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Kate D'Arcy

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Home education, school, Travellers and educational inclusion

Kate D'Arcy*

Department of Applied Social Studies, University of Bedfordshire, Luton, UK

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The difficulties Traveller pupils experience in school are well documented. Yet those in home educating go unreported. Monk suggests this is because some groups are overlooked; that gypsies and Travellers are often not perceived as home educators. This article highlights how the move to home education is seldom a free choice for Traveller families. Although existing literature suggests this is a consequence of Traveller culture and mobility patterns, this article argues that problems in school drive uptake. Issues of race and ethnicity continue to drive educational inequality and there is an urgent need to redress this is in educational policy and practice.

Keywords: elective home education; school; educational inequality and discrimination

Introduction

Travellers are a distinctive, yet often disregarded group of home educators in England (Monk 2009). The term Traveller is commonly accepted as one which covers a range of identifiable ethnic groups, the largest being Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers. The term Traveller is also sometimes extended to include Occupational Travellers, the most significant being the Fairground or Showman community,[1] and more recently New Age Travellers. Defining a Gypsy, Traveller or Showman is a matter of self-ascription and does not exclude members of these communities who live in houses because ethnic and cultural identity is not lost, it simply adapts to new circumstances. This article reports on research involving Showmen and Romany Gypsy families; the term Traveller is applied when discussing all groupings.

Having worked in a Traveller Education Service (TES) for many years I am passionate about improving access and attainment in education for Traveller children and their families. A main focus of work concerned Traveller pupils' move to secondary school as they continue to experience difficulties there; hence there was a high drop-out and uptake of home education. TES

*Email: kate.d'arcy@beds.ac.uk

are not generally funded to support home education and little is known about the home-educating practices of Traveller families. Existing reports on home education justify Travellers' uptake of home education as a consequence of the communities' culture and mobility patterns. My experience suggested otherwise. I therefore undertook empirical research into home education as I wanted to challenge the discourse which suggests that the Travellers' move to home educate is a cultural choice. I argue that it is driven by inequality in school and that the current freedom to choose children's sites of education (i.e. home rather than school) is not an inclusive practice for already marginalised groups.

The specific contribution of this article is thus that it reports on an under-researched area; little is known about the reasons for choosing home education and consequential outcomes. A literature review discovered only two other studies on the topic of home education and Travellers in the United Kingdom. Most research on home education is based on professionals' views; however, this research asserts the voices of Traveller families in order to illuminate continuing educational inequality and draws on Critical Race Theory (CRT) to do so. Although CRT is not often applied to Travellers, I propose that it is a valuable and practical theory to highlight ongoing inequalities in education for Traveller children.

The article begins with an overview of Elective Home Education (EHE) and the difficulties Travellers experience within mainstream school. The research project and its design are then elaborated upon. The findings of the reported research include two short stories or vignettes that depict different Traveller families' experiences of EHE. The article concludes by summarising the challenges the current EHE system presents and several recommendations in working towards educational inclusion.

Elective home education and Travellers

In England education is compulsory for children of statutory school age; however, schooling is not. The official UK government wording to describe home education is 'Elective Home Education' (DCSF 2007) and this term is used throughout this article. There is little research on EHE in England and no information about the exact number of children who are home educated. Current EHE guidance does not require parents or carers who are home educating their children to make themselves known to their Local Authorities (LA), and Rothermel (2002) suggests up to two-thirds of home educators may be unknown. LAs can estimate numbers from school data regarding withdrawn pupils, which suggest that home education is on the rise. In 1997 estimated national figures were around 50,000 (Meighan 1997), in 2009 the total number was estimated to be 80,000 (Badman 2009). Still, regional figures are variable and Ofsted (2010) reported that the number of home-educated children ranged from 32 to 620 across the 15 LAs they visited.

Over the years the subject of home-educating Traveller families has been noted sporadically (Kiddle 1999; Ofsted 2001, 2003; Derrington and Kendal 2004). As early as 2003 Ofsted documented the growing trend among secondary-aged Traveller pupils to be home educated and stated concerns about its suitability because 'the adequacy, suitability and quality of such provision is uneven' (2003, 5).

