



FROM INTERDEPENDENCE, TO DEPENDENCE AND INDEPENDENCE

Home and school learning for Traveller children

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Travellers are the most discriminated against group within the European Union. Empirical research on their situation *within* schools is minimal, yet policy, supported by substantial funds, has been developed throughout Europe, largely focused on issues of ethnicity and anti-racist approaches. This article, based on 10 years of research in Scotland and an analysis of the UK and EU approaches, reviews the mismatch between Traveller cultures and their schooling experience. Schools ignore and devalue the children's home learning of interdependence and independence and offer only learned dependence and institutional exclusion, leading to lowered self-esteem, high absenteeism and early drop-out.

There have been Travellers in every European state since written records began, yet today they are regarded still as 'outsiders' within the settled dominant societies. It can be argued that they have become further marginalized in the last half century as affluence and success have become increasingly correlated with academic achievements in school and new related career paths, rather than inheriting one's place in society, as was common in the UK prior to the 1944 Education Act (Fraser, 1992). However, research into historical sources revealed the Traveller groups' ability to diversify down the centuries in order to capitalize on a range of self-employed niche markets. Thus we find evidence of Tinklers (travelling tin and iron smiths) in the 12th century, owning properties throughout Scotland (MacRitchie, 1894), 'egiptians' entertaining at the royal court in Edinburgh and travelling on to the Danish court under royal patronage in the 15th century, Tinkers and Gypsies making small household artefacts to sell as pedlars and hawkers in the 19th century (McCormick, 1920), and serving as agricultural labourers on a seasonal basis in the first half of the 20th century (Rehfisch, 1975). Today Gypsy/Travellers still follow self-employed opportunities such as fencing, tree felling, gardening, paths and house maintenance, buying and selling

secondhand and antique items, market stalls, etc. (Okely, 1996), but recent legislation has impinged on their ability to travel and stop at will for work purposes (the Criminal Justice Act of 1994¹). Despite recognition of their ethnic status,² the Gypsy/Travellers continue to experience open discrimination and overt racism in their daily lives.³

The Occupational Travellers, i.e. the show and fairground Travellers and, to a lesser extent, the circus Travellers, separated themselves from the broader Gypsy/Traveller group through the 1889 Showmen and Van Dwellers' Protection Association. They adopted an identity as a business community, with rigid self-regulation of membership and codes of practice set by the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain. They still follow traditional routes round the UK, servicing the historical fairs and agricultural shows, and recently have diversified into servicing exhibitions and conferences, opening amusement arcades and themed leisure parks.⁴ They reject any move to apply ethnic status to the group despite the strong hereditary and cultural mores which govern their industry.

The generic term 'Traveller', although a modern, supposedly non-pejorative appellation, adopted by the European Parliament, signals clearly the group's historic roots of a lifestyle of itinerancy, or mobility.⁵ Mobility does not cohere well with the demands for regular attendance at the local school. As early as 1885 the UK government was concerned at Travellers' lack of uptake of free formal schooling and equated this absenteeism with lack of employment prospects and poverty. In Scotland the Vagrancy paper (Departmental Committee, 1895) proposed the removal of the children of vagrants and itinerants (Tinkers and Gypsies are specifically mentioned) from their families to state boarding facilities in order that they should enjoy their right to an education and the privileges that this would bring. Traveller families viewed this differently and still, throughout Europe, verbalize their fear of losing their children to the 'authorities' (Hawes and Perez, 1995; Kiddle, 1999). A smaller-scale version of this approach had previously been tried in the Borders region of Scotland, where, with the Gypsies' approval, the children were boarded during the summer months in the village of Kirk Yetholm while the parents travelled, thus ensuring full attendance at the local school and their future suitability for employment as labourers and servants (Baird, 1847). It is interesting to note that today there are virtually no mobile Gypsy/Travellers in the Borders area, once the stronghold of the Gypsy kings and queens (Chambers, 1886): this raises the question – was schooling, in fact, little more than a benign form of ethnic cleansing (Jordan, 1998)?

