others. Instead, I chose to adopt an action research methodology that would enable me to claim originality and to exercise my personal judgement with universal intent. In establishing my right, as a thinking person, to make my own decisions, I am also accepting responsibility, in accordance with my values of social justice and equality, for encouraging the children whom I teach to exercise the same right. With regard to granting equal recognition to others, Polanyi (1958) states:

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

(Polanyi 1958, p. 327)

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

4:10 Research design

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

throughout the research. In the second year one child moved on to secondary school and one child joined the group from the infant school, but she moved to England after two months, thus reducing the group to thirteen for the remainder of that year. In the third year four children left, three to go to secondary school and the fourth said she was going to attend a second level school in the North of Ireland, though I have no evidence that she did. Five children moved up from the infant school, bringing the number in the group once more to fourteen.

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

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

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

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

4:11   Research participants

My research is based on my work with Traveller children, whom I wished to consider as equal participants with me in the research process, and not as objects of my research, and so I sought a form of research that would accommodate my stance on

this. Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) describe the features of an action research approach, which appears to be commensurate with my requirements:

> It is not research done on other people. Action research is research by particular people on their own work, to help them improve what they do, including how they work with and for others. It does not treat people as objects for research but encourages people to work together as knowing subjects and agents of change and improvement.
>
> (Kemmis and McTaggart 1988, p. 22)

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

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

> It is entirely within the spirit of classroom research that pupils be involved in the process of improving the teaching and learning situation in their classrooms.
>
> (Hopkins 1993, p. 174)

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

participants a relationship based on mutual respect and reciprocity, in fulfilment of my commitment to values of social justice and equality.

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

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

experiences of discrimination, and video-taped a role play and ensuing discussion on Traveller culture, both of which I transcribed for the purpose of presenting data (Appendices A and B). All of these sources of data are retained in, and can be accessed from, my research archive.

4:12   Ethical considerations

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

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

and that her face was not visible on the video-tape. My action in this instance was commensurate with my ontological commitment to equality of respect for all.

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

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

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

4:13 Research location

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

a classroom in the school building. This setting also proved to be a source of valuable data and significant insights for my research. The three separate, but interconnected, areas of the research, therefore, occurred within the location of the school in which I work.

4:14   Conclusion

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

The developmental nature of my research that I have outlined in this chapter was commensurate with my epistemological and ontological stances. My ideological concept that knowledge is not static but can be created and communicated through a process of dialogue was realised through the quality of the conversations in my classroom with the Traveller children, in which we constructed a view of education as a positive and culturally enhancing experience. In this context, I contend that I have demonstrated a unity of ontological, methodological and epistemological concepts as I engaged in the research process. My values around social justice and equality resulted in enabling the Traveller children to articulate their experiences of injustice and in ensuring that our relationship was based on mutual respect and reciprocity. In

holding myself accountable for my practice, I used criteria such as my deep commitment to my espoused values, my openness to change, and my reliance on trust as a basis for my interpersonal relationships with my pupils. I would hope that these criteria would be understood as the grounds for the emergence of living standards of judgement for the evaluation of my research. In the next three chapters, as I recount the narratives of the three interconnected aspects of my research, I propose to provide the data to indicate the location of the evidence for my claims to knowledge in the process of theorising my educational practice.

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 déja 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 that 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

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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)

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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, uncleanliness 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. Andereck (1992) indicates that Irish Travellers in the United States also use this term, when she

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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.

<div align="right">(Kristeva and Lechte 2002, p. 162)</div>

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 that 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.
>
> <div align="right">(Fanon 1992, p. 236, emphasis in original)</div>

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.
>
> <div align="right">(Fanon 1992, pp. 237-8)</div>

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

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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.

<div align="right">(Apple and Beane 1999, pp. 11-12)</div>

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

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willingness to discover what he can become and to assist towards its fulfilment.

<div align="right">(Murphy 1988, p. 102)</div>

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.

<div align="right">(Hartog 2004, p. 310)</div>

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

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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.
> <div align="right">(field notes, 10 March 2004, item 7g)</div>

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)

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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)

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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 colonialised 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:

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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.

<div align="right">(Apple 1996, p. 107, emphasis in original)</div>

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

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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 overstress 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.

Section 4   Chapter 8   Findings

8:1   Introduction

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

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

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

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

The meeting was tape-recorded and the members of the group also e-mailed their comments to me.

8:2 Structural and organisational issues

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

> Discrimination can be seen in the actions that disqualify members of one group from the opportunities that are open to others.
>
> (Giddens 2001, p. 251)

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

> The failure of successive Irish Governments to recognise the role of nomadism in Traveller culture has had adverse consequences for the Travelling community, and is a prime example of institutional racism.
>
> (Fitzgerald 2003, p. 8)

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

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

> Teachers need to specify the criteria that they wish others to use if they are to make valid judgements about the worthiness of the claim. Individual teachers

should exercise their right to establish the criteria that they believe are appropriate, based on their practice-based knowledge.

<div align="right">(Ghaye and Ghaye 1998, p. 94)</div>

In agreement with the living theory form of action research, within which my research is located, I respond to Whitehead's (2000) suggestion that, instead of applying external criteria, standards of judgements based on an educational practitioner's values can be used in evaluating self-study research. I have articulated my living standards of judgement by which I wish my research to be evaluated in Chapter 1. In this chapter, as I explicate the findings emanating from my research, I will demonstrate how these findings fulfil the standards of judgement that evolved from my embodied values of social justice and equality (Whitehead 2000).

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

> Rorty argues that we need to develop increased sensitivity to others so that we do not marginalise them. The process of coming to see other human beings as 'one of us' rather than as 'them' is a matter of a detailed description of what unfamiliar people are like and of a redescription of what we ourselves are like.
>
> <div align="right">(Green 2002, p. 133)</div>

I contend, therefore, that my sensitivity to the normative positionality of Traveller children as marginalised and alienated, together with my commitment to living to my values of social justice and equality, enabled me to perceive Traveller children as belonging to an all-embracing 'us', rather than an excluded 'them'. Kincheloe (2003)

identifies a similar perspective among the liberation theology practitioners who seek to overcome poverty and colonialism in Latin America:

> Liberation theology makes no apology for its identification with the perspective of those who are excluded and subjugated. Proclaiming their solidarity with the marginalised, liberation theologians work alongside them in their attempt to expose the existing social order as oppressive and unethical. All aspects of our emancipatory system of meaning and the teacher research that grows out of it rest on this notion of identification with the perspective of the oppressed.
>
> (Kincheloe 2003, p. 60)

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

> Because you have championed their (Traveller children) rights of equality of access to services and resources to which they were entitled but to which they were being denied access, you have also shown how you have raised awareness of these issues in your institution.
>
> (e-mail 24 November 2004, retained in research archive, item 8a)

My living theory of justice also includes according recognition to the cultural traditions, values, beliefs, practices and identity of Traveller children within the educational system, in fulfilment of my commitment to the practice of diversity. One instance in which I appear to have achieved this recognition was in my acceptance

and valuing of the speech patterns of the Traveller children, where these differed from the norm (see Chapter 5). The adoption of this new approach represented an improvement in my educational practice, as well as in the Traveller children's educational experiences. Traveller culture was also recognised and validated in the provision of a space in my classroom for Traveller children to explore, in a safe environment, cultural issues, such as their experiences of discrimination (see Chapter 6). The project on Traveller history that I undertook with a group of Traveller children helped to create in them a more positive sense of identity, through positing their cultural history as a valued and valuable one. Engaging in this project provided what was probably the only opportunity during their primary schooling for the Traveller children to experience a focus on their particular history and culture. These initiatives that I undertook are evidence of my claim to have influenced the quality of educational experience for Traveller children, and to have their culture valued within the educational system. In response to this claim, which I articulated at the validation session that convened in the University of Limerick, one of the group commented:

> You have contributed to new educational practice insofar as you have chosen to provide your students with a curriculum that takes account of their culture instead of forcing them to adapt to the values of the dominant culture of settled people.
>
> (e-mail 24 November 2004, retained in research archive, item 8b)