The number of home-educating Traveller families is also growing and varies across England. The TES have reported a marked annual increase and research across 23 LAs, and Ivatts (2006) observed that approximately one-third of all home-educated children were Travellers. Traveller children therefore make up a significant proportion of home-educated children.

At this point it is also important to acknowledge the diverse reality of educational provision. EHE is only one of the various educational options open to and used by families in England. Not all children who are out of school will be home educated. This article concerns two legal educational options – school and EHE – but there are additional educational alternatives such as Pupil Referral Units and private education, which are not covered. It is also important to stress that there are significant numbers of children who are not registered in any educational provision. Once again exact data is hard to find, but Ofsted (2003) estimated that 12,000 Traveller pupils of secondary age were not registered in any educational provision.

Elective home education

In England, Section 7 of The Education Act guides current workings of EHE policy and practice:

> The parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him to receive efficient full-time education suitable (a) to his age, ability and aptitude, and (b) to any special educational needs he may have, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise. (The Education Act 1996)

While there is a duty for parents to educate their children, they are not obliged to send them to school (Gabb 2004) as 'suitable' educational alternatives are legal. EHE guidance states that LAs must 'make arrangements to enable them to establish the identities, so far as it is possible to do so, of children in their area who are not receiving a suitable education' (DCSF 2007, 5). This is particularly challenging for EHE children (Hopwood et al. 2007) as there is no legal definition of what a suitable education looks like or comprises.

Moreover, LAs do not currently have any statutory duties to monitor EHE on a routine basis. They cannot legally insist on entering the homes or seeing children for the purpose of monitoring EHE provision (DCSF 2007). Many LAs therefore have to ask parents to inform them of their decision to home educate and to agree to a visit by an EHE advisor. Consequently, the

LA's abilities to fulfil their EHE duties are reliant on positive relationships with home-educating parents.

The vagueness of current EHE legislation has resulted in EHE becoming a very indistinct area of education. Practices and expectations across LAs regarding EHE are diverse and applied inconsistently. Ofsted (2010) found little uniformity across the 15 LAs they studied on how monitoring visits were managed and what they were to include. In a time when mainstream education and the achievement of children within school is regularly scrutinised and monitored, it seems surprising that the area of EHE has not until recently attracted the same attention (Monk 2004).

The Labour government's Every Child Matters agenda[2] encouraged a scrutiny of any policies or practices that did not protect children and ensure the development of their potential. This scrutiny, coupled with the growing numbers of home-educated children and increasing disquiet from LA children's services[3] regarding the current effectiveness of EHE systems, came to a head with the death of a seven-year-old girl who was home educated (Webb 2010). Consequently, in January 2009 the government commissioned Graham Badman to assess whether the current system of supporting and monitoring home education enabled all home-educated children to receive a good education and stay safe and well (DCSF 2010).

Badman (2009) reviewed and reported on EHE and suggested that regulatory and legislative changes to the EHE system were necessary. Twenty-eight recommendations were proposed, which included: setting up a national registration system for EHE children and allowing EHE officials the right to access home-educating children's homes to monitor provision and establish their safety and well-being. Although the government initially accepted Badman's recommendations, the public rejection by home-educating organisations and the political pressures of an upcoming general election meant that, in actual fact, none were upheld. Many professionals and practitioners were disappointed with this outcome. Indeed, Ofsted suggested that the failure to:

> register all children with the LA, irrespective of where they were educated – in LA or in independent schools, at home or in other educational provision – contributed to making it possible for young people to disappear. (2010, 24)

EHE remains a complex, yet vague area of education. The purpose of this article is not to advocate for or against home education but to investigate the effect of current EHE systems on already marginalised groups of children. It reports on the reasons a small sample of Traveller families took up EHE and documents their home education practices to evidence that the move to EHE is not necessarily an inclusive practice. To substantiate this argument it is essential to provide a brief overview of the difficulties Traveller pupils experience in school, as this article will highlight how in some cases neither school nor EHE provides Traveller children with a suitable education.