At the same time there was evidently some official recognition and support for their particular lifestyle since the 1908 and 1937 Children and Young Persons (Scotland) Acts contained clauses excusing Traveller children from compliance with the mandatory requirement for full attendance at school; they enjoyed a reduction to a minimum of 200 attendances between

October and April, thereafter allowing the children freedom to travel unhindered with their families throughout the rest of the session. This positive discrimination continues to be upheld in the latest directives from the Scottish Executive (Scottish Office, 1982, 1998a; SOEID, 1995) on the application of 'authorized absence' where Travellers are free from prosecution as long as the family is 'legitimately travelling for work purposes'. Schools, however, are increasingly reluctant to report the extent of such absences, despite assurances that there are no attendance league tables in Scotland. Similar recognition of the Traveller mobile lifestyle has been granted now in the rest of the UK, but the publication of attendance league tables there has resulted in an increased reluctance on the part of schools to accept the enrolment of Traveller children (ACERT, 1998; NATT, 1999). Such forms of governmental imposed institutional discrimination, ironically at the same time as demanding that schools become more inclusive, highlight the very real tensions facing schools which engage with mobile Travellers.

European initiatives for Travellers

At European level there has been a concerted drive to ensure employability of all, to service the changing job markets and reduce dependency on the state. Programmes, such as ESF, Adapt, Socrates, Telematics, all focus on education for employment. Travellers, as the single largest group of illiterate and unqualified people, have been allocated specific treatment through European acts, resolutions, recommendations and Socrates funds (Danbakli, 1994). These actions, while undeniably necessary in order to ensure Travellers enjoy equality of access to education and training facilities, will undoubtedly influence and change their cultures and lifestyles. There is some evidence of an awareness of the complexity of the issues, however, as the recommendation is that all actions to provide education for Travellers should cohere with their traditional lifestyles and travelling patterns.⁶ Thus distance learning for Travellers has been pushed as a progressive step towards bridging the gap between attendance at the settled school and the needs of the mobile family (EFECOT, 1994, 1999a, 1999b; *Interface*, 1991, 1992). However, there is no evidence of any debate as to the appropriateness and relevance of the education on offer to them through the distance learning projects.

The research

It was against this background that research was undertaken in Scotland to try to discover the reality of the Travellers' interface with school education. The empirical research of the schools' experiences of Travellers' enrolments and attendances covered a 5-year period, including five consecutive annual returns from all schools in Scotland, reviews of a selected range of school

registers to deduce enrolment and attendance patterns. In addition, a qualitative approach was adopted, in constructing the case studies of five disparate schools with regular enrolments of Travellers, the written information requests to local authority personnel and the face-to-face interactions with around 100 Gypsy/Travellers and Occupational Travellers of all generations and both sexes. In this way it was intended to provide a broad basis for deriving conclusions which could be used to inform the development of policy in this area.

The yearly returns from schools revealed a broad range of patterns in enrolment and attendance reflecting some Traveller attendance in each mainland authority. The statistics confirmed the reported over-wintering habits of showground Travellers predominantly in one city, with some 500 members of the Showmen's Guild registered there. This was later identified as the single, largest over-wintering group in Europe, thus presenting a unique opportunity for researching their experiences in formal education. The group responded positively to requests for interviews and actively participated in securing further interviewees: they saw the research as an opportunity to support their quest for better educational provision, one more appropriate to the reality of their working lifestyle. They recognized the increasing demands on their industry for higher levels of literacy and formal qualifications, and the tensions between acquiring these and still developing sufficient competence in the practical show life.

Things have changed. Kids need a good education to cope. In my day you didn't need the qualifications; today you have to understand so many regulations and deal with so much paper work, insurance, health, safety, tax, local authority regulations . . . but the more time they're in the school the less time they have for learning the business. You have to spend years acquiring the skills; there's no course can teach you that. (Occupational Traveller, senior male)

Gypsy/Travellers, too, for the most part welcomed the opportunity to 'make their case' and spoke freely of their reservations concerning schooling. They were unanimously adamant about the positive value of education (specifically literacy), yet saw inherent dangers and threats in regular school attendance. In particular drugs, sex education and bad behaviour were specified as being contrary to their cultural mores, which coheres with the general findings throughout Europe as reasons for rejecting secondary schooling (Liegéois, 1998). Schools had contributed to Gypsy/Travellers' feelings of marginalization over the last century in Scotland, as poignantly described by Betsy Whyte in her fight to remain in school despite racist treatment from peers and many staff (Whyte, 1979). Racism and bullying are reported as having increased over the last three decades in England (Plowden, 1967; OFSTED, 1996, 1999; Swann Report, 1985). This perception was substantiated in further research with Traveller pupils who had been excluded or who had dropped out of Scottish secondary schools prior to possible exclusion (Lloyd and Norris, 1998; Lloyd et al., 1999a, 1999b) and revealed the extent

to which many Gypsy/Travellers felt excluded from state education. Institutional racism, together with staff and pupil attitudes, undoubtedly contributed to some Gypsy/Travellers' self-exclusion from schools since few stayed long enough to be formally excluded.