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

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

> provide a way of assigning rights and duties in the basic institutions of society and they define the appropriate distribution of benefits and burdens of social cooperation.
>
> (Rawls 1971, p. 4)

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

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

When some people are prevented from exercising their capacities or constrained from achieving self-determination by the actions or policies of bureaucratic institutions, they can suffer oppression and domination. Young (1990) describes oppression and domination as the two social conditions that define injustice, and therefore regards the elimination of these two factors as a means of achieving social justice. In providing a space within my classroom where Traveller children could explore

aspects of their cultural identity and articulate their authentic life-experiences (see Chapter 6), I contend that I was promoting, not a Rawlsian form of distributive justice, but a concept of social justice as the enablement and fostering of self-determination and self-actualisation, and as overcoming the effects of oppression and domination. When I explained this stance to the validation group on 21 November 2004, one member commented:

> You explained how this theory (distributive) could help you get extra resources for one traveller child but could not influence how that child was treated as a person. On this you are differing from Rawls because you see him valuing people as things whereas you would value them through their relationships with other people – that we interact with people in a holistic sense not just one dimension.
>
> (e-mail 24 November 2004, retained in research archive, item 8d)

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

that I would remain largely unaware of the inequitable treatment often meted out to Traveller children, and thus would be less effective in my efforts to achieve equality for them. Having listened to my argument as to why I find Rawls's theory of the impartial observer's capacity for achieving justice untenable, a member of the validation group stated:

> Your research has contributed to new educational thinking in that you have taken issue with Rawls and have considered the affective domain, the whole person, and not just their rational side. You have incorporated and added to the work of Rawls in your practice.
> (e-mail 23 November 2004, retained in research archive, item 8e)

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

A singular or unitary approach, therefore, might appear attractive at the conceptual level, especially to those who believe it is the only way to achieve peaceful

coexistence, but attempts to realise it in practice reveal the inherent injustice of its application in the case of minority groups, since it ignores the particularity of their situation and serves only to increase their sense of oppression and marginalisation. In order to diminish the effects of such injustice, I provided in my classroom the opportunity for Traveller children to give voice to their experiences of discrimination within the educational system (see Chapter 6). Their voices became the voices of dissent, challenging the consensus of the dominant majority and in the process claiming for themselves a space for recognition and participation in educational discourse. This is nowhere more obvious than when the Traveller children rejected the stereotypical image of themselves that they perceived settled children to hold, and also in their transferring of otherness to settled children, when M declared, 'We could call a name to them, because they're not different in anything to us, like they go to shops like us, dress in clothes like us and go to school like us.'

It could be argued that the main difference between my work and that of theorists such as Rawls, Kant and Young, is that my living theory is emerging from my practice, whereas Rawls, Kant and Young are operating at a conceptual level only. I am dealing with the lived reality of injustice and inequality, in contrast to the abstract theorising of Rawls, Kant and Young. Rawls's theory of justice, which draws on the moral philosophising of Kant, applies to an idealised world, in contrast to my practice of engagement with real people, in a complex world, fraught with contradiction, injustice and imperfection. I am constantly struggling to achieve a situation that reflects a practice of justice and equality in what Schön (1995) refers to as 'the swampy lowlands', where 'problems are messy and confusing and incapable of technical solution' (1995, p. 28). In trying to make sense of this world, and to derive meaning from the plethora of conflicts and complexities within which it is ensnared, I draw on my embodied values of social justice and equality. I suggest that a logic of idealism, consensus and perfection is not relevant to the real world that I inhabit. I propose, instead, that what is needed is a living logic of plurality, inclusionality and diversity that takes account of the humanity, integrity and uniqueness of real people. In applying such a living logic to my educational practice, and drawing also on my

embodied values of social justice and equality, I was able to theorise my practice as equality of respect for all and as the recognition and acceptance of diversity. I was able to do this because I was living to my values in my practice, rather than holding them up as noble concepts to be admired, and perhaps fated to remain, at the level of theory. When I presented my practical theory, indicating where I diverged from conceptual theorists such as Kant, Rawls and Young, to the validation group, a member responded thus:

> You drew on Rawls' theory of distributive justice, but critiqued him also. Rawls' ideas are at a conceptual level whereas your form of theory is drawn from your practice. This demonstrates an original contribution to knowledge because you are not taking Rawls' theory at face value; you are building your own theory from it. You believe that justice exists in the relationships between people, not just as a cake to be divided up between people.
> (e-mail 25 November 2004, retained in research archive, item 8g)

8:4   Misconceptions in the practice of equality

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

embodied values that promote recognition of ethnic and social difference as a means towards the alleviation of oppression, marginalisation and alienation.

Having generated my living theory around the necessity for an acceptance of difference and diversity, as well as a recognition of the emancipatory ethos adhering to pluralistic ways of living, I became aware of the tendency in educational institutions to either deny or ignore the validity of this position. I attribute this stance to a misconception of the nature of equality, resulting from an interpretation of the concept of equality that equates it with sameness. In agreement with Tormey and Haran (2003), I argue that 'treating everyone the same is not the same as treating them equally' (2003, p. 31). Instead of promoting the principle of equality, a focus on sameness often has the opposite effect, leading to the creation of an inequitable situation, since it is grounded in the assumption that all share the same cultural beliefs and practices, thereby denying recognition to the separate and distinct cultural identity of minority groups. Thus, while an educational institution might profess to subscribe to a policy of equality in theory, this principle may not translate into practice in the reality of its normative activities or in the manner in which it treats its minority groups. A member of the validation group, to whom I explained my views on the misconceptions around the nature of equality, wrote:

> You described how your work with disadvantaged traveller children has led you to question the dominant understanding of the concept of equality. You acknowledge the right of these children to have their difference and diversity of culture and of traditions respected.
>
> (e-mail 24 November 2004, retained in research archive, item 8h)

The lacuna resulting from such a dichotomy between theory and practice is manifested explicitly in the area of curriculum implementation. The curriculum offered in the educational system is usually a one-size-fits-all, monocultural model, based on the cultural norms of the dominant group in society. Textbooks, too, tend to conform to this ideal of sameness, and also reflect the culture and ethos of the majority within the educational system. When, therefore, minority groups, such as Traveller children, attempt to participate in the educational system, they generally do

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not find any representation of their culture in the curriculum or in textbooks. There is no acknowledgement of their separate cultural identity and no space within which their views and opinions can be articulated at the point where these differ from the majority viewpoint. The message that this situation transmits to Traveller children is that their culture is not valued within the educational system, that they themselves are inferior to the children belonging to the majority group in schools and that, if they wish to succeed in educational terms, they must conform to the norms and dictates of the dominant majority. The problem faced by Traveller children is articulated by Bernstein (2000) as follows:

> the images, voices and practices that a school reflects make it difficult for children of marginalised classes to recognise themselves in school.
>
> (Bernstein 2000, p. 14)

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

learning. This initiative had wider repercussions for social transformation in the school setting in that two of the mainstream class teachers, who taught N during the two years that I worked with her, decided to employ the method I was using with N. Both made copies of the culturally specific words that I was teaching N, and used them in the classroom to reinforce the work that I was doing with her. In a discussion on N's progress, one teacher remarked to me:

> When you started using words relating to N's environment, I noticed a great improvement. We made up sentences using these words and it gave her more confidence in her reading, and she improved in this area.
>
> (field notes, June 2004, item 8i)

I suggest that this is evidence of my claim to have increased awareness of the importance of Traveller culture and identity within the school setting, as well as of the need for more emancipatory pedagogic practices. In a validation session in the University of Limerick on 21 November 2004, one of the group remarked:

> A significance of your work is that others are beginning to follow your change in practice – a form of inclusion of your work into mainstream.
>
> (e-mail 23 November 2004, retained in research archive, item 8j)

A misconception commonly found in educational institutions is the belief that having an enrolment policy that admits all pupils to the school is sufficient to fulfil the requirement of equality. Prior to undertaking my research, I would probably have accepted that the practice of open admission of all pupils into educational institutions was evidence of equal treatment. However, I now perceive this view as defining equality in terms of access only, ignoring other aspects, such as equality of opportunity, of outcomes and, perhaps more importantly, of respect. Institutions that define equality in such narrow terms are unlikely to be aware of the existence of structural prejudice and bias within their organisations. Another common misapprehension regarding the nature of equality occurs in the manner in which schools communicate with their parent body. The normal method is to send written communication to all parents, which schools argue is treating all parents the same.