Traveller pupils' experiences of mainstream schooling

The issues concerning Traveller pupils' low attendance in school are well documented. Traveller children's achievement was noted in the 1960s (Department of Education and Science 1967), yet in 2010 Traveller children were still among the lowest achieving groups. Indeed, Romany Gypsy and Traveller of Irish Heritage pupils were the only ethnic groups in the United Kingdom whose performance had deteriorated (Equality and Human Rights Commission 2010).

Research has highlighted the barriers to Traveller pupils' achievement and attainment: high levels of racist bullying and harassment from pupils and staff (Lloyd and McClusky 2008; Lloyd and Stead 2001), a lack of understanding and respect for Traveller cultures in school (Tyler 2005; Wilkin et al. 2010), low expectations of Traveller students and a high drop-out rate during the secondary school phase. Racism and discrimination underpin all these barriers.

Racism and discrimination

Issues of race equality are a significant factor in Travellers' educational success. Ulreche and Franks reported that Roma, Gypsy and Traveller children experienced 'prejudice, bigotry and institutional racism as part of their daily lives' (2007, 9). Among the 201 children they consulted, 63% were bullied or attacked physically and 86% had received racist comments. Within wider society, Travellers are all depicted as Others and stereotyped according to a set of negative descriptions that justify their exclusion from full participation in society (Devine, Kenny, and Macneta et al. 2008). As a consequence, teachers may either deny Traveller pupils' cultural differences or construct this as deviant (Lloyd and Norris 1998).

The literature on Travellers' experiences in school highlights many problems within an educational system in which stereotypes and misunderstandings of Traveller communities and cultures are commonplace (Wilkin, Derrington, and Foster 2009). Lloyd and McClusky (2008) suggest that central to the negative educational experiences of so many Travellers lies a denial of difference and the complexity of cultural identity. Accounts of Travellers' failure in education commonly emphasise Travellers' reluctance to participate in education and this is presented as a feature of Traveller culture (Piper and Garrett 2005; Wilkin et al. 2010).

Consequently, there is a discourse that Traveller parents are not interested in or committed to their children's education, this being more pertinent at secondary level than primary (Wilkin, Derrington, and Foster 2009). Such discourses are concerning as they inform educational practices; practitioners may use them to predict and explain away the poor outcomes for Traveller pupils. Such judgements are also used to justify why high numbers of Traveller families home educate, and as a consequence ongoing issues of educational inequality are ignored.

Research method and design

The research drew upon an interpretive paradigm that recognises research participants' views are diverse and numerous and seeks to document their understandings of the situation being studied. Data were collected through two sets of semi-structured interviews with 11 Traveller families (nine Romany Gypsy families and two Showmen families) over six months. The research sample concentrated on family units. This was for ethical and practical reasons. Families could themselves select who was part of the interview; children could be part of the interview if the family wished and parents were present at all times. Many family units included more than one child who was home educated. Across the 11 families there were 42 children, 32 of whom were being home educated or had been in the past. The other 10 children were in education, of pre-school age or old enough to work.

The main selection criteria specified that families needed to be registered as providing EHE. As a professional who worked in the field, it was my expectation that there were many more home-educating families than those registered, as there is no current legal requirement for families to inform the LA of their intent to home educate. Nevertheless, I only approached those on the registered list because I might otherwise be inviting children who were not registered in any educational provision and were deemed 'Missing from Education'.[4] This could have difficult ethical implications regarding the responsibility to report such families to the LA.