You're fighting, always fighting, every day. Teachers don't listen at all.
(Gypsy/Traveller, teenage male)

Occupational Travellers reported particular examples of institutional discrimination; the need to make subject choices at the end of Year 2 secondary (while the children were out of school) and the unavailability of reserved places in their subject choices on their return, together with the Standard Grade (Scottish national qualification system at Year 4 secondary) requirement for continuous assessment and the development of portfolios throughout the academic session, were the key factors reported in prompting drop-out of Occupational Travellers in Years 3 and 4. Yet, ironically, these very measures had been introduced to help increase pupil participation in the Scottish state school examination system after the previous, summative, end-of-course, one-off examination had been identified as a barrier to achievement for many youngsters who were seen to be competent within the secondary classroom setting.

The findings from the statistical returns revealed a range of previously unreported patterns of absenteeism. To summarize, the most significant facts resulting from the quantitative research were:

- The high degree of changes in school enrolments of all Travellers, both Occupational and Gypsy/Travellers;
- The very regular attendance of Occupational Travellers at their base school during the winter period;
- The number of changes Occupational Travellers made in winter schools in successive years;
- The significantly high rates of early drop-out (around age 14 years) of Occupational Travellers across all the researched winter-base secondary schools;
- The regular annual short-stay attendance of Glasgow-based Occupational Traveller primary age pupils at certain other schools throughout Scotland during the travelling season;
- The highly irregular appearance and disappearance of Gypsy/Travellers in all schools they attended;
- The low enrolment levels reported by schools with nearby official Gypsy/Traveller sites;
- The highly variable patterns in Gypsy/Travellers' returns to any one school, from one half-day visit in a 5-year period up to four separate re-enrolments in the same school in a year;
- The enormous variation in Gypsy/Traveller numbers in any one

school per session, from one to 55 different Gypsy/Traveller pupils in a single school;

- The high levels of Gypsy/Travellers' absenteeism from primary school even while enrolled (an average of only 67 percent attendance rate);
- The almost complete lack of Gypsy/Travellers' presence at any secondary schools, but no difference in the enrolment rates of Occupational Travellers between primary and early secondary stages.

From this evidence it was apparent that there was significant non-attendance of both sets of Travellers, for at least some periods of each session. As such they could be classed as interrupted learners, with the likelihood of experiencing similar difficulties in socializing and achieving academic success as other such groups. Apart from the work on truancy (Carlen et al., 1992) and on mobility (Dobson and Henthorne, 1999), there has been no specific research focus on Travellers' attendance in the UK. Even the OFSTED (1996, 1999) reports make no analyses of the contribution of patterns of attendance to their academic achievements and continuing engagement with schooling. Instead, the focus is on the exclusionary approaches adopted by staff and peers as a cause of absenteeism in Gypsy/Travellers.

The statements made throughout this article are based on the evidence gathered both through the aforementioned research and through additional information derived from texts and personal interactions with Travellers and colleagues working in the field throughout the UK and the EU over a 10-year period.

Interdependence: learning in a Traveller culture

For Travellers, both Gypsy/Travellers and Occupational Travellers, family-based learning is fundamental to the preservation and continuation of the groups' social and cultural identities.

I taught them all I know how, but there's somethings I canna do. I had little education myself so I can't help him with his reading. (Gypsy/Traveller, elderly female)

We teach them the tricks of the trade and bring them up in our ways. (Gypsy/Traveller, male)

If they spend too much time at school on book learning they fall behind in their learning for the family business. (Occupational Traveller, male)

In the mobile communities there is little or no demarcation between social life and work. Home is the family group, not the caravan or any specific place (Okely, 1983). Family life revolves around work opportunities, with all members being involved and included. Okely provides a lucid account of the complexity of the group's ability to capitalize on their skills and knowledge

developed 'on the job', with adults and children collaborating to exploit any self-employed niche-market opportunity.

Everybody works. Even the wee ones, they can collect the money and sort out the stock. They all learn to count long before they go to school. (Occupational Traveller, female)

For show and circus families, tangible goals are set each season and routes are planned and booked a year in advance (Jordan, 1998).

Each family has a set route that they generally follow, usually handed down by their dads. We travel mostly in the north, covering all the local [agricultural] Shows, while L... 's folks cover the galas [Borders areas] and fairs and go down as far as Coventry. (Occupational Traveller, senior female)

You book your pitch a year in advance, and pay for it! Them that's no got the cash canna manage that, so they have to let out their pitch and they'll no earn. (Occupational Traveller, senior male)

Thus each child from an early age is aware of the need to plan and work towards the family set goals.

Gypsy/Travellers, in general, operate on a much shorter time-scale and can respond rapidly to any opportunity as it arises.

He'll just come home and say 'we have to get on the road'; which means there's work somewhere else, so I have to get everything packed up ready to move. (Gypsy/Traveller, female)

While, initially, to the outsider, this may seem a chaotic and serendipitous approach, loyalty to a historic locus and extended family links mean that there are parameters within which they work. However, a few Gypsy/Traveller families are now regularly travelling to Norway, Germany and France as new work opportunity links are forged, while show groups travel as far afield as the Far East (Hong Kong and Singapore), the Bahamas and with some regularly visiting Cyprus. Lack of a second European language is not viewed as a barrier to trade in either group.

I asked S... if he could speak German, but he just said 'no need, I smile and use my hands and just tell them the price'! (Primary school headteacher describing Gypsy/Traveller child, 8 years old)

Within the show and fairground communities, females are increasingly owners of stalls, not only of catering facilities but also of games stalls and gaming arcades. Both partners share responsibility for running the 'business' and managing any employees. Youngsters are involved increasingly with age until they, too, can afford to buy their own equipment. The ability to work and save hard is valued and provides tangible evidence of success so that self-esteem is enhanced through diligent compliance with the group's work ethic.⁷

A... 's got three rides now and he's only 19. A... [his younger sister] helps him with the driving. (Occupational Traveller, female, mother of two)

Practical skills are learned through observation, listening to discussions and participation in hands-on experiences in real-life tasks. Occupational Traveller youngsters regularly collaborate with each other, and their elders, to develop new techniques, such as air brushing and modern artwork on the new thriller rides. Children's early play centres on mimicking and learning from those around them as they engage in socializing and work.

You should see young T... B...! He's only 3, but he knows how to use a hammer and screwdriver. He's out with his dad and the men 'helping'. That's the way they all learn. (Occupational Traveller, female)

From a young age children are encouraged to be involved: they are not excluded from adult conversations and work domains nor relegated to childish occupations. They are expected at an early age to become useful contributing members to the economic success of the family or group. While this may be, and often is, construed by outsiders as exploitation of the young by the adults, the reality from their perspective is that children are encouraged and supported into membership of a society for which interdependence is a central tenet.

We all muck in and help each other. Even if your worst enemy is in trouble, such as a breakdown, you still stop to help. You'd never drive by, but you still might never speak again. (Occupational Traveller, male)

We're nearly all related, to some extent. You meet up at social events as well as on the job so that is how you find a partner. (Young educated male from an Occupational Traveller family)

For Travellers, the loyalties, responsibilities and obligations to the extended family group ensure a cohesion and stability which provides a strong sense of community, albeit one not based on locus. Traveller children thus are assured of a network of relations who will take responsibility for supervising, supporting, comforting and guiding them in acquiring both social and work skills.

You can't get away with anything! Everybody knows you, and they'll tell my Ma if I step out of line. . . . Anyway, I keep the younger ones in check too. (Occupational Traveller, teenage female)

Frequent interactions with people of all ages within the extended group help develop in the child a sense of mutual responsibility as well as comfort and security. Caravans are not often locked, older children take responsibility for caring for the younger ones, materials, tools and jobs are shared in repairing and building motors and showground rides and stalls. The acculturation process into Traveller mores is achieved through explicit example and implicit messages rather than verbal instructions on 'dos' and 'don'ts'. Children gain in self-esteem as their characters and contributions develop and are given approval by the extended group.

I would never do anything to shame my family. . . . I want them to be proud of me, and I know they are. (Gypsy/Traveller, female teenager)

Childhood is thus an apprenticeship for *being* a Traveller, with teaching and learning being experiential and collaborative.

Dependence: travellers' experience of school education

In contrast, the school situation offers little of such experiences. The school situation normally is largely based on dependency: for instructions, for permission, for planned learning experiences and for behaviour control. The pedagogies adopted in many classrooms do not reflect educational policy documents, which are more commonly based on theories of learning, such as 'inculcating the independent learner' and encouraging 'social and academic inclusion' through 'collaborative teaching and learning' (Biott and Easen, 1994; Thomas et al., 1998).

For showground Travellers schooling was regarded as the norm for all children from age 5 years. But, due to their travelling patterns, i.e. between March and October, they enrolled late at their base schools in Glasgow and thus missed out on the significant acculturation of the settling-in period, normally between mid-August and the October half-term holiday. They were thus at a disadvantage within their peer group, both scholastically and socially. Long after their peers had settled in and knew the 'ropes', they had little appreciation of the class rules, both the explicit and, more importantly, the implicit. Additionally, for most of the Occupational Traveller pupils there was no history of literature as a source of pleasure or learning, and for many, family literacy was at a barely functional level. Families, particularly the males, described their own early drop-out from schooling as a matter of regret but understood and still condoned similar practice in their teenage children today.

He's made up his mind, so there's no point in forcing him. (Occupational Traveller, father of teenage son)

While all schools interviewed reported very positively on the Traveller pupils (not unexpectedly perhaps since these were schools with a history of repeated Traveller enrolments), there was little evidence of any knowledge of the realities of Travellers' lives, nor, surprisingly, was there much appreciation of a distinction between Gypsy/Travellers and Occupational Travellers as two discrete groups. The relevance of the set curriculum (particularly the teaching methodologies and the learning experiences offered) went unquestioned despite staff expressing serious regret at being unable to offer more to the Traveller pupils.

Despite their late entrance at each successive stage, Occupational Traveller pupils were described by the schools as 'socially very competent' and 'extremely hard working'. They were thought to 'make a major contribution' to the class and the school. Their ability to collaborate and win group entry and peer approval in each successive year was noted. But, at no point

was there any evidence of schools accrediting the significant learning gained by these same pupils on the showground. For those youngsters who sometimes struggled to read, while they were noted to have higher levels in the 'Listening' and 'Talking' elements of the 5–14 language curriculum than most peers, there was no real appreciation of their very significant skills in these areas, particularly those in 'negotiating', 'making a point' and 'persuasion'. This may have been because of the mismatch in cultural settings in which they were required to give evidence of such skills: the restricted classroom setting does not provide the same rich environment for verbal exchange as the busy interactive showground.

For Gypsy/Travellers there were difficulties in integrating into the school community and little opportunity to operate interdependently. Primary schools were aware of the duty the older children had for the safety and well-being of the younger ones yet made little accommodation to support them in this duty. Siblings were not placed in the same class but were rigidly streamed by age as were all other pupils. As a result older children were frequently anxious about their younger siblings. Due to their relatively low levels of scholastic achievement they were most often given individual learning programmes and out-of-class learning support, confirming implicitly their low status and marginalized position. Thus learning in school was described by many Gypsy/Traveller drop-outs as increasingly an intolerable mix of veiled antagonism, isolation, non-valuing of Traveller cultures and strengths, with increasing dependence on teachers leading to increasingly lowered self-esteem so that drop-out was seen to be occurring around primary years 5, 6 and 7 (ages 9–11) rather than at the later secondary stages. This earlier drop-out was found to be closely linked to children accompanying their parents to work. The relevance of current school education to Gypsy/Travellers' lives is questionable: in particular, the implicit goals of schooling, both social and scholastic, and the intangible deferred rewards of academic achievement for a community with no history of need for engagement in such a process, or any expectation of success in that domain. Schools verbalized an understanding of the very different Gypsy/Traveller aspirations, of independence, early marriage and family responsibility, of observance of Traveller traditions, yet showed little accommodation to support those.

The Gypsy/Travellers' interdependence, reported on positively by staff as being displayed in schools, operated strictly within the Gypsy/Traveller group itself, specifically in their support for each other, with older Gypsy/Travellers taking responsibility for the younger ones, and especially when one of the group was threatened by a settled pupil. Their cohesiveness was strongly approved, yet at the same time, paradoxically, was mentioned as a source of their isolation within the schools. Some Gypsy/Travellers, mostly girls, were reported in primary schools to mix well and have non-Traveller friends and participate fully in the life of the classroom.

Given the evidence from the enrolment and non-attendance patterns, it is perhaps not surprising that staff referred frequently to the Gypsy/Travellers' self-exclusionary tactics. Virtually no Gypsy/Travellers would allow their children to participate in school trips, even when these were free, so they were thus seen to deprive their children of a valuable educational experience through being overprotective.

They never let their children go on school trips. It's not the money; they're just frightened anything happens to them. Traveller children don't get out on their own. But it means they miss out on the experience and I have to prepare other work for them to do in school so that they will be able to join in the class discussion on the project and they're not left out. (Primary schoolteacher)

Social, rather than academic, goals seemed to predominate in teachers' thinking, yet their formal lesson plans focused on traditional scholastic objectives.

You want them to succeed, but they've moved around so much, and they're absent a lot so they miss out. Every time they come back it's like starting again. (Primary headteacher)

They suddenly appear; you alter all your forward plans to include them in groups and then they just don't come back. It's so frustrating! (Senior teacher, primary school)

They, in common with the teachers reported in Nias's longitudinal research, were predominantly operating in a 'caring' mode, yet hoped for scholastic success (Nias, 1989). This may help to explain the apparent underachievement of Gypsy/Travellers despite sufficient cognitive ability. Kenny (1997), however, noted that even in a Traveller-only school they made little academic progress and engaged in resistance, a process also reported by Andereck (1992) on the immigrant Irish Traveller community of Georgia (USA). Kenny's careful and detailed analysis of the Irish Traveller pupils' discourse within her school led to an identification of their use of agency as a means of deflecting attention from their scholastic failures.

Earlier research into the situation of other interrupted learners, in particular the children of Services families, had revealed their significant scholastic underachievements, but the causal interpretation then was the lack of coherence and continuity and the great diversity in pedagogic and social experiences which they met as they travelled throughout the UK and other British bases (Ritchie, 1965; Whalen and Fried, 1973). More recent research on homeless families (Power et al., 1999) and on pupil mobility (Dobson and Henthorne, 1999) draw similar conclusions on the effect of interrupted learning. Discontinuity in the school experience must be considered as a factor in contributing to Traveller pupils' underachievements and exclusion from school, particularly their significant periods of absences (Jordan, 1996). The racist attitudes in schools are generally described to be at the core of the Gypsy/Travellers' lack of success in educational achievement

(Liegéois, 1987, 1998), while for Occupational Travellers it is accepted that it is the interrupted and part-time schooling which leads to underachievement (Knapkaens, 1987, 1988). The mismatch between preferred learning styles and the teaching styles on offer in schools does not yet feature in the literature on Traveller education.

Independence: learning at a distance

The European Commission from an early stage (1989) proposed that the use of distance learning would make a significant contribution to redressing Travellers' scholastic underachievements and lead to qualifications for employment. Yet, distance learning in the UK is a technique adopted for providing the already independent and mature learner with the means to independent academic progress. The materials, largely paper based, require a sophisticated range of study skills and an ability to engage in abstract work, together with high levels of motivation and self-choice in content relevance. How this approach could be adapted to meet the needs of a largely non-literate and uninformed community has been left to the individual EU states to interpret. Funds, latterly targeted through Comenius Action 2, have been available since 1992 to help develop small-scale, international projects aimed at producing appropriate learning materials and to encourage the development of distance learning approaches.

It is perhaps significant that this challenge has been taken up at a grassroots level, i.e. educationists working directly with Travellers, rather than by governmental departments or traditional providers of distance learning products. Thus we find the proliferation of unrelated short-term projects, producing relatively cheap and unsophisticated materials with little reflection of the appropriate pedagogical considerations, not dissimilar to ordinary classroom remedial materials. The producers of these, while having intimate knowledge of the target users, have had no specific training in the development of distance learning: the materials produced have met an 'immediate' and 'local' need with often no transferability to other situations, especially not the mainstream classroom. Thus their production and use may be seen to contribute to the continued 'exclusion' of Travellers within state education.

The significant contributions in this area have been led by the Centre National d'Education à Distance (CNED) in France and EFECOT (European Federation for the Education of Children of Occupational Travellers), where focus on the production, delivery and tutorial support for distance learning have been central. In France, CNED was already funded nationally to provide distance learning materials for migrant families, so the inclusion of a Gypsy educationist into the writing team assured appropriate cultural cohesion. These packages, sold directly to parents, include a tutorial support system for the mobile learner. To date, some 800 Traveller families in France have enrolled in their use, most funded by state benefits.

Through EFECOT, partners from various states devised an innovative, technology-based, international project using the Telematics (DG XIII) budget. The focus was on devising a few short units of work for a limited number of different age groups which show Travellers in several different states, including some in Scotland, could take with them while travelling. Using the new technologies, i.e. laptops and CDIs, they were in direct touch with their base school. The results were increased motivation in pupils and also increased educational aspirations and expectations in the parents of such continued support for out-of-school learning for their children (EFECOT, 1999a). Two further international distance learning projects using computers (FLEX and TRAPEZE) followed. This past season has seen a substantial growth in Scottish show families buying computers and, paradoxically, also a significant increase in the numbers returning regularly to the city for 1- or 2-day stays each week in order to allow children to keep in touch with their teachers and peers. The results have been positive, with at least two highly mobile pupils gaining entrance to university. Investigation revealed, however, that a major cultural shift was made in that a few families allowed their older children to stay with retired relatives for periods during the traditional travelling season in order to maintain continuity in their learning at this significant and critical stage of their studies.

Travellers thus have demonstrated accommodation more readily than have the schools, who recognize the Traveller sacrifices yet still feel themselves unable to provide the technological support for their learning needs. The use of such technologies is dependent on appropriate power supplies and access to telephone lines. Both of these are problematic in many mobile Traveller situations. The introduction of mobile phone email and Internet facilities offer further possibilities, but at a not inconsiderable cost. Schools as yet are not funded to support such 'teaching resources' despite a national push, such as the National Grid for Learning and the Super Highways initiatives, to encourage more independent, technology-based learning within schools.

The clear message from these trials has been the pupils' voiced need for ongoing support with a known teacher in order to maintain momentum and keep on task. In this respect Travellers' needs are no different to others with interrupted learning, such as those with chronic illnesses who need support for learning out of school for significant periods of their school days (Closs and Norris, 1997). Until recently, no formal acknowledgement of their specialist requirements had been made. However, the new Scottish Executive has recently initiated legislation backed by targeted action for them, but without recognizing the broader range of interrupted learners who also need open and distance learning materials in order to maintain scholastic progress. Yet Travellers are the only group of absentee pupils for whom EU resolutions and recommendations have been formulated through the European Parliament (Danbakli, 1994) with demands made on individual

states to report on progress at regular intervals (European Commission, 1997a, 1997b). It could be claimed that the Scottish Executive, while clearly upholding and promoting the case of the chronically sick pupil (the obviously 'deserving' absentees), in ignoring the situation of Travellers (the 'undeserving' absentees?) is demonstrating racism. Further evidence of this exclusion of Travellers may be indicated in their apparent rejection of their own advice on positive discrimination for Travellers (Scottish Office, 1982, 1998a).

There are positive models of supporting independent learning for all school-age learners in other countries (Boylan and Alston, 1993; Dyer and Choksi, 1998). In particular, the situation in Australia, which has developed as a response to show Travellers' self-identified learning needs (Danaher, 1998) offers a model of parent power. The statutory school-age distance learning materials proved problematic for mobile Occupational Travellers, where the working day is long and parents have had little formal education. The use of mobile teacher support staff at some of the major shows, coupled with entrance, on a short-term basis, into 'local' schools at the longer events, helped the development of a cultural shift, with the Travellers increasingly taking on responsibility and making demands on the education system for a tailor-made response to their specific needs. Gaining access to the corridors of power, using their home-developed skills of negotiation and persuasion, resulted in policy development supported by state funds so that now some literate, older Travellers with less physical work to do on the shows are employed as regular tutors to families in between the support teachers' visits. The gains in confidence have been significant, so that there is now an aspiration for academic achievement coming from *within* the group.

Conclusions

There is an acknowledged mismatch between educational theory and educational practice in general (Brown, 1994; Simpson and Ure, 1994), so it is not surprising, that this situation is echoed in the provision made for Travellers. However, it is disappointing that the proposals for Traveller education emanating from the European Commission are founded on a narrow base of assumptions about what their educational needs actually are and not on current models of inclusive teaching and effective learning for all in state schools. The pathologizing of Travellers as a victim group with little choice in the face of racism in service providers does little to reflect the reality of their strengths in making balanced choices between acceptance and rejection of what is freely available. That Traveller families do daily make such choices and make demands on the system without the assistance of professionals is rarely included in the texts. The insularity from mainstream education issues of the researchers and report authors in the Traveller field has been a key factor in maintaining education for Travellers as something

separate and different until relatively recently: the republished *Synthesis Report* (Liegeois, 1987), now the *The Gypsy Paradigm* (Liegeois, 1998), has at last given some acknowledgement of the complexity of the task in making appropriate education provision for the range of mobility and attendance patterns within Traveller communities, yet does not draw on any of the long-established research into the achievements of other mobile groups (Lally, 1993, 1996). There is no concerted effort or call for a major shift in the delivery of the school curriculum, nor parallels drawn with the need for such a shift for a whole range of other interrupted learners (Jordan, 1996; Jordan and Holmes, 1997). The focus has been largely on combating Travellers' social exclusion rather than on raising their scholastic achievement through changing the institutional exclusion inherent in a school system designed for an academically aspiring group within the local, settled population.

Ironically, the shift is more apparent in the political rhetoric: the current governmental credo of 'Education, education, education' indicates the strength of the belief that qualifications equal employability and, implicitly, success and escape from socioeconomic disadvantage. The only education on offer is full-time schooling, with regular attendance equating with achievement. Some recognition of the inability of schools as they are presently constructed to maintain all pupils in school and to ensure they are motivated to achieve their highest potential, is indicated by the range of specific targeted funds, such as the Excellence Fund, available to combat problems of disaffection and underachievement, including support for learning out of school in homework clubs. The success of this latter approach in engaging pupils and producing significant leaps in achievement point to the deficiencies of classroom learning for many pupils (MacBeath and Turner, 1990). No policies, matched with significant funds, are available to reconstruct the school curriculum and its delivery on a nationwide basis, although increasing hints are to be detected in speeches by education ministers on the future possibility of learning outside school classrooms.

New Community Schools (SOEID, 1998) and *Communities: Change Through Learning* (Scottish Office, 1998b) documents do offer the imaginative Local Authority an opportunity to provide innovative approaches backed up with central funds, for joint health, social work and education initiatives, including, most importantly for Travellers, family learning plans. These actions are being focused on areas of socioeconomic disadvantage and on local communities who are already known to require the concerted support of such agencies in order to maintain a presence at school. Traditionally, there has been little involvement of Travellers with any of these services and Travellers are seldom included as part of a local community, so it is difficult to see how their specific needs will be met even within such 'open' schools. It is difficult not to arrive at the conclusion that Travellers will continue to remain marginalized within the education system and that they will continue to strive to educate their children as best they can with minimal appropriate

help from the state. The loss to schools is great as the strong values inculcated through Travellers' home-learning, in interdependence and independence, offer a strong contribution to the school community of learning.

Notes

1. The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act (1994) (CJPOA); covers Scotland with the exception of clauses 77–80 (sections 61–64 deal with Travellers).
2. *Commission for Racial Equality v. Dutton* (1989) 2WLR 17 (1989), 1 ALL ER 306.
3. See *Traveller Times*, various issues: journal of the Traveller Law Research Institute, Cardiff Law School.
4. See *World's Fair*, various issues: the weekly newspaper of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain.
5. Resolution No. 89/C 153/01 'Resolution on the Education of Children of Occupational Travellers', 22 May 1989; Resolution No. 89/C 153/02 'Resolution on School Provision for Gypsy and Traveller Children', 22 May 1989.
6. See note 5.
7. See note 4.

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