However, I contend that this is not treating all parents equally, since it does not take into account that some parents, including Traveller parents, may not have adequate literacy levels to enable them to understand, or benefit from, written communication from schools. In order, therefore, to fulfil the requirement of treating all parents equally, I suggest that schools should communicate with parents in a more appropriate manner, certainly sending written communication to some parents, but also communicating orally with others. In this way, educational institutions would be fulfilling, not only the requirement of equality, but also the practice of diversity, both of which, I suggest, are necessary for the achievement of social justice.

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

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

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

8:5 Conceptual frameworks

Although the main conceptual frameworks for my research evolved from my values of social justice and equality, there were other significant conceptual issues inextricably linked to these central themes. For example, my commitment to social justice for Traveller children necessitated a consideration of the concepts of oppression, marginalisation, discrimination and exclusion, which were the conditions contributing to situations of injustice and inequality for these children. In raising awareness of what I perceived as the equal value of Traveller culture with that of the dominant majority, I engaged with theories of ethnicity, identity, inclusion and interculturalism. Finally, my concerns around pluralistic ways of living that valued the equal entitlement of all people to self-determination and self-actualisation compelled me to explore the conceptual issues of difference and diversity.

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

then, that I was fulfilling the criteria for Freire's theory of research, which, according to Kincheloe (2003):

> provides critical educational action researchers with a sense of direction, an orientation which transforms our idea of research from mere data gathering into a consciousness-raising, transformative pedagogical technique.
>
> (Kincheloe 2003, p. 136)

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

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

> a pedagogy which must be forged with, not for, the oppressed (whether individuals or peoples) in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity. This pedagogy makes oppression and its causes the objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation.
>
> (Freire 1972, p. 33)

In my practice of encouraging Traveller children to reflect on the reasons for the discrimination suffered by them, I suggest that I was initiating them into a process that contained the possibility of rejecting such treatment in favour of more emancipatory human interactions. This situation is reminiscent of Freire's idea of 'man [sic] in the process of liberation' (1972, p. 42). Through engaging in dialogue

with Traveller children on the subject of their oppression and marginalisation (see Chapter 6), I was involving them as subjects, rather than objects, in the process, a condition that Freire considered necessary so that the oppressed can 'see themselves as men [sic] engaged in the ontological and historical vocation of becoming more fully human' (1972, p. 52).

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

> It is essential for the oppressed to realize that when they accept the struggle for humanization they also accept, from that moment, total responsibility for that struggle.
>
> (Freire 1972, p. 55)

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

In attempting to rationalise this divergence between Freire's interpretation of the role of the oppressed in achieving their own liberation and my view on this possibility, I concluded that it resided in the fact that the situations we were theorising were not similar in all respects. While we were both concerned with a group of people who were subjected to a marginalising and oppressive regime by a dominant group, in Freire's case the oppressed people of Brazil formed the majority, whereas the Traveller community in Ireland comprises a tiny minority, accounting for less than one per cent of the population. In these circumstances, therefore, it is easy to understand how Freire could maintain such confidence in the possibility of oppressed people being capable of orchestrating and controlling the campaign for their own liberation. I, on the other hand, could not entertain any such hope that a miniscule group could challenge the power and authority of the dominant majority without the aid of some of the members of that majority group, particularly in view of the fact that the Traveller community appears to lack strong leadership, as well as any role model among its members, which could be of advantage in the struggle for emancipation. Another significant point of difference between the two oppressed groups is that Freire's group shared a common ethnicity with the minority ruling class, whereas the Traveller community portrays itself as comprising an ethnic minority, indigenous to Ireland, with a long history of separate cultural existence. This factor appears to compound the marginalised status of Travellers and to reduce the possibility of having their voices heard or of being able to conduct a campaign for their own liberation. Nevertheless, I concur with Freire in his view of the necessity for the oppressed to be active participants in the struggle for their liberation, even if the guidance and impetus necessary for the attainment of this state have to emanate from outside of the oppressed group. Accordingly, I encouraged Traveller children to interrogate and critique instances of discrimination experienced by them, and provided the opportunity for them to do so in my classroom (see Chapter 6).

8:6 The idea of positive resistance

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

A claim that I have made consistently throughout my thesis is that I have encouraged Traveller children to resist the imposition of oppressive and marginalising practices on them by the dominant majority. In Chapter 6, I outline the manner in which the children were enabled to rationalise their experiences of discrimination with a view to rejecting and resisting them, and to put forward their own theories on the rationale that underpinned the discrimination. In theorising this form of resistance, I am proposing a concept of resistance as a positive and life-affirming response to the experience of domination and oppression. This theory supports my commitment to my values of equality and social justice, and also concurs with Young's (1990) view that social justice can only be achieved by the elimination of oppression and domination. I am emphasising the positive element in my theory of resistance, and posit it as a view that could be considered as oppositional to some of the theories of resistance found in the literature, which often appear to be negative forms of resistance that do not offer any hope of self-realisation or self-actualisation.

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

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

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

However, these theorists also demonstrate awareness of a positive aspect to the concept of resistance. Willis (1977), for example, acknowledges that resistance can be a radical act by working class boys who refuse to collude in their own educational suppression. Fagan (1995) suggests that the oppositional behaviour of working class students can be politically based, rather than deviant, in a situation where the students, recognising the inequalities in the educational system, reject schooling. It is

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perhaps Kenny (1997) who provides the most powerful interpretation of resistance as a positive force when she states, 'Resistance is emancipatory, when it is no longer primarily oppositional, but autonomous' (1997, p. 284). This resonates with my view of resistance as a positive and transformative influence on the life-chances of my Traveller pupils. I do not think that resistance for its own sake, or resistance that manifests itself in oppositional behaviour, in obstructionist policies or in reaction to unwelcome change, can have a transformative, emancipatory effect on the lives of oppressed people. Therefore, when I encouraged my Traveller pupils to resist the negative and dehumanising acts of discrimination experienced by them (Chapter 6), it was with the purpose of enabling them to question and critically reflect on these experiences and to reject them as frameworks for their educational lives, in favour of more life affirming and liberatory concepts.

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

The concept of ethnicity is a major influence in defining the status of the Traveller community. Travellers themselves often invoke this status in seeking entitlement to equality of treatment with the settled community. Pavee Point Traveller Centre supports the view that ethnic status is the only condition that can ensure humanist consideration for the Traveller community. Being able to claim ethnic status would also provide Travellers with a definitive framework for the construction of their identity. Ethnicity grants to a minority group a certain degree of acceptance and recognition by the majority group, and so allows for the possibility of inclusion, while avoiding the risk of assimilation. When policies promoting ethnicity are put into practice, there is a strong probability that a situation of interculturalism, giving equal value and status to the minority culture, will ensue. However, Travellers have not been able to enjoy the various benefits that would accrue to them as a result of the recognition of their ethnicity, because the Irish Government has never endorsed their status as an ethnic group, opting instead to refer to them as a nomadic group or a minority group. The Report on The National Education Convention (Coolahan 1994) acknowledges Travellers' claim to ethnicity, when it says: 'The discussion opened

with the suggestion that Travellers must be recognised as a distinct ethnic, nomadic group' (1994, p. 200). I find it incomprehensible, therefore, that official acceptance of their ethnicity has not yet been granted to the Traveller community, in spite of the fact that, as I argued in Chapter 2, they meet all the requirements, as identified by Barth (1969), for recognition as an ethnic group. It would also appear that the Traveller community fulfils the conditions of ethnicity articulated by Giddens (2001):