Further subgroup criteria related to different geographical locations, different travelling patterns, a range of socio-economic status and different Traveller groups in order to represent broadly the characteristics of the LA Traveller population and build up an unbiased and trustworthy sample. The main groups of Travellers residing in the LA under study were English Romany Gypsies, Travellers of Irish Heritage and Showmen. Romany Gypsy families are reasonably settled whereas Travellers of Irish Heritage and Showmen are highly mobile. There were no Irish Travellers registered as EHE and they were therefore not included.[5]

EHE practices are varied and it is important to note that this research sample is quite particular in its social characteristics. Thus, as previously suggested, the incidence of EHE take-up by Travellers in this LA may not be typical when considered on a national scale. Consequently, findings must be acknowledged with caution and no generalisations regarding all Travellers and EHE must be made. No names are referenced; those provided in the text are pseudonyms to protect all respondents' identities.

I recognised that I was potentially in a more privileged position than other researchers as I was working with Traveller families. However, my TES was not funded to support EHE and I relied on gatekeepers to initialise contact with EHE families. My methodological approach included a deliberate choice to focus on Travellers' voices and I used storytelling to highlight

Travellers views, and not those of other educators as they have been documented before and form part of the discourse that so often portrays Travellers in a negative light.

Storytelling is one of several CRT tenets. CRT provides ways to problematise Travellers' inclusion and exclusion within education – stories can document the lived experiences of racism and oppression. Who tells whose stories is a fundamental concern in CRT, and in reporting on my research I made a conscious choice to document the stories of Travellers in their own words, rather than mine. My book documents Travellers' voices verbatim (D'Arcy 2014), and this article offers a smaller selection due to word limitations. I member-checked my findings and the sections of interview I planned to report on with all families to ensure they agreed with the way I was presenting their views. I recognise that I am asserting these stories on Traveller families' behalf, but do so to raise awareness of how education systems continue to deal with difference and how this results in ongoing inequalities in education.

CRT recognises the complicated and deeply embedded nature of racism (Gillborn 2005). CRT has emerged as a focus point for work on race and is frequently applied to education in the United Kingdom. CRT is academic and practical. It challenges hidden operations of power that disadvantage minority ethnic groups by asking critical questions about inequality (Gillborn 2008). Travellers' stories can challenge what the dominant discourse suggests; for example, the dominant discourse implies that Travellers take up EHE for mobility reasons, yet research (Ivatts 2006; Bhopal and Myers 2009; D'Arcy 2014) suggests that the Travellers' decision to home educate is associated with discrimination in school. Consequently, the voices of the marginalised provide counter-stories which oppose stereotypical assumptions that blame Traveller communities themselves for their educational exclusion and a lack of appropriate educational response to their needs. In a CRT fashion, I document my findings by telling the stories of two different Traveller families.

Traveller families' experiences and practices of EHE

Research tells us that home-educating practices are diverse (Rothermel 2003) and this was reflected within the Traveller families interviewed. Nevertheless, there was one broad distinction that could be made. Seven out of the 11 families paid for private tuition, and the rest of the families delivered educational provision themselves. The stories that follow capture the experience of one of a family who employed a tutor and another who provided home education themselves.

The Smith family

Mrs Smith had four boys, ranging from seven to 13 years old. They had only lived in the county for six months. They had been settled in another

city where the boys all attended school regularly. Mrs Smith spoke of their excellent progress there and referred to the head teacher and staff who supported the boys and made them feel included:

> It was like they cared. They were in cricket team, they were doing ever so well, it upset me to move. The rules in secondary were good; there was no bullying, no swearing.

Due to unforeseen and unplanned events the family moved suddenly, but mum was not happy with the local school and therefore decided to home educate all her boys herself:

> Well, there was a couple of reasons [for home education] really … for one main reason I did not like the things what was said in the playground, it wasn't things I like my kids to be involved in. The things my kids were having said to them were disgusting … Alfie told me about it. Home education is the way to go with Alfie anyway, because he's … well he is at home and he was uncomfortable at school.

Mum did not feel that her children were safe in the new school environment, she also felt that Alfie's needs would not be met there. Alfie had been diagnosed with autism and at least three other children in the families I interviewed had a statement of special educational needs (SEN) and this played a part in families' decision to home educate. Educational support for families is an important consideration, and in the EHE literature the issue of support for vulnerable groups of children in schools is a recurring factor. It is interesting to note that children with additional needs (including Travellers, those referred to as Gifted & Talented and having SEN and children who are bullied) often resort to EHE because the school system does not support them. Indeed, Arora's (2006, 62) research on the experiences of children with SEN found that the need for home education would not have been contemplated if flexible school support had been available at the time.