> Ethnicity refers to the cultural practices and outlooks of a given community of people that set them apart from others. Members of ethnic groups see themselves as culturally distinct from other groups in a society, and are seen by those other groups to be so in return.
>
> (Giddens 2001, p. 246)

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

The interconnectedness of the concepts of ethnicity, identity, inclusion and interculturalism became evident in my involvement in the after school group (see Chapter 7). Initially, this group consisted of Traveller children only, and the aim was to develop an enhanced sense of self-confidence and self-esteem around the issue of progressing to second level education, an option that Traveller children had not considered, until quite recently, as having relevance to their lives. The after school group provided the space for Traveller children to give free rein to the expression of their ethnicity, without the risk of being categorised as belonging to an inferior social group. They were, for example, able to discuss concepts such as friendship and relationships in the context of family and community solidarity, which is a traditional feature of Traveller life. In this way, they were enabled to experience their culture as a valuable and valued entity, which provided evidence of my claim to have enabled Traveller culture to be viewed in a more positive light, and to have it accorded equal status with the dominant culture. The after school group also allowed for the construction of Traveller children's identity in a positive and life-affirming environment. There was, therefore, both the space and the opportunity for their voices

to be heard, and they appeared to experience a sense of agency as they participated in the group activities. However, it was not until the after school group opened up its membership to settled children that the concepts of inclusion and interculturalism were called into play. As I outlined in Chapter 7, the Traveller children were resistant to the idea at first, but following discussion, their fears around the situation were allayed, and consequently, two settled children joined the group. This event presented an excellent opportunity for the development of an intercultural ethos, as both groups worked together in a spirit of collaboration, cooperation and mutual respect.

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

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

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

What was innovative about this situation was that the practice of inclusion did not originate with the dominant majority, but rather with the minority group that had traditionally been excluded from decision making processes. The marginalised group

expanded its boundaries to include those belonging to the oppressor class, in a manner reminiscent of the theme of Markham's (1936) poem:

> He drew a circle that shut me out –
> Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.
> But Love and I had the wit to win:
> We drew a circle that took him in!
>
> (Markham 1936, cited in Billington and Pomerantz 2004, p.1)

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

The process of inclusion that occurred in the after school group is the reverse of what normally takes place in educational institutions, where the minority group is integrated into the space already occupied by the majority, and often results in the minority group being absorbed into the majority grouping. It could be argued that the possibility of absorption was also present in the expanded after school group, in that the two settled children could potentially be assimilated into the majority group. I suggest that such an eventuality was highly improbable, given that the two newcomers, though in the minority while participating in the after school group, belonged to the majority group in society in all other aspects of their existence. There was, therefore, little threat to their cultural identity as members of the dominant majority group, during their brief encounters in the after school group. Because the

model of inclusion that characterised the after school group did not reflect practices of absorption or assimilation, I submit that it was a more socially just framework for accommodating different groupings. In accepting the cultures of both groups, normally designated as majority and minority in the social hierarchy, as equally valid and valuable, I contend that the after school group represented a counter-hegemonic space of diversity. As such, it enabled me to theorise my practice as the provision of a space for the recognition and acceptance of diversity, as well as a practice of social justice as equality of respect for all.

8:8   Difference and diversity

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

Because they subscribe to different beliefs and value systems, commensurate with their separate cultural identity, Traveller children are assumed to be outsiders, not belonging to the mainstream of society. Thus marginalised, it is easy to translate their otherness into inferiority, deviance or deficiency. The acceptance and legitimation of such a negative viewpoint causes educational institutions to adopt an approach that

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

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

> the danger of simply affirming difference as an end in itself without acknowledging how difference is formed, erased and resuscitated within and despite asymmetrical relations of power. Lost here is any understanding of how difference is forged in both domination and oppression.
>
> (Gillborn 1995, p. 69)

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

Having rejected the concept of difference as a framework for accommodating the distinct cultural practices and beliefs of the Traveller community, due to the negative connotations accruing to such a framework, I opted instead to locate Traveller cultural issues within notions of diversity, on the basis that this concept did not entail

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

> We can see the diversity of human cultures behind us, around us, and before us. The only demand that we can justly make (entailing corresponding duties for every individual) is that all the forms this diversity may take may be so many contributions to the fullness of all the others.
>
> (Boon 1972, p. 137)

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

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

> The distinctive features of the new cultural politics of difference are to trash the monolithic and the homogeneous in the name of diversity, multiplicity and heterogeneity; to reject the abstract, general and universal in light of the concrete, specific and particular; and to historicize, contextualize and pluralize by highlighting the contingent, provisional, variable, tentative, shifting and changing.
>
> (Gillborn 1995, p. 70)

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

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

8:9 Pedagogical Issues

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

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

> There remain tensions and dilemmas – between the focus on changing individuals to fit existing systems, and changing systems in order that endemic and often subliminal practices of exclusion and marginalisation are avoided.
>
> (Daniels and Garner 1999, p. 1)

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

> enabling the child to live a full life as a child and to realise his or her potential as a unique individual,
>
> (Ireland, DES 1999, p. 7)

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

A further aspect of my conceptualisation of pedagogical freedom relates to freedom of choice and of opinion. The incident involving a change in my approach to teaching with N is illustrative of a change in my practice that reflects the exercise of freedom of choice. I contend that the freedom to choose and to make decisions for oneself can be empowering for pupils. It can help to minimise the powerful/powerless dichotomy that often characterises teacher/pupil relationships and result in more equitable power

relations. In relation to Freire's theory of education as the practice of freedom, Glass (2001) refers to:

> the dialectical interplay between the way in which history and culture make people even while people are making that very history and culture.
>
> (Glass 2001, p. 16)

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

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

> I cannot understand human beings as simply *living*. I can understand them only as historically, socially and culturally *existing*….I can understand them only as beings who are makers of their 'way', in the making of which they lay themselves open to or commit themselves to the 'way' that they make and that therefore remakes them as well.
>
> (Glass 2001, p. 17, emphasis in original)

I suggest that, in providing the space for Traveller children to articulate their historic, social and cultural beliefs in the context of pedagogical issues, I was enabling the conditions for their attainment of a level of human existence commensurate with the

Freirean concept of ontological vocation, which Freire (1972) suggests is to be 'more fully human' (1972, p. 40).

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

> It was suggested that the approach to the education of Travellers should be located within the broader context of respect for human rights. This would incorporate an emphasis on the right of Travellers to access all levels of the education system, to consultation, to choice of school as they feel appropriate, and to significantly improved participation rates at all levels. However, it would also involve an emphasis on quality issues, such as the need for culturally appropriate materials and texts, and, across the curriculum, an intercultural approach to the education of all children – one which would include celebration of the culture of Travellers and other nomadic peoples.
>
> (Coolahan 1994, pp. 126-7)

These are lofty and noble sentiments, but compelling evidence of the immense gap that continues to exist between rhetoric and practice. My research is a testament to the existence of this dichotomy, for, if the ideals mentioned in the Report had been realised in practice, my research would have required a different focus. The suggestion regarding the right of Travellers to consultation is ironic, given that Travellers were not invited to participate in the convention, even though every other

group, no matter how remote or tenuous its connection to education, was either consulted or invited to make a submission. This omission is acknowledged in the Report:

> Before commencing our discussion on the education of Travellers it was noted and regretted, that Travellers had not been invited as a group to the convention.
>
> (Coolahan 1994, p. 200)

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

> For Travellers schooling is experienced as alien from their culture. It has not been easy for them to see the linkages between what happened in school and in the home. They have also found in many cases, that teacher expectations of Traveller children are low, with consequent effects on achievement.
>
> (Coolahan 1994, p. 200)

When the opportunity to get involved in an after school group for Traveller children, for the express purpose of encouraging transfer to second level schooling, presented itself, I viewed it as a further prospect for the realisation of my ideals in this area. I

have recounted in Chapter 7 the success of this venture at various levels. Through their participation in the after school group, the children were enabled to reflect critically on their experience of education at primary school, they engaged in problem solving through investigating how to deal with problems they might encounter at secondary school, they experienced empowerment through the absence of any sense of exclusion or marginalisation during their time working with the group and, when settled children joined the group, they experienced authentic inclusion on equal terms with the settled children.

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

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

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

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

8:10 Conclusion

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

> As teacher researchers, we can display our findings and argue for their value, but always with one hesitation, a stutter, a tentativeness – never as the truth.
>
> (Kincheloe 2003, p. 150)

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

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

9:1   Introduction

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

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

and emancipatory pedagogy (Freire 1972). I have demonstrated how this process resulted in the development of a living theory of my practice as a space for the promotion of more positive and liberatory educational experiences. I have explained how my living theory of practice incorporates my living theory of justice as the lived reality of equality and respect for cultural diversity. In this final chapter, therefore, I wish to discuss the significance of my research in terms of the following two claims to knowledge:

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

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

> Concomitant with the support of personal theorizing is the recognition that knowing and understanding the self is an essential aspect for generating change and developing new knowledge.
>
> (Hamilton and Pinnegar 1998, p. 241)

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

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

> We take the explanations we produce to be the grounds of our action; they are endowed with coherence in terms of our explanation of a self.
>
> (Spivak 1988, 104)

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

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

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

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

(Durie 1999, p. 71)

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

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

(May 1999, p. 2)

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

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

> Educational research is for the improvement of the education of children and students; what constitutes that improvement is always uncertain, and will remain so; however, it is worthwhile struggling for justice and knowledge, even though they remain fallible and uncertain.
>
> (Griffiths 1998, p. 83)

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

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

> The myth of verbal deprivation is particularly dangerous, because it diverts attention from the real defects of our educational system to the imaginary defects of the child.
>
> (Labov 1973, p. 22)

The concept elucidated here is part of a wider discourse of 'the myth of cultural deprivation' (Keddie 1973), a theme with which I have engaged in Chapter 5. The main purpose of this theory is to locate the educational failure of working-class or ethnic children within their culturally-deprived homes, thus exonerating educational institutions of any responsibility for the failure of such children within the schooling system. Cummins (2003) paints a vivid picture of the manner in which social

institutions engage in unjust and oppressive practices that are constitutive of what Ryan (1971, cited in Derman-Sparks 2002) refers to as a 'blame the victim' policy:

> In virtually every country histories of education reveal a systematic and usually intentional process whereby dominant groups have organized the structure of educational provision in ways that construct the human differences that children bring to school – differences in race, class, culture, gender, language – as deficits that are invoked as explanations of these children's poor academic performance.
>
> (Cummins 2003, p. 41)

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

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

> Patriarchy, imperialism, capitalism and racism are examples of social domination that are exploitative and anti-ecological.
>
> (Capra 1997, P. 8)

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

> Peoples of internal colonies have become termed 'minorities', 'ethnics', or 'lower classes' rather than peoples, nations or cultures. The colonizer, often called the dominant power in the case of internal colonialism, proceeded in many cases to redefine the nature of the colonized group, calling them 'culturally disadvantaged' or an 'underclass'. In assimilation, the cultural/national past becomes rewritten to show similarities rather than differences, almost beckoning the colonized to become assimilated because it is *his* [sic] rather than the colonizer's way.
> (Altbach and Kelly 1978, pp. 23-4, emphasis in original)

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

> Colonialism can even exist within a single country in which one class, ethnic group, race or sex dominates others through certain patterns of behaviour that are identifiable as colonialistic. Some scholars have even coined a special expression for this: 'internal colonialism'.
> (Lyons 1978, p. 181)

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

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

(May 1999, p. 1)

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

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

(Brady 1994, p. 150)

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

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

(Freeman 1978, p. 211)

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

My awareness, through reflection on my practice and its contexts, of the injustice and oppression resulting from the imposition of Standard English on Traveller children, led me to change my practice to one of acknowledging and recognising as legitimate the Travellers' formation of language. This language emanated from their specific cultural habitus and consisted of significant features, both in enunciation and in vocabulary, that differed from what is generally considered to be the norm. I adopted a stance of accepting without comment their different enunciation of certain words. I noted in my reflective diary that, subsequent to my change in practice, the Traveller children began using in my classroom words from their vocabulary that differed from Standard English, and that they would probably not have felt comfortable using in their mainstream classes (see Chapter 5). I attributed this sense of freedom, that they appeared to experience, to my more emancipatory and more accommodating educational practice, resulting from my decision to support the idea of a plurality of language patterns in my classroom. In this context, I suggest that I was fulfilling the tenets inscribed in May's (1999) assertion that:

> education has now come to be seen as a key arena in which indigenous peoples can *reclaim* and *revalue* their languages and cultures and, in so doing, improve the educational success of indigenous students.
>
> (May 1999, p. 1, emphasis in original)

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

projects on their culture and history (see Chapter 6). The more democratic practice, which resulted from these changes in their educational experiences, reflects also a transformation in the lives of the Traveller children, as there now appears to be a space in their educational experience for the expression of their specific language norms.

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

> Many children of the marginal classes may indeed have the recognition rule, that is, they can recognize power relations in which they are involved, and their position in them, but they may not possess the realisation rule. If they do not possess the realisation rule, they cannot then speak the expected legitimate text. These children in school, then, will not have acquired the legitimate pedagogic code, but will have acquired a place in the classificatory system. For these children, the experience of school is essentially the experience of the classificatory system and their place in it.
>
> (Bernstein 2000, p. 17)

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

> Thus, for example, the habitus acquired in the family underlies the structuring of school experiences (in particular the reception and assimilation of the specifically pedagogic message).
>
> (Bourdieu 1977, p. 87)

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

A situation of superiority/inferiority in the educational system has implications also in the area of assessment tests, which are usually standardised according to the norms of the dominant majority group in society, and therefore tend to be biased in favour of this group. Children who do not belong to the dominant group are disadvantaged through having to cope with a language that is not part of their traditional habitus. I suggest that it would be advantageous to minority and disadvantaged groups if changes were effected at the level of practice to take account of their culturally specific needs in the area of language usage. As a first step in this process, teachers could reflect on their current practice to ascertain in what ways minority and disadvantaged groups are being discriminated against through having to participate in a system that does not value their specific culture or language. Once awareness of the problem has been achieved, teachers with a social consciousness would probably experience a need to change their practice to one of accepting and validating the various forms of language their diverse pupils bring to the learning situation. In this way, they would be enabled, as I was, to change their practices to more socially just ones that valued difference and diversity of language. My research, therefore, has significance for the community of practitioners who may be struggling to find a more positive and life-enhancing pedagogic approach that enables them to treat their marginalised, disadvantaged or disabled pupils in a socially just and equitable manner.