Practice

Mrs Smith had purchased several books covering a wide age range. The boys work from handwriting, counting, tables, multiplication, basic mathematics, spelling, science and other text books and reading schemes. Routine was important:

> The boys sit down round the table, I bought books and they sit and do their lessons. We try to do everything in the lessons and they sit and write an essay about what they did or where they have been or whatever. You know, so they have practiced their writing. Then they have sit and read it back so I can see their spelling mistakes.

Mrs Smith felt that the good things about EHE were:

> You can stick to the way of life they are used to … our way of life.

> EHE is different – they enjoy it – it's in a different environment, its more easy going. The lessons are different. The main thing is routine … leaving school they were out of routine … but we set up our own. The boys do their chores [look after dogs, chickens and tidy up]. It makes them independent for when they grow up. It teaches them respect and clean living. Books provide the basics then they explore wider stuff through their interests like history. You can channel them, instead of sitting in with kids doing things they don't like you can channel them so that they do get interested in what they like and do reading. Once they have read about it, got excited about it then they can also write about it – it just goes round and round … I get by, I can read a bit but I want my kids to be better than that. My friend does up mobile homes – when they get older he will take the boys with him. So if they have that and reading, writing and calculations they are all the main things they should be concentrating on.

The type of education Mrs Smith describes is one that is self-generated and driven by the children's interests; it was also felt to be a more relevant education than school. But EHE was also challenging:

> Getting the boys to do what I tell them to do was difficult. I had a new role – as teacher … has taken a while for boys to get used to. If they don't do it – they will be going back to school … I enjoy it because it gives me time with the kids, it's nice. I enjoy it and I think they enjoy it with me as well.

> I felt a bit lost at the start, I did not know if I was teaching them the right things. I though logically about it. Well … what are the main things they will need? I picked out the things I thought they needed.

EHE is very much left to parents' resources, and Mrs Smith was waiting on the EHE adviser to visit for guidance and reassurance; in this LA such visits took place just once a year:

> I see EHE as 'You have made the choice you do it'. I would not be happy if I did not speak to anyone because I would feel a bit lost. I don't want to do wrong by my kids education. I did not have much education, only went to school until I was seven. I said I was going to home educate and the children wouldn't be left without an education. I need the adviser[6] to point me in the right direction … I'll be ok … I will be pleased when he has been.

> I think EHE is ok. You make decision you do it, but I think there a lot of chances that kids can slip through. It's the ideal option for people who don't really want to take their kids to school – EHE but not for the right reasons. They use it as an excuse and because there is not a lot of back up I think there were a lot of kids will fail and that a shame because I do think kids need their education.

Mrs Smith is committed to her children's education and is doing the best she can with available resources. Her comments do reveal concerns with the current, liberal EHE system that, in her opinion, does allow children to fall through the education net as it is solely reliant on parents' input, which can limit their educational experiences and long-term opportunities.

The Young family

Mrs Young has three children – Gary the eldest, Rosanne and Bob.

> Gary went to secondary school and he had a terrible experience, yes … because he's a Traveller. He got picked on; even by the teachers … I don't know … I was not prepared for Rosanne to go through that. We had the same when I went to school, my brothers and sisters so … I think she would have liked secondary education but it doesn't just come like that does it … I think she would have enjoyed it all but … you got all the bad points … like with being a Traveller haven't you? Like being picked on. I tried with Gary because I thought it might be different … but no.

Rosanne went to primary school: 'It was a lovely school, it was a good school'. Mum was reluctant to send her to secondary because Gary was bullied there, but she also did not feel confident about taking up EHE so she asked the primary school if Rosanne could repeat her final year. Her request was refused. Rosanne told me that:

> She [mum] did not know what she had to do to home educate, she thought if she could keep me in [school] another year, it would just be easier all round.

The fact that Gary's bullying issues in school were not addressed, led to his withdrawal but also mum's reluctance to send her daughter to this school. Mrs Young's concern about doing home education properly also highlights lack of confidence in taking on sole responsibility for educational provision, yet this was preferable to her daughter being bullied and the family chose the safer option – EHE.

Practice

> We have not heard of EHE, we call it home tutoring. Rosanne was home tutored since 11, for five years. She never did go to big school at all. Well, I knew other people that had their children home educated so at first we had different tutors coming out … In the first beginning we had a tutor come out, but she was not a lot of good. The work that she was setting was not good. Then we went to the learning centre for a long while … I took her every fortnight. She had a tutor there – a really good lady. She was setting her work out for two weeks and then going back and then going there for two hour lesson.

> Rosanne has stopped now because she is 16. She had her inspector come out, he gone through all the work she's done and give her a really good report. If I'd of thought I could of showed you. He was really pleased. He loved all the social stuff she did. He said that is their biggest worry … that they are not socialising with other people.

For Rosanne EHE was overall a positive experience and they had learnt by trial and error. She had spent more time with her family and had flexibility around her learning; these were the good things about EHE:

> I have been able to be with me sister more, she's only little, so I have been able to be with her a lot more. I can do what I want, when I want and how I want, that sort of thing … that was good.

Mrs Young felt that EHE had worked out well for Rosanne; however, Bob was now coming up to the end of primary school and they were planning on trying to send him to secondary school:

> Yes, we are trying again now because he is leaving school in September and he'll be going … we will let him have a go. Gary had a go and did not like it, Rosanne did not get a chance because I wouldn't let her and now with him we are deciding again to try again. See how he gets on, if he doesn't we'll pull him out and home educate him.
>
> Bob really, really wants to go and all, he wants to go to other school. He's got lots of his friends going up as well. They all know where he comes from, he goes round lot of their houses and they all know where he comes from … what all helps …
>
> That's how it should be [Nan].
>
> Yes, but it ain't always like that, when he gets up there … we'll see when he gets up there, but there are a lot of different children in a year, it is bigger than the little school. So … I don't know – we just got to try it.

Mrs Young's story reveals the effect of racism on educational progression; it prevented her completing her school education and that of her two oldest children. The youngest was going to transfer – his situation was different because he had friends who knew he was a Traveller and accepted him; highlighting that identity, acceptance and inclusion is key in educational progression. Her story also reveals the concerns about secondary school, it is bigger than primary and she is concerned about other children who might bully her own. Although the family are willing to try secondary school they are also ready to withdraw him at the first sign of difficulties. This is a common approach and one seldom appreciated by schools.

Quick intervention can prevent EHE in cases of racism, bullying, and discrimination in school, which were mentioned by every family I spoke to. Seven out of the 11 families talked about direct bullying experiences because they were Travellers. Some children were also bullied because they could not read or write by the time they got to secondary school. Lots of families talked about the way their child was treated differently because they were a Traveller. Most parents felt worried about their children's safety and well-being in school. Families who did not feel supported opted for home education as a way to avoid racism and discrimination. Traveller families were attracted to EHE because it represented a safer place to educate their children legally.

Both stories counter the idea that Travellers are not interested in their children's education and confirm that discrimination underpins school access and inclusion; they also dispel the discourse that EHE is a free choice. These findings correlate with previous research in this field, which suggested that Travellers' reasons for EHE and their withdrawal from school had 'less to do with not wanting their children to receive an education and far more to do with concerns about the school institution itself' (Bhopal and Myers 2009, 4).The illustrative examples from Mrs Smith and Young were confirmed by the wider sample of voices. Traveller parents wanted their children to go to secondary school, but the fact that children experienced racism and bullying and did not get the right support for their educational needs meant that they did not feel able to continue sending them there.

Elective home education and exclusion

Reviewing the literature on EHE confirms that this is not just an issue for Travellers; there are other groups of children whose parents feel compelled to home educate. Thus, it might be argued that if systems in school were better prepared in meeting the needs of those children considered to be 'different', then there might be less need for these children's parents to resort to home education in the first place. I also propose that in seeking to escape mainstream school, Travellers' pupil's exclusion is further reinforced by home education as they may have limited access to educational resources. The lack of support for EHE parents also creates uncertainty about their competence at home schooling.

Levels of financial and social resources did vary among families and this was reflected in the provision they were able to offer their children. Those children living in families with fewer financial and social resources had more restricted activities and opportunities. Affluent families took children on trips, social activities, purchased laptops to work on and books to study; others could simply not afford this. Several low-income families spoke about the challenges of home education due to the cost of tutors and books

and not always knowing whether what they were doing was right, especially if their child had SEN.

The current EHE system does not ensure that all children receive an equitable education and the most vulnerable children may therefore not receive the education they need because of their financial circumstances or SEN. Within school such inequalities are addressed in part through free school meals and additional support, yet those who are home educated receive no support at all. In this way the move to EHE is likely to limit some children's ability to become autonomous in later life. These children can as a result of inequality in school and EHE not access their right to an education.

Educational inequality

> One way of looking at the patterns of inequality in education is to look at the 'outputs' of the system … who stays on, who does what and who goes where. (Ball 2013, 181)

Reay, Crozier, and Clayton (2010) researched the benefits and challenges of the unfamiliar surroundings of higher education institutions for working-class students. Many of the working-class parents interviewed as part of this study wanted their child(ren) to go to university but had underlying fears that this move could result in 'abandoning the family and its norms and values' (Thomas and Quinn 2007, 63). Thus there is a price to pay in trying to fit in. The same could be said for the sample of Traveller families interviewed.

Some were fearful about revealing their child's Traveller identity in a secondary school environment where they were in the minority and did not feel safe. Research has shown that many Traveller children do not feel confident in revealing their Traveller identity publicly because of fears of racism and discrimination and 'play White'. Derrington describes this as 'passing identity by concealing or denying one's heritage' (2007, 357). The extent to which Traveller children feel safe and accepted is therefore an essential criterion in school attendance and achievement.

Others struggled with 'cultural dissonance' – the different expectations in school and home meant it was hard to fit into either world. Safety and survival is always in question and where there is no history of secondary transfer in the family there might be additional lack of confidence in this educational process. In some cases children tried to return to mainstream education at the post-16 stage, but this also posed challenges: Kyle had dropped out of school in Year Seven (first year in secondary school); he was home educated until he was 16 but enrolled on a construction access course to specialise in plumbing. Kyle completed his access course but as he had dyslexia and limited literacy and numeracy skills the college suggested he was not able to carry on. His mother related this decision to being a Traveller:

> I see it as a lot of excuses. It was a bit of a smack in the mouth. I thought those days were over. There are a lot of things, unless you live this lifestyle you think things have changed but they are basically the same.

Kyle did not see the relevance of secondary education but this did not mean that he was totally disengaged from education or learning. Still, the fact he had SEN, was a Traveller and did not attend secondary school limited his opportunities at college. Such setbacks can confirm families' suspicions about mainstream education establishments.

This tale confirms the vulnerability of those with intersecting inequalities. Although many home-educated children will undertake GSCE examinations, Traveller families often find the education systems complex and may struggle finding information about GCSEs. The route to EHE can thus prevent social mobility as no qualifications are achieved and consequently securing a job is challenging, especially one in education, law or other professions where by community role-models can begin to establish themselves. The reality that a significant number of Traveller children are not attending school has a direct impact on the communities' social inclusion and families' opportunities for social mobility. This is why education in the broadest sense of the word is a fundamental human right. As Save the Children (2001) confirm, the denial of education can affect the enjoyment of other rights such as employment, health and economic well-being.

Critically observing EHE highlights interesting parallels between those who are labelled or managed differently in mainstream systems. The literature shows that the difficulties Traveller children experience in school are not theirs alone, Gifted and Talented children and those with SEN also struggle to have their needs met. These studies confirm that inequality in schools is ongoing and this is driving uptake of EHE. It is therefore important to note the relationship between school experience and uptake of EHE. An emerging equality issue is the perceived differences of learners who are problematised according to a non-specified but dominant view of what is considered 'normal' (Armstrong, Armstrong, and Spandagou 2010, 37).

Studying EHE provides important information about inequality for Travellers as well as different groups of children. Many home-educated children end up outside mainstream education through no fault or desire of their own, but simply because they are different to teach or culturally diverse. It cannot be denied that meeting the needs of all children via one educational system is challenging. However, schools are places that hold real potential in creating inclusive and democratic societies. Yet EHE facilitates the exclusion of particularly vulnerable groups of children and is therefore not an inclusive practice. The concluding section of this article will now briefly summarise the challenges raised and propose some recommendations in working towards educational inclusion.

Working towards educational inclusion

Attention has been drawn to the effects of a very liberal EHE system, whereby Traveller children drop-out of school with ease, cannot necessarily access further education and may experience limited educational provision. This challenges the dominant discourse that suggests home education is a free choice which derives from Travellers' mobility. Families referred frequently to racism and discrimination, particularly in secondary school systems, which compelled them to home educate their children. Yet these families were all committed to their child's education. Educational systems are therefore still not enabling all children to feel included and achieve.

Analysing EHE draws attention to the relationship between school and EHE, the complexities of inclusion and exclusion and the consequences for those children labelled as 'different'. Travellers' explained their strategies to ensure that their children continue learning in a safe environment. Home education can be safer and remains a legal educational alternative but it is also unequal. The EHE system as it stands is problematic because it cannot ensure all children can access the resources and support they need to become autonomous. Support and resources for EHE are limited, especially if the child has SEN. The freedom to legally choose home education over school is thus not necessarily, from these data, an inclusive practice. Depending on the capital and social resources available, some children will have a positive experience whereas others will be much more limited.

Enabling school inclusion is a complex task. Sociological thinking about educational inclusion has certainly drawn attention to the social construction and perpetuation of inequality because of perceived differences of learners. The liberal EHE system in many ways continues segregation as home-educated children are removed from the mainstream. There is a need for further sociological debate to consider how children defined as 'different' can be supported without stigmatising them on that basis (Minow 1985). The issue for contemplation is not how to educate those who are 'different' but how to educate all children.

Gewirtz and Cribb (2009) suggest that sociologists should take seriously the practical judgements and dilemmas of the people we are researching. This research has shown that Traveller parents' motivations for EHE are comparable with other parents with children who have SEN. These parents may be seen to be expressing as choice to home educate but closer investigation indicates that this is driven by discrimination. This research has begun to document the educational experiences of those who experience EHE first hand, and further research is needed to establish a better understanding of the number of children who are home educated and their needs. A useful next step would be to ask LAs to record to reasons why parents are withdrawing their children from school and analyse this information, as such data would be hard to ignore.

Opportunities for debate within sociological and educational communities are important to ensure that such issues do not continue to be disregarded. The aim of this article has been to raise awareness of ongoing inequality in education, both school and EHE. The hope is that it will act as a reminder to researchers, educators and policy-makers alike; there is much to be done to ensure educational inclusion for all.

Notes

1. This community will be referred to as 'Showmen' in this article.
2. The aim was for every child, whatever their background or their circumstances, to have the support they need to 'be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic well-being' (DCSF 2003, 6).
3. Practitioners working for and with children and young people.
4. Children and young people who are not receiving education and whose whereabouts are unknown.
5. Undertaking research into those not registered formally as providing EHE would be a further research study of interest because there remain many Traveller children who are not registered in any educational provision.
6. The adviser is an EHE staff team member. In the LA under study there are three EHE staff in total: a manager, an administrator and an adviser, the latter visits families when they register and monitors provision on an annual basis. Please note that such arrangements vary and this example will not reflect practice in all LAs in England.

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