An area of practice in which I achieved a transformation, and that could have significance for other practitioners, was in relation to obtaining extra educational resources for Traveller children. I do not mean to suggest that I obtained for the Traveller children anything other than their just entitlements, or any more than was being provided for other children within the educational system. My aim was one of 'encouraging Travellers to take full advantage of the educational opportunities which are theirs by right' (Johnson 2003, p. 136). In my context, the problem was that, in the keen competition for scarce resources, a system of prioritising that appeared to discriminate against Traveller children was employed. Other children, who did not have as great a level of learning difficulty, were often given priority on the basis that the Traveller children were irregular attendees and were unlikely to progress to second level schooling (see Chapter 5). I found the form of logic that resulted in this situation problematic from several perspectives. In the first place, it was an overt contradiction of my embodied values of social justice and equality, to discover what I perceived as blatant discriminatory practices against the Traveller children. Secondly, the logic of the particular discourse used to deny them their just entitlements appeared to be grounded in concepts of reductionism and essentialism. It is true that Traveller children did not, until relatively recently, progress to second level schooling. This was partly due to cultural reasons, such as marriage at a young age, but was also the result of prejudice from the settled community (McDonagh, 2000). However, to stereotype Traveller children by assuming that they will not continue to secondary school, and to try to set boundaries to the trajectories of their lives by fixing their identities in historic spaces, is dehumanising and disrespectful to them. McLaren (1999) describes Freire's (1997) commitment to a profound respect for the cultural identity of students, when he says of the various aspects of cultural identity:

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

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

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

An area of my research that proved to be a major learning experience for me, and that I suggest could also influence the learning of other professionals involved in similar practices, was the provision of a space within my classroom for the recognition, acceptance and valuing of cultural identity. This initiative had far reaching consequences, including an increase in self-esteem and self-confidence for the

Traveller children, the experiencing of their culture as a valuable, valued and valid one, and the opportunity to give expression to their usually silenced voices (see Chapter 6). In the normal classroom situation, minority groups, whether ethnic, disadvantaged or disabled, can often be aware of their marginalised position, through the exclusion of their particular cultural or social habitus, and of the expectation that they should conform to the dominant norms and practices. May (1999) explains the political logic underpinning such a stance:

> Only one language and culture can effectively represent the nation-state in its public realm, or so the story goes, although this language and culture are invariably most often the preserve of the dominant ethnic group. Minorities are, in turn, denied rights to their *existing* language and cultural traditions where these differ from those of the dominant ethnic group.
>
> (May 1999, p. 43, emphasis in original)

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

In Chapter 7, I referred to the after school group in which I was involved in partnership with Winnie McDonagh. I outlined the working relationship, based on cooperation and collaboration, which informed the practice in which Winnie and I engaged in the conduct of the group. The after school group initially consisted of

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

> In cultural synthesis, the actors who come from 'another world' to the world of the people do so not as invaders. They do not come to *teach* or to *transmit* or to *give* any thing, but rather to learn, with the people, about the people's world. In cultural invasion, the actors superimpose themselves on the people, who are assigned the role of spectators, of objects. In cultural synthesis, the actors become integrated with the people, who are co-authors of the action that both perform upon the world.
>
> (Freire 1972, pp. 181-2, emphasis in original)

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

I have indicated here some of the ways in which my research can influence the work of other educators situated in contexts similar to my own. I have shown how my learning contributed to the development of more emancipatory and more democratic forms of practice that valued cultural diversity, and I would anticipate that my account of my learning process could prove beneficial to the community of fellow educators seeking to achieve improvement in their educational practices. I would hope that, in showing the value of grounding my practice in principles of social

justice and equality, I might inspire other practitioners to frame their practices within these principles also, thus enhancing the probability of achieving improvement in their educational practices, as well as achieving a transformative influence in the lives of their pupils. In this context, my learning could have a positive influence on the learning of others.

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

Through studying my educational practice and working to achieve an improvement in that practice, I came to a realisation of the significance of a living theory of social justice to the outcomes of my research. When, therefore, I was formulating a living theory of practice, it necessarily incorporated my living theory of social justice. Prior to developing my own living theory, I analysed and critiqued some of the theories of social justice in the literature, notably Rawls's (1971) theory (see Chapters 3 and 8). I concluded that, while Rawls's theory was sufficient to explain the distributive elements of my practice, such as acquiring extra educational resources for Traveller pupils, it was not adequate for achieving an understanding, and a realisation, of the equality of respect and recognition of diversity that, for me, were essential aspects of educational provision for a minority group. I sensed the need for a more inclusive living form of theory of justice that reflected a rejection of the lived reality of practices of discrimination and injustice, which had been common experiences for my Traveller pupils. What I wished to achieve was a concept that expressed, in a positive and life-enhancing manner, the qualities of human valuing and nurturing that I felt ought to be the experiences of Traveller children within the educational system. Rogers and Freiberg's (1994) sentiment 'that this person has worth and is valued in his or her separateness and uniqueness' (1994, p. 285) conveys the ideal that I was attempting to frame, as does Noddings's (1992) admonishment to teachers that we often 'fail to treat the recipients of our care as individuals' (1992, p. 116).

In articulating my living theory of justice, therefore, I took account of the need for more affirmative experiences in the educational lives of the Traveller children, and

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

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

democratic practices, as well as for those involved in generating living theories of social justice.

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

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

them equal treatment. Noddings (1992) critiques the policy of treating all pupils the same when she says:

> We may also mistakenly suppose that they want to live exactly as we do – that they want the same knowledge, the same kinds of work, the same forms of worship, the same daily customs.
>
> (Noddings 1992, p. 116)

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

> Assimilationist policies in education have also contributed significantly to the rapid decline of the Māori language over the course of this century… assimilation was replaced in the 1960s by a brief period of integration…this proved little different in theory or practice from its predecessor. It was less crude than assimilation in its conceptions of culture but a clear cultural hierarchy continued to underpin the model.
>
> (May 1999, pp. 54-5)

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

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

> The strategy seeks ways of organizing the content and method which builds on the experience of the disadvantaged, but generalizes that to the whole system, rather than confining it to an enclave. The strategy thus seeks a practical reconstruction of education which will yield relative advantage to the groups currently disadvantaged. It attempts to turn a defensive, compensatory strategy into a proactive, universalizing strategy. If you wish to teach about ethnicity and race relations, for instance, a more comprehensive and deeper understanding is possible if you construct your curriculum from the point of view of the *subordinated* ethnic groups than if you work from the point of view of the dominant one.
>
> (Connell 1993, pp. 38-9, emphasis in original)

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

I am claiming that the significance of my living theory of inclusion lies in its potential as a framework for resolving conflictual situations arising from unjust or

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

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

characterised by more emancipatory and more democratic actions that constitute experiences of social justice and equality.

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

9:4   Significance for myself

An enquiry into one's own practice is conducive to producing new knowledge about the practice, which can be construed as learning outcomes from the research. In an educational context, the learning from practitioner research can result in improvement in the researcher's own practice, as well as in the quality of educational provision for other participants in the educational endeavour, for example, the school pupils. Ghaye and Ghaye (1998) attest to the value of a reflective disposition in achieving such improvements:

> It is through reflective conversations that a greater sense of self and professional identity can be brought about. Reflective conversations that are empowering enable teachers to name, define and construct their own 'realities': they enable teachers to sustain themselves.
>
> (Ghaye and Ghaye 1998, pp. 22-3)

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

> The practice of teaching becomes educative when professionals have the opportunity to validate critical theories of teaching in their own school-based enquiry, for example achieved through various investigatory processes often referred to as reflective enquiry, investigatory practice or action research.
>
> (O'Hanlon 2000, p. 149)

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

> Theory is not produced by a group of 'intellectuals' or experts who claim the right to generate valid knowledge. In educational research a wide range of techniques, methods and procedures are used, which allows researchers to define their own forms of valid knowledge, and present them as educational theories.
>
> (O'Hanlon 2002, p. 117)

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

> profound disappointment to witness research for higher degrees, which has little personal impact on the researcher, except as a purely intellectual exercise for the purpose of an award.
>
> (O'Hanlon 2002, p. 118)

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

> Creating the text is one thing; interpreting it and then using it to move thinking and practice forward is something else.
>
> (Ghaye and Ghaye 1998, p. 77)

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

I am aware that, in subjecting my practice to scrutiny as I critique my personal and professional decisions, I am, to a certain extent, placing myself in a vulnerable position. However, I am confident that the benefits of this exercise, in terms of increased self-knowledge and self-awareness, far outweigh any potential

disadvantages. I am also encouraged by Dadds and Hart's (2001) conviction of the positive effects of such an undertaking:

> Opening one's professional practice to critical scrutiny demands courage, curiosity, fortitude and a willingness to accept that there are always opportunities for further development. It often means that the practitioner researcher renders himself or herself vulnerable to critique, from both self and others. Yet such open attitudes, we believe, signal one of the highest forms of professionalism. Such professionalism deserves fostering and respecting in climates of optimum growth.
>
> (Dadds and Hart 2001, pp. 8-9)

I have stated in Chapter 8 that I consider my research findings to be tentative, rather than final, outcomes, and thus always subject to further improvement and refinement in the light of engagement with the views and theories of others in the field. I suggest that such an outlook can contribute to continuing growth and development, both at a personal and a professional level, thus ensuring that my learning is ongoing.

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

> Bias comes not from having ethical and political positions – this is inevitable – but from not acknowledging them. Not only does such acknowledgement help to unmask any bias that is implicit in those views, but it also helps to provide a way of responding critically and sensitively to the research.
>
> (Griffiths 1998, p. 133)

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

> In learning to speak, every child accepts a culture constructed on the premises of a traditional interpretation of the universe, rooted in the idiom of the group to which it was born, and every intellectual effort of the educated mind will be made within this frame of reference. Man's [sic] whole intellectual life would be thrown away should this interpretive framework be wholly false; he is rational only to the extent to which the conceptions to which he is committed are true.
>
> (Polanyi 1958, p. 112)

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

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

> Action research is not only about learning: it is about knowledge production and about a commitment to improve practice…the principles and practices of action research can play a significant part in helping us all to establish, sustain and nourish more meaningful work environments.
>
> (Ghaye and Ghaye 1998, p. 69)

When a Traveller child was not succeeding in learning to read, while using words and books from the curriculum, which was based on the dominant culture, my reflections on the situation led me to seek to change the system by providing the opportunity for her to base her reading on her own culture and background, thus reconceptualising the idea of curriculum as a more emancipatory experience grounded in a concept of diversity. My action in this instance reflected my valuing of the lived reality of my pupil's needs over the monocultural curriculum that did not accommodate her needs. My learning from this incident is reflected in my understanding of the primacy of the lifeworld over the systems-world, in terms of Habermas's explication of these differing foci, and of the relevance of speech acts, which Dallmayr (1996) describes as follows:

> Even the most simple of these conveys a will to communicate something about a shared lifeworld and to reach a common understanding about it. It is this intersubjective will to communicate, rather than the subjective will to dominate, which is found in any competent speaker's pre-theoretical grasp of linguistic rules.
>
> (Dallmayr 1996, p. 224)

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

In accordance with my commitment to lifelong learning (Field 2000) and my values around the potential of education as an emancipatory force (Rogers and Freiberg 1994), I recognised the importance of remaining in the educational system for Traveller children. I availed of the opportunity, therefore, to become involved in setting up the after school group to encourage Traveller children to continue to second level schooling. Following the success of the original initiative, as evidenced

by the fact that all the Traveller children who completed their primary school education in June 2004 transferred to second level schools, I then moved the project forward to become an intercultural space, with the introduction of settled children, who might also be at risk of dropping out of the educational system, into the group. This group then became the nucleus for the development of my theory of inclusion as the recognition of difference, which evolved as a new form of inclusional practice that was grounded in the acceptance of diversity. In this context, I am claiming that my work contains the potential for the transformation of practice to reflect principles of democratic freedom, social justice and equality.

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

9:5   Conclusion

The improvements in my practice that I have outlined in this chapter are evidence of the transformational processes of my own learning throughout the process of my research. The narrative of my research, therefore, is as much an account of my learning as it is the story of the transcendence of the marginalisation and alienation traditionally endured by Traveller children within the educational system. It also reflects the transcendence of my own capacity for prejudice and bias, which were

unacknowledged characteristics of my educational practice, prior to my engagement in critical reflection on my practice. Through the adoption of a more critical stance in my work, I have emancipated my own thinking and, consequently, have been able to engage in a practice of pedagogic freedom that has benefited both me and my pupils. In documenting the process of my learning in this account of my research, I wished to show how I hold myself accountable for implementing improvements in my practice and for accomplishing a developmental transformation in my thinking. The development of my thinking, through the process of engaging in cycles of self-reflection and action, enabled me to theorise my practice. My embodied values of social justice and equality ensured that these principles underpinned the emerging living theories, as well as providing the conceptual frameworks for my research. One of the living theories that emerged from my practice is a living theory of social justice as equality of respect for all. Implicit in this living theory is the notion of acceptance of concepts and practices of diversity and plurality. Interlinked with, and grounded in, my living theory of justice, is the concept of practice as a democratic, life-enhancing and affirmative space. Such a form of practice could help to contribute to the achievement of equality for all. The final living theory that emerged in the process of my research, and that is also grounded in my living theory of the practice of justice, is the living theory of inclusion as the acknowledgement of diversity. Once again, this living theory has the potential to ensure equality of treatment for all.

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

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

(Polanyi 1958, p. 207).

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Appendix A

Transcript of taped conversation with four Traveller children on the subject of discrimination, recorded on 9 April 2002

Me: How do you feel about coming to the Resource Teacher for Travellers?

D: I think it is ok.

Me: Why do you think it is ok?

D: Because you really understand us.

Me: What do you mean that I understand you?

D: Em…

Me: Understand Travellers, is that what you mean?

D: Yes.

Me: Do you think other people don't understand them?

D: Some people don't.

Me: What don't they understand about them?

D: I don't know.

M.E: I know, I know! You understand Travellers better because you are more kind to us, because the other day, when we were in the yard, all the other girls called me a knacker.

M: When I was in 2nd class, another girl from another class called me a knacker.

Me: And you don't like when that is said to you?

R: When I was in junior infants' class, a girl – I'm 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.'

Me: When people call you names like that, just because you're a Traveller, what do we call it?

M: They hurt your feelings.

Me: Did you ever hear of discrimination?

R: Yes, but why do they use 'knacker' for a Traveller?

Me: I don't know. It doesn't mean 'Traveller'.

R: My cousin says it's a man that kills horses.

Me: Yes, that's what the word meant originally.

M.E: Travellers are just the same as everybody else.

Me: Yes.

M.E: So there's nothing for them to call us because in God's life we are all together. We are all sisters and brothers. They can't call us anything because we're all the same human beings.

Me: Why do you think people would call you names like 'knacker'?

M: Because 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 and…

Me: Hurt you?

M: Yes.

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

Me: They think what?

R: They think I'm a buffer.

Me: What's a buffer?

R: Can't tell you, sorry.

Me: Why not?

R: Because it's a bad word.

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.

Me: Yes, just trying to hurt your feelings.

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

Me: So they pick on you because they've no one else to pick on?

Transcript of video recording of discussion with eight Traveller children, following role play by four of the children on the importance of regular attendance at school, and of continuing to second level schooling, recorded 29 May 2003.

Me: Who do you think is right, the girl (who wants to stay home from school) or her mother (who tries to persuade her to go to school)?

G: Her mother is right because by staying off she would be missing days.

Me: And what problem would that cause?

G: She would be missing out on all the work in school.

Me: What do you think, Ma?

Ma: Well, I think her mother is right, because in this day and age you need an education to make something of yourself. Not many Travellers make anything of themselves. My granny never went to school and she said it's the sorriest thing she ever did, not going to school. If she had it back again, she would have gone to school. She has gone back to school now.

Me: She has gone back to school now, to learn to read and write?

Ma: Yes, to learn all the things that she didn't learn when she was young.

Me: What do you think, Di?

Di: I think both of them are right?

Me: What do you mean by that?

Di: I think the girl is right, because you need time off.

Me: So you think you need days off?

Di: Yes, and the mother is right too because you won't get anywhere, like, everyone has a dream to become something, but you won't become something without an education.

Me: So you think that if you don't have a good education, your dreams won't come true. M.T, what do you think? Do you agree with the girl or her mother?

M.T: I agree with the girl.

Me: That you should have days off?

M.T: Yes.

Me: You are the first person in your family to go to secondary school?

M.T Yes.

Me: None of your brothers or sisters went to secondary school

Di: My brothers and sisters who are older than me didn't go to secondary school.

Me: But you are going.

Di: Yes.

Me: G, none of your older brothers or sisters went to secondary school.

G: One of them did.

Me: Oh yes, she went for a short time, but you are going to secondary school

G: Yes.

Me: I want to ask the three girls who acted out the role play a question. D, do you really think you should have days off or did you just say that because you were playing the part of the girl?

D: I suppose I was just saying it for the part, but really I think you should have a couple of days off.

Me: You think you shouldn't have to come to school every single day. What do you think, J? You played the part of the mother, encouraging the girl to go to school. How do you feel yourself about it?

J: I think we should have some days off.

Me: You feel you should be able to take some days off as well. What about you, M? You played the part of the granny in the role play.

M: If I was a granny, and hadn't gone to school, I'd like to go back to school.

Me: You would like to go back to school. But do you think, now that you have the opportunity of going to school, that you will keep going to school?

M: Yes.

Me: Would anybody like to say anything else?

Ma: One way, Mrs. Sullivan, that would get more children going to school, well most of them don't fancy getting up so early in the morning, so if it started at ten and maybe finished at four.

Me: So you think school should start at ten o'clock?

All: Yes!

Me: The rest of us were talking about maybe going on to secondary school. Ma, I think you have made up your mind that you are staying for five years in secondary school and that you are then going on to DCU to do accountancy?

Ma: Yes, that's right.

Me: So you are looking very far ahead. You have already looked ahead to third level education.

Ma: Yes.

Me: And do you think that you are really going to stick with it all the way?

Ma: Yes, because there's 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.

Appendix C

School name,
School address,

24 March 2002.

Dear Principal,

As part of my PhD research programme, I am undertaking some action research into how I can encourage Traveller children to remain in the educational system, in keeping with my commitment to lifelong learning. I would be grateful if you would grant me permission to conduct this research.

My data collection methods may include audio and video recording of conversations between the children and me, as well as the keeping of a reflective diary and field notes relevant to my research. I will seek permission from both the parents of the children and the children themselves to become involved in the research. I guarantee confidentiality around any information collected, and promise not to reveal the names of the school, colleagues or children in the research report.

My research report will be available to you for scrutiny before it is published. I enclose two copies of this letter, one for your files and one to be returned to me for retention in my files. I would appreciate it, therefore, if you would sign the permission slip below and return it to me at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,

Bernie Sullivan.

To Whom It May Concern:

I, principal of ……………………………… school, give permission to Bernie Sullivan to undertake research in the above-named school.

Signed………………………

Appendix D

Dear Parents,

I am undertaking some action research into how I can encourage Traveller children to continue on to secondary school, and would be grateful if you would give permission for your daughter to take part in the research.

I will be using audio and video recordings of my conversations with the children, as well as keeping a diary and field notes of the research. I promise to observe good ethical conduct, including not revealing the names of the school, colleagues, parents or children in the research report. The research report will be available to you at the school before it is published.

If you need further information about my research, I am available during school hours to answer any questions you may have. I would appreciate if you would sign and return to me the permission slip below.

Yours sincerely,

Bernie Sullivan.

To Bernie Sullivan,

I give permission for my daughter……………………….to take part in your research.

Signed…………………………………..

Appendix E

School Name,
School Address,

24 March 2002.

Dear Pupil,

I am doing a project that I hope will encourage Traveller children to go on to secondary school, and I would like your help in carrying it out.

I will be using audio recording, video recording, a research diary and note-taking as part of the project. I promise not to reveal your name, your parents' names or the name of the school in writing my report of the project.

I have asked your parents for permission for you to take part in the project, but I would like your permission too, as it will be based on work we do in the classroom. If you would like to take part, please sign the permission slip below.

Yours sincerely,

Bernie Sullivan.

_____

I…………………………….wish to take part in the project and give permission for

audio and video recordings to be used in writing the research report.

Appendix F

Ethics Statement

In undertaking my research I intend to comply with certain ethical principles, as outlined here.

I will regard all research participants as coresearchers, and will endeavour to ensure that our relationships are based on principles of mutual respect and equality. This means that I will respect the rights of other participants, including their right to withdraw at any stage from the research.

I will seek written permission from all research participants to use any data collected by me in the course of my research. In view of the fact that most of the participants are children, I will seek permission from their parents, as well as from the children themselves. I will also obtain permission from my school principal to undertake my research within the school.

I guarantee anonymity and confidentiality to participants in writing my report of the research. Participants, therefore, will only be referred to by initials. The name of the school and the names of teachers will not be revealed.

I promise that any data collected will only be used for the purposes of my research, and will be disposed of in a responsible way, that ensures confidentiality and anonymity, at the conclusion of the research.

Spelling tests of M.T and C, using traditional spelling schemes:
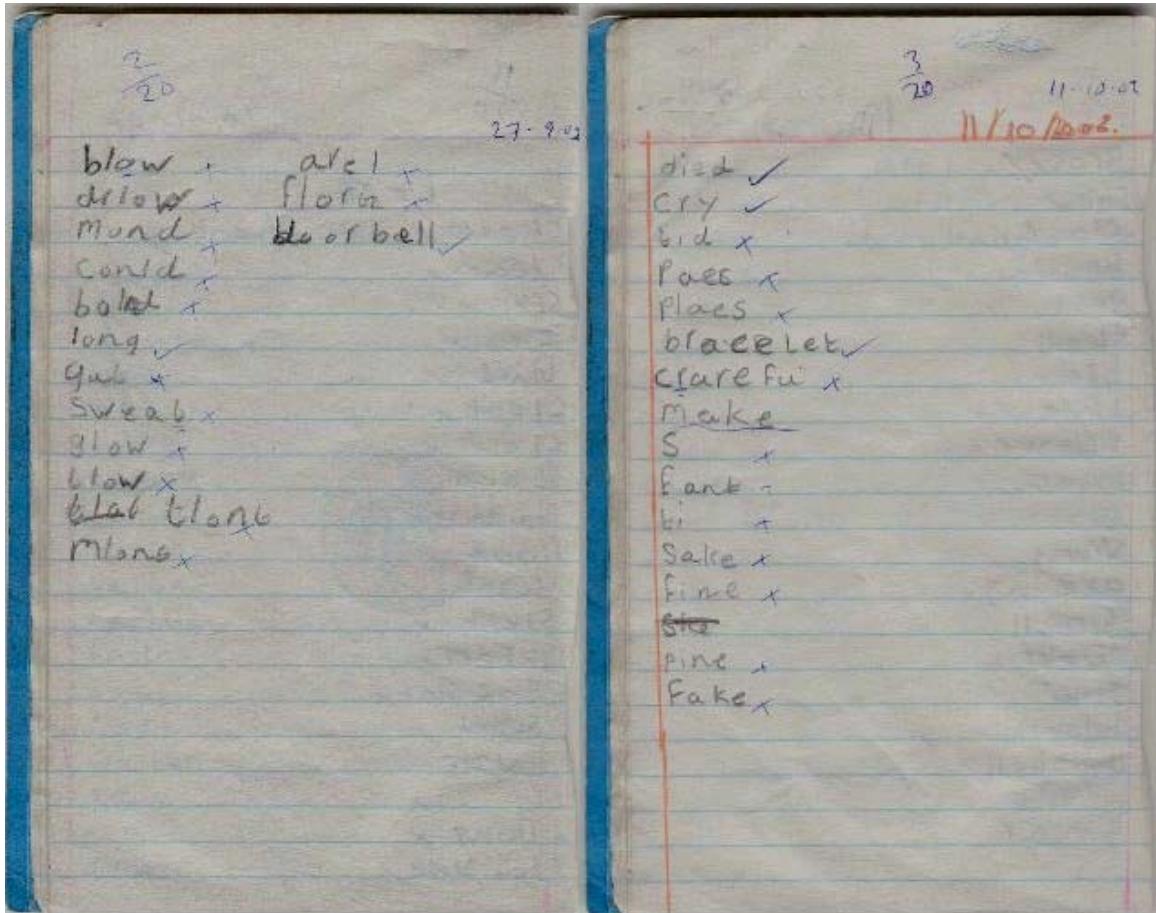
Spelling tests of M.T and C, when I had changed my practice to one of using words from the children's experiences: