



# THE TEACH REPORT

Traveller Education & Adults:  
Crisis, Challenge and Change

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The views expressed herein are those of the authors and can not be taken to reflect the views of the Directors of the National Association of Travellers' Centres (NATC, 2010)

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# THE **TEACH** REPORT

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report was commissioned by the National Association of Travellers' Centres (NATC) in light of the findings of the Value for Money Review (2008) and the report of An Bord Snip Nua (2009) which recommended the phasing out of the Traveller Training Centres. The object of the research was not to reverse this recommendation but rather to map the way forward in terms of adult education for Travellers in 21st century Ireland. The rationale provided in both reports for the closure of the 33 TTC's was the low rate of **progression** by Travellers from the Centres into mainstream, further and higher education and the workforce. This research began with the aim of interrogating why so little progression had emerged from the TTCs, from the perspective of education stakeholders and Travellers themselves. The research had a number of additional objectives:

- To investigate why mainstream education services have also generated relatively low rates of progression. In this context, we sought to examine why despite the high levels of Traveller enrolment at primary level, only 102 Travellers completed the Leaving Certificate in 2007/2008;
- To examine the experiences of Travellers who had progressed into the workforce and mainstream education in terms of the costs and benefits they encountered during this process;
- To examine the work of the TTC's using the broader measures linked to integration rather than progression. We sought to explore the distinction between work-based skills and personal competencies being taught within modules in the Centres. We also mapped the services and supports being provided by some of the Centres which are not strictly part of their remit such as conflict resolution and point of contact for agencies such as HSE, Gardaí;

Finally, we sought to examine how in light of the research findings, adult education services can best meet the needs of Traveller learners in the future.

## Structure of Research

The project began with a review of the policy documentation and scholarly literature on Traveller education and inter-cultural education in the Irish context. The empirical strand of the research consisted of 96 interviews with Travellers, Traveller education stakeholders and community stakeholders in the fields of health, criminal justice and local environment. This research was conducted primarily in four locations which had four different models of Traveller adult education

- Ennis has a stand-alone Traveller Training Centre
- Dundalk has a Traveller Training Centre integrated into a VEC campus
- Mullingar had a Traveller Training Centre which closed in 2008. None of the 52 Travellers attending the Centre have subsequently been integrated into local adult education services
- Waterford does not have a Traveller Training Centre but does have other adult education services which have Travellers within their student cohort such as Youthreach

The data collected during this interview and focus group series was analysed in two stages. Firstly, sociological frameworks were used to examine the question of progression in terms of the experiences of Travellers themselves and the difficulties experienced by education stakeholders in supporting progression. Secondly, educational perspectives were employed to examine the work of the TTCs and mainstream education services in order to identify their strengths and weaknesses in contributing to Traveller progression and the intercultural integration of Travellers into Irish society.

## Findings of the Research

An evaluation of educational documentation on intercultural integration indicated that there is a significant gap between the state's aspirations to support inter-cultural education and the provision of applied policies and resources which might support this process. As a result of this policy weakness, schools can avoid enrolling Traveller students. Travellers have little influence in the administration and management of schools and Traveller culture is largely invisible within the curricular content of the Irish educational system.

In the second section of the research, sociological analysis of the empirical data revealed that prejudice experienced by Travellers and welfare dependency constituted major obstacles to Traveller progression into mainstream education and the workforce.

We found that a significant proportion of Travellers who had progressed had hidden their identities from settled colleagues for fear of experiencing prejudice. In some cases, entering the workforce had significantly weakened the Travellers' relationships with their own community and extended families. However, there were also significant 'culture clashes' between aspects of Traveller culture and settled attitudes to work and progression linked to nomadism, feuding, gender roles and extended family obligations.

In evaluating the Traveller Training Centres, we found that while the Centres were not generating high levels of Traveller progression into the workforce, these units were providing Travellers with the 'personal competencies' necessary to participate in broader Irish society. Literacy, numeracy and personal development programmes in settings where Travellers felt supported by members of their own community were highlighted as being particularly important by community stakeholders in providing Travellers with basic integration skills.

Finally, the role of mainstream education in facilitating Traveller progression and integration into Irish society was also examined. We found that the high levels of enrolment by Travellers at primary level did transfer to post-primary settings. However, during the early teenage period, there is significant haemorrhaging of Travellers from the second level system linked to experiences of prejudice and the transition from single teacher to multiple teacher environments. Most importantly, we found that while the age 15-19 period, is critical for settled teenagers in laying the foundations for their progression into the workforce or further education, it is also the critical period for progression in Traveller culture. However, Traveller progression is based almost entirely on marriage which signals entry into adulthood and is linked to status and income generation within Traveller culture. Thus, large numbers of Travellers are leaving the school system when they reach this age group in order to marry. As a result of patterns of early marriage within the Traveller community, the provision of adult education services for Travellers will be a critical factor in facilitating Traveller participation in Irish society for many years to come.



## Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, our recommendations include the following:

- Because of the extremely low levels of self-esteem and confidence amongst Travellers and the expectation by many Travellers that they will experience prejudice from the settled community, there will continue to be a need for dedicated Traveller adult education spaces within the Irish education system.
- We recommend that these spaces should be units located within existing VEC campuses which are designated Traveller spaces where Traveller culture is visibly valued and celebrated
- The remit of these units should extend beyond basic educational provision and they should be viewed primarily as support centres for Travellers whose primary goal is to assist the broad integration of Travellers into Irish society.
- A number of different activities should be undertaken in these units: (1) The provision of dedicated Traveller only programmes on literacy, numeracy and personal development. These programmes should be part-time and flexible; (2) The provision of broader personal competencies programmes focusing on childcare, nutrition, health, woodwork etc. which would be open to both Travellers and members of the settled community; (3) These units should function as a point of contact between the Traveller community and agencies such as the HSE and Gardaí; (4) These spaces should be sites where Travellers can access advice and support on legal rights, counselling etc. Learners at the Centres should be provided with childcare facilities and travel allowances.
- A new Centre would run a 'Preparation for Further Education and Work Programme' over one year/ six month period which would be open to both Travellers and the settled community. Participants could only take this programme once and would receive a training allowance. The programme should involve a short work placement.
- Travellers who progress from these units to the mainstream VEC should be given extensive peer support which is sensitive to a number of issues such as: whether the individual wants to be identified as a Traveller, the pressures of Traveller family obligations, the need to modify welfare entitlements, feuding and the broader culture clashes experienced by Travellers linked to progression.
- Staff at these units should be available to work on other programmes taught within the VEC campus.

# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction



## Chapter One - Introduction

The Irish Traveller community has been consistently recognised as one of the most stigmatized and disadvantaged minority groups in the Republic of Ireland (MacLaughlin, 1995, Fanning, 2002, Garner, 2004, Walker, 2008). The marginalisation of Irish Travellers is particularly evident in the Irish education system where despite government commitments to intercultural education<sup>i</sup>, just 102 Travellers completed the Leaving Certificate (DES, 2009). In order for Irish Travellers to fully participate in Irish society, they must at the very least, be literate, numerate and understand their rights, entitlements and obligations as citizens of the Irish state. Yet, given the lack of engagement between Irish Travellers and the state's education system, the potential for education providers to assist and support the integration of Travellers into Irish society is currently limited. This report was commissioned by the National Associations of Travellers' Centres (NATC) in light of the findings of the Value for Money Review (2008) and the report of An Bord Snip Nua (2009) which recommended the phasing out of Traveller Training Centres. The object of the research is not to reverse this recommendation but rather to map the way forward in terms of adult education for Travellers in 21st century Ireland.

Within this introductory chapter, the rationale for this research on Traveller adult education is outlined in detail. The immediate context of Traveller Training Centre closures is reviewed within the broader context of anti-Traveller prejudice in Irish society. The design and methodology utilised in our research as well as the range of ethical considerations which informed the study is discussed. The parameters of our study in terms of our differentiated vision of the Travelling and settled community is explained. Finally, the conceptual framework underpinning this study which explores how education can contribute to broader processes of inter-cultural integration is presented.

### Rationale

The first Traveller Training Centre (St. Joseph's Training Centre, Ennis) was established in 1974 to meet the education and employability needs of the local Traveller community. In the subsequent 10 years, 15 centres providing 350 places for Travellers were established. The target group for these Centres was mainly young Travellers who had left school with either minimal or no qualifications. During the 1990s, responsibility for the network of TTCs changed from Fás to the Dept. of Education and this shift led to an increased emphasis on providing learners with holistic education. In 2008, a *Value for Money Review* conducted by the Dept. of Education and Science found that the 33 Traveller Training Centres

‘were effective in addressing learners’ needs for personal and social development’. However, authors of the report indicated that the TTCs should be phased out over the next 10-15 years ‘as participation rates for Travellers increase at post-primary level in the future’. *The Value for Money Review* concluded ‘in the long term (15 years) there should be no segregated provision for adults’ (2008, p.13).

In 2009, the report of *An Bord Snip Nua* recommended the hastening of this phase-out period to two to three years. The rationale for this change was outlined as follows:

A Value for Money report published in April 2008 evaluated the STTC programme and found that **progression rates** (either to employment or further education and training) are low at 37% compared to other programmes... It is recommended that the provision for the Senior Traveller Training Centres (€25m) be wound down over the next 2 to 3 years with participants being integrated into mainstream adult and further education programmes run by the Department of Education and Science (McCarthy, 2009, p.5).

While the majority of stakeholders in Traveller Adult Education recognise the need to move from segregated to integrated provision, concerns have been raised about the way in which the goal of progression has been utilised as a benchmark to measure the success of Traveller Training Centres. Within the Teacher Unions, it has been argued that this benchmark does not fully acknowledge the level of prejudice which Travellers encounter in Irish society and the extent of cultural difference between the Traveller community and the settled community in relation to attitudes to work and further education<sup>ii</sup>.

Given the timeframe outlined by *An Bord Snip Nua*, it is important to note that after the closure of the Traveller Training Centre in Mullingar in 2008, none of the 52 Travellers who attended the Centre were subsequently integrated into mainstream adult education despite efforts by local adult education services. If this situation were to be repeated around the country, the closure of Traveller Training Centres would result in a significant loss of Travellers from the education system in Ireland.

In this report, we investigate the degree to which anti-Traveller prejudice operates as an obstacle to Traveller progression into further mainstream education and workplace contexts. Secondly, we examine how some distinctive elements of Traveller culture such as nomadism, early marriage and the pre-eminence of the extended family also curtail Traveller participation in the workforce and mainstream

education. We highlight the experiences of Travellers who have entered the workforce and higher education particularly in terms of their struggles to reconcile their Traveller identity with broader participation in Irish society. While we acknowledge that the TTCs have failed to deliver on the goal of progression, we explore how TTC programmes have provided Travellers with the ‘personal competencies’ to engage in other forms of integration into Irish society. Indeed, the achievements of the TTCs in this area was recognised by the Value for Money Review which found ‘that those learners who engaged fully with the programme that was on offer to them in their centres had positive learning experiences, improved self-esteem and self-worth and enhanced personal and social development’ (VFMR, 2008, p.12). These personal competencies are vital for successful integration in contemporary European societies (Byram, 2003, p.50-66). Therefore, while recognising the inevitability of the closure of the TTCs, this report had a number of key objectives...

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- To interrogate why so little progression had emerged from the work of the TTCs and to examine this question from the perspective of stakeholders in Traveller Adult Education and Travellers themselves.
  - To explore the distinction between the ‘personal competencies’ and work based skills within modules being taught in the centres and evaluate how these programmes impact on Traveller’s capacity to integrate into Irish society.
  - To map the services and support being provided by some centres which were not strictly part of their remit such as conflict resolution, point of contact for agencies such as Gardaí, HSE.
  - To evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of programmes provided by the Traveller Training Centres in terms of broader debates about segregation, integration and assimilation between the Traveller and settled communities in Ireland.
  - To investigate the successes and failures of mainstream education services in meeting the needs of the Traveller community given that integration into mainstream further education is the option being recommended both by *An Bord Snip Nua* and the *Value for Money Review*. In this context, we sought to examine why despite the high levels of enrolment of Travellers at primary level and the high rate of transition to post-primary level, only 102 Travellers completed the Leaving Certificate in 2007/2008.
  - To investigate Travellers’ own experience of progression into the workforce and higher education.
  - Finally, given that the TCCs will be phased out over the coming years, we explore how adult education services can best meet the needs of Traveller learners in the future.
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## National Policy Context

Although the Traveller community in Ireland is not recognised as an ethnic minority (McVeigh, 2007), the cultural differences between Travellers and the settled majority have generated a range of tensions and conflicts since the 1960s (Gmelch, 1977, 1985, MacLaughlin, 1995, Fanning, 2002, Garner, 2004, Hayes, 2006, Walker, 2008). According to the 2006 National Census, there are 22,369 Travellers in Ireland although these figures are regarded by many stakeholders as an underestimate of the Traveller population<sup>iii</sup>.

Historically, the key cultural difference between Travellers and the settled community has centred on the practice of nomadism (Donahue, McVeigh and Ward, 2005). It is estimated that 77% of Travellers currently live in houses. However, Michael McDonagh (1994) argues that the nomadic mindset continues to be central to Traveller culture. He comments...

When Travellers speak of travelling, we mean something different from what country people [settled people] usually understand by it... Country people travel to get from A to B but for Travellers, the physical fact of moving is just one aspect of a nomadic mind-set that permeates every aspect of our lives. Nomadism entails a way of looking at the world, a different way of perceiving things, a different attitude to accommodation, to work and to life in general (1994, p.95).

Along with nomadism, the extended family plays a very distinctive and dominant role in the Traveller value system (Gmelch, 1985, Helleiner, 2000, Ní Shúinéir(a), 2005). These cultural features form the basis of a collective identity which is more at odds in many ways, with the value system of the settled community in Ireland than the ethnic identities of many migrant communities (Hayes, 2007). This point was highlighted by community stakeholders and Travellers such as Jean who comments 'being a Traveller in Ireland today is harder than being a black person living in Ireland, or you know Chinese or whatever, I think it's very hard'. Given the scale of this cultural difference, responding to the educational needs of Irish adult Travellers presents a significant challenge to an Irish state which has formally committed itself to a policy of intercultural integration<sup>iv</sup>.

State policy on Irish Travellers can be separated into three distinct phases based on the reports of three government bodies. The *Report of the Commission of Itinerancy* (1963) explicitly used the language of assimilation in trying to identify how the 'problem' of Travellers might be solved. The report recommended housing Travellers as the most effective means of assimilating them into the

settled community. It noted that all policies aimed at Travellers 'should always have as their aim the eventual absorption of the itinerants into the general community' (DSW, 1963, p.106). The settlement project which emerged from this report was widely criticised subsequently as assimilatory and as stigmatizing Traveller culture as deviant (Fanning, 2002).

The *Report of the Travelling People Review Body* (1983) recognised that the settlement policies which resulted from the Itinerancy Commission were informed by an assimilatory perspective. The report acknowledged that 'the concept of absorption is unacceptable, implying as it does the swallowing up of the minority Traveller group by the dominant settled community and the subsequent loss of Traveller identity' (1983, p.6). However, the report went on to assert that housing was still the best form of accommodation for Travellers. In addition, some of the language utilised portrayed Traveller culture as inferior rather than simply different to the culture of the settled community (Walker, 2008, p.31).

The *Report of the Taskforce on the Travelling Community* (1995) is viewed as a considerable step forward in Traveller-Settled relations by all stakeholders in our sample. It recommended that the distinctive elements of Traveller culture be recognised and supported by a range of government policies. Following the publication of the report, a number of significant policy interventions were undertaken and consultation bodies established such as the Traveller *Accommodation Unit* and the *National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee*.

Despite these reforms, Travellers are still not recognised as an ethnic minority in Irish society, a position which 'has significant practical implications in the promotion of equality of opportunity for Travellers and in the elimination of discrimination experienced by Travellers' (Equality Authority, 2006, p.8). In addition, members of the Traveller community continue to face high levels of prejudice and discrimination even as the Irish state has become more diverse and multi-cultural (McGinnity et al, 2006, Hayes, 2007). Apart from general levels of prejudice in terms of name-calling, refusal of entry to public houses etc, there are a number of specific issues which reflect the marginalisation and disadvantage which continue to be experienced by Travellers. These issues include poor Traveller health (Murphy, 2002, Combat Poverty, 2009), high suicide rates (Walker, 2008), feuding (Ní Shúinéir(a), 2005, McGearty et al., 2008) and high rates of domestic violence (Watson and Parsons, 2005). There are also a number of issues highlighted by settled stakeholders as causing tensions. These issues include temporary encampments and trespass, waste and littering (Crowley & Kitchin, 2007).

Given the scale of these tensions, debates about the future of Traveller adult education in Ireland are critical not only to evolution of the Irish education system but also to the development of genuine inter-culturalism in Irish society.

### **Parameters of this Study**

Very little of the existing sociological and anthropological research on the Traveller community has had any impact on contemporary Irish education policy. There are two main scholarly traditions in terms of research on Travellers. Since the 1970's, a body of anthropological and historical literature on Travellers has emerged which aims to describe the distinctive elements of Traveller culture (Gmelch, 1985, Gmelch, 1991, McCann, O'Siochain and Ruane, 1994, Helleiner, 2000, Hayes 2006, Bhreatnach and Breathnach, 2006, Bhreatnach, 2007). This literature has attempted to develop an accurate history of the Traveller community, provide studies of Traveller language and identify distinctive extended family structures and gender roles.

Alongside the anthropological tradition, sociologists, social policy analysts and geographers have published work which focuses on conflict between Travellers and the settled community (MacLaughlin, 1995, Fanning, 2002, Garner, 2004, McVeigh, 2007). Despite the sophistication and complexity of these research initiatives, a number of significant gaps continue to exist in terms of scholarship on Traveller culture. Very little mapping has occurred of the internal hierarchies within the Traveller community and indeed, academic studies have devoted little attention to the experience and views of the wealthier members of the Traveller community (Dillon, 2006). Despite the increasing prevalence of feuding, very little research exists on Traveller perspectives on conflict and conflict resolution apart from two studies conducted on feuding in the Midlands (Ní Shúinéir(a), 2005. McGearty et al., 2008). Most importantly, within existing research, the Traveller community and the settled community tend to be presented homogenous entities. In fact, during the course of this research we found very significant regional differences between Traveller communities, a feature also highlighted by Hickland (1994)<sup>v</sup>. We also found that the proportion of Travellers in relation to settled persons within a community had a significant impact on Traveller-settled relations<sup>vi</sup>. These regional and demographic differences are not sufficiently recognised within either current scholarly analysis or contemporary public policy debates on Traveller-Settled relationships. It is also important to recognise the differentiation in the 'settled' community in Ireland which has become more diverse in terms of culture and ethnicity since 1996 (Watt, 2006, Gilligan, 2006).

## Design and Methodology of Research

We began this study by gathering and reviewing all the existing quantitative and qualitative data available on Travellers in the Irish education system and the Traveller community as a whole. A full list of books and reports which were used to inform this documentary analysis phase of the research is provided in the bibliography. Having reviewed this data, a number of interview schedules for Traveller focus groups and stakeholders in Traveller education were developed in association with our research assistant, Deirdre O’Riordan<sup>vii</sup>. These interview schedules were piloted in a range of locations in Cork, Limerick and Dublin<sup>viii</sup>. Based on feedback from this pilot series of interviews, the research instruments were refined and finessed. In constructing the interview schedule, considerable attention was devoted to the specific ethical challenges in engaging in research with minority communities. Thus, due care was taken to develop questions in language which was culturally appropriate and respectful to all involved in the project<sup>ix</sup>. A total number of 96 interviews were conducted<sup>x</sup>.

The research process took place in four separate locations selected on the basis that each site has a different model of Traveller adult education. In each context, Travellers who were engaged with the education system and Travellers who had no contact with education services were interviewed. We also interviewed stakeholders in Traveller education with particular attention being devoted to those who had tried to facilitate Traveller progression through the organisation of placements. We also spoke to employers who had been involved in these schemes. Finally, we conducted a series of interviews with community stakeholders in **health** (doctors, social workers, Traveller nurses, HSE officials); **criminal justice** (members of An Garda Síochána and probation services) and **local environment** (local councillors, community activists, and local residents groups) in order to map the broader dynamic of Traveller-Settled relationships in each location. The four locations selected were:

- **Ennis** - St. Joseph’s Training Centre is a stand alone centre located on an Industrial Estate in the town. The oldest Traveller Training Centre in Ireland, it has a student cohort currently of 52. The Traveller population in Ennis is approximately 428<sup>xi</sup>.
- **Dundalk** - The Tara Training Centre in the town is integrated into the local VEC campus and caters for 24 students. Dundalk has a Traveller population of approximately 327.
- **Mullingar** - We chose Mullingar as our third location because the town had a Traveller Training Centre which closed down due to a local feud in 2008. Mullingar has a Traveller population of 351.
- **Waterford** - We initially selected Sligo as our fourth location as the town had no Traveller Training Centre. However, we found it extremely difficult to get access to the Traveller community in the town perhaps reflecting the low levels of integration between Travellers



and the settled community which were in evidence there. As a result, we decided to conduct the final stage of our research in Waterford, a town which has also had a high profile local Traveller feud and a Traveller population of 306 persons. Waterford does not have a Traveller Training Centre; however, the town has a number of other services which cater to Travellers such as *Youthreach*.

The data gathered during this second stage of the research process was coded and analysed in two distinct phases. Using sociological frameworks, the entire interview and focus groups series was evaluated in order to identify the views of Travellers themselves in relation to education and progression. This sociological segment of the project attempted to map the significant tensions experienced by Travellers in managing the external 'pressures to integrate' imposed by state agencies and service providers with internal pressures from their community to maintain their commitment to their cultural identity.

Educational frameworks were utilised in order to evaluate the entire data set in terms of national and international debates concerning education rights and intercultural education models. The segment of the research project sought to investigate whether existing programmes provided by TTCs supported the development of personal competencies by Travellers, a significant factor in their integration into the local community. The challenges and difficulties which Travellers experienced while participating in mainstream educational services were also examined. Finally, a review of interviews with community stakeholders from both disciplinary perspectives sought to establish whether the existence of dedicated Traveller education services had any impact on Traveller-settled relationships in local communities.

### **Conceptual Framework for Research**

The conceptual framework which underpins this research is based on comparative analysis of segregated, assimilatory and integrated models of educational provision. For the purposes of this research, we define segregation as 'the physical and social separation of categories of people' (Bolaffi et al. 2001, p.73). Our definition of inter-cultural integration is drawn from the report *Integration is a Two way Process* which defines the term as the 'ability to participate in Irish society, to the extent that a person needs and wishes in all major components of society without having to relinquish his or her own cultural identity' (DJELR, 2003, p.42). Finally, the term assimilation is defined as 'the process through which a minority takes on the values, norms and ways of behaving of the dominant mainstream group is accepted by the latter as a full member of their society' (Fulcher and Scott, 2003, p.861).

Public policy debates about inter-ethnic and inter-cultural relationships in Irish society have become much more prominent since the major wave of inward migration to Ireland between 1996 and 2006. Most analysts of race and inter-ethnic relations in the Irish context have included the Traveller community in their research despite the problematic status of the community as a minority. Indeed, the most prominent analysts such as Bryan Fanning (2002) and Steve Garner (2004) have devoted particular attention to the experience of Irish Travellers. Since 2003, the Irish government has committed itself to the model of inter-cultural integration as the philosophy underpinning its inter-ethnic relationships (Gray, 2007). However, there is some evidence that these aspirations towards inter-culturalism have yet to be translated into applied policy in the education, health services and the criminal justice system. Indeed, Gerry Boucher has argued that the Irish government has adopted a *laissez-faire* approach to integration policy which ‘off-loads much of the success (and lack of success) for integrating into Irish society onto immigrants and indigenous individuals, families and collective organizations’ (2008, p.2). He adds that this *laissez faire* approach tends to exacerbate the difficulties experienced by marginalised socially excluded groups as it ‘tends to reinforce and reproduce the already existing hierarchies of wealth, status and power in Irish society’ (2008, p.2). This broader appraisal of integration policy in Ireland informs the analysis of specific educational contexts presented in this research.

In the next chapter of this report, the tension between aspirations towards inter-cultural education in education legislation is contrasted with the absence of applied policies to support this inter-culturalism. Chapter Three focuses on the theme of progression and seeks to map the obstacles to progression encountered by Travellers and stakeholders in Traveller adult education. The clashes between the state’s model of progression and culturally distinct aspects of Traveller culture such as nomadism, gender roles, feuding and obligations to extended family is also examined. Chapter Four presents the findings of our comparative research on the four sites: Ennis, Dundalk, Mullingar and Waterford. It outlines the strengths and weaknesses of the current Traveller Training Centre model and seeks to establish whether their existence has had any impact on inter-cultural integration in each location. Chapter Five focuses on the experiences of Travellers in mainstream education services and seeks to interrogate, in particular, why so few Travellers complete post-primary education. In our concluding chapter, we outline how adult education for Travellers might develop given the proposed closure of the TTCs and the considerable cultural tensions which continue to exist between the Traveller and settled communities in Ireland.

- i NCCA (2005) Intercultural Guidelines for the Primary School. Dublin: NCCA. NCCA (2006) Intercultural Guidelines for the Primary School. Dublin: NCCA.
- ii TUI 'Bord Snip Recommendations would destroy education system' Press Release 16 July 2009.
- iii Liégeois notes that Census figures on Gypsies/Travellers tend to be inaccurate as Travellers fear surveillance from the state and are reluctant to declare themselves on census forms (1994, p.29). The annual count of Traveller families by local authorities is viewed as a more accurate measure of the size of the community by education stakeholders and Traveller organisations such as the Irish Traveller Movement. Although the 2006 census measured the size of the Traveller population at less than 23,000, the Local Authority count for the same year found 7,691 Traveller families. As the Central Statistics Office have found that the average Traveller family size is 4.22, this estimate would put the Traveller population at 32,456. Pavee Point estimate that the Traveller population was approximately 30,000 during 2006. For further discussion of the problems with demographic data on Traveller see Walker, 2008, p.27.
- iv Interdepartmental Working Group on the Integration of Refugees in Ireland (2003) Integration is a two way process. Dublin: Dept of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.
- v In her 1994 study, Cailiosa Hickland found for instance: 'The Tuam population who do travel do so without moving their entire household... For Cork Travellers, however, movement is an integral part of their existence. Their mobility is highly seasonal'. Hickland, C. (1994) Nomadism and Identity: The Case of Irish Travellers (Unpublished MA Thesis, Dept of Geography, University College Cork).
- vi Having conducted interviews and research in our four chosen locations, we conducted a number of subsequent interviews in Rathkeale and Longford, towns which have high Traveller populations and found that the demographic context had a significant impact on Traveller-Settled relationships.
- vii In developing the interview schedules for the focus groups conducted with Travellers, we drew on literature highlighting the specific methodological challenges required for focus groups with minority communities (Culley, Hudson and Rapport, 2007, p.102). We also sought to increase our cultural competence as researchers within the Traveller community by considering questions of cultural meaning, gender relations and specific linguistic phrases frequently utilised by Travellers prior to the main research process (Suh, Kagan and Strumpf, 2009, p.194).
- viii The piloting and evaluation stages of the research process proved to be among the most useful. We refined and re-worked the interview and focus group schedules considerably after the pilot stage to focus more closely on the theme of progression. The benefits of this type of piloting in educational research is also highlighted by Desimone and Carlson Le Floch (2004).
- ix In her paper on 'Researching Minority Ethnic Communities: A Note on Ethic's', Laura Ryan notes that truly ethical research in relation to the Irish Traveller community must 'consider the usual aspects of research ethics, namely informed consent and confidentiality procedures but additionally focus upon procedures to promote dialogue between the researchers and the 'researched' minority ethnic communities' (2009, p.1). While guaranteeing anonymity and confidentiality, we also sought at each stage of the research to engage and manage the power disparities between the researchers and the 'researched' in order to produce a project which was ultimately collaborative in its findings. We also drew on Sieber's (1992) core principles which should guide ethical choices in research, namely beneficence, respect and justice.
- x The structure of the sample was as follows. Travellers interviewed (50), Community Stakeholders (46).
- xi All estimates of town populations based on Census 2006 figures.

## CHAPTER 2

### Travellers & Irish Education Policy

## Chapter Two - Travellers & Irish Education Policy

The rapid industrialisation and urbanisation of Irish society in the 1960's resulted in the movement of Travellers to larger centres of population and the redundancy of many of their traditional skills (Lee, 1989, Gmelch, 1985). The greater numbers of Traveller encampments in urban centres also increased the visibility of the Traveller community in Irish society (Helleiner, 2000, Gmelch, 1991). The report of the *Commission on Itinerancy* (1963) which represent the State's first major response to these changes not only used the language of assimilation but was also underpinned by a philosophy of charity which had a direct impact on subsequent Traveller education policy. This is clearly indicated in the terms of reference of the Commission of Itinerancy which included:

1: to enquire into the problem arising from the presence in the country of itinerants in considerable numbers; 3 (b): to promote their absorption into the general community; 3 (c): pending such absorption, to reduce to a minimum the disadvantages to themselves and to the community resulting from their itinerant habits; (GOI, 1963, p.11).

Thus, members of the Traveller community were characterized as being in need of assistance and supports in order for them to successfully assimilate into Irish society. It is within this policy context that the first Traveller Training Centres (TTC's) were established in the early 1970's. They were initially set up by local voluntary groups, with a view to 'supplementing the educational deficiencies of young Travellers aged between fifteen and twenty five years of age, preparing them to take up gainful employment or avail of further or more advanced training at the end of the course' (Report on the Travelling Community 1983).

A variety of organisations became involved in the development of the TTC's over the subsequent thirty years. From 1976 to 1998, the *Vocational Educational Committee's* (VEC) and *The Industrial Training Authority* (AnCo/Fás) were involved in the Centres and their development was supported by funding received from the European Social Fund (ESF). This was a difficult period for the Irish economy, with 'unemployment figures in the high teens and mass immigration in evidence' (McGorman and Sugrue, 2007, p.5). Within this economic context, the individual's participation in the Irish education system was viewed in light of their potential to contribute to the Irish economy. Therefore, the primary focus of the Traveller Training Centres became up-skilling Travellers for entry into mainstream further education and the workforce.

From the mid 1990's, Ireland's economy entered a phase of rapid growth which led to a dramatic decrease in unemployment (Nolan, O'Connell and Whelan, 2000). This improved economic performance promoted a new confidence in Irish society (Coulter and Coleman, 2003). During this period, there was also a reversal of historical migration patterns. In 1996, Ireland shifted from a pattern of emigration to become a country of net inward migration (Fanning, 2002). Thus, in the 2006 census, 10% of the Irish population were of migrant origin (CSO, 2006). Developments in Ireland's educational policy from the mid 1990's through to the 21st century reflect not only these demographic changes but the educational priorities emerging within the European policy context. European policy makers were moving to an emphasis on lifelong learning and the development of models of intercultural citizenship in order to support intercultural integration (Council of the European Union, 2010, p.5).

In April 1998, it was decided to move responsibility for Traveller Training Centres to the Department of Education and Science (DES). As a result of this change, it was anticipated that the focus of the TTC's would shift away from the assimilatory principles which informed their establishment. Instead, there were hopes that the Centres would embody a more holistic vision of education, reflective of 'the eight key competences necessary for personal fulfilment, and active citizenship' as well as 'social inclusion and employability in a knowledge society' (Council of the European Union, 2010, p.5). However, following the publication of the Inspectors' Evaluation Reports on TTC's in 2006, the *Value for Money Review* (2008) and the report of An Bord Snip Nua (2009), it was evident that the work of the Centres was still being evaluated in light of the relatively crude benchmark of progression. Thus, the success of TTCs was being considered solely in terms of the numbers of Travellers moving from the Centres into further education and the workforce and not on their development as intercultural citizens.

Within this chapter, the gap between changes to educational policy language and the actual benchmarks of success as applied to the Traveller Training Centre, is explored. The development of Irish educational policy from the assimilatory philosophy evident in the 1960's, to the focus on inclusion which emerged in the 1990's is examined. Finally, the development of contemporary aspirations towards inter-cultural integration is also explored. This changing educational context is mapped with a view to exploring whether the shifts in policy language from assimilatory principles towards intercultural integration is reflected in the lived experience of Travellers.

## Education, Assimilation and the Traveller Community

In order to understand why the principles of assimilation underpinned educational provision for Travellers in the 1960's, it is necessary to examine the role of education in the broader construction of national identities. According to Kymlika (2003), virtually every Western democracy has engaged in a process of constructing national identities in order to support the operation of the nation-state and national economies. However, this process tends to be controlled by those elites who are already most powerful in a given society (Anderson, 1983). Thus, the state becomes 'possession of a dominant national group, who use the state to privilege its identity, language, history, culture, literature, myths, religion' (Kymlicka, 2003, p. 148). This active construction of a national identity and a nationally homogeneous culture, inevitably involves suppressing alternative or minority identities. As a result, cultural minorities are faced with 'either exclusion or assimilation' (Kymlicka, 2003, p. 149). Nation states have used education as the primary means of embedding this sense of national identity among their citizens by using schools and curricula to transmit cultural norms, beliefs and values (Crowley et al, 2006, Bhatti, 2006, Wylie, 2004, Schiffauer et al, 2004, Sleeter, 2001, May, 1999). Therefore education institutions come to constitute the critical sites where enculturation<sup>i</sup> of national identities occurs (Apple, 2002).

Having gained independence from Britain in 1922, the Irish State began the task of developing a homogenous Irish national identity by foregrounding the distinctive elements of Irish culture such as the Irish language, the Catholic religion and traditional Irish games and sports (Ferriter, 2004). Because education was the primary means by which this process of enculturation was undertaken, 'Irish schools' culture was deeply informed by a consensualist ethos and a bias towards conformity' (Kenny, 2004, p.17). In light of this emphasis, the educational system did not encourage or promote difference within its educational structures or practices.

Until the 1960s, references to the Traveller community were entirely absent from education policy and provision in Ireland. We can trace three phases or approaches that have emerged since this period, namely an assimilatory approach, an inclusive approach and an intercultural approach. The first approach, the assimilatory approach encompasses a deficit model of educational provision, which locates the 'problem' of Traveller participation in Irish education as resting with the Travellers themselves. It characterizes members of the Traveller community as being in need of assistance in order to assimilate into the settled majority. This deficit model was reflected in educational practices which according to the DEIS report included 'segregation as a short-term strategy which was aimed to prepare Traveller children for absorption into the 'normal' or 'mainstream' classes' (DEIS, 2005, p.52).



## An Inclusive Approach

During the 1990's, the first attempts to move away from assimilatory deficit model became apparent. During this period, the language of policy documentation began to fore ground the concept of inclusion. The model of inclusive education has since been defined by of the DES, as a 'system that... incorporates equality and diversity together with an understanding of anti-discrimination, anti-racism, anti-bias, and inter-culturalism' (DES, 2006). This move towards inclusive education was strongly driven by Special Educational Needs (SEN) interest groups and was linked to the outcome of a number of high profile cases brought by parents of children with SEN against the Irish State<sup>ii</sup>. Aspirations towards inclusion were also evident in the report of the *Task Force on the Travelling Community* (1995) which recognised Travellers as a culturally distinct group in Irish society. This recognition of cultural difference represented an important first step in the redefinition of the Traveller community's relationship to education as moving towards a model based on cultural rights rather than a response to some deficit within their own culture.

However, subsequent policy documentation fell far short of the enforcement of education rights. Instead, the softer policy option of inclusion or inclusive education emerged which fore grounded respect for diversity within Irish education as opposed to the support of every individual's right to an equal education. Indeed, one could argue that assimilatory principles were still evident in this policy change as Travellers still had to adapt themselves to the education system of the settled majority in Irish society. Thus, the rights of Travellers as a culturally distinct group were overshadowed by the embedded but continuing principles of assimilation.

The commitment towards inclusive education which is evident in the *White Paper on Charting our Educational Future* (1995), in the *White Paper on Adult Education* (2000) and in the *Education Act* (1998) did however, have some positive results. From the mid 1990's onwards, there was an acknowledgement that all Traveller children did not have Special Educational Needs. Two reports were influential in this process namely, the *Report on Preschool Education for Travellers* (1995a) and the *Task Force on the Travelling Community* (1995). The latter stated that 'all Travellers do not share the same educational needs and, while special provisions may be required to meet the varied educational needs, access to mainstream provision must be regarded as the norm for Travellers' (1995, p.10). This shift resulted in a general acknowledgement that Traveller children should receive their education in mainstream schools and in integrated rather than segregated structures.

While this policy change was an important move away from the deficit model of education in relation to Travellers, some remnants of the previous SEN culture remain evident in the administration of Traveller education. For instance, Kenny (2004) notes that although Traveller education is currently located under the aegis of the Social Inclusion Unit of the DES, 'the organisation of funding channels keep it linked to the Special Needs Unit' (2004, p.15-16). Thus, there remains an assumption that the innate learning needs of Travellers are best still supported in the Special Educational Needs sector, an approach which reflects not only the deficit model but considerable prejudice towards Traveller children.

The commitments of the Education Act (1998) also represent a significant step forward in relation to the position of Travellers in the Irish education system as it asserted that 'the state respects the diversity of values, beliefs, languages and traditions in Irish society' (1998, p.5). However, it is important to note that this aspiration is couched in language which stresses 'respect for diversity' as opposed to a more robust assurance of equal rights based on cultural difference. On further examination of the legalisation, one could conclude that the government appears to evade its responsibility in relation to educational provision for all citizens including Travellers. The *Education Act* (1998) states that the educational services provided for children are based on the resources available to schools highlighting that the state is obliged 'to provide that as far as practicable and having regard to the resources available... a level and quality of education appropriate to meeting the needs and abilities of those people' (1998, p.10). However, critics such as McGorman and Sugrue (2007) claim that this reference to available resources constitutes a step backwards from the rights awarded to all children of the State to an equal education enshrined in the 1937 Constitution.

Furthermore, the Education Act (1998) did not succeed in addressing some of the fundamental practices which result in unequal educational provision for Travellers and other minority groups. These practices are most evident in terms of enrolment policy. The legislation does require schools to establish and maintain an admission policy that provides maximum accessibility to the school. However, the Act also allows schools the right to reject pupils under certain circumstances. The negative effect of this opt-out clause is highlighted in the *Report of the Task Force on Student Behaviour in Second Level Schools* (2006), which notes that parents seeking to enrol a child with challenging behaviour in a school of their choice in the locality may be advised to place their child in an alternative school. The basis for this advice from the refusing school is that the other school is in a better position to cater for the child. However 'as a result of this perception of an open enrolment policy; some schools attracted a disproportionate number of students who require additional supports' (DES, 2006, p.71).

Thus, this opt-out clause had generated marked imbalances in student intake where some schools are accepting large numbers of students with special needs or who are members of ethnic and cultural minority groups while other schools tend to have a student intake which is much more homogenous in terms of culture, ethnicity, socio-economic background and special educational needs. This imbalance in student intake was evident in our research where almost half of the Traveller parents interviewed highlighted that some second level schools were more open to enrolling Traveller children than others.

This disjuncture between the aspirations of education policy and educational practice is also evident in adult education policy. European educational policy on lifelong learning and the concept of interculturalism clearly underpins adult educational policy in Ireland as outlined in *Learning For Life: White Paper on Adult Education* (2000). However, the assimilatory goal of progression to the workforce is still the primary goal of the lifelong agenda in Ireland as evident in the *Report and Recommendations for Traveller Education Strategy* (2006). This report states that ‘the lifelong learning agenda is regarded as key to delivering on employability and social inclusion since it enables individuals to access more and higher quality jobs’ (2006, p.11).

The weakness of the inclusive approach is also evident within the process of curricular reform in the Irish context. For example, the introduction of the *Revised Primary Curriculum* and in particular, the revised *History Curriculum* in 1999, provided the DES with a practical opportunity to foreground the concept of cultural difference within the Irish education system. These curriculum changes had the potential to ensure all pupils in the Irish education system developed an enhanced understanding, respect for and knowledge of cultural diversity as curricular content conveys subliminal and obvious messages to pupils (Gleeson, 2004). Waldron (2004) notes that while the content of the *Revised History Curriculum* appears to acknowledge diversity in general stating that ‘the History Curriculum will develop a sense of personal, local, national, European and wider identities through studying the history and cultural inheritance of local and other communities’ (1999, p.13). She concludes that it ‘fails to problematize the historical roots of either class or gender’ (Waldron, 2004, p.219). Furthermore, while suggesting the topic of nomadism as a teaching theme, there is no mention the Irish Travellers. This absence suggests a lack of vision as to how respect for cultural diversity should be manifested in practical terms within the Irish education system. The *Revised Curriculum* attempts to engage with diversity by examining difference in other cultures outside Ireland, but does not subject the cultural differences evident in local Irish culture to scrutiny. Thus, in practical terms, the revised primary curriculum was not underpinned by the principles of intercultural education.

This weakness in addressing issues of local cultural diversity is not exclusive to the Irish education system. The German education system has also been criticised for introducing programmes aimed at enabling Germans to interact with citizens of other European countries but ignoring questions of engagement with local minorities such as the Turkish migrant community (Kymlicka, 2003). Kymlicka explains why this focus on distant cultures can emerge, stating

For most people, learning about a distant culture carries no historical or political baggage: one can simply enjoy and cherish the intercultural interaction. By contrast, interacting with neighbouring groups is typically wrapped up with unresolved political demands and long-standing fears and resentments. Local inter-culturalism almost always creates more anxiety and tension than global inter-culturalism, particularly in contexts where there is a long history of mistreatment and mistrust between the groups (2003, p.150).

The following section examines how the principles of inter-culturalism have gradually emerged within Irish educational literature, reflecting a broader European emphasis on the development of intercultural citizenship.

## **Intercultural Education and Intercultural Citizenship**

With the rapid rise in migration in Ireland between 1996 and 2006, cultural difference at last became the focus of attention in official educational documentation and scholarly literature. However, Kaya (2004) notes that there is often a mismatch between a state's aspiration towards inter-culturalism and the lived experience of its citizens. Kymlicka (2003) highlights three factors which shape this divide between aspiration and experience; (1) the extent to which policies are underpinned by issues of justice and rights, (2) the extent to which there is interaction between different cultural groups or communities, (3) the nature, duration and specific aims of the initiatives which seek to foster intercultural interaction and understanding of the fundamental nature of cultural differences. He maintains that addressing these three issues provides the social, cultural and political environment where intercultural citizens can develop and flourish. In this context, he defines an intercultural citizen as someone who...

has more positive personal attitudes towards diversity... who is curious rather than fearful about other peoples and cultures... who is open to learning about other ways of life, and willing to consider how issues look from other people's point of view... who feels comfortable interacting with people from other backgrounds, and so on (Kymlicka, 2003, p.149).

In the following sections, we examine the extent to which Ireland's educational policies and practices have incorporated the principles of inter-culturalism as outlined by Kymlicka and whether this aspiration towards inter-culturalism has impacted on Traveller education.

## Towards Intercultural Education

In 2005 and 2006, the NCCA issued *Guidelines on Intercultural Education for the Primary School* and *Guidelines on Intercultural Education for the Post Primary School* respectively. The Guidelines (NCCA, 2005 and 2006) define intercultural education as 'education which respects, celebrates and recognizes the normality of diversity in all areas of human life... It is education which promotes equality and human rights, challenges unfair discrimination and promotes the values upon which equality is built' (NCCA, 2005, p.3). While these documents foreground the concept of educational rights and respect for diversity, they are merely guidelines and are not underpinned by legislation. Thus, the divide between aspiration and experience in terms of inter-cultural education remains ever present in the Irish context. This weakness is highlighted in the findings of the *Behaviour Matters Report* (2006) which concludes 'It is easy to outline a wonderful set of inclusive, progressive values in the school brochure, but a lot more difficult to realise those ideas in practice... thus a schools' sense of moral purpose is often challenged by the growing realisation that their best efforts are sometimes powerless in the face of difficulties that extend well beyond the walls of the school' (2006(b), p.72).

The aspirations towards equality and respect for cultural difference which are evident in the Intercultural Guidelines are also identifiable in other educational publications which do refer specifically to Travellers. The Inspectorate published its *Guidelines on Traveller Education in Primary Schools* and *Guidelines on Traveller Education in Second-Level Schools* in 2002, where they state that the aim of DES policy on Traveller education 'is 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' (2002, p.5). However, the absence of practical policies to support these aspirations means that it is unlikely that these guidelines will have a significant impact on the lived educational experience of Travellers.

## Employment, Educational Policy and Social Interaction

Within contemporary Irish employment policy, there is little recognition of how the significant cultural differences between Travellers and the settled population contribute to low levels of employment of Travellers in the Irish workforce. In 2009, an ESRI report entitled '*Social Communities in Ireland*' reviewed the Census 2006 figures and noted that only 14.4% of all Travellers in the age range of 15+ are recorded as being in work, compared with 65.2% of the population as a whole aged 15 or over. Some 43% of Travellers of normal working age are reported as being unemployed, compared with 6% for the working-age population as a whole. 22% of Travellers are 'in home duties', in other words working full-time in the home, compared with 10% for the population as a whole. The percentage of Travellers reported as unable to work due to illness or disability is also relatively high at 8%, compared with 4% for the population (ESRI, 2009, p.66).

If we examine the *Employment Equality Acts* (1998 and 2004) and the *Equal Status Act* (2000) and *Equality Act* (2004), there are nine grounds on which discrimination is prohibited, one of which is membership of the Traveller community. Yet the existence of this protection appears to have had little impact on rates of Traveller employment in the Irish workforce. The difficulties experienced by Travellers in trying to enter the workforce have been evident to managers in Traveller Training Centres for some time. Indeed, the *Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy* (2006) highlighted how the TTC's had little if any success in arranging work placements for Travellers in the private sector considerable prejudice towards Travellers amongst employers. Garner (2004) notes that in attitudinal survey work done between 1972 and 2001, Travellers are found to be the subject of particularly hostile attitudes when compared with other minorities. There is little if any acknowledgement that this level of prejudice constitutes a significant barrier to Traveller progression in official educational documentation. The absence of this acknowledgement means that the benchmark of progression, remains in place as a measure of the success for TTC's. There is also an absence of positive discriminatory policies within education which might breakdown prejudice and promote further intercultural interaction between Travellers and the settled community. Such policies might ensure the representation of Travellers and other minority groups on the Board of Management of schools, on Parents' Associations and on curricular development committees which inform the work of the National Council of Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). There have been clear moves by the TTC's to ensure that Travellers are represented on the Boards of Management of the TTC's. While this is a step in the right direction, there is still little evidence of positive discriminatory practices in any other area of adult education.

## Opportunities Lost to Promote Intercultural Understanding

The introduction of the *Guidelines on Intercultural Education* provided the DES with a valuable opportunity to engage clearly with the concept of cultural difference and to promote intercultural interaction within the Irish education system. This document was a genuine attempt to target the majority community as the guidelines clearly aspired to ‘further reinforce the importance of a whole-school approach whereby the school changes into the intercultural and inclusive school’ (2006(b), p.19). However, the guidelines fell short of delivering on intercultural education according to the principles outlined by Kymlicka (2003) on two levels. Firstly, the Guidelines did not begin by engaging with indigenous cultural difference which exists in Ireland, namely the difference between the settled majority and the Irish Traveller community. Secondly, there was no subsequent in-service provision for teachers who were to be the implementers of this new approach to education. There was no public debate or discussion on the difference between the inclusive model of the 1990’s and the intercultural model. Versions of these models have evolved in the UK and US, where the distinct history of each society informed the development of culturally specific models of inter-cultural interaction. However, in the Irish context, the terminology and ideology was adopted from international models without significant debate about their relevance within the Irish context. Ireland is not alone in this uncritical borrowing of education policies and practices from other nations and regions. Green et al. argue that this practice has proved largely unsuccessful because ‘an attempt to transfer a policy that has worked well in one context at one period of time to another context in the same or different time, with little understanding of the present or the past is unlikely to succeed and in some cases, will fail miserably’(2007, p.220).

According to Barry (2009), the most significant factor inhibiting the development of inter-culturalism in Ireland is the belief that the economic factors assume primacy overall of all other educational policy considerations. As a result of this economic determinism, the main priority of state policy is to ensure all its citizens take up employment in order to contribute to the financial wellbeing of the state. The limitations of this approach are evident in *The Task Force on Lifelong Learning* (2002), which notes that the purpose of lifelong learning is primarily to facilitate entry to the workforce and one’s progression to further education is primarily to secure higher quality jobs.

Murphy (2006) and Gleeson (2004) explain the context for this emphasis, outlining that change to Irish education policy and curricula were driven by ‘an emphasis on economic development following the harsh 1980’s where unemployment levels were between fourteen and twenty percent’ (Gleeson,



2004, p.108). Lodge (2002) also contends that the key task of schooling has come to be perceived as the preparation of young people for the labour market. Indeed, the DES has made this emphasis explicit as one of the five goals of the DES Strategy Statement (2003-2005) is to contribute to Ireland's economic prosperity, development and international competitiveness. Given this emphasis, it would appear that the role of education in Irish society is intrinsically linked to the training of economically viable individuals.

A recent report by the European Commission in 2008 which examined educational policy across fourteen European Union States supports this view stating; 'Educational disadvantage has until recently been mainly constructed in socio-economic terms in Irish policy circles' (EC, 2008, p.10). This view is supported by the earlier work of Lodge and Lynch (2004) who observe that: 'Although vital for the promotion of equality generally, the focus on socioeconomic status has overshadowed the impact of other differences' (2004, p. 1).

Because of the emphasis placed by the Irish state on the education of economically viable individuals, the question of how cultural difference impacts on the individual's participation in the education system has been significantly neglected. One would hope that the recommendation by the *European Commission Report on Adult Education* would inform future Irish policy. It states 'Lifelong learning and mobility provided by high quality education and training are essential to enable all individuals to acquire the skills that are relevant not only to the labour market, **but also for social inclusion and active citizenship**' (CEU, 2010, p.19). However, we would argue that despite these European aspirations, the training of economically viable individuals remains another benchmark by which the success of Traveller education is measured.

## Measuring the Success of Traveller Education

There has been a substantial increase in the number of Traveller children enrolling in primary school in recent years. There were 8,158 Traveller children enrolled in mainstream primary schools in 2009 compared with 3,953 in 1988 (DES, 2009). Apart from enrolment figures, there are no other nationwide measures available of either the academic achievement of Travellers or the extent of their interactions with the settled community. When viewed from the perspective of enrolment solely, the rate of participation of Travellers in the post primary system is less favourable. The number of Travellers transferring from primary to post primary has increased in recent years with over 90% of Traveller students transferring in 2008 (DES, 2009).

However, it is in the rate of retention of Traveller pupils at post primary level that the large disparities between the settled community and the Traveller community become apparent. Only 56% of Travellers completed the Junior Certificate in 2008 compared with an estimated 94% of the broader Irish population and just 102 Travellers completed the Leaving Certificate. This is an estimated completion rate of less than 20% for post-primary education for Travellers, considerably lower than the national average of 84% (DES, 2009). In addition, there is evidence the number of Traveller boys engaging with post primary level education is significantly lower than that of female Travellers (DES, 2009). Chapter Five examines in detail the factors which contribute to this low retention rate.

It is within the context of this weak retention rate at post-primary level, that the work of the Traveller Training Centres can be examined. Currently there are thirty three Traveller Training Centres throughout the country which cater to just over 1,000 Travellers. From 1st January 2009, only Travellers aged eighteen years and over were eligible to apply to the Centres. Attendance at the Centres is supported for a maximum of two years and in certain circumstances three years, with training allowances and supplementary financial supports.

The DES measures of success by the TTCs solely on data related to progression into mainstream education and the workforce. Despite aspirations towards inter-culturalism, there is no acknowledgement that this form of progression is in essence a measurement of the extent to which Travellers are absorbing the cultural norms of the settled majority. This blindspot in the current benchmarks utilised is evident in the *Value for Money* Review (2008) which states; 'The 2005 figures indicate that only 11% (or 180) of learners (out of 1,564 that year) actually completed the foundation and progression phases of the programme... and only 11 out of 54 who completed the foundation phase went on to 'employment' with 6 going on to further education' (2008, p. 211). However, Bhatti notes that measures of success and failure in any educational institution are culturally constructed and notes that 'It is at the intersection of different ethnic communities' self perceptions, aspirations and the negotiation of power relations between the ethnic majority and ethnic minority communities, that academic and social aspects of 'success' and 'failure' are defined' (2006, p.134).

According to Hearne 'although progression is referred to throughout education policy literature and is still used as the measurement of achievement in employment and by stakeholders in education, there is no universally accepted definition of the concept' (2008, p.4). In a review of the policy documentation on the Centres, the term progression or progress is utilised to describe the number of Travellers to describe only moving on to employment or moving on to further or higher education programmes. Again, the *Value for Money Review* states:

Ultimately, STTCs, as a positive action of the DES of two to three years duration for adult Travellers, should no longer be required. This may take a decade. More young Travellers should have completed their Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate and should *progress* to mainstream further or higher education. Adult Travellers should have access to dedicated literacy and numeracy supports and should *progress* into mainstream adult and further education, training programmes or into an educational setting where an intercultural perspective is the norm (2008, p. 215) [emphasis added].

Thus, the TTC's are not assessed in terms of their contribution to intercultural integration and their initiatives to promote enhanced intercultural understandings. This focus on progression fails to acknowledge that societal prejudice remains one of the primary barriers to progression into the workforce and to further education (Nolan and Maitre, 2009). In addition, this benchmark fails to recognise the considerable personal development required by members of stigmatized minority groups in order to give them the confidence to overcome prejudice and in doing so engage with broader Irish society.

Furthermore, there is no recognition of the gap between the basic educational levels of Travellers who enter the Centres and members of the settled community attending other adult mainstream educational initiatives. For example *The Value for Money Review* (2008) highlighted that 70% of the Travellers attending the TTC's had primary education or less. However this rate of primary education is much higher amongst settled students in mainstream adult education contexts (BTEI, 2009, p.11).

Finally, the gap between Dept. of Education aspirations and the lived experience of Travellers is also evident in the lack of the available data in relation to Travellers in the Irish education system. The absence of this data in the public domain is evidence of a reluctance in practice to recognise Travellers as a culturally distinct group. The gap makes it difficult for policy analysts to measure the success of other mainstream adult education initiatives which target members of the Traveller community including the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) and the Community Development programmes (CDP). In fairness, this lack of cohesion is acknowledged by the Dept of Education who note that 'there is no comprehensive tracking system encompassing all providers of education' (DEIS, 2005, p.2).

According to the report of *An Bord Snip Nua* (2009), the TTCs cost the state 25m. The recommendation that Travellers be fully integrated into the existing mainstream educational and training units raises two important questions. Firstly, as mainstream education at post primary level is not succeeding in

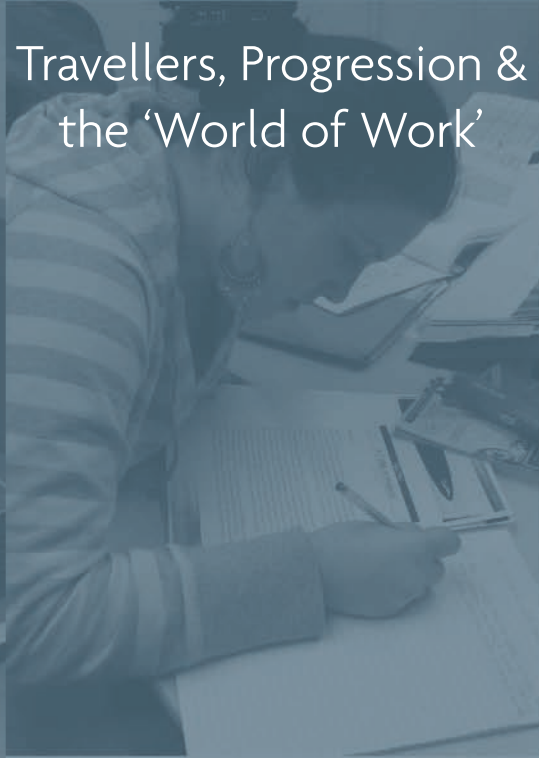
progressing Travellers, to what extent will alternative educational facilities be made available to ensure adult Travellers participate in the education system? Secondly what is the role of adult education services in assisting Travellers to engage in the process of intercultural integration? It is clear that facilitating the integration of Travellers into society would generate a range of benefits and would ultimately save the Irish state money. Therefore, the provision of services which will assist Travellers with the process of inter-cultural integration while recognising the significant prejudices they face, will remain a requirement of the Irish education system for many years to come.

- i According to LeVine, (1990, p. 99) the term enculturation was first coined by Herskovits in 1948 and further adopted by Mead in 1963 and referred to 'the acquisition of cultural representations by the human organism'.
- ii The case which received most coverage was that brought by Catherine Synott on behalf of her son, Jamie Synott.



## CHAPTER 3

### Travellers, Progression & the 'World of Work'



## Chapter Three - Travellers, Progression and the 'World of Work'

As outlined in Chapter Two, Dept. of Education aspirations toward inter-cultural education have not been matched by applied policies and resources which support the participation of Travellers in mainstream education in the Irish state. This weakness has contributed to extremely low rates of participation by Travellers in education, particularly at post-primary level. Dedicated Traveller education services such as the Traveller Training Centres have attempted to draw adult Travellers into the education system. However, the success or failure of the TTCs has been measured using the benchmark of progression which examines how many Travellers proceed from the TTCs into further education or the Irish workforce. This criterion does not take any genuine cognisance of the significant prejudices which Travellers face when they do try to become part of the settled workforce. Secondly, it does not acknowledge the scope and depth of the cultural differences between Irish Travellers and settled community in terms of attitudes to work and education.

Within this chapter, the clashes between Traveller culture and the settled 'world of work' are identified based on evidence gathered from our research. Within our sample, the spectrum of attitudes towards education and work amongst Travellers and Traveller education stakeholders is outlined. The role of prejudice and welfare dependency in creating obstacles to Traveller progression is explored. Factors within Traveller culture which clash with participation in the workforce including nomadism, gender roles, family obligations and feuding are also examined. The conflict between the Irish settled community's view of work and the Traveller view of work is interrogated. Finally, the significant struggles which Travellers who embrace progression encounter in terms of reconciling their own cultural identity with the demands of the settled 'world of work' are analysed.

### Diversity, Work and Travellers

In this study, we interviewed 50 Travellers in four different locations and 46 community stakeholders. The purpose of this interview series was to map the gap between the settled model of progression and the values, behaviours and lived experience of members of the Traveller community. Approximately, 28% of Travellers interviewed could be described as having progressed into the workforce. We describe these individuals as 'trans-cultural' Travellers because they are actively attempting to reconcile the competing value systems of Traveller and settled culture. All the trans-cultural Travellers in our sample had been in fulltime employment at some stage and they tended to be from Traveller families who



were already quite assimilated into the settled community (in terms of living in housing schemes, reduced nomadism etc). During their interviews, they demonstrated a desire to participate in the Irish workforce and they had taken time to develop the skills necessary to achieve their goals. In almost all cases, they described how they required considerable self-esteem in order to overcome the prejudice they encountered in the workforce. They had, in some instances, hidden their Traveller identity or revealed it only at strategic times, a coping strategy also identified by MacLaughlin (1995). Almost all the trans-cultural Travellers who had revealed their identity were working in Traveller safe spaces such as Training Centres, Traveller media outlets, Travellers organisations or in contexts where they were providing peer support to other Travellers.

16% of Travellers in our sample could be characterised as very disadvantaged and we describe them as disengaged Travellers because they had relatively little contact with the settled community. These Travellers tended to have low skills in terms of numeracy and literacy and exhibited low-esteem linked to these issues. Disengaged Travellers were very fearful of feuding in their own community. The majority of interviewees in this category were in the older age group and tended to believe that 'progression' was simply not an option for them.

Approximately 56% of our sample could be described as Travellers who had achieved some level of integration. We describe this group as engaged Travellers because they had frequent contacts with the settled community but had not entered the settled 'world of work' or mainstream further education. The majority of Travellers in this category were in their 20s, 30s, or early 40s and had large families. All of this group were living in housing or serviced sites while a number of families still travelled during the summer months. These engaged Travellers; tended to have some literacy and numeracy skills and indicated that they were anxious that their children remain in school in order to be literate. This group was very conscious of prejudice towards Travellers by members of the settled community. They also expressed fear about local feuds and outlined instances where they would limit their own behaviour in light of local feuds. The bulk of the data reviewed in the next section concerns the experience of engaged Travellers, the experiences of trans-cultural Travellers will be examined in the final section of the chapter. The experience of disengaged Travellers will be addressed to some extent in the sections on gender, family and feuding. The names of all interviewees and focus group participants who participated in this research have been changed to protect their identities.

## Progression and Traveller Culture - Major Clashes

- **Prejudice**

Within the scholarly literature on Travellers in Ireland, there is a long tradition which focuses on the level of prejudice and discrimination experienced by members of the Travelling Community (MacGréil, 1996, Mac Laughlin, 1995, Fanning 2002, Garner, 2004, Hayes, 2006). Within this study, there was evidence that the expectation of discrimination and previous experiences of discrimination by most Travellers operated as a significant obstacle to their engagement with the process of 'progression'.

### *Sinead describes her own experience of looking for a job as follows:*

When I went on the first day the secretary told me there was no manager, no application forms etc. that was the zero point in her eyes, I had to get past her. She was doing a job that had nothing to do with hiring me but she was on the front desk and I had to get past her... She didn't say the manager would be here tomorrow or we will be getting back in some applications forms, She just said there's no manager, no application forms, please leave and don't come back.

For Travellers who manage to get past gatekeepers such as secretaries and HR staff, prejudice from co-workers can also impact on their experience of work. Seamus says 'I was a scaffolder and for the first 12 months, it used to be mayhem for me, people calling me knacker to my face and writing down names. I went to the foreman of the site and said it eventually 'cos I was getting fed up and the foreman gave out to me because I didn't say it earlier.'

In interviews with employers, we found the level of prejudice towards Travellers to be very significant. One employer commented that if he did take on a Traveller 'he wouldn't be at the counter anyway' while another said that he would always employ a migrant or a settled Irish person ahead of a member of the Traveller community. Organisers of placements attached to the TTCs indicated that they faced significant problems in organising placements for their students. One placement organiser commented 'I remember at one stage sending out 210 letters to employers in the town as regards work experience for Travellers, we had about 42 responses and managed to place 18.'

The expectation that Travellers will encounter prejudice if they try to get a job impacts on their views of progression in two significant ways. Firstly, a number of Travellers interviewed indicated that because of the level of prejudice in the settled community, participating in the workforce was simply not a viable option for them. Shauna comments: 'if they know you're a Traveller you haven't a hope. They'll



tell you in a nice way there's no vacancy. Somebody else could go down. A settled person could apply a week later and next thing you know they're working there. You know you could have more qualifications.' Secondly, those who try and fail to enter the workforce can become very disheartened. Jimmy, who works in Adult Education describes the experience of one of his students. He says...

This guy was going up for interview, he was in the centre (TTC) before the interview getting preparatory advice... when he came in [for the interview] he was dressed impeccably; I would have hired him just on his appearance alone.. he was just like a salesman in a shop... he didn't get the job, now why didn't he get the job... if you were to ask me, my sense was that a) he was a Traveller and b) if he hired him, people wouldn't buy from him... so I mean that's getting back to the perception of the settled community.

A number of Travellers indicated that they had also experienced significant prejudice in mainstream educational contexts, starting at primary level. Aimie comments 'I had an awful experience in school actually, yeah I hated school... you know being called knacker, dirt, smelly and stuff... just the pressure of going every day... they always pitied me which I hated'. This experience of prejudice appears to become more pronounced at post-primary level when Traveller teenagers have to deal with less-structured classroom situations. Kathleen says...

A lot of Traveller people will not stay in school after 15 that's their leaving age. There can be bullying going on in school. My one, for instance, she is one of 4 Travellers and each one is put into one class each, they are left on their own. When they're small they don't mind but older they don't like it. There's too much discrimination still there.

In mainstream higher level education contexts, Travellers can encounter anti-Traveller racism even when their classmates are not aware of their Traveller background. Mary-Anne describes how...

I was talking one time to a girl in the class and I was saying I was involved in the CDP for Travellers... And she said to me, don't you just think if they just kept themselves more tidy and washed themselves better, they wouldn't have the... you know, they wouldn't have the same stigma or the they're dirty knackers, kind of thing. I just felt so hurt, by that, you know, at that, I'd have to be in a class with someone like that; but I can't attack a person for the way they've been obviously brought up.

These experiences led the majority of engaged Travellers in our sample to believe that the workforce and mainstream educational contexts, which the state identifies as 'progressed', are simply places where they don't belong. They viewed them as sites where they would encounter hurtful prejudice and where they would not be trusted or valued as human beings. Ciara describes this feeling of being out of place, saying...

I felt I didn't deserve to be in college. I don't know why I felt like that, I shouldn't have felt like that but I just felt that why should I even be here, why am I thinking I can do this... I got more confident as I did each exam, but it was awful for me like... I couldn't do the presentations, because it felt like my voice even sounded wrong.

Evelyn concludes...

I have seen signs in windows looking for positions and you dress up and walk in for the job and you're told it's gone. The difficulty is you're a Traveller... They discriminate the whole time... I would love a job house keeping, but I know I can't because I wouldn't be trusted.

Therefore, there is an inherent contradiction in Irish government policy around the question of Traveller progression. The Irish State through the DES insist that 'progression' should be the main goal of Traveller Education policy. However, Travellers who do attempt to progress experience high levels of discrimination and encounter such prejudice that the achievement of this progression is virtually impossible.

- **Welfare Dependency**

The second significant obstacle to Traveller progression which is evident in the data is the level of welfare dependency within the Traveller community. In the first instance, the knowledge that Travellers can rely on the social welfare system to support their lifestyle means that they have little incentive to engage with 'progressed' educational and work-based contexts. The attitudes to work exhibited by many engaged Travellers in this study were predicated on an unacknowledged reliance on the social welfare system. For instance, Julia comments...

I think Travellers like the way they live themselves.. I know it's a good thing to have a career, to have a life... but Travellers life is a good thing too... just because they don't have a job or anything that don't mean they don't have a good life... Travellers like their life... I like mine... even before I came here... I'm

not saying that having a career and life is a bad thing, some people would love that but Travellers like the way they live you know... it's like you having no career and living like a Traveller and then someone offers it to you and you're not very interested.

The Traveller life which Julia identifies is possible only because of the subsidisation of the social welfare system. The '*Job seekers allowance*' and other benefits available through the Irish social welfare system were historically designed to protect workers during periods of unemployment (Cousins, 2003, 2007). However, Travellers, along with other socially excluded groups in Irish society have developed a pattern of long-term reliance on welfare payments. While these welfare payments provide a safety net in meeting basic subsistence needs, the dependency generated by the system seriously limits the aspirations of Travellers in terms of progression into the workforce (Helleiner, 2000, p.141). This dependency also contributes to the stereotype of Travellers as 'spongers' and therefore, adds significantly to the stigma associated with being a member of the Traveller community.

A number of the educational stakeholders interviewed, who could be considered sympathetic to the Traveller community, contrasted the 'noble' Travellers of their youth who were engaged in metalwork, trading etc with contemporary Travellers who are dependent on social welfare. Tina comments...

The Travellers we would have known [at home] well they were known as Tinkers then but they would have been very good living, honest hard working people. They made tin cans and the women would come with the basket of the knitting needles and thread and all paper flowers and that kind of stuff to sell at the door. So it was very different from what we know now... I would find them very demanding, very very demanding, they know all of their entitlements and they feel they should get everything handed to them.

Although flawed in many ways, George Gmelch's (1977) study of the urbanization of Irish Travellers accurately predicted the emergence of this negative 'sponger' stereotype in relation to Travellers. He comments 'Materially, they have never been better off... [but] It has led to the demise of the old public stereotype of Tinkers as carefree jacks-of-all-trades: a new image of Travellers as parasites is emerging' (1977, p.157). We found this stereotype to be very evident amongst stakeholders in our sample, particularly employers with one commenting...

The system is there and they're milking it. In fairness to them... and it's hard to blame them 'cos if they

were to settle down and work, there's records kept of everything and they'd lose their benefits... they're claiming benefits we don't even know of. You can't blame them for that when the benefits are there.

Amongst Travellers themselves, the most significant obstacle to progression apart from prejudice was the fear of losing social welfare entitlements and particularly, medical cards. The engaged Travellers in our sample who were attempting to progress were applying for relatively low-paid jobs where the gap between pay and social welfare payments was not significant. Laoise, a placement organiser, comments...

The whole social welfare thing is the thing that has militated against work for everyone. I had one Traveller man on board who worked out that under the social welfare system with benefits and a medical card, he would only be 15 better off by working. It just outweighed the benefit of integration into the workforce, the workforce aspect of it. Incredible like!

Fear of losing the medical card was a particularly significant factor because of the numbers of children in Traveller families. In two instances, trans-cultural Travellers in employment had given up their jobs in order to keep their medical cards. Tommy comments 'you lose your medical card, that's a big issue, 'cos of my kids, I've 6 kids and another one of the way and we're in the doctors every second day, every third day like, how would you afford to pay that like'. This inflexibility of benefit structures has a demotivating impact on Travellers attempting to progress and on stakeholders involved in the progression process. Catriona, a placement organiser, describes her experience with Shane, a Traveller man. She describes how...

I asked this guy 'what would you like to work at?' 'You would never find me work' he says 'I'm a Traveller man. Who'd have me working'. And I said 'What is it, y'know that gets you going an that' and he said 'well I'd love to be able to get young Traveller fellas to stay in education'... so I got him a working as a peer support working in the local school. And he did this very successfully for about three years and eleven months, Y'know he was going to lose his medical card and he left at that stage.

Because of the current recession, a major fear amongst trans-cultural Travellers interviewed, is that they will lose their jobs and have to re-apply for their welfare entitlements, a process which is stressful for those who anticipate prejudice from state services and in some cases, have literacy issues. Feargal says 'if I get a full time job, I lose the medical card for the wife and kids and everything. The dole is

gone. Then you might be out of the job within the first three months and then you have to reapply for the whole lot again, go through torture'. Jessica concludes 'it's a lot to lose to walk away... if you don't know if you are going to keep your job'. The inflexibility of the medical card system, in this context, results in a massive waste of state resources. Trans-cultural Travellers who are trained and supported through the process of entry into the workforce at considerable cost to the state, find that they then have to withdraw after three years in order to keep their medical entitlements.

The significant welfare dependency within the Traveller community operates as a limiting factor on their aspirations and a de-motivating force for stakeholders attempting to generate Traveller 'progression'. Hilda, who works in a TTC concludes 'The Job seeker's allowance is probably the worst thing that ever happened to the Traveller community. It has taken away their independence, their ability to cater for themselves, to try new things like they're just caught in this welfare trap'. Therefore, prejudice and welfare dependency constituted the most significant obstacles to progression by Travellers in our sample. However, there are also elements of the Traveller value system itself which directly clash with state's goal of progression.

- **Nomadism**

Historically, the defining characteristic of the Traveller Community was the fact that they travelled and were nomadic. The Oxford English Dictionary defines a nomad as 'a person with no fixed residence who roams about, a wanderer' (2009: 411). while Webster's Dictionary characterises a nomad as a 'member of a tribe or people having no permanent home but moving about constantly in search of food, pasture etc.' (2008: 305). Nomadism has historically been central to Traveller identities and the Traveller mode of engagement with society, impacting on their family structures, modes of conflict resolution, inter-familial relationships etc. As a result of state policy and changes in Traveller culture, patterns of nomadism have changed significantly since the 1960s and this was evident in the sample of Travellers we interviewed. None of the Travellers encountered were completely nomadic and all interviewees lived in houses or serviced sites. However, a number of respondents expressed the desire to be able to travel during the summer months. Lorraine comments 'I prefer living in a house, but need my break in the summer, if I didn't get away for my break, I'd be a nervous wreck' while Connie states 'but that's what Travellers do... travel in the summertime... just take off'. Donahue, McVeigh and Ward (2005) argue that although patterns of mobility have changed significantly, nomadism continues to be an important part of Traveller culture. They note...

The reality [is] that nomadism refuses to 'die out'. Traveller nomadism remains a defining feature of many Irish Travellers lives. It takes new forms certainly, it endures terrible pressures certainly but it doesn't 'die out'. The tents disappear- but the Travellers keep travelling; the barrel tops disappear – but the Travellers keep travelling; the trailers disappear - but Travellers keep travelling, This reality should warn us that the period assertion of the demise of Traveller nomadism is somewhat premature (2005, p.4).

Travellers themselves recognise that nomadism represents a major clash between their culture and the settled model of 'progression' as established by Dept. of Education. Julia comments 'Travellers wouldn't be used to staying in the one place all year long... and you could get fired then 'cos Travellers is used to travelling and you know the way it's your life and even if they said you could have holidays, Travellers don't take them anyway 'cos that's the way they were brought up'. Kathleen also views the nomadic lifestyle of Travellers as a major obstacle to career development saying 'I have heard of Travellers who have become guards or nurses. But they are Travellers who have been bred, born and reared in houses, not the same as Travellers who move around'.

The need of Travellers to practice their form of nomadism was a source of continual frustration to placement organisers interviewed during our research. Laoise comments 'it became a great joke they used to say 'well Laoise, you know now in the summer I'll be hitching up the trailer and I'll be off and I used to say 'off where?' But sure, we like to travel' And I'd say 'But you can't, you're working'. Anybody who was ready for work was easier on the nomadism'. Indeed, Laoise argued that the willingness of Travellers to end their nomadic practices was a decisive factor in determining their willingness to engage in the relatively assimilatory process of progression. She tells how 'I remember going to a group and they were just not ready for work and you just knew it in a whole lot of things. They would say things like 'Oh yeah, I'll go in from September to May. Y'know four hours work a week or four hours a day. I have to be back in time for this and I'd say well 'that's not work'.

The trans-cultural Travellers interviewed as part of this research recognised that sacrificing their nomadism was a major concession in terms of progression and represented a form of assimilation into the settled community. Bridget comments: 'you can't take the summer off or build up your hours. I started working. I got in and I was staying in and I knew that. But you have to make a choice for yourself, if you're in a job and you like it, you can always take holidays. You need to look long term if it's what you want or if it's not'. The employers interviewed had no tolerance of nomadic practices. One employer

stated 'Well, certainly, if they're going to be doing that [travelling during summer months] then they're not really at work. You can't have jam on both sides and eat it as well. If they won't work – which most of them don't want, and if they do want work then they won't go travelling... you can't employ someone on a part-time footing like that'. In this context, the desire of a significant number of Travellers interviewed during this study to continue their nomadic practices, particularly during the summer months, represents a major clash between the DES model of 'progression' and the contemporary Traveller value system.

- **Gender**

The construction of gender roles within the Traveller community also conflicts with the Irish State's model of progression. During the teenage period when members of the settled community are laying the groundwork for progression through taking state exams, Traveller teens are expected to marry, a process central to progression in Traveller culture (Helleiner, 2000, p.161-195). Sean comments 'you talk to the older generation and they say 'well Samantha is 15 now; it's time for her to get married. You know and we were married at that stage'. Jimmy, a placement organiser comments 'they would find it hard to see girls being educated in the sense that they would see that they must be married in their teens, and that is a difficulty.'

Within Traveller culture, there are very significant constraints on the freedoms and behaviours of girls prior to marriage (Helleiner, 2000, p.162). For our interviewees, the marriage bond and marriage ties were viewed as the most important source of social status and prestige within Traveller culture. For Traveller teenagers in our sample, marriage offered the chance for progression in two key ways. Marriage marked the progression from the status of child to the status of adult and signals a willingness to take on the responsibilities of parenthood, housekeeping etc. Secondly, through marriage, Travellers determine their own place within the social, political and economic hierarchies of broader Traveller culture which are rooted entirely in extended family relationships. Marrying a partner from a richer or more powerful Traveller family, in particular, offered significant opportunities for progression.

Traveller girls themselves appear to recognise the importance of marriage in terms of women's status in the Traveller community. Interviewees for this study indicated that for Traveller girls, the task of finding a marriage partner assumed a higher position in their priorities than progression into work or education placements. Catherine comments 'you see marriage is very important to Travellers. They constantly talk about it and plan it... that's what they want... that is their goal'. Sinead comments

‘definitely marriage... they see that as their career path... that’s their dream that they will walk down the aisle in that big, big, white dress and they’ll get married’. Sheila who works in a Training Centre commented ‘for women, if you’re not married and a mother, you’re no-one. If you talk to the young girls, they don’t have any ambitions or dreams other than getting married’.

Engaging in training and education contexts which bring Traveller girls into close contact with men in the settled community can place question marks over their reputation and endanger their prospects of making a good marriage. Noreen comments ‘there was this one girl... I said to her father ‘If I find her a job in this manager’s office and he sends her to this part of town or that part of town on a message, can she go? And he says no she can’t, she cannot go and I says why? [he says] ‘because it would endanger her reputation’.

There would also appear to be a link between status and marriage for boys as a number of interviewees expressed the view that young men become adults when they marry. In this context, staying in school or in training settings can be viewed as remaining a child, rather than embracing the adult roles of marriage and parenthood. Kevin, a school principal commented ‘you’re not a man if you’re in school after the age of fifteen and a half, or sixteen’.

During the course of this research, we encountered 5 cases where Traveller teenagers who had achieved a significant amount of progression halted their participation in education or work placements in order to get married. Laoise, a placement organiser, argues that those involved in Traveller education services need to acknowledge and accommodate the pressure which Traveller teens experience in terms of marriage. Laoise states ‘These cultural things are so strong and it’s a question of, say in a place like here, being able to tolerate... encompass those kinds of pressures that they’re under because they’re pressures that we don’t know about’. The need to marry during the late teenage period in order to affirm status within Traveller culture conflicts directly with the value system and life-course model of the settled community where the late teenage period is usually devoted to progressing in the workforce or further education. This element of the Traveller value system also seems to constitute a major obstacle to the DES goal of keeping Traveller teenagers in the mainstream education system until Leaving Certificate. Apart from marriage, the construction of gender roles for men and women clashes in a number of significant ways with progression. The model of masculinity which operates among Travellers in our sample placed considerable emphasis on men being physically strong, functioning as the primary source of authority in their own households and being independent, ‘masterless men’ (Ní Shúinéir(b), 2005).



Progression in further education contexts or the mainstream workforce can involve having to compromise on all these dimensions of Traveller masculinity. Participating in education and training programmes or working in the conventional workforce involves being part of the authority structures of the settled community. In these contexts, Traveller men have to obey the authority of managers and teachers. Ní Shúinéir has also highlighted a resistance to hierarchal structures within Traveller culture, stating 'they will not work under a non-Traveller boss – they won't work under a Traveller boss either' (2005(b), p.5) Sheila, who is involved in a TTC argues that men who conform to this settled hierarchal authority system, fear being perceived as effeminate by their peers. She notes that when men first started attending the TTC: 'they wouldn't come in during the day, because they didn't want to be 'mollies' and come in with the women'.

The patriarchal dimensions of Traveller culture<sup>ei</sup> can also come into direct conflict with the culture of workplaces and TCC's which are based on the values of the settled community. In one TTC, which had a mixed student cohort, Maeve outlines how 'at break time, the men would sit and the women would serve them... The men would not, under any circumstances, take their cup or their plate off the table – the women had to do it'. The patriarchy evident in some families can also impede women's participation in placements. Sheila comments 'the women or girls couldn't go [to the workplace] unless the husband and/or father, and in some cases the brothers, actually agreed to it. They just wouldn't be let go'.

Being part of a family where men had a positive view of progression was a critical element in generating successful placements for women and teenagers. Laoise comments 'you find a little nucleus of people that are ready for progression... depending again say... on the men's attitude to work and that... that you'd know that work is a good thing in that house'. In families where the men were not supportive of progression, exposure to the values and gender roles of the settled community can actually generate greater levels of conflict in the home. Maeve tells how...

the reason I talked to the men in the first place was about bringing a group of young marrieds into the town... we were gone for the day... we went to a restaurant and did a bit of shopping and went in on the bus... and one woman actually got beaten that day when she went home, because his thing was, 'you were meant to be going into the [Training centre], not gallivanting... going somewhere else.

Because of the clash between these value systems, Traveller men were characterised by a number of education stakeholders as obstructers of progression. Iseult concludes...

What is holding back the whole thing is the men. And it's a struggle for them. The men holding on to their old sense of values. I mean, that's a hard thing for them. They'd be obstinate... Y'know they've kind of lost a role. Women would be the same wherever they're going, they've involved in children, education, a piece of work, whereas the men, the income is guaranteed for them.

While Sandra comments 'it's the guys that are continuing with the way of life, the original old values in a culture that's dominated by men'. In this context, any new model of adult education which is aimed either wholly or partly at Travellers must consider the critical role of Traveller men. Because of the level of political authority associated with being a man in the Traveller Community (Helleiner, 2000, p.161-185), it is almost impossible for any meaningful integration to occur without engaging with them. Sheila concludes 'gender is one of the major difficulties, that's why I talk to the men in the first place... even though the women will speak before the committee... in reality they don't have a lot of decision making power'.

- **Feuding**

Feuding is an aspect of Traveller culture which has assumed greater importance in recent years (Ní Shúinéir(a), 2005, McGearty et al, 2008). Amongst the sample of Travellers which we interviewed, disengaged Travellers all cited fear of conflict with other families as a critical reason for not engaging with Traveller education and training services. When asked why he hadn't engaged with a local training service, Patrick commented 'cos people are scared over feuds... like they'd be thinking about the trouble and all'. Winnie explained 'a lot of Travellers had violence over years, not myself, there's a lot of workshops that I say to myself, I'd love to be in but maybe over the years, there could have been trouble with Traveller people which stops some families doing the workshops'.

In recent years, feuding has forced the closure of one Traveller Training Centre in Mullingar and lead to the installation of increased security measures in a number of other sites. A former worker in the Mullingar centre describes the experience as follows...

We had a two year period with huge stresses... there was a lot of violence, and threats of violence, and phone calls to say 'we're coming down to petrol bomb now' at one stage, we evacuated the building, when the police arrived to tell use we had to get out we were going to be petrol bombed... we'd a phone call to say they were gathering weapons and they're on their way down'... you didn't know if this was true or not but you couldn't take the risk so you'd have to close.

A number of Traveller education institutions have created contracts and agreements whereby students/trainees agree not to engage in conflict within the centre. This model appears to have been a success in some contexts, Johnnie comments 'the place here the fights don't come inside here. You'd come into an agreement if you are in the centre... We get on very well here, there is no trouble'. However, as feuding intensifies, this approach does have limits. In describing the deterioration of the situation in Mullingar, James explains 'we had by far one of the best centres around, we sort of nosedived when the rise in violence occurred, up to that point we were able to keep the violence outside.[then]... the row came in... and then we couldn't... we were stuck... and it went downhill from there'.

In terms of placements, employers interviewed in our sample did have fears that Traveller employees would bring inter-familial conflicts into the workplace. In describing the impact of feuding in one location, a placement organiser commented 'of course another impact of feuding is: from the employer's perspective... it sets us back. I can understand where people are coming from because the level of violence has been horrific and you can't condone it, so people are very fearful of that.' In Mullingar, this setback ultimately led to the closure of the centre. James explains...

we had lads coming in balaclavas with hatchets and hammers saying 'if you employ this person your centre will be destroyed'... my understanding is they went to various employers in the town and said 'if Joe Bloggs whatever the name might be is working here tomorrow then you won't have a shop'... so both sides of the feud they were doing it to each other.

For trans-cultural Travellers working in contexts where they have to deal with other Traveller families, the outbreak of feuding can cause huge complications. Thomas, who was working as a peer support worker in a school felt he had to leave his job because of a local feud. He comments...

It all started when there was a feud going on in the town at the time and I wasn't involved in it but part of the family was involved in it and this young lad had no respect... giving me this cheek and that cheek and I couldn't do my job properly like... that's what happened.

Laoise describes how this pressure brought his progression journey to an end, saying 'the feuding that happened stopped him. He had to leave that school, y'know... it was just too much.. there would have been boys there from the feuding family at the time and if he were to correct one of those lads? That was all too big and he had to leave that, and I suppose that did become the biggest factor.'

Even for employers who are committed to Traveller progression, they can find that employing a member of one family can create difficulties with other families in the area. A placement organiser who wanted to hire a Traveller as her own assistant comments...

And I remember, in considering that, being so aware that ; people coming and giving their facts to someone of their own community... I think they didn't mind me... but somebody telling their personal details to someone of their own community, they were very careful about it. Who was she going to be and was she one of this family or that family or the other... so in the end I got a settled person'.

A number of Travellers with ambitions to progress indicated that fear of feuding had added considerably to the stigma associated with being a Traveller. Nuala comments 'it affects big time, we feel very embarrassed, we do get ashamed of this, 'cos we are Travellers as well, they have made a show of themselves. It's a disgrace. You can be better by using your personality rather than your hands... and the discrimination they're getting over fighting'.

The stress and trauma generated by feud-related violence also had a direct impact on the capacity of some Travellers to engage with education and training programmes. Travellers who are members of feuding families may be afraid to come and go from training sites or work placements or be fearful of meeting opposing feuding family members. Sheila concludes 'you just feel so sorry for the families and the individuals involved because they're traumatised... they are afraid to sleep at home... and when you can't take care of your basic needs how can you expect to take care of their higher order needs'. One Youthreach worker describes the impact of feuds on Traveller teens in his programme as follows:

the kids are either out of here because they're scared to be here or those who do come in are only on proviso that they are safe here... in the last feud a member of staff here would have been in a house calling to see the family and the whole room with weapons. The window blocked up, the door blocked up and waiting for it to happen basically.

Therefore, the stress, fear, violence and trauma generated by feuding constitute a major obstacle to participation in education and work placements for members of some Traveller families. Future inter-cultural education programmes which are designed to respond to the needs of Travellers adults will, of necessity, have to consider the specific pressures and constraints generated by Traveller feuds.

- **Traveller Family Values**

The position of the family within Traveller culture is significantly different to its place in the value system of the settled community (Gmelch, 1985, Helleiner, 2000) and this clash presents a major challenge to education providers seeking to generate progression. For disengaged, engaged and trans-cultural Travellers in our sample, family referred not alone to the nuclear family, (their partners and children in the case of married Travellers, and parents and siblings in the case of unmarried Travellers) but also extended family relationships. Gerard, a Traveller activist confirms this view of Traveller families, saying...

Our family is quite different from the family in the settled community... which is primarily nuclear based... the Traveller family is the extended family... so we've a very different understanding and a very different view of what family means... there's a feeling of being secure... in that arrangement... where everybody is there for each other... supports each other, particularly around times of crisis.

For all Travellers interviewed in our sample, the marriage bond was regarded as permanent although the rate of marital breakdown in the Traveller community appears to have increased in recent years. In addition, the size of Traveller families although reduced in recent years, was still considerably greater than average family size in the settled community with many parents we interviewed having more than five children.<sup>ii</sup>

Both men and women in our sample consistently indicated that family came first in the Traveller value system assuming a much higher position in their priorities than progression in the settled workforce. Mick comments 'speaking for myself, my family comes first... more than anything, more than a job... I make sure that my family is fine, them going to school. I would struggle along as long as they're happy'. Julia argues that 'settled people would be settled like, work and have a job like, they'd have a career. Travellers wouldn't, Travellers would be into horses and most of all, their families.' A number of Travellers emphasized that attitudes towards family were the single biggest difference between Travellers and the settled community who they viewed as materialistic. Shane compares his priorities to those of the settled community as follows: 'the way of living I suppose... they're having the new house and car... having enough to eat... with Travellers it's the other way round like, worrying about their family more than new cars and houses like'.

On a day-to-day basis, the duty of care to family members which is expected of Traveller men and

women presents a serious conflict with the DES model of progression. Amongst engaged Travellers in our sample, there was a strong expectation that women would always put their obligations as wives and mothers before participation in education or work placements. In relation to his wife's participation in Traveller education programmes, Joe comments...

my personal view of it [work placement for women] I wouldn't like to see my wife doing it because when Travellers get married and start to have a family they're reared by a man and woman, like that's their part in life done, if they go into fulltime education, there's no time for the family and who'd stay at home and mind the kids? It's just the culture like, it's just culture.

Sheila, who works in Traveller education describes how 'sometimes the men would bring the children out [to the centre] with the nappies, for the wives to change. They'd come to the centre... and the wives would have to go out to change the child's nappy... another woman would have to go home at lunch time and cook.. and then sometimes, when they went home, they wouldn't be let back'.

Older women we interviewed had strong expectations that younger women would put mothering first in their priorities. Vera, an older Traveller, describes how 'when a Traveller girl and a settled girl leave the hospital with their baby, the settled girl leaves with her baby in a pram, the Traveller girl leaves with her baby here and it never leaves her. That baby won't be thrown to a babysitter to mind, she'll stop going to a pub, she'll give up her whole creation. She'll stick right by the side of the baby till its about seventeen. Even trans-cultural Travellers argued that women need to put their families before progression. Katy comments...

its ok for me, I've no kids, I don't have to say here I've 5 or 6 kids behind me to look after so yes I think it would be hard for any mother to say here I'll get up and go to work, I don't care. It wouldn't happen, family comes first... in the Traveller community. The mother was always in the house and kept the family together.

In organising education programmes and work placements, Travellers' need to attend family events such as weddings and funerals presented a major clash with the settled model of time management. Laoise comments...

Things in the world of work are so different... time limits as you say, and completing jobs and that and that was quite hard for them to take on board and there would be things that were particularly community related, like y'know a family wedding, or a family funeral and the perception among the Traveller community... y'know that everyone took off to somebody's funeral that was [related] four layers out from them and that you couldn't just up sticks and do that.

The priority which Travellers give to their family obligations over and above their obligations in terms of education, training and placements was highlighted repeatedly to stakeholders as the single biggest obstacle to progression. Timmy, a placement organiser, comments 'their culture is totally different. Travellers could be absent for two weeks around the time of a wedding because it is part of their culture and tradition to leave a few days before to attend and come back a few days after the wedding and they see nothing wrong with this'.

For Travellers engaged in progression, negotiating time off with employers to attend family events such as funerals creates a major tension between their own culture and settled culture. Sinead comments 'you can try to swap days you may not get it and it can be tough that way... Employers don't like you going to funerals of people not closely related to you. If you have a good relationship with your employer, you'll be better off'. However, the clash between settled and Traveller models of time management linked to family obligations need not be insurmountable. Traveller activist Gerard describes how in his own organisation...

We have a policy round here around funerals around marriage, christenings and we specify for the immediate family so many days for extended family so many days... and people generally respect it in a way that it respects the needs of the Traveller concerned but it also respects the organisation that employs them in terms of their duties... and I have to say that it hasn't been an issue at all... because it's a jointly agreed and negotiated document... but I will say this... there were a few years ago... I felt that some Travellers were milking it... and were using that stereotype to get an extra few days off.

In his work outlining the position of work in different cultural value systems, Shalom H. Schwartz notes that the 'meaning of work in the life of individuals is influenced by prevailing cultural value priorities' (1999, p.4). The data collected in this research process suggests that obligations towards family far supersede the priority placed on work within Traveller culture. In addition, it would appear that Travellers have their own culturally specific model of 'work' linked to family which differs significantly from the models of work evident in broader Irish society (Fields, 2003).

## Traveller Culture and Work

In the settled community, people tend to view work as something which happens during a specific period for which an individual receives payment and sometimes, benefits such as pensions, paid holidays etc. Being part of the 'world of work' in the settled community operates as a significant claim on an individual's time but a claim which is limited to specific hours of the day. Almost all jobs involve some expectations around appearance, diligence, and behaviour. Those involved in the 'world of work' almost always are part of an authority structure. Even those who are self-employed must take direction from clients, suppliers, banks etc. (Kain & Bolger, 1986; Eriksson, 1998).

In her research Sinéad Ní Shúinéir (2005(b)) suggests that Travellers have a somewhat different view of work. First of all, work is not something which is confined to specific hours of the day and not something for which one receives pay or benefits from an employer. 'Work' as many Travellers conceive emerges from 'taking advantage of opportunity' where Travellers take advantage of opportunities which present themselves for trading goods or doing certain tasks. Our research supports her findings in highlighting how little Travellers use occupation as a source of status or social prestige. She notes

Non-Travellers identify with their work to the extent of defining themselves in term of it... Travellers by contrast, recognise no such occupational pyramid. There are only more and less effective ways to earn money... While Travellers take pride in their skills, they do not define themselves in terms of specialisations [emphasis in original] (2005(b), p.3).

Ní Shúinéir argues that for her respondents like the Travellers interviewed in our sample 'kinship is the only capital'. Travellers 'work' at their family because family in the Traveller community is linked to status, position and income, factors which the settled community derive from occupation. Traveller Michael McDonagh explains this perspective:

Working at your family ties is the key to Traveller identity so we will turn up at all meetings of the extended family, for weddings, for funerals or when visiting the sick in hospital. If you even look at what happens in hospital when someone's sick or dying, everyone gathers together and visits the hospital, and the nurses are going haywire over the huge number of Travellers there (2000, p.31).

A number of stakeholders in Traveller education whom we met expressed their frustration with Traveller attitudes to family when a family wedding would supersede all attempts to encourage a young person



to achieve progression or a funeral would come in the way of a work placement or achieving a qualification. However, for the Travellers we talked to, these tasks of attending funerals and weddings, demonstrating loyalty to family members, are 'work' and were closely linked to status and income in the Traveller community. These are the same socio-economic attributes which conventional 'work' delivers for individuals in the settled community. Therefore, viewed from their own cultural perspective, many Travellers are deeply involved in their own world of 'work'. They spend enormous amounts of time and energy devoted to activities which reinforces their position and role in their extended families, 'work' which can be linked to status and income.

### **The Trans-cultural Traveller**

Although trans-cultural Travellers form a small proportion of our sample, 28%, their experiences are hugely informative in terms of broader debates about Traveller education, integration and progression. Almost all the trans-cultural Travellers in our sample came from backgrounds where a certain amount of assimilation to the settled community had already occurred. Michelle says...

I would have had a different upbringing to what some Travellers might have because I would have been reared in a house; I never lived on the side of the road, and my parents did, they lived on the side of the road, they didn't have the education, they kinda seen the importance for us to have it... We were made go to school and like I had sisters that did the Leaving Cert.

Michelle highlights a number of features which are relatively common in the personal biography of the trans-cultural Traveller. Firstly, the vast majority of this group grew up in houses rather than on sites. Secondly, these Travellers had parents who were either educated themselves or recognised the importance of education. Kieran, who is attending third level, notes that 'a big influence was my parents... em... because since I was a young age they always taught me how education was important... my mother did a diploma... my father... he went to college'.

Throughout the sample, it was evident that trans-cultural Travellers had a range of skills, however these capacities were also evident in engaged and disengaged Travellers. What distinguishes the trans-cultural Traveller from the other Travellers interviewed, was the level of confidence and self-esteem which they demonstrated, Sheena comments 'well I'm lucky because I'm very confident in myself... I'd be able to get on with people anyway and just, if anyone had issues with me, I'd be able to address it no

problem'. Orla also feels her self-esteem has been critical to her progression. She notes...

Personally myself, I'm very good to deal with people... y'know... I sort of... what word would I use now... I'm a good mixer... I know my background, I know my culture, which I'm very proud of, my mother and father is Travellers and my sisters and brothers and the whole lot but as I said I'm well able to get in there with the settled community and make my mark as well as they say... if you want something don't be shy to ask, that's how I live.

Stakeholders in education and training interviewed for our research also highlighted confidence and esteem issues insisting that lack of confidence amongst some Travellers was a critical obstacle in terms of progression. Maura who runs a homework club comments 'yes, it's basically a confidence issue... I think it's essential, It's the basic ingredient'. This view was supported by Traveller activist, Gerard who highlights how prejudice impacts on Travellers' self-esteem. He comments 'it has reached stage for a significant number of Travellers that to be a Traveller means to be inadequate, to be a Traveller means to be inferior to settled people, to be a Traveller is to be a problem full stop'.

Illiteracy was identified by both Travellers and stakeholders as a critical factor eroding the confidence of teenage and adult Travellers. Jerry says that 'Confidence comes with your literacy, like, you see if you've no literacy... if you're ignorant about something, your confidence is very low in it like, whereas if you know what you're doing and where to start like, your confidence grows with it like'. It would appear that without some degree of literacy, Travellers find themselves in situations where they repeatedly experience acute powerlessness and shame. Karen tells how...

It [being illiterate] effects a lot in a lot of ways that you bring a baby to a doctor they give you a form, I can't fill it out, I have to say to the lady behind the counter 'sorry love I can't fill this' standing in a big queue of people... It's an awful shameful thing to admit it, you'd be so embarrassed it takes a lot out of ya when you're standing in front of people like and your face turns red. And everyone's just standing there looking at you.

Both stakeholders and Travellers reported a decrease in levels of respect by literate Travellers towards parents who are illiterate. One school principal has noted problems between parents and children 'where the child, at thirteen or fourteen, no longer takes the direction of the parents... and even loses respect for them because they know the parents can't read or write'. For trans-cultural Travellers, their

literacy and subsequent progression can open a significant gap between themselves and their parents. Sinead comments 'my mother can't read the time, she can't make a phone call, she can't count money. She can't dial a number in the phone... Her life revolves around what she sees on TV. She can never go near a newspaper even... I often say how do you get through?' This inter-generational gap in understanding linked to literacy levels can operate as the thin end of a major wedge between the literate Traveller and their own cultural community, a tension also highlighted by Walker in her report on Traveller suicide (Walker, 2008, p.41).

Even with high levels of confidence and self-esteem, the journey of progression is enormously demanding for Travellers, requiring them to manage the significant tensions and clashes between two almost diametrically opposing value systems. A number of trans-cultural Travellers managed these tensions by creating a sharp division between their home life and work life. Sheena comments...

When I come into work here in the morning, I shut down from home... and when I go back home in the evening time my life is completely different... I've a different aspect of life at home altogether because being a Traveller, y'know..., a different aspect altogether... but I can play... I can do both roles... I'm good at it y'know.

However, this approach can be stressful as individuals attempt to juggle the competing demands of two cultures. Sandra comments 'I would still have the same kind of thing [stress linked to time management] if a Traveller funeral came up or something like that, but I still, I know you get twenty-one days of holidays a year so I have to constantly try and figure it out'.

For other Travellers, the most effective response to these difficulties is to cut ties with their own community. Janet, a placement organiser notes that 'There are three Traveller women who are working out in private industry but they wouldn't say, they wouldn't get involved with the rest of the Travellers... they have kind of moved off and yes, all three are single'. Tommy, a school principal describes the children of one trans-cultural Traveller family as follows 'They're fully integrated and as a matter of fact if you ever mentioned anything about Travellers, they don't want to know because they feel there is a stigma attached'.

For some Travellers in our sample, the pull of their own culture had become too great and resulted in their withdrawing from education and training programmes. Sheila describes how...

One girl I'm just thinking of there now, she couldn't handle it and she left. Her family kept ringing her at work and that, because maybe the family didn't understand what was needed? That she's working and you can't ring when she's at work 'cos she can't answer the phone or that you can't go out for a one hour lunch and come back, say, in two hours time. So there's a lot of pressure from the families sometimes I suppose.

Five trans-cultural Travellers in our sample had hidden their Traveller identity entirely from co-workers and friends in the settled community for fear of experiencing prejudice. Laura explains why she didn't reveal her Traveller identity to her college friends saying...

I didn't want to have to face that I didn't want people saying that I knew nothing about college... If I stood up I would become a target for three years. If I had to say anything my whole three years would have been different. Even though the people I sat down with were fine. But if I said I'm from the Traveller community it would have changed.

The strain of concealing one's Traveller identity can however bring its own problem as Orla explains 'I felt I was very good at my job as well; but I found it very hard because I suppose, the line of work that I was in... we were regularly meeting Traveller people and... the people that I was dealing with, their view of Traveller people upset me a lot'. In Orla's case, her fears about revealing her Traveller identity at work proved to be very well founded. She continues 'it came out obviously that I am a Traveller and I don't think I was treated the same since. Once they discovered out my background, they were very ashamed that I'd been taken on in the first place.' Indeed, the trans-cultural Travellers in our sample who were most public about their Traveller identity tended to be those Travellers who were working in safe spaces such as public sector organisations providing Traveller-oriented programmes. Mairead, who works in such a context comments...

Well, as I said, anywhere I went, if they didn't know that I was a Traveller that was the one thing that I made clear from the get go, because I wouldn't like to be sitting in a room and a discussion taking place about Travellers and offending me...some people would be shocked, some people would have no problem... it's a choice whether they mix or not.

For the majority of the trans-cultural Travellers in our sample, their status as workers had changed their relationship to their own families. Some families were very supportive such as Katy's family. She

comments 'my family are very proud of me. They're very proud of me... they've seen how hard it was for me to do something like that'. For others, the journey of progression can generate significant tensions in their relationships with family members. Anna describes her sister who is working in the following terms...

I had a sister who worked and didn't get married... She gave up half her culture. It's something that you have to lose, you are not going to be mixing with travellers if you are working and you can't hang around with Travellers. A lot of my sister's friends wouldn't know that she was a Traveller... She shouldn't lose her culture though. If I worked I would still socialise with Travellers but you can't because the settled won't let you... Of course, you can't give up who you are just for work. If they don't take you in for who you are then you should leave it be.

Trans-cultural Travellers can find themselves accused of 'becoming a buffer' by members of their own community. Kelly describes how some Travellers have reacted to her saying '[they say] who does she think she is and 'you're only trying to act like a settled person... a fella said to my son 'oh you look like a settled person, I thought you were a buffer'.

Ironically, the same trans-cultural Travellers who are stigmatised by their own community for being 'buffers' may continue to experience prejudice from the settled community for being Travellers. Kelly explains that while she has been stigmatised for being a buffer by Travellers, she has been turned away from settled pubs. She tells how 'We went into a certain hotel here in town and we were blocked at the door... the manager said that the bar was only for... regulars... I walked straight into the bar and people that I know, where I live were in that bar... there was no... t'wasn't for regulars. I knew it was because we were Travellers'. Consequently, the trans-cultural Traveller can find they face a position of isolation in Irish society. Even if their immediate family accepts their choice to progress, their extended family and community may reject them as having assumed the 'buffers' way of life. At the same time, they face stigma from the settled community who continue to view them as members of the Traveller community.

In its evaluative reports on Traveller training, the DES assumes that the benefits of progression for Travellers are obvious. This literature does not consider what costs progression may generate for Travellers when it occurs. However, evidence gathered for this study suggests that there are very significant costs to Travellers who engage in the process of progression. Despite the current resources

being devoted to Traveller progression, it is these costs which operate as the most significant obstacles to Traveller participation in the workforce.

## Conclusion

The benchmark of progression as currently utilised by the DES takes for granted that Travellers want to work and that the Traveller view of 'working' is the same as the settled view of 'working'. The 'progression' goal does not take cognisance of the considerable cultural differences between Travellers and the settled community in terms of their cultural perspective on what constitutes 'work'. In addition, cultural characteristics such as attitudes to time and time management and the constraints which gender roles place on Travellers, are not considered. Nomadism and pressures from feuding can also conflict with cultural expectations at the heart of the settled 'world of work'. In terms of barriers generated by broader Irish society, the significant levels of prejudice towards Travellers constitute the most important obstacle to their entry into the workforce. In addition, the inflexibility of some social welfare benefits, particularly medical cards, can impede Traveller progression once they enter the 'world of work'.

For Travellers who want to enter the settled labour market, participation in the workforce can and does mean having to sacrifice many aspects of their culture and can interfere and in some cases, destroy their sense of belonging to the Traveller community. Some trans-cultural Travellers interviewed during our research had become isolated from their own community who viewed them as having joined the world of 'country' people. At the same time, many of these Travellers still experience considerable prejudice from the settled community related to their cultural identity. Thus, having achieved the Dept. of Education's stated goal, some 'progressed' Travellers find themselves trapped in 'no-man's land', rejected by both Travellers and the settled community.

- i Jane Helleiner provides an in-depth discussion of gender relations in her study of Irish Travellers. Surprisingly, despite dealing with topics such as domestic violence, women's work etc, she doesn't use the term patriarchy in relation to the Irish Travellers, though her analysis highlights many practices which clearly patriarchal. See J. Helleiner (2000) *Irish Travellers: Racism and the Politics of Culture*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- ii Mary Rose Walker highlights the degree of scholarly dispute which exists around the demographic statistics currently available for the Irish Traveller community. However, according to the 2006 census, within the Travelling community there was an average of 33.32 births per 1000 as compared to 15.0 per 1000 for the Irish national population. Thus, the Irish Travelling community have one of the highest birth rates of any group in the European Union. For further discussion see Walker, Mary Rose (2008) *Suicide amongst the Irish Traveller Community 2000-2006*. Arklow: Wicklow County Council.

## CHAPTER 4

### Comparison of Traveller Education for Adults in Four Locations

Dundalk | Ennis | Mullingar | Waterford



## Chapter Four - Comparison of Traveller Education for Adults

In the introduction to this report, we outlined the immediate context for this research which was the recommendation to phase out the Traveller Training Centre's as providers of adult education to the Traveller community (DES, 2008, McCarthy 2009). While we endorse the decision to phase out the stand alone segregated provision, the research presented in Chapter Two and Three suggests that the validity of 'progression' as a measurement of the success or failure of adult education for Travellers should be questioned. The Travellers we interviewed for this research project repeatedly stated that they viewed 'progression' as a process of assimilation into the settled community. This reluctance to engage in a process which is viewed as assimilatory has been an important factor in the failure of TTCs and other mainstream adult education services to deliver on the goal of Traveller progression.

Leaving the question of Traveller progression aside then, this chapter examines the impact of adult education services for Travellers in four locations in the Republic of Ireland. This comparison interrogates not only the different models of educational provision but also the influence which the absence or presence of dedicated adult education services has had on the broader relationships between Travellers and the settled community in each location. The chapter will begin by providing an overview of each educational site in the context of broader relationship between Travellers and the settled community. The findings of the comparative research on the four sites are then presented to provide an overall evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the current Traveller Training Centre models. Finally, the importance of adult education services which promote personal development as well as work based skills will be reviewed in terms of international debates about the role and function of adult education services.

### **Ennis**

St. Joseph's Traveller Training Centre in Ennis was the first Traveller Training Centre to be established in 1974. It is a fifty two place Centre with programmes running from Monday to Friday. Almost half of the students (twenty eight) in the Centre are male, a highly unusual gender profile in the current national context where overall there are 150 males and 920 females enrolled in Traveller Training Centres (NATC, 2009). The Centre gender ratio is approximately 1:1 slightly in favour of women, whereas the national ratio is 6:1 women to men. The Centre offers FETAC programmes from Levels 1-5. These programmes are offered on a needs basis. Pre-level 3 courses include subjects such as literacy, numeracy, craft, personal development, cookery, religion, holistic therapy, physical education and health. At Level

4, the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme is offered<sup>i</sup>. Central to the Centre's success in attracting male students has been the provision of courses which are of interest to men such as woodwork and metalwork. The Centre has also run a range of programmes designed to progress students into workplace contexts, however the management team acknowledges that these programmes have met with limited success. Most learners who do progress, work in supported employment in either Traveller Support services such as the local CDP, Traveller Enterprise Office or other local supported employment options with the VEC or County Council/ Primary Health Care etc.

The Traveller population in Ennis is 428 or 17.6 Travellers per 1000 of the population (CSO, 2006, p.34). Relationships between Travellers and the settled community in the town have been mixed. Fanning (2002) outlines a number of conflicts which have emerged between Travellers and the settled community in Ennis since the 1970s in the town. Despite serious feuding within the local Traveller community and a spate of suicides in 2008, the community stakeholders interviewed characterised relations between the two communities in the town as having been relatively positive in recent years. A number of stakeholders interviewed highlighted the important role which St. Joseph's had played in supporting inter-community relationships. The Centre has also been very involved in other local services. There have been a very high proportion of Traveller Suicides in Ennis over the past few years and the Centre has been one of the main sources of support for families. It provides an opportunity for learners to access Traveller health services, counsellors, voluntary and statutory agencies which support suicide. St. Joseph's has encouraged Traveller men to access help for depression, alcohol and drug abuse<sup>ii</sup>. Melissa who works for the HSE comments 'the training centre itself, it's been a fabulous resource, over time and I think it has helped how we have worked'. Kieran who works in the local adult education service explains 'from what I've seen of it, I think it's very important, it's a place for them to... I won't say relax, but at least they... they have the Centre. We brought them into... eh, our centre in Durrowvale, the adult education centre, and it worked well; but they talked but only to a point'. St. Joseph's facilitates student Gardaí as part of their social placement policy. One local Garda sergeant highlights how the Centre provides the Gardaí with a positive point of contact between themselves and the local Traveller community stating;

I would think myself that those who attend would have a different viewpoint or impression of the Garda Síochána, as a result of our student interaction. Rather than see a Garda in while patrol car with blue lights on top of it, in a blue uniform or whatever, they would actually see the Garda in runners and torn jeans, the very same as everyone else. They're actually seeing the person rather than the uniform.'

The staff of the Training Centre also set up a mediation service with the local Gardaí to help resolve local feuding.

However, the location of St Joseph's as a stand alone unit on a local industrial estate has generated a number of problems. The rigid structure of the Monday to Friday timetable as made the Centre a focus for conflict when local feuding tensions are heightened. In addition, there are few opportunities for students to interact with members of the settled community as peers in a learning context. Students are inclined to refer to their attendance at the Centre as 'work'. Given the relatively insulated environment provided by the Centre, this tendency creates quite a false impression of the settled 'world of work' and mainstream further education.

## **Dundalk**

The task of establishing a Training Centre for Traveller People in the Dundalk area began in the 1970's. The Centre evolved over the following decades to become *The Tara Workshop* which offers 24 places to female Travellers only and is located in the main VEC campus in the town. The Centre offers a range of accredited programmes from FETAC Level 3 to 5 as well as Junior Certificate subjects. There are also a range of non-accredited programmes which include modules on social and life skills, basic literacy, basic mathematics, EDCL, First Aid, Parents Plus and Sexual Health. The Centre has a strong focus on building and maintaining links with local organisations in order to ensuring positive, on-going interactions between the Travellers attending the Centre and local industries, schools and community groups. The Centre has achieved notable success in assisting its students to progress into mainstream educational and workplace contexts. Social worker Sinead comments for instance:

We couldn't have set up the preschool without the Tara workshop because all of those girls came through Tara workshop. All of them went on to do qualified childcare courses. Without getting that start... they wouldn't be employable... that's the difference. When we have a CE scheme, I would notice the girls who came through Tara workshop and came on to the CE scheme, they're fine. The girls who came to the CE scheme without that support, they haven't got the social skills... the confidence, the personal development.

The Traveller population of Dundalk is 327 or 9.3 Travellers per 1000 of the population (CSO, 2006, p.34). Of the four locations examined during this research, relationships between Travellers and the settled community would appear to be most positive in Dundalk. There is little evidence of feuding in the town and the Traveller community appears to have integrated relatively well with the local

community in local authority housing estates. Michael, a local councillor comments 'quite honestly... I think they have integrated extremely well. That's my opinion, I don't have any complaints', while community worker Elisabeth states 'I suppose in Louth a lot of Travellers are housed and would appear to me to be very well integrated in Dundalk in particular'. Jimmy, another local councillor highlighted the role of the Centre in giving members of the Traveller community locally the confidence to engage in this process of integration. He notes...

I think that it [the Centre] makes a massive, massive difference. I've been in some fantastic warm households this year. Traveller women getting ready for weddings... sang a few songs and they sang back at me... To me, that confidence to have me come in, and sit me down and sing a song or whatever was great to behold.

Significantly, however Dundalk was the location where local stakeholders most frequently highlighted the growing problem of drugs in the Traveller community. In this context, the absence of men from the Tara centre restricts its impact on the integration of males. Jimmy who works with the HSE concludes 'the first thing I notice is that it is women who attend here. It is not men. That's a huge issue I think, educational access for men'.

## **Mullingar**

In 2008, the Traveller Training Centre in Mullingar was closed. Up to this point, the Centre was regarded as one of the most successful in the network. It had a relatively high number of men within its student cohort and the service had made significant strides in generating Traveller progression. The Centre offered nine programmes which included Cookery, Driving Theory Test Preparation, General Vocational Studies, General Learning Studies, Hairdressing – Introduction, Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA), Recreation and Leisure Pursuits, Religious Education and Social, Personal and Health Education (Qualifax, 2010). In 2006, twelve Traveller women who had never attended secondary school completed the Leaving Cert Applied programme. This was a significant milestone for Traveller women in the Mullingar area as they were the first Travellers in the town known to achieve such certification.

The outbreak of a serious Traveller feud in the town however made the operation of the Centre almost impossible. Both staff and students in the Centre were threatened and the provision of programmes became unworkable. One worker at the Centre describes how...

We had a two year period with huge stress... we had an incident outside when a member of the Traveller community beat up another women with sticks and things on her way to work, we had members of

staff almost run over, we had situations where let's say a member of staff... house was threatened to be burned out, petrol bombed... there was a lot of violence and threats of violence and phone calls to say 'we're coming down to petrol bomb now'... at one stage we evacuated the building.

Michelle who is involved in the Traveller Inter-agency group in Westmeath argues that the stand-alone structure of the centre exacerbated these problems. She states...

There was a decision made to try and find a location for the standalone building for a Traveller Centre in Mullingar. Up to then we had tried to avoid this segregation of Travellers, I think, that is a huge weakness. It means that... Travellers up to now have essentially been ghettoized, no matter what level you look at it.

She also argues that more integration within the VEC would have enabled the provision of more courses attractive to men commenting...

For example, in Mullingar, the Community College has a woodwork room and it struck me why weren't efforts made to give the lads access to those resources? It would have meant a certain amount of movement between two buildings and that is problematic but it would have brought Traveller lads and young Traveller men and men from the VEC school together

There was also widespread criticism of the response of the local VEC to the situation particularly as the feuding in Mullingar worsened. Diarmuid who works for the HSE in the Midlands comments 'it was an easy option for the VEC to close it down. It wasn't done for the good of the Travellers'. Following the closure of the centre, none of the 52 students who attended were integrated into mainstream adult education programmes despite the effects of local educational providers.

The Traveller population of Mullingar is 351 or 19.1 Travellers per 1000 of the population (CSO. 2006, pg. 34) which constitutes the largest ratio of Traveller to settled community of the four locations. During the course of this research, we found that relations between the settled and Traveller community in the town continue to be characterized by mistrust and hostility. Members of the Town Council, Social Services and the HSE interviewed were critical of housing policy in the town which they claimed resulted in large numbers of Traveller families being located in certain housing estates. They indicated that this did little to facilitate integration between the two communities and contributed to heightened tensions between some Traveller families. Of all the four sites examined in this survey, the critical lessons to be learned in terms of the role of adult education in generating intercultural integration arise from the case of Mullingar.

## Waterford

We initially selected Sligo as the fourth site for this study as it had no Traveller Training Centre. However, we found it impossible to gain access to members of the local Traveller community in the town, reflecting perhaps the lack of integration between the two communities there. Instead, we selected Waterford as the fourth location for our research. Waterford has no Traveller Training Centre though a number of other adult education services include Travellers in their student cohort. This educational provision includes a Traveller Youth Project, Traveller Community Project and a Youthreach programme which is particularly successful in this context.

The Traveller population of Waterford is 306 or 6.2 Travellers per 1000 of the population (CSO, 2006, p.34) which constituted the lowest ratio of Traveller to settled community of the four locations chosen. In 2008, a serious Traveller feud broke out in Waterford. Following the feud, relations between Travellers and the settled community continue to be characterized by extreme mistrust and hostility. This hostility has had wide-ranging implications for community stakeholders in the city. For instance, Brian an official in City Hall in Waterford comments...

The public perception of Travellers at the moment is very, very poor. Waterford is in a very unique position regarding what happened with the Traveller feud here... the public would have no appetite whatsoever for us to comply with the absolute need for 58 [housing] units... they actually asked the Traveller inter-agency group to concern itself with the poor public perception and the public confidence and to address the causes of that problem.

Maurice, a Youthreach worker also notes 'Waterford is way behind unfortunately in terms of Traveller involvement in community life and/or work life in the country. Its way behind so at the end of the day really if they are segregated then they will continue to be segregated'. He argues that the establishment of a Traveller Training Centre would be a backward step in terms of integration. Nevertheless he notes that young Travellers which he has encountered have specific needs which are not being met within the mainstream education system. He concludes...

Their needs in the sense of their literacy needs or their behavioural needs aren't being met and you can speak to any of the young people there and their experience of education wouldn't be positive because there's a tendency to sideline them, rather than really try to bring them in, in terms of education because they're not meeting their initial needs.

Maura who is involved in local Traveller Community Development Programme again highlights the critical importance of engaging Traveller men in future education initiatives stating ‘Traveller men have never been identified. Who has singled them out for help? Where are their needs being met?’. She concludes ‘in terms of the DES, I think they’re far removed from what’s happening nationally’. In light of the significant differences between the four sites evident in this review, what then are the strengths and weaknesses of the current Traveller Training Centre model?

## **What the TTC’s are doing well**

### *Finding 1: Respect for the Traveller culture*

All the Travellers interviewed indicated that they had experienced varying degrees of discrimination, rejection and ridicule from the settled community. In light of these experiences, one of the key attractions of the Traveller Training Centres’ was the level of respect for and understanding of Traveller culture which existed within the Centres. They attributed this cultural respect to the staff at the centres who they noted had in most instances, spent considerable time working with Travellers and clearly demonstrated their respect for and understanding of the Traveller culture.

Traveller learner Eileen comments...

Even though all the teachers are all settled and they’re lovely, we like them, you can say anything and you know they’re there to support you, there’s always someone there if you need them, that’s all the teachers. They’re very good at that.

Paul also commented positively on staff understanding of Traveller culture noting ‘they understand Traveller culture, ‘cos they work with Travellers, most of their whole life so like they know a lot about Travellers like’. Furthermore, a significant number of both male and female Travellers indicated that having a place where Travellers could come together and openly discuss their own culture was extremely affirming for them. For instance, Tony says...

You’ll always hear about your culture in this Centre but if you’re in a settled centre you’re not going to be talking about like... tents, wagons things like that there. They’d be all talking about politics or something else. We talk about politics in here but they [the staff] also bring in the Traveller culture into it. It’s like the settled community leaving their home for a meeting. It’s like the Travellers being here for their own discussion as well.

Karen, a young Traveller mother indicated that she never felt 'out of place' at the Centre and noted that 'everybody has a smile for you'. As a result, she noted that 'Its a place where you know it's ok to be a Traveller, more Travellers get to know one another, everyone has someone to talk to here, if we meet one another in the street we might just say hello and keep going but the Centre, it's the only place we can really meet'. The majority of Travellers interviewed who attended a TTC also commented that knowing that they were in a Traveller-only environment reassured them that they would not experience the level of ridicule which they previously associated with educational contexts. Patricia noted that 'the only courses I have done are the ones here, I wouldn't do one anywhere else'. This sense of security derived from respect and support for their culture was also acknowledged by Noel who comments...

See it wasn't school, like, do you know what I mean? I wouldn't go back to school now; I wouldn't have gone back to school like. I was learning here but in a way, it was with friends... I know when I came out here with Travellers that they'd be in the same category as myself, and then we'd be moving on together like it was laid back but there'd be no-one looking down at me do you know what I mean? Like we'd all be talking about the same things, we were all moving on together.

Therefore, the Centres were particularly successful in providing learners with an educational context where they felt confident that their cultural distinctiveness was acknowledged, accepted and supported. This cultural respect and understanding was critical to the continued participation of student learners in programmes provided by the Centres.

### ***Finding 2: Enhanced Self-Esteem through literacy and numeracy development***

Data obtained from Traveller education stakeholders during this research indicated that low self-esteem amongst Travellers was one of the main barriers to progression and inter-cultural integration between Travellers and the settled community. We found that lack of literacy and numeracy skills to be particularly significant in Traveller's own explanations for their low self-esteem. In recognition of the importance of this issue, one of the key areas on which the Traveller Training Centre's have focused has been the development of the key personal competencies<sup>iii</sup>. Travellers themselves highlighted that weak literacy and numeracy skills have resulted in their inability to engage with basic everyday activities, causing them to be reliant on others and thus contributing significantly to their low self-esteem.



Kathleen, a mature Traveller who couldn't read or write before coming to the Centre noted that she used to feel ashamed when she had to ask her children to perform very basic tasks that required literacy. Through her attendance at the Centre, she developed her literacy skills which have improved not only her self-esteem but changed her relationship with family members. She states 'Me myself I can't read and write, my children had to do everything for me, make a phone call, everything, once I came in here I'm coming on a bit. Say my grandchildren there, I can help them a little bit with their homework. It's a good place to be in'. Noelle comments 'It's a great feeling. When you go in to the bank you can write your name and that means everything you know'. Helen, a mother of five children noted that 'Even for things like health care, going to the doctor, or the price of food when you go into the supermarket, or when you get tablets, you didn't even know the directions, you couldn't read them'. Therefore, the programmes offered at the Centres which provided Travellers with a secure and shame-free environment to enhance their literacy and numeracy were repeatedly highlighted by Traveller learners and stakeholders as boosting self-esteem and facilitating broader forms of integration between Travellers and the settled community in Irish society.

### *Finding 3: Personal Development Programmes*

The Traveller Training Centres also provided a range of programmes and supports which focused on personal competencies including communication skills, personal development and management. These programmes were viewed by Traveller education stakeholders as being absolutely critical to building self-esteem and confidence of Travellers and facilitating broader forms of integration with the settled community. In some Centres, these personal competency skills include the following...

- How appointments systems and offices work: how to call to an office, make an appointment, wait to see individual, follow procedures if individual is not available;
- How parent teacher meetings work: teacher/learner meetings at the Centre were modelled on the school setting and included discussion of how to queue for the teacher, how to take praise, how to take criticism, progress reports etc.;
- How to behave in restaurant settings: queuing for food, how to complain politely, what to do with uneaten food;
- How meetings work: how to set and follow an agenda, the role of the chairperson, how to express a difference of opinion, issues such as punctuality, use of mobile phones etc.;

- Understanding of local services: information sessions and opportunity to meet with service providers including HSE services and health screening, An Garda Síochána, public health nurses, citizens information, Home School Liaison officer, FÁS, Educational Welfare workers;
- Basic confidence issues: how to say they cannot read something, how to question a health professional or talk about sensitive health issues, how to make a phone call to services such as schools/doctors etc., how to talk to counsellors;

The data indicated that where these skills were developed, Traveller themselves believe that their own capacity to engage with members of the settled community increased significantly. For instance, Sinead explains how following her Communications course, she felt much more confident in talking to members of the settled community including her children's teachers and her GP. She says 'Doing the course brought me out, I was very shy before I went to the Centre, then I did the Communication course, then I could sit down and speak in a group and give my opinion. Where before I would have kept my mouth shut I could discuss what we were going to do etc., I could talk to the teacher. I wouldn't have done that before'. A substantial number of female Travellers indicated that courses on cooking and nutrition enhanced their self confidence as they felt they clearly understood the benefits of planning healthy meals for their families. While only a limited number of males took the courses on cooking, a course on nutrition given by 'an outside person' impacted significantly on the lifestyle of two of our male interviewees, Donal and Kevin. Both were interested in sport and boxed at local clubs. Donal comments...

They had a lady in there talking about guidance and weight. I used to do boxing before and soccer, they were just telling me there eat plenty of fruit. She said if you are going to go for a game of soccer tomorrow eat a bowl of rice the day before and then before you go to bed only have a sandwich or something light and only something light before the match. That made a big difference

While Kevin comments...

You have more understanding about calories and everything. She said don't be embarrassed. The lady was lovely though and said oh you know ask whatever questions or whatever. I asked what would the best foods then to be eating if you are training? She said get 4 spuds and bit of cabbage and bacon or liver and eat plenty of chicken and fish. Fish is great for your brain. I never knew that.

The benefits of these kinds of programme in generating real forms of integration where Travellers can engage with confidence with settled community while still maintaining their cultural difference can not be under-estimated. For 46% of engaged Travellers, these programmes were the first instance where they had participated in formal education since their generally negative early experiences in primary school. They highlighted with pride their sense of achievement on completing these courses and their surprise at the relevance of the courses to their lives. Finally, they commended the sensitivity and respect of the teachers who provided these programmes who appeared to have a rich understanding of the particular problems which Travellers face in Irish society.

*Finding 4: Work based Skills: Preparation for the workplace and further education*

For the minority of Travellers who wish to progress into the workforce or further education, the Traveller Training Centres ran specific modules linking personal competency programmes to work based skills and training. The content of these modules focused on introducing Travellers to the expectations, understandings and behaviours which underpin the norms of the settled world of work in Irish society. Travellers who had taken these modules indicated that they saw immense benefit in terms of understanding the settled communities' view of timekeeping, attendance, working day structures and forms of communication at work. They also participated in programmes which assisted them in preparing a CV for job applications and interview skills. Seamus notes that these programmes are particularly important because he wasn't exposed to the values and norms of the settled 'world of work' at home. He states that 'we wouldn't see that at home, I mean we didn't see parents going out to work 9-5 like, it wasn't like that for us'.

Work preparation modules also explored with the Travellers the expectations of the settled community in relation to behaviour, dress and leave issues. Elaine who had recently secured a position with a local firm indicated that her preparation for work modules at the Centre assisted her in developing phone skills, computer skills and organising her work day. These work-based skills contributed enormously to her confidence as she started her new job and have been critical, in her view, to her continued success in the position. She found the work placement particularly useful as 'you see what work is like, you see the pressure, keeping time, all of that, you get a chance to try it and the staff [of the centre] will help you if you need them'. In Dundalk where the Centre has had particular success in generating work placements, all the Travellers interviewed noted that the availability of this option

made the courses offered particularly attractive to them. However, it is important to note that Centre staff in Ennis and Mullingar highlighted the particular difficulties they had experienced in organising work placements for their Travellers students, particularly with private sector employers.

***Finding 4: Social hub providing a range of supports***

A significant number of Travellers indicated that one of the key benefits which the Centres provided was a space where they could socialize with members of their own community. This social hub dimension of the TTCs was particularly important to Traveller women who have limited opportunities to socialize outside the home. This social isolation can lead to depression and poor mental health.

Alice comments:

You see we don't have a social life like settled people. If we get into a bar, there is only one bar in the town that lets us in. If we were to go out in the weekends, people wouldn't be half suffering from depression and all the other problems that they do if we went out like the settled people but we don't have a social life.

Peter indicated that for Traveller men, the Centre not only provided opportunities for education but a place where they could socialise with others in a crime-free environment. He comments 'What is there for Traveller men, in today's world, well if you don't do something you're gonna be in a lot of crime, in drugs, you could end up in jail over it like, because you won't be able to go to work, you'd have nothing to do, you'd find things very difficult like'.

For engaged and a number of trans-cultural Travellers in our sample, the Centres constituted their first port of call when they encountered difficulties when engaging with the settled community. The forms of support provided by Centre staff included help in filling out forms, accompanying Travellers to meetings with officials in local authorities and assistance in meeting with school and health services personnel. Staff at the Centres played a particularly important role in negotiating with employers when culture clashes linked to gender roles, family obligations, nomadism and general time management occurred. Indeed, we found that the capacity of TTC staff to assist Travellers in negotiating these integration and progression issues constituted one of the most critical ways in which Traveller Training Centres have contributed to Traveller integration in local contexts.

This support role was also highlighted by community stakeholders such as HSE worker, Natalie who comments ‘It’s a one stop shop for the Travellers, even dealing with the passport office, HSE, FÁS, schools, school liaison, form filling, whatever. It’s like a resource centre and a reference point to refer them on’. Three Travellers highlighted instances where they had returned to their local TTC for support after they had progressed to further education contexts. Two of these individuals noted that without the support of Centre staff, they certainly would have dropped out of further education. Interestingly Nora, a Traveller woman in Waterford, noted that after taking up a place in further education, she experienced difficulties in relation to researching and writing up her assignments. She states that she didn’t feel comfortable using the access support services in her third level institution because she felt that the staff did not understand the specific problems experienced by Travellers. She describes how in the end ‘I just dropped out, it was too hard, I didn’t understand what I was being asked to do and I didn’t feel I could go and ask them for help’. Therefore, the support provided by TTC staff in terms of general life skills and their role as mediators between Traveller learners and other agencies emerged as a crucial element of their broader contribution to intercultural integration between Travellers and the settled community.

#### *Finding 5: A meeting point for other agencies*

The Centres provided an important link between various government agencies and members of the Traveller community. In locations where Centres existed, Travellers, staff at the centre and community stakeholders in the Gardaí, HSE and local councils all noted that there was a better quality of engagement between the Traveller community and the settled community. A number of community stakeholders attributed this enhanced engagement to the degree of respect for Traveller culture which is evident in the Centres. One local Garda in Ennis commented that he felt this atmosphere of respect contributed to a sense of confidence among the Travellers who felt that they were meeting community stakeholders on a more equal footing. He notes ‘they would have had no animosity towards me, in full uniform, going in. So I think that the Travellers have taken ownership of St. Joseph’s. Now, I know that St. Joseph’s is run by members of the settled community, but the members of St. Joseph’s have taken ownership of the Centre and would see it as their space’. Francis, a male Traveller learner supports this view of enhanced interaction stating ‘There’s a guard out there, he comes here, he’s very nice and honest. At the moment he is finding for me about the rugby because I’m going back playing rugby’. The opportunities for enhanced interaction in TTC modules which had Traveller and settled learners in their student

cohort was also noted by Patricia who states ‘In our Centre, a couple of settled women came in and they’re learning from us, so they’re moving in with us, we’re afraid to move out. We have to meet half way. The settled people are a bigger group but if we have to fight about everything, where are we going to go then?’

In both Mullingar and in Waterford, community stakeholders repeatedly highlighted considerable difficulties they encountered in gaining access to Travellers. One social worker noted that she had difficulty engaging with them in a way that would be perceived as ‘non-threatening’. Staff from other adult education programmes indicated that while their courses provided Travellers with the opportunity to mix with their settled peers, providing a ‘positive’ point of contact for other state agencies was not part of their remit.

#### ***Finding 6: Positive Impacts on Traveller children’s engagement with Mainstream Education***

Throughout the data set, there was clear evidence that adult Traveller attending the TTCs were very supportive their children’s engagement with mainstream education. Two school principals, a resource teacher for Travellers and a member of the National Educational Psychology Service (NEPS), indicated that the attendance of Travellers at TTC’s has had a positive affect on their children’s engagement with mainstream education. Garret, a school principal comments ‘Sean and Mary, always attended out there [the Centre], their kids have done very well here. Bill’s three kids came here, he had attended out there [the Centre]. They did very well here’. Both principals indicated that there was a greater tendency for parents who attended TTC’s to support their children’s attendance beyond that of first year of post-primary education, in particular.

Furthermore, attendance at TTC’s appears to enhance not only Traveller parents enthusiasm for their children’s education but also their capacity to assist their children in more practical ways. Mick commented ‘I’d like to see them finishing school anyway, I can always be proud to say that I made them finish school and get jobs and then someday down the line they can say the same thing about me’. While Tracey comments ‘All our life was structured around getting the shopping, cooking and cleaning in the house. Help children with their homework, our parents couldn’t. Now parents know what their children are missing when they can’t read and write and they can help them with their homework ‘cos of the Centres’. A significant number of education stakeholders particularly highlighted

the benefits of Traveller parents who attended the Centres being in a position to help their children with their homework. Three principals also noted the added respect that enhanced levels of literacy and numeracy generated between Traveller parents and their children. School principal, Cormac notes...

The biggest impediment is the parents having no value on the education system... The second biggest impediment is where the child, at thirteen or fourteen, no longer takes the direction of the parents... and even lose respect for them because they know the parents can't read or write. They [Kevin and Sheila] have that little bit extra because they go to the Centre and it makes a difference.

Finally, it was evident that Travellers who attended the TTC's were very supportive of their children progressing to further education, while remaining sceptical of their chances of gaining employment because of anti-Traveller prejudice. Mary-Ann concludes 'Well I've a boy second year in college doing computers and I just hope that he gets work after it. He's doing a four-year course'. Therefore, the findings indicate that while the development of personal competencies by Traveller learners in TTCs may not result in progression, these programmes, nevertheless, have a long-term impact on the intercultural integration of the Traveller community into Irish society.

## **Areas where the Traveller Training Centre's are not successful**

### *Finding 1: Gender Imbalance*

Figures from the Back to Education Initiative (2009) indicate that women tend to outnumber men in their adult education programmes with the current ratio standing at four female participants for every single male. The trend is reflected in the student cohort of the Traveller Training Centres and across the adult education sector in Ireland generally where significant gender imbalances continue to exist. The recent decline of employment in the building industry has resulted in a small increase in the number of males attending adult education courses. However, sharp gender imbalances continue to exist in Ireland when adult education services here are compared to our European partners. The ratio of female to males attending the Traveller Training Centres currently stands at 6:1 (NATC, 2009). However, the success of St. Joseph's Traveller Training Centre (Ennis) in attracting twenty eight men into their student cohort of fifty two demonstrates that with targeted programmes the number of Traveller men engaged in adult education programmes can increase significantly.

Why do so few Traveller men attend the TTCs nationally? Firstly, the majority of Traveller men interviewed in our research had little interest in entering the settled world of work. For instance, Peter states that 'that's not the way for Traveller men, working 9-5, for a boss, that's not the way, we wouldn't have done it in the past'. Four male Travellers indicated far from increasing their status, participation in the workforce would be viewed by their Traveller peers as 'giving up their Traveller ways', essentially participating in a process of assimilation. This finding is also reflected within Nì Shúinéir's research on hierarchy in the Traveller community which highlights how little occupation is linked to status within Traveller culture (Nì Shúinéir(b) 2005). Traveller men interviewed in our sample also believed that they were particularly affected by general levels of prejudice towards Travellers in the settled community. They highlighted a number of instances where this prejudice had become evident in situations where they had attempted to engage in the process of progression. For instance, Ronnie describe how he had sent out over twenty nine C.V's and had spoken to several potential employers on the phone but once they ascertained that he was a Traveller, he had not been called to a single interview. Similarly, James who worked in Adult Education noted a number of Traveller men put down different addresses on their CV's as they felt they would not be called for interview once it was known they were a Traveller.

Apart from the limited opportunities to progress, it is clear where Traveller Training Centres made an effort to provide courses which were of interest to men, they did succeed in attracting them into their student cohort. In contrast, where Centres did not make deliberate efforts to target men, they had a largely female student cohort. Three male Travellers indicated that they had attended TTC courses because the subject matter (woodwork, metalwork) was of specific interest to them. Two males who were not engaged in Adult Education indicated that they would only be interested in attending courses at the Centre if they were in areas of interest such as horse welfare or car maintenance. A number of education stakeholders were critical of the lack of resources such as woodwork rooms and metalwork rooms for use with Traveller males. Finally, it was evident that far from being obstructers of progression and integration, in TTCs where the interests of Traveller men were taken into account, male Travellers did become more open to progression. For instance, Donal describes how 'I went on to study youth and community work after being at the Centre...I like the idea of keeping lads off the streets, that's the only reason why I did it like... I do coaching in the boxing and the handball with the youths 'cos I like it'.



Research presented in Chapter three highlights the critically important role which men play in the political and socio-economic structures in the Traveller community. However, state services in general and Traveller Training Centres in particular have been much more successful in targeting Traveller women than men. The findings of this comparative study on four sites suggest that in contexts where the needs and interests of Traveller men are targeted, they do engage with services provided. Thus, in the long term, any adult education service which seeks to facilitate greater integration between Travellers and the settled community will have to devote considerable attention to addressing the specific needs and interests of Traveller men.

### *Finding 2: Segregation from the Settled Community*

The major weakness of the current Traveller Training Centre model evident in our study was the segregated form of educational provision which is on offer in the Centres. For instance, Philip, a community worker in Waterford felt that opening a TTC in the city would constitute ‘a step backwards for Travellers’. He noted ‘if you segregate Travellers then they will remain apart from society’. This sentiment was echoed by Denis a Traveller man who had not attended a Traveller Training Centre but who had worked in a series of jobs and felt that he had integrated quite well into Irish society. He noted ‘There should be something else, the settled and the Travellers should be in the same place, working together. Not just a group of Travellers, they should be mixing that’s the way life should be’.

Approximately half of the Travellers interviewed who had attended a Traveller Training Centre indicated that they would like to see more interaction between Travellers and the settled community within Centre structures. Some Centres do provide courses which include members of the settled community within the student cohort. Patricia notes for instance, ‘We do have a few settled at the moment but I would like to see more settled coming in to mix with us. I would love to see them in’. Kevin, another learner also believes this interaction is important stating ‘as long as you keep Travellers away from the settled they’ll never mix. If they don’t mix, there will be no Ireland’. A number of TTC students indicated that they would be happy to go to another institution to do courses with settled people providing a member of TTC staff was giving the course. Therefore, despite their openness to intercultural engagement, they highlighted the importance of having a teacher who understands Traveller culture in the early stages of this integration process. Maureen comments ‘If the teachers that were here, were on those courses, where there are settled people and they could introduce us then it would be fine. When

people know who you are, its fine'. Shane, a Traveller who is part of a Youthreach programme highlights how difficult interaction in a mixed student cohort can be some of his friends who don't have much contact with the settled community on a daily basis. He states...

We know most of them now like but some of them we didn't know, half of them [other Travellers in the programme] aren't used to mixing with settled people. Since I came here like we mix, do you know what I mean? We mix with settled and Travellers, that's kinda good like because you're meeting new people, you're learning more about life, you know what I mean?

The stand-alone location of some Traveller Training Centres in industrial estates which are located far away from other educational institutions is particularly problematic in terms of this issue of segregation. Because of this structure, these Centres are physically removed from other educational programmes and structures used by adult education students in the settled community. Thus, there is little opportunity for the less formalised Traveller-Settled interaction which might occur during break and recreation periods in more integrated facilities. Finally, the location of these Centres on industrial estates decreased the visibility of the TTCs as dedicated Traveller spaces within local communities with some employers and community stakeholders indicating that they didn't even know that the Centres existed.

### *Finding 3: Lack of progression to further/higher education and to the workforce*

Chapter Three has highlighted some of the barriers to Traveller progression into the workforce and further education. These barriers included the very high degree of prejudice against Travellers evident within the settled community and the significant level of welfare dependency amongst Travellers. However, there are also considerable constraints emanating from within Traveller culture itself in terms of the progression models. These constraints include nomadism, feuding, Traveller gender roles and obligations towards the extended family. However, there was one aspect of the operational culture of the Traveller Training Centres which also impeded Traveller progression. During the Fás period, programmes at the Centres came to be run from nine to five, Monday to Friday in order to mirror the working week. However, this cultural tendency provides Traveller learners with a false impression of the settled 'world of work'. Many of the Travellers interviewed referred to their participation in programmes at the Centres as 'work' and not as education. This misrepresentation of Centre attendance

was also highlighted as problematic by the *Value for Money Review* (DES, 2008). When coupled with the allowance payment structure which currently exists for students, this operational model has resulted in some Travellers believing that their attendance at the Centre itself is a form of progression. They view themselves as having progressed to a point of employment, albeit in a protected environment. As a consequence, students feel little impetus to progress beyond the comfortable and sheltered space of the Traveller Training Centre into the more culturally alien environment of the workplace. Indeed, two Travellers interviewed who had progressed to the workforce indicated that they found they were ill-prepared for the vast difference between the culture of the work environment and that of the TTC as they had previously believed that the norms and practices of the Centre were in keeping with those of the workplace. Thus, for future adult education provision of Travellers, it is essential that learners be made aware of the difference between work and education, per se and that this difference is reflected in the operational culture of programmes oriented towards Traveller adults.

### **Adult Education and the Traveller community**

According to Census 2006, there are approximately 14,000 Travellers over the age of eighteen living in the Irish State who could potentially engage in adult education. These programmes include Adult Literacy Courses, Back to Education Initiative (BTEI), Community and Adult Education, FÁS, Post-Leaving Certificate Courses (PLC), Vocational Training Opportunity Scheme (VTOS) and Youthreach<sup>v</sup>. However, providing an overview of the extent of Traveller participation in these programmes is difficult due to the varied reporting systems of each agency and the absence of available data in relation to the total number of Travellers enrolled on Adult Education programmes.

A number of education stakeholders in our sample noted that the current emphasis on cost cutting measures may not only result in the phasing out of Traveller Training Centres but also the reduction of places in programmes which target Travellers such as BTEI, CDP, Fás and Youthreach<sup>v</sup>. The following table indicates the number of Travellers engaged in these programmes (BTEI, 2009, DES, 2010, TTC 2010) when compared to Traveller Training Centres.

**Table 4.1 Travellers attending Adult Education programmes**

Year	BTEI	Fás (CTCY)	Youthreach	TTC's
2007	884		364*	1089
2008	1,171	247	473*	1070
2009	857			

\*These figures indicate the total number of Travellers attending Youthreach between the age of 16 to 25.

As Chapter three highlighted, the goal of progression to the workforce and to higher or further education is not a priority for many Travellers. However, the Travellers interviewed during this research indicated that the goal of integration was important to them. In terms of the existing programmes offered by the TTCs, we found that it was the programmes which focused on personal competencies such as literacy, numeracy and personal development which had the most significant impact on intercultural engagement between Travellers and the settled community. However, many of the programmes on offer in adult education services outside the TTCs focus on work based skills. There is a presumption that learners have already developed personal competencies in communications skills, literacy and numeracy necessary to complete these courses<sup>vi</sup>.

Travellers also have to compete with members of the settled community for the limited number of places available on these programmes. For some Travellers, their lack of formal educational certification and the absence of positive discriminatory enrolment policies mean that they are at a disadvantage during the selection process when compared to their settled peers. Finally, for Travellers their lack of self esteem and their fear of rejection and ridicule from settled peers results in a reluctance to engage in adult education services where members of the settled community form the majority of the student cohort.

## Conclusion

Despite the barriers to intercultural integration between Travellers and the settled community, the findings from this research suggest that members of the Traveller community have a significant contribution to make to Irish society. In order to facilitate their increased participation, this chapter has highlighted the importance of the development of personal competencies such as interpersonal development, literacy and numeracy as well as work-based skills for those Travellers who wish to engage in the process of progression. It has been suggested by *An Bord Snip Nua* (2009) that when the Traveller Training Centres are phased out, Travellers will engage with mainstream adult education services in order to progress into the workforce and further education. One has to question the validity of this assertion given that the majority of Travellers interviewed for this project indicated that due to their previously negative experience of formal education in Ireland, they would not attend mainstream adult education services. The outcome of the closure of the Mullingar TTC supports this finding as not one of the fifty two trainees who attended the service has subsequently taken up a place in mainstream adult education. As mainstreaming is being recommended as the alternative to the Traveller Training Centre model, the following chapter explores the reasons for this low take up of mainstream education by Travellers.

- i Other programmes are offered depending on the needs of the learners at the time. A number of pilot programmes were developed in conjunction with the local Adult Education Centre under the BTEI initiative. These were Level 5 PLC programmes where Traveller learners were in an integrated setting with other learners. This programme was very successful the first time it ran when supports were provided for learners making the transition between segregated and integrated provision. Six Traveller learners receiving full certificates and one receiving a component certificate at Level 5. The second time the course was offered supports were not provided for the Travellers making the transition. The result was very poor, by the end of the first term of the two year programme only one Traveller remained on the programme
  
- ii The Centre has also been very involved in other local services. There have been a very high proportion of Traveller Suicides in Ennis over the past few years and the Centre has been one of the main sources of support for families. It provides an opportunity for learners to access Traveller health services, counsellors, voluntary and statutory agencies which support suicide. St. Josephs has encouraged many Traveller men to access help for depression, alcohol and drug abuse. With suicide rates so high and drug and alcohol abuse rising the importance of Traveller men accessing such services are of utmost importance as with support services. The centre also has a health Education/ Promotion Programme which promotes Traveller men and women accessing local health services. Van Hout, M C (2009). Irish Travellers and Drug Use- An Exploratory Study. Ethnicity and Inequalities in Health and Social Care. Volume 2, Issue 1, 42-49.
  
- iii There is broad acknowledgement in both educational policy documentation and in scholarly literature of the importance of fostering confidence and self-esteem in conjunction with work based skills in order to equip individuals to engage with society and with the workplace. However, the wide array of terminology used to describe these necessary skills which ranges from Soft and Hard skills (FAS, 2010), Personal Competencies (Evans and Kersh, 2004), Key Skills (UKFIET, 2008), Key Competencies (EU, 2006), to name but a few can result in confusion. While subtle differences and emphasis exist among the various interpretations, there is general agreement that personal development in the areas of literacy, numeracy, interpersonal skills and self management is a necessary pre-requisite to engagement with formal educational and training programmes (Evans and Kersh, 2004). It is also acknowledged that the development of these personal competencies is a gradual process where participants need to be reassured that the sustained effort involved in gaining these skills will result in tangible benefits for them (FÁS, 2010). For the purpose of this report the term personal competencies will be used to describe competencies or skills in the areas of literacy, numeracy, interpersonal skills which include communication skills and self management skills. Work based skills will be used to describe the competencies or skills which focus on specific tasks associated with the workplace or formal educational contexts namely skills in machine or apparatus operation, in computer protocols, in safety standards, in specific financial procedures, in sales and administration, in context specific interpersonal communication, in specific writing styles and in sourcing and analyzing educational/content specific literature (FAS, 2010, UKFIET, 2008, EU, 2006 and Evans and Kersh, 2004).
  
- iv It is important to note that Youthreach accepts clients between the ages of 16 and 25.
  
- v This cost cutting is particularly likely because of the payment of allowances to Travellers who attend these programmes.
  
- vi This assertion is borne out in the findings of the BTEI (2009) report on its programmes in 2007 which had 27,832 clients

in total of which 884 were Travellers. The report documents the previous educational attainment of all its clients, the literacy support offered them and the subsequent certification awarded. It notes that on entry to the programme, 76% of males indicated they had less than lower second level education with 38% indicating they had primary education only. Despite this significant statistic only 5% of all males received additional support for literacy (BTEI, 2009, p. 11). The report further notes that only 30% of males received some form of accreditation at the end of their programme. Figures were not available in relation to the attendance rates or the extent of early leaving or self exclusion from programmes. While the educational attainment of females on entry to the programme was slightly higher than that of males with only 24% of females indicating they had primary education or lower, only 40% of females received some form of certification. In total only 4% of the 27, 832 participants received additional support in literacy (BTEI, 2009, p.11-12).

## CHAPTER 5

### Travellers & Mainstream Education



## Chapter Five - Travellers & Mainstream Education

The shift towards inclusive education policies in Ireland during the 1990s recommended in the *Task Force on the Travelling Community* (1995), the *White Paper on Charting our Educational Future* (1995), the *White Paper on Adult Education* (2000) and the *Education Act* (1998) led to a move away from all segregated models of education. Against this backdrop, the *Value for Money Review* (2008) and *An Bord Snip Report Nua* (2009) have called for the phasing out of the Traveller Training Centres, stressing that adult Travellers should engage with mainstream educational options. However, figures published by the DES demonstrate that the engagement of teenage and adult Travellers with mainstream educational options in Ireland falls far below that of the settled community. The one exception to this trend is the primary education sector where the enrolment of Traveller children is in keeping with rates in the settled community. Within this context, this chapter examines the differentiated engagement of Travellers with the mainstream education system including primary, post primary, further and higher education in the Republic of Ireland.

### Travellers and mainstream primary education

Figures from 2006 Census indicate that of the 22,435 people who identified themselves as Travellers in Ireland, 10,431 (almost 50%) are aged sixteen or under (CSO, 2006, p. 37). Thus, almost half the Traveller population are required by law to engage with the Irish education system in some capacity. Over the past twenty years, there has been considerable improvement in the number of Travellers enrolling in primary education. Figures for settled and Traveller enrolment are now comparable, with both in the high ninetieth percentile. The scale of this increase in Traveller enrolment is significant over the last twenty years. For example, in 2007/2008 there were 8,158 Traveller children enrolled in mainstream primary schools compared with 3,953 in 1988 (GOI, 2009a).

This increased enrolment can be attributed to improved collaboration between government departments and state agencies and involves significant levels of co-operation between resource teachers for Travellers, welfare officers, social workers, the Inspectorate, HSE personnel and primary school personnel (DES, 2006). This 'joined up approach' was inspired by a number of policy documents, including The Education Act (1998), The Welfare Act (2000) and The Guidelines on Traveller Education in Primary Schools (2002) and Guidelines on Traveller Education in Second-Level Schools (2002). This emphasis

on collaboration coupled with the provision of additional supports such as transportation to and from school, the establishment of Traveller pre-schools, home/school visits and the continuous monitoring of attendance have yielded significant dividends in terms of Traveller participation in the primary education system.

Despite the overall positive picture of Traveller enrolment however, a detailed review of the statistics reveals some worrying patterns. Firstly, although the average attendance rate of Travellers at primary level was approximately 80%, the figure varied from 35% to 100%, with the lowest attendance amongst Traveller children living in unofficial halting sites<sup>i</sup>.

Secondly, there is no nationwide data available on the academic achievement of Travellers, standard test results in comparison to those of the settled community<sup>ii</sup>. However, findings from localised and small scale research projects, indicate that in many instances 'up to one third of the Travellers were absent on the day of the assessment with other Travellers indicating they were not able to take the test' (DES, 2006, p.38). In instances where the tests were taken, it was found that 'over 60% of Traveller pupils are below the 20th percentile in English reading and mathematics' (DES, 2006). In the absence of coherent nationwide data, it is difficult to determine to what extent these poor test scores are reflective of the performance of Traveller children in general within the primary education system.

Finally, despite the promotion of intercultural education throughout the Irish education system, there are no criteria by which the intercultural integration of a pupil is measured. Thus, the only way of measuring the success of education services in supporting integration at primary level is through the relatively rudimentary statistics on enrolment and attendance.

The findings from this research indicate that the main reasons for the improvement in enrolment figures at primary level include the following factors:

- Legislation which requires children under the age of sixteen to attend school, a requirement which is monitored and enforced by Welfare Officers;
- Strong religious motivation which culminates in the sacraments of Communion and Confirmation;
- Having the same teacher for the entire year;

Maureen, a post primary school principal notes how difficult the transition from single to multiple teacher environments can be for Traveller children. She states 'I think they survive better in Primary

because they're with the one teacher all day, but you come to secondary and there's nine different teachers and nine different subjects and you have homework in different subjects and you need a bit of order and structure in the home to have that happen'.

The other contributing factors to increased enrolment included;

- The increased level of emphasis among Traveller parents on the importance of attaining a basic education;
- The various supports that have been provided as a result of additional funding for schools;
- The provision of transport and additional personnel such as Resource Teachers and Visiting Teachers for Travellers which build links between home and school;
- The enhanced collaboration between the various agencies which help monitor the progression of Traveller children through the primary school system;

The findings from this research also indicate that there is still relatively little intercultural interaction occurring between Traveller children and their peers in primary school. Kevin, a post primary school principal describes the experience of one Traveller child Maura in relation to birthday parties. He states

And the next thing was anyway that she realised that one of the children in the class was having a birthday. The notes were given out discreetly to all the kids to attend, but she didn't get one. And then, maybe a week or two after that it was her birthday and she went to the trouble of writing out all the stuff, but she started handing them out, but no one turned up to her birthday.

Two small scale research projects carried out in culturally diverse primary schools in the west of Ireland (O'Dea, 2007, McHale, 2008), support this observation of weak peer interactions between Traveller and settled children. Both researchers found that Traveller children constituted the most socially excluded group from playground games, from friendship groups and from invitations to home visits such as birthday parties and sleepovers. Furthermore, a significant number of dis-engaged, engaged and trans-cultural Travellers in our sample indicated that while they were aware of their Traveller identity from early childhood, primary school was the first place where they personally experienced prejudice and stigma in relation to being a Traveller. William notes for instance that it was at school that he first associated being a Traveller with 'something bad, or something to be ashamed of'. These sentiments find resonance in the work of cultural analyst Stuart Hall (2009) who notes that it was not

until his arrival in England from Jamaica in the early 1950's that he became aware that he was viewed as being black. He also recognised that this term black was associated with 'being lesser, undesirable or feeling ashamed of one's identity' (2009, p.205).

The lack of intercultural interaction between the settled and Traveller community highlights the importance of moving beyond initiatives which target the Traveller population alone. Initiatives which target the attitudes of the settled majority are also needed if the 'respect for diversity' outlined in the Guidelines for Intercultural Education (2005) is to be achieved. Kymlicka (2003) notes that these initiatives to support intercultural engagement can be difficult at an interpersonal level but are vital for social cohesion, stating...

we may not find it personally enriching (and may instead find it painful and tiring)... but is something we have a duty to attempt... otherwise contact will reduce quickly to rather crude forms of bargaining and negotiation, rather than any deeper level of cultural sharing or common deliberation which in turn reinforces the underlying sense of 'solitude' between the groups (2003, p.160).

Pro-active intercultural integration strategies coupled with new legislation which promotes/enforces positive discriminatory practices in enrolment policies would mean that, at the very least, opportunities for inter-cultural interaction between Travellers and the settled community would be increased. Arising from this interaction, one would hope that greater understanding would evolve between both communities.

## **Mainstreaming at Post Primary Level**

There has been a substantial increase in recent years in the transfer of Traveller children from primary education to post primary education with just over 90% of Traveller pupils transferring to secondary school in 2008 (GOI, 2009). There has also been some improvement in the retention of Traveller children within the post primary sector with figures indicating that 2,596 Traveller children were enrolled in mainstream post primary schools in 2007/2008 compared with less than 1,000 in the 1999/2000 school year (DES, 2009a). However, three issues become apparent on closer examination of the data available. Firstly, as Travellers progress through post primary school, there is a significant drop in both enrolment and attendance on a year by year basis. For example, in 2007/2008, only 56% of Travellers completed the Junior Certificate compared to 94% of the population nationally. Furthermore, just one hundred and two Travellers completed the Leaving Certificate in the same period, an estimated completion rate of less than 20%, considerably less than the national average of 84% (GOI, 2009a).

Secondly, there is general acknowledgement from Dept. of Education sources that there is considerable disparity between enrolment and attendance of Traveller boys and Traveller girls, with the figures for boys coming in far below that of girls (DES, 2009a). While there has been an increase in the number of Travellers taking up other educational options such as *Youthreach* (DES, 2009a), evidence gathered during this research suggests that the numbers of girls taking these educational routes also exceeds the numbers of boys by almost two to one.

Finally, there is no nationwide data available on academic achievement of Travellers who progress through post primary school compared to students from the settled community. There is also no data in relation to the integration of Travellers in second level schools. Therefore, the success of the post-primary system in engaging with Travellers can be measured only in terms of enrolment and attendance which according to statistical evidence falls far below rates for the settled community.

## **Key Challenges for Mainstream Education**

The data collected during this research project offers insights that go beyond the 'statistical what' of Traveller engagement with post-primary education and attempts to engage significantly with the 'whys' of the situation. A number of factors contribute significantly to the current low rates of participation by Travellers in the second level system. These factors include enrolment and attendance policy and enforcement, identity reductionism and peer rejection, fear of assimilation and patterns of early marriage, lack of role models and Traveller support tutors, lack of engagement with specific Traveller behaviours, lack of respect for parents by some Traveller students, suppression of Traveller identity and feuding

## **Enrolment**

Enhanced collaboration between government agencies around issues of enrolment and attendance were viewed by some stakeholders in our sample as contributing to the increased participation of Traveller students in the post-primary system. Two post primary principals indicated that they had noticed an improvement in the attendance of Travellers in the past year which they attributed to increased monitoring by Welfare officers. Furthermore, school principal Stephen noted that 'the tightening up on Welfare payments, and how they are now linked to attendance, that has made a difference in attendance, especially with the boys'<sup>iii</sup>.

However, data from other stakeholders including other school principals, youth workers, youth placement officers, social workers and TTC staff indicated that in some locations the lack of coordination between education providers at post primary level led to in one social worker's words 'many Travellers falling through the cracks'. These education providers included the VEC sector, the community school sector, the comprehensive school sector, the voluntary secondary school sector, and Youthreach. The complexity and lack of co-ordination within the post-primary system has made it more difficult to track the progression of Travellers through second level education. This situation is further exasperated by insufficient collaboration between the education providers and welfare services, particularly, the HSE. Sheila who works in the education sector stressed 'it comes down to the government really, their responsibility really, if they don't single out Travellers and make an issue of their education, then there is no need to address it or be accountable'. She is particularly critical of the tendency of state services to characterise Travellers as a very disadvantaged group rather than a culturally different group in Irish society which means that specific strategies needed to address the cultural reasons for the lack of Traveller engagement with the second level system are not developed.

The lack of collaboration between education providers at post-primary level is acknowledged in the *Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy* (DES, 2006) which called for an integrated approach to the education of Travellers, involving partnerships between all key players in the sector including the HSE. The report concluded that 'The Department of Education and Science cannot work successfully on its own in this area' (2006, p.71). In this context, the current Dept. of Education proposal to introduce a tracking system for Traveller children from their initial enrolment in primary school would, we argue, have a significant and positive impact on Traveller participation in the Irish education system at all levels.

The lack of positive discriminatory enrolment policy is another significant factor contributing to the lack of engagement by Travellers with mainstream post-primary education. Flexible enrolment policies of some schools have resulted in a reduction of school choice for Traveller parents and an unequal distribution of Traveller pupils throughout schools in each location. This uneven distribution of Travellers within schools generated a number of problems. Tom, a post primary principal noted flexible enrolment policies had resulted in some schools enrolling no Travellers, limiting opportunities for intercultural interaction. He comments 'I mean I know people in schools above in Dublin and... they will never see a Traveller in that school... They will never see people from poor ethnic minority groups either'. Tom is also critical of trends where by large numbers of Travellers enrol in one school in a town. He stressed

that this practice often resulted in school resources being over-stretched in an effort to meet the needs of the Traveller children. Kevin, a post primary school principal noted that in some schools where there were large numbers of Traveller children and other minority groups enrolled, there was a notable decrease in the number of children from the settled community enrolling in that school over time. He tells how...

There was a school in the town here that wasn't taking any Travellers... I went to a meeting then and I addressed the elephant in the room... I think that's totally unfair. If they come from around this side of town or their halting site is on this side, then it's normal they should be here... but they shouldn't have to go all the way across town... if they're not from this side. I also don't believe that one school in town should be able to say 'oh we're never going to take them'.

Thus, our research suggests that reform of enrolment policy of mainstream post-primary school will have to be addressed if Traveller participation in the post-primary education system is to be increased.

## **Identity Reductionism and Peer rejection**

Peer rejection is a major inhibiting factor of Traveller participation at post primary level. A significant number of Travellers indicated that they experienced ridicule, rejection and continuously feared being laughed at by their peers at post-primary school. Michelle tells how...

I remember being... locked into a doll's house in school in the classroom and my lunch being given to another child. You know? And being asked to repeat a word because I didn't say it the way... the way the teacher spoke... Like eh... and eh, having to repeat myself, repeat myself, until I felt so bad... that I didn't...want to be there.

Michelle's experience highlights a number of factors which emerged repeatedly when Travellers in our sample described their school experiences. A number of Travellers emphasised the shame they experienced because of mocking of Traveller modes of speech and name-calling from settled peers. Therese describes her son's experience as follows...

He's very proud to be a Traveller, you know, and I brought him up that, that if anyone says anything like that, he doesn't have to pick a fight, but he can explain his heritage, his culture and be proud of who he is... he was actually wearing a Traveller peace pin on his jumper and... a few of the lads in school said... 'that's all them knackers and they're doing to bomb us' and stuff and my son said... 'do you know that knacker is not to be used for a person?'

Amartya Sen (2006) highlights this practice of ‘identity reductionism’ which can occur when different cultural groups interact. He notes that the fear of one’s culture being diluted, ridiculed or coming under attack often results in hostility towards other cultural groups. Thus tension can lead to the accentuation of a single aspect of group identity or over-emphasis on a single aspect of the cultural identity of the ‘other’. He stresses that nation-states seeking to generate intercultural engagement between different ethnic and cultural minority groups need to develop initiatives which combat this identity reductionism. These strategies must begin with an acknowledgement that we all have multiple identities. For example in describing himself he states that he can be at the same time, ‘an Asian, an Indian citizen, a Bengali with Bangladeshi ancestry, an American or British resident, an economist, a dabbler in philosophy, an author... a man, a feminist, a heterosexual’ (2006, p.19). Once the complex and diverse nature of everyone’s identity is recognised, initiatives which emphasize the similarities that exist between different cultural groups around aspects of identity such as gender, age, place in the family can be developed (Sen, 2006).

In light of this model, we found that sporting activities provided a particularly valuable means for Travellers to bridge the divide between themselves and the settled community. Participation in sports demonstrates clearly that there is more to the individual’s identity than simply being a Traveller or being a settled person. Ciaón highlights how sport helped him integrate at school saying ‘Well I left school when I was eleven like but I came back when I was sixteen ‘cos I realised it was needed it like, I played soccer, handball everything like that with settled lads... See some settled people are different to others like...the lads I play football with they’re basically the same as myself like’. The findings of this research suggest that the DES need to urgently develop practical intercultural integration strategies which focus specifically on identity reductionism and peer rejection between Travellers and settled students in the post-primary system.

## **Fear of Assimilation and Patterns of Early Marriage**

A significant number of engaged Travellers in our sample indicated that fear of assimilation was one of the main reasons why Travellers did not remain within the mainstream post-primary education to Leaving Cert. Three Travellers indicated that they felt that remaining in post primary education created pressure for them to assimilate into settled community. Sean comments ‘If you stay in school, then you have to turn your back on your Traveller ways. It’s different for them, they don’t get it, they don’t understand our Traveller ways’. Maeve says ‘you just feel that the cost is too great, you might become just like the settled girls and then your own won’t want you’.



There was evidence that the Traveller model of the life course which emphasises early marriage as the route to progression and status within Traveller culture clashed directly with the settled model of progression within the mainstream post primary education system. Three post primary principals indicated that the reason most frequently given by parents for the departure of their child from post-primary school was marriage or preparation for marriage. Teresa, a learner at TTC stresses; 'Why would they stay in school?... well it's come to the stage now where there is some staying in school...but a lot hasn't stayed in school... I think it's like, y'know when a Traveller girl becomes a certain age... it's marriage'. Kevin, a post primary school principal also noted that Traveller boys in mid teens were more interested in progressing to manhood and as such the 'confines and routines of the school, they couldn't cope with it, they just wanted out'. Timmy, a Traveller boy who had recently married commented 'well really we just wanted to get on with it, get on with the next stage of our lives, time to be a man, y'know, that's our part in life'. In light of the Irish state's commitment to the model of intercultural integration, there is evidence that the DES will have to consider much more seriously the impact that patterns of early marriage have on progression of Traveller teenagers through the Irish education system. The findings of our research suggest that because of this distinct cultural practice, significant numbers of Travellers teens will continue to leave the post-primary system after the age of fifteen. In recognition of this culturally distinct Traveller model of the life-course, targeted strategies which focus on the development of adult education services for Travellers must be a policy priority.

### **Lack of role models and Traveller support tutors**

The lack of role models for integration and progression and the lack of Traveller support tutors within mainstream post primary schools also contributed to the high rate of early school leaving. John, who coordinated a Traveller Youth project highlights the importance of role models saying 'What we try and do say, here... through the Traveller interest group is to get role models... to get more and more role models out there, whereby the Travellers can see it is achievable... because there is no precedence of this... they feel they just can't do it'. Where Traveller support tutors were in existence, Travellers interviewed noted that this was especially helpful, particularly for Traveller boys. Three Traveller males stated that although they had left school before the Leaving Certificate, the support they received from the Traveller support tutor meant that they stayed in school for a year longer. One boy indicated that the support of the Traveller tutor had prolonged his post primary education by two years. Dean indicated that having an adult male Traveller in the school with whom he could talk and who could act as mediator in difficult situations meant he felt understood and supported within the school

environment. He stressed 'You could go to Seamus, like he got it, he understood like and he could talk to the teachers for you, even when you were angry, he would calm you down'. Liam who worked as a Traveller support tutor noted much of his work involved diffusing potentially tense situations saying 'Often if there was a problem, like someone forgot a book or something, I would just go and get it, stop things before they got heated, get people to calm down'.

The importance of role models and mentors in supporting students from cultural minorities is stressed repeatedly in the educational literature on intercultural integration. Hung and Chen (2002) note that before people can engage with curriculum to 'learn about' something, they must first understand the implicit rules and norms of their environment, in other words, they have to 'learn to be'. Etienne Wenger's (1998) concept of 'communities of practice' demonstrates how the underlying culture of a school environment can support the participation and cultural identity of some groups while implicitly excluding other cultural minorities. The culture of these communities of practice can be evident in:

- language which includes the documents, images and symbols used to communicate with each other;
- tools that people use to get their work done such as selected readings;
- the chosen format used for teaching; explicit roles, procedures and regulations that define how work is done in that community;
- implicit behaviours that make the culture of that community unique.

In order to become part of a community of practice, the student must be supported in moving from a position of observation, to periphery participation to full participation (Wenger, 1998). Both education stakeholders and Travellers indicated that the absence of role models and mentors meant that the task for teenage Travellers to move from observation to full participation in the relatively alien cultural environment of the post primary school was significant. Traveller support worker Liam says for instance 'The teachers don't get it sometimes, they don't get the Traveller way, you have to talk to them and tell them the Traveller ways and explain how the Traveller sees it... you want Travellers helping Travellers 'cos well see you're in the same boat, d'yknow what I mean?'. Two post-primary principals indicated that Traveller support workers were particularly helpful for Traveller pupils who found the transition from the single teacher primary school environment to the multiple teacher post primary school, unsettling.

## Lack of Engagement with Traveller behaviour

During the course of this research, it was evident that a number of stakeholders were uneasy when discussing Traveller behaviour issues, a reluctance which is also evident in government publications. For example in the report 'School Matters, the Report of the Task Force on Student Behaviour in Second Level Schools' (2006), there is no reference to Travellers, to specific elements of Traveller behaviour or to discrimination towards Travellers. While one would not advocate the singling out of Travellers, the failure to confront how the clash between Traveller and settled culture generates specific behaviour challenges is problematic.

In the United Kingdom, there is a growing body of research which looks specifically at Traveller behaviour within educational contexts. The findings of a longitudinal study on forty-four post-primary Traveller students carried out by Chris Derrington (2005) explored the linkage between behaviour patterns and the exclusion of Traveller children<sup>iv</sup> in fifteen UK secondary schools over a three year period. His research was prompted by the findings of an OFSTED report in 2003 which indicated that Gypsy Travellers had the poorest retention figures at secondary school across Scotland and England and 'the overall attainment of Gypsy Traveller students is the lowest of any minority ethnic group' (Derrington, 2005, p.55).

As a starting point, Derrington interviewed the primary teachers who had taught the forty-four students in his sample. They noted that, in general, the behaviour of their students was good at primary school but they anticipated that these students would experience difficulties in making the transition to secondary school. They stressed that mis-understandings of their behaviour might occur which could result in their exclusion or self exclusion from school. Derrington identified the following seven issues:

- Hostile exchanges in response to racist name-calling;
- Direct communication style which might be misinterpreted by teachers as a sign of disrespect;
- Social and academic grouping where students with learning difficulties may be grouped with and come under the influence of other students with additional behavioural difficulties;
- Students with learning difficulties may employ acting-out behaviours in order to mask their difficulties or to gain peer approval;
- Lack of a trusted adult to whom they could turn in times of difficulty;

- Hierarchy or power issues where students may challenge or be challenged by others to fight and determine the 'pecking order';
- Irregular attendance which impedes a sense of belonging and impacts negatively on attainment across the curriculum (Derrington, 2005, p. 53).

Derrington (2005) concluded that the predictions of the primary teachers were realised in a number of cases. One third of students in his sample received one or more temporary exclusions during the three years of the study due to behavioural issues, with physical aggression towards peers and verbal abuse towards staff being frequently cited as reasons for these exclusions. At the end of the three years, more than half of the original sample of forty-four had self-excluded themselves from the second level school system. In his conclusion, he highlights three important issues which provide valuable insights into post primary education provision for Travellers. Firstly he stressed that the behaviour problems encountered were contextual and not generic which 'suggests that the relationship with individual teachers was a key factor... as there was some glowing comments interspersed with extremely negative appraisal of behaviour' (2005, p. 60). Secondly, he noted that having a trusted and understanding adult in the school was an important factor for those Travellers who remained in the school system. Thirdly, he discovered that in cases where learning difficulties were interwoven with challenging behaviour 'supplementary provision could be perceived by students and parents as punitive rather than restorative' (2005, p.60). Finally, he concluded that if Gypsy Traveller parents and students viewed the school as a place where their social, moral, physical or emotional well-being was under threat, they would permanently disengage with the education system. Given Derrington's findings, it is disappointing that the '*School Matters, the Report of the Task Force on Student Behaviour in Second Level Schools*' (2006), did not engage with the specific behavioural issues which pertain to Travellers. The development of a more culturally nuanced response to challenging Traveller behaviour might go some way to increasing the participation of Travellers in mainstream post-primary education, particularly at Senior Cycle level.

### **Lack of respect for parents**

Lack of respect for parents by some Traveller students contributed to their poor engagement with post primary education. A number of adult Travellers in our sample described how levels of respect for the elders in the community had diminished since their own childhood. Audrey says 'They don't

listen to us parents the way they used to, they don't have the respect'. This perceived lack of respect for parents was confirmed by educational stakeholders who highlighted instances where parents were supportive of the school in its endeavours to ensure their Traveller children attended. However, in these cases, the students themselves made it clear that they did not want to remain in school. Tom comments 'The parents, their backing is not as valuable as it used to be, because I can see, the respect isn't there between thirteen and fourteen year olds and their parents, and the respect is gone'.

According to Bhatti (2006) this phenomenon of diminishing respect can often occur between parents and children of minority groups. She highlights the experience of Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities in the UK where parents' lack of education and cultural difference generates a gap between the 'home culture' and the culture of the school. She notes that teenagers are often caught in 'no mans land' as they struggle to reconcile the requirements of their parents' culture and their desire to fit in with their peers in school. In instances where they face rejection by their peers, the student may manifest anger towards their parents linked to their own difficulties in negotiating culture clashes. Peter who worked on a Traveller Youth project says 'I think unfortunately a lot of the younger Travellers are losing out on their own culture because they just want to fit in so badly and they're taking on the settled ways... and... em... parents are trying to fight against that'. This observation of a growing cultural gap between Traveller parents and their children was also highlighted by Walker (2008) in her report on Traveller suicide.

## **Hiding Traveller identity**

There was evidence that a significant number of the Travellers in our sample who remain in post primary school hide their Traveller identity. Two principals noted that there were children from Traveller families in their schools who were doing extremely well academically and were emphatic about keeping their Traveller identity a secret. Unfortunately, some educational stakeholders tended to view this practice of hiding identity as evidence of successful integration rather than assimilation. Brian describes one family in his school stating 'They don't want it known that they are Travellers, I mean they come from great families and work very hard, they don't mix with the other Travellers, they are like 2nd or 3rd generation, they are fully integrated'. This suppression of Traveller identity is a phenomenon also evident in interviews with trans-cultural Travellers who have progressed into the workforce. It represents a worrying practice as it suggests that the Travellers who have most contact with the settled community

believe that they will be more accepted if they hide their cultural identity entirely. If this is true, then the process of progression will only ever be open to a small minority of Travellers who have the psychological and intellectual resources to engage in the complex, demanding and psychologically damaging process of identity suppression. In contrast, if the Irish state and the DES were to recognise that supporting the intercultural integration of Travellers involves not only the increased participation of Travellers in the education system but also unpicking the prejudices of the settled community, the process of integration becomes more viable for the entire Traveller community in Ireland.

## **Feuding**

From the perspective of the educational stakeholders, Traveller feuds had an impact on the attendance of some Traveller pupils. James, a post primary school principal noted that one family 'kept away from school for over three weeks' due to fears of confrontation with other feuding families. Two Traveller support tutors indicated that feuding had a negative impact on their ability to work in schools because of considerations for their own safety. Neil noted that he was unable to support some of the Traveller pupils in school as he feared his interventions would be construed as 'taking sides'. He indicated that he finally had to 'stop going to the school altogether, even though I had nothing to do with the feud, but the family was in the school and I couldn't risk it'. Two Traveller women also noted that although their family was not involved in a local feud, the feuding itself reflected badly on the perception of Travellers by settled parents and teachers. Siobhán noted the discomfort she felt when she brought her children to school and noted that the feuding made her 'feel ashamed, you feel that the other parents are looking at you and saying... that's a Traveller'. Given the serious safety issues which have emerged in relation to Traveller feuds in recent years (McGearty et al., 2008, Ní Shúinéir(a), 2005), the challenge of supporting Traveller teenagers' participation in education during feuds is one which must be addressed not only by the Dept. of Education but by Traveller families and Traveller organisations themselves.

## Mainstreaming at further and higher education

From the limited statistical data available, there is evidence that significantly fewer Travellers engage with further or higher education than the settled majority. 2008 figures indicate that there were 'fewer than one percent of Travellers engaging in further education and less than twenty Travellers pursuing studies at higher education' (DES, 2008, p.16). However, the different reporting mechanisms of education providers such as the VEC, VTOS, Youthreach, Back to Education Initiative (BTEI), Community Development Programmes (CDP), Institutes of Technology (IT) and the University sector means that it is difficult to get a reliable nationwide overview of Traveller participation in further or higher education. In fact, interviews conducted during this research suggest that a greater number of Travellers are progressing to further and higher education than evident in the statistics.

There are three reasons why the presence of a Traveller student within an education service might not be recorded. Firstly, Travellers who progress to further or higher education tend to be from families who have already substantially assimilated into the settled community. Mary's experience is typical in this context. She says 'I have more contact with the settled than what I would with my own. We were just a family who was reared on our own, we lived with settled, we went to school'.

Secondly, a number of trans-cultural Travellers stressed to administrators that they did not want their Traveller identity revealed at any cost. Four Travellers indicated that they felt they would not be able to continue on their course if their identity as Travellers was known by their peers. Eileen states for instances 'Yes, sometimes you would have a few friends and they would be talking about something in the paper about Travellers. I had to learn to let it pass. If I stood up I would become a target for three years. If I had to say anything my whole three years would have been different'. Adult education stakeholders like Ellen confirmed this observation saying...

I mean we would have an awful lot of families who are settled in to the second generation. They think there's a big stigma attached to being a Traveller so they don't want to know about the culture. They don't let on to anyone and they get on just fine. They are all very bright and have done very well and have gone on to further education. But it must be hard for them at some level.

There was also evidence that a number of Travellers enrolled on further and higher education programmes did not complete their first year. In some instances, bureaucracy or lack of confidence on the part of the Traveller applicant resulted in their withdrawing from a programme at the application stage. Joanne, an Access officer, illustrates the tremendous fear which some Traveller students experience

about integrating into mainstream further education and revealing their identity. She describes the experience of one of her students, Aisling as follows...

I mean she got almost 500 points in the Leaving Cert and flew through the Access programme. She needed very little help with her assignments and came out almost top of the class but she wouldn't go forward, no matter what we said or did, she said she just couldn't go on in case someone found out she was a Traveller.

A number of Travellers indicated that the academic and bureaucratic requirements of their courses proved too onerous. In the absence of student support services which were oriented specifically towards Travellers, they felt they could not complete their first year at further education. Elaine says 'I'd love to work with old people. I did start a course a year back, but they give you things to look up, and I couldn't read half the things and I was afraid to ask anyone so I left it after a couple of weeks because I couldn't do the homework they were giving me'. Adam who works in adult education confirms this observation saying 'I know there were four children from that family who all went to the local IT or to the VEC, they were really bright kids but I don't think any of them finished the courses, they needed the extra support and didn't want anyone to know they were Travellers'.

For those Travellers who progressed into further or higher education via the TTCs, it is clear that the support of the Centres was crucial in their success. Four of the Travellers interviewed indicated that knowing that they could return to the Centre for help and guidance when needed boosted their self confidence while completing their programmes. Pauline describes how one teacher helped her: 'John was great. He would help you with the forms, with the work. He always made you feel good about yourself. You knew you could ask him anything. I couldn't have done it without his help'.

Another significant barrier to the progression of Travellers to higher education lies in the disparity between policy and practice. A substantial number of stakeholders expressed their anger and dismay at the announcement in November 2009 that candidates who successfully completed the *Leaving Certificate Applied* programme (LCA) were no longer eligible to enter programmes such as catering and hospitality in the Institute of Technology (IT) sector. Entry to these programmes is now organised through the Central Applications Office (CAO). Three educational stakeholders noted that Travellers in their student cohort had previously opted for this route and proceeded successfully into higher education. It is difficult to reconcile this negative development with the call for flexible delivery models in both European and Irish Adult Education policy and documentation. While the specific



reasons for this action were not given, one can only conclude that this decision was a response to calls to cut the cost of programmes as the examination of these modules required extra manpower and expense. However, given the opportunity for financial independence generated by participation in these programmes for Travellers, one would have to question how much savings will realistically be achieved by this decision over the long term.

In light of the overall analysis of Traveller participation in mainstream adult education in Ireland, one must question why the recommendations from the *Task Force on the Travelling Community* (1995) which stressed the need for systems to ensure 'the collection and collation of Travellers participation rates through out all educational contexts have not been adopted' (1995, p.56-57). In addition, the recommendation of the *Value for Money Review* (2008) which highlighted the need for further collaboration between agencies, have also not been implemented. The lack of action on these issues suggests that there is much that the DES could do in the short term to improve our knowledge of the specific obstacles and challenges which Travellers face in the mainstream adult education system in Ireland.

## Conclusion

On the basis of data gathered during this research project, it appears that the main challenge facing education policy makers and providers is how best to support Travellers' participation in the Irish education system while at the same time acknowledging their rights and cultural identity. Given early marriage patterns amongst the Traveller community, there is evidence that the 80% percentage of Travellers who leave the mainstream post-primary system prior the completion of the Senior Cycle will require targeted and systematic support to re-integrate into adult education services. This support must include programmes which address issues of self esteem and confidence building as well as further modules on literacy, numeracy and personal competency development. The 'one size fits all' model recommended in the *Value for Money Review* (2008) and the report of *An Bord Snip Nua* (2009) will not suffice. Indeed, creative educational solutions which are underpinned by justice and rights legislation, if necessary, must be developed if the majority of Travellers are to be supported in participating fully in Irish society.

- i Dept. of Education. (2006) STEP Report. Dublin: Dept of Education
- ii As regards literacy and numeracy, data from standardised tests conducted for the STEP survey (30 primary schools and 6 post-primary schools) indicate that over 60% of Traveller pupils are below the 20th percentile in English reading and mathematics whilst 2% are in the top 80 - 100 quintile. The Report also notes a high proportion of Traveller pupils perform in the bottom quintile on standardised tests of literacy and numeracy in each of the primary schools surveyed. Assessment data were not available for almost 25% of pupils in reading and 30% of pupils in mathematics. Many were reported to be unable to undertake the test, or were absent during testing. Similar results were noted at post-primary level.
- iii This quote refers to the payment of Children's Allowance to parents whose are over 16 but still attending school.
- iv Derrington's (2005) study of Traveller children refers to Gypsy, Irish Traveller and Roma children.

# CHAPTER 6

## Conclusion

## Chapter Six - Conclusion

Within this report, we have demonstrated that despite a formal commitment to intercultural education in Ireland (McGorman & Sugrue, 2007, p.15-17, NCCA, 2005 and NCCA 2006), there has been little targeted policy to facilitate the integration of the Traveller and settled community in the Irish education system. The aspirations of the *White Paper on Adult Education* and the *Intercultural Guidelines* (NCCA 2005, NCCA 2006) are not underpinned, in any meaningful way, by targeted strategies and policies which would support the process of intercultural integration between the two communities at primary, post primary and third level.

Within the adult education services which are dedicated specifically to Travellers, namely the Traveller Training Centres, various BTEI, Fás and CDP which include education initiatives, the criteria for success has been the number of Travellers' progressing into the workforce and mainstream further education contexts. Through the research outlined in this report, we have demonstrated why this goal essentially measures assimilation rather than integration. The emphasis on progression within education policy fails to acknowledge the depth of prejudice which Travellers encounter daily in Irish society. In addition, there is no recognition that mainstream educational and workplace contexts are dominated by the values, behaviours and authority structures of the settled community. The majority of Travellers interviewed in our study viewed the process of 'progression' into mainstream educational and workplace contexts as assimilation which would require them to sacrifice the aspects of their cultural identity which bind them to their own community. As Joan, a Traveller woman, states, in explaining why she didn't want to progress, 'the price is just too high'.

Within existing DES policy in relation to Travellers, there is no recognition that the rewards which settled people receive from working and progression are not received by Travellers. The average Irish settled person derives both income and status from their occupation (Fields, 2003). However, within Traveller culture, there is little or no social prestige attached to participation in the workforce. Social status is derived, almost completely, from marriage and family ties. Ní Shúinéir also highlights this cultural difference stating 'Travellers... recognise no occupational pyramid. There are only more and less effective ways to earn money, and more and effective earners... While Travellers take pride in their skills, they do not define themselves in terms of specialisations' (2005 (b), p.3)

In addition to the absence of prestige rewards, Travellers who progress into the workforce, tend to occupy relatively low paid positions where pay levels are not significantly above social welfare payments. Thus, the process of progression does not generate major financial dividends for Travellers. Giving up welfare entitlements in an uncertain economic climate is viewed as a major risk by many Travellers, when they may have to re-apply for all entitlements within a short period if they lose their job.

Most importantly however, in focusing solely on the goal of progression, the DES has failed to acknowledge the significant levels of prejudice which Travellers face on a daily basis. Travellers are simply not another disadvantaged group in Irish society, but a community which has significant cultural differences to the settled majority (Fanning, 2002, Garner, 2004, Hayes, 2007). Almost all the engaged Travellers interviewed during our research indicated that the level of prejudice amongst the settled community was so great that they wouldn't even consider trying to get a job. The transcultural Travellers confirmed this impression by telling us how they had hidden or concealed their Traveller identity at various stages during the process of progression in order to avoid becoming a 'target'. Given this level of prejudice, it is not surprising that the TTCs examined in our research have failed to deliver on the goal of progression.

In examining the work of the TTCs and other Adult Education providers, we found considerable variation across the four sites reviewed. Of the sites examined, the TTC in Dundalk which is part of a mainstream VEC campus was, in our view, the most successful model despite being a female only facility. The model of a stand-alone centre, St. Joseph's Training Centre in Ennis, while highly successful in terms of general education and attracting male Travellers, struggled more with the task of integrating its activities with those of the surrounding community. In this context, we would broadly support the view of the DES that stand-alone centres should be phased out over a period.

Significantly however, we also found much lower levels of integration between Travellers and the settled community in the sites where no centre existed (Waterford) and the site where the TTC had been closed (Mullingar). In both locations, relations between the two communities were characterised by deep hostility evident in interviews with Travellers themselves, education and criminal justice stakeholders. Worryingly, in Mullingar, where the TTC had been closed due to feuding, none of the fifty two Travellers attending the Centre had taken up places in the mainstream education system after its closure. This student cohort included ten women who had successfully completed Year One of the Leaving Cert Applied programme, and who did not subsequently enrol for Year Two in other local VEC

services. This outcome of the Mullingar closure indicates that the DES policy of closing centres in the hope that Travellers will be absorbed into the mainstream VEC, is untenable and will have to be revisited in the short-term. Even if they wish to enter mainstream educational contexts, very few of the engaged Travellers which we interviewed had the self-esteem to engage in this process. The small minority of Travellers who had the confidence to progress, were generally part of families where considerable assimilation had already occurred.

In reviewing the experience of Travellers in mainstream educational contexts, we found that despite the high level of transfer of Travellers from primary schools to post primary schools, only half remain within the system by Junior Certificate and Travellers almost completely disappear from the system by Leaving Certificate. Factors critical in this level of early school leaving were bullying and prejudice experienced by Traveller teens and the change from single teacher to multiple teacher environments. However, the most significant factor was the difficulty experienced by Traveller teens in reconciling the expectations of their own community with those of settled Irish society. For teenagers from the settled community in Ireland, the mid to late teenage period is critical in laying the foundation for progression into further education and work contexts through engagement with state exams structures, apprenticeships etc. However, for the Travellers we interviewed, the mid to late teenage period (between fifteen and nineteen) is also a critical period when young Travellers are expected to marry, a step which is absolutely central to status and progression within Traveller culture. The impossibility of reconciling the competing demands of these two sets of expectations leads to the disappearance of most Traveller teens from the state school system prior to Leaving Certificate. Given this widespread pattern of early school leaving within the Traveller community, it is certain that the state will have to give serious consideration to dedicated adult education service provision for Travellers for the foreseeable future.

In considering the way forward for adult education for the Traveller community, the impact of feuding must also be critically evaluated. The increasing number and intensity of Traveller feuds in recent years has been a significant complicating factor in the provision of a whole range of services to Travellers (Nì Shúinéir(a), 2005, McGearty et al., 2008). Feuding in Mullingar has already led to the closure the very successful local TTC and a number of other centres have had to introduce increased security provisions in order to respond to feud-related conflicts. Within international debates on adult education provision for cultural and ethnic minorities, the importance of culturally safe spaces has been highlighted

in a number of contexts (Boostrom, 1998). For a significant number of Travellers interviewed, a Traveller-only space was viewed as the most unsafe of spaces because of the potential that individuals or families could be drawn into feuding conflicts. At the same time, the majority of Travellers interviewed expressed reluctance to enter mainstream adult education. They also stressed their appreciation for the respect with which Traveller culture was treated within the TTCs.

Amongst the educational and community stakeholders interviewed for our research, there was significant support for more integrated approaches to Traveller adult education. Yet, even the most ardent supporters of mainstreaming highlighted the need for dedicated personal development programmes for adult Travellers. These personal development programmes should, they argued, include courses on literacy and numeracy as well as courses aimed at enhancing basic self esteem. In terms of the existing work of the TTCs, the skills of literacy, and numeracy as well as interpersonal skills and personal management skills were repeatedly highlighted as adding significantly to the capacity of Travellers to integrate into their local communities. Furthermore programmes on cooking and nutrition, infant and adult health were noted as contributing significantly to enhanced self confidence and self esteem of Travellers. It was also acknowledged that more targeted initiatives were needed to attract Traveller men into adult education. The success of St. Joseph's Training Centre in Ennis in attracting a significant number of men into its student cohort is to be particularly commended in this context.

The Traveller Training Centres serve as a crucial point of contact between the Traveller community and services providers. The HSE, welfare services, the Gardaí as well as local community and cultural groups all use the Centres as sites where members of the Traveller and settled community can meet in a non-threatening environment where there is mutual respect for both cultures. In this context, we would argue that while the existing TTCs have not delivered significantly in terms of assimilation (the process by which adult Travellers adopt patterns of the settled community), the Centres have made significant strides in terms of delivering integration (the process of adapting to Irish society *without abandoning or being expected to abandon one's own cultural identity*)<sup>i</sup>.

Given the weaknesses in the current structure of Traveller education identified in this report, what then is the future for Traveller education services in the Irish State? On the basis of data gathered during this research process, we would accept many of the criticisms of the operation of the Traveller Training Centres as identified by the DES and Skills in the *Value for Money Review* (2008). However,

we have also identified major weaknesses in the operation of mainstreaming in second level and adult education which appear to result in the continued exclusion rather than greater integration of Travellers into the Irish education system. This exclusion coupled with the lack of rights-based education policy and positive discriminatory practices also functioned as a major barrier to integration. The lack of recognition of the 'difference' of Travellers within the mainstream education structure was repeatedly highlighted as problematic. Furthermore, the lack of confidence and low self-esteem evident in many of our Traveller interviewees operates as a significant internal constraint on participation in mainstream educational contexts. Given that the DES is proposing to phase out the existing Traveller Training Centres, what is the best way forward for Traveller education in the Irish state? Can a new model be developed which will deliver integration and progression while respecting the distinctiveness of Traveller culture?

## Recommendations

- Given the findings of our research, we would support the decision of the DES to phase out stand alone TTCs. However, our research indicates that it is highly unlikely that students from these Centres will simply be integrated into mainstream VEC frameworks. In this context, the Dept. of Education must give serious consideration to the operational consequences of this decision in terms of timescale, staffing and resources.
- We argue that the state needs to focus on the development of dedicated Traveller adult education spaces within mainstream VEC campuses, similar to the structure of the current TTC in Dundalk.
- It should be evident in terms of the design and decoration of these spaces that they are sites where Traveller culture is respected and celebrated and where members of the Traveller and settled community can interact from positions of relative equality.
- The remit of these spaces should extend beyond basic educational provision. These units should be viewed primarily as support centres for the Traveller community whose primary goal is to facilitate the broad integration of Travellers into Irish society. Thus, funding for these units could be supported by a number of government departments.
- These units would have five functions: Firstly, they should serve as an educational space for Travellers where dedicated Traveller-only programmes are held; Secondly, the spaces should function as a public space for Traveller culture in the locality where events related to Traveller culture could be held, Traveller art displayed etc. Thirdly, these spaces should serve as a positive point of contact between agencies and service providers such as the HSE and Gardaí and the local Traveller community. Fourthly, these spaces should be sites where Travellers can begin



to access advice and support in terms of health, counselling, individual tutoring, preparation for job interviews etc. Finally, courses should be provided to integrated student cohorts of Travellers and settled people in a context of respect, stability and security for intercultural engagement.

- Within the remit and operational structure of the Traveller educational space, it should be acknowledged that a significant number of students may never wish to enter mainstream education or workplace contexts. To this end, emphasis should be placed on facilitating the integration of Travellers into Irish society rather than forcing them into a process of assimilation.
- Supporting the Traveller economy should also explicitly be part of the remit of these educational spaces. The objective could be reflected in course content which might focus on starting your own business in areas such as horse trading, waste disposal and recycling, haulage, metal work, book keeping. In addition, personal development programmes should provide Travellers with the skills to become self-employed. Hickland (1994), MacLaughlin (1995) and the report of the *Task Force on the Travelling Community* (1995) have all recognised that the self-employment model is viewed by many Travellers as being more suited to their lifestyle than entry into the settled workforce.
- *The role of unit staff would be three fold...*
  - Their main priority should be to enhance and support the self-esteem of Travellers and to provide Traveller only classes which focus on the development of personal competencies, in particular literacy, numeracy, interpersonal and self management skills.
  - Their second priority should be to facilitate initial integration between Travellers and members of the settled community through the provision of courses on personal competencies and on work-based skills such as child care, nutrition and starting your own business.
  - Their third priority should be to act as support tutors, advisors and mediators for Travellers who attend the unit, and to enhance the both the visibility of Traveller culture and integration of Travellers within the broader community.
- The majority of courses run at the unit should be part-time, allowing Travellers to select the programmes most appropriate to meet their needs. This structure would erode the current tendency by some Travellers to view participation in adult education as work, a practice which creates a false impression of workplace culture and practices in Ireland.
- Child care facilities or allowances and a travel allowance should be provided to both Travellers and members of the settled community who attend courses in the Traveller education space in order to provide an added incentive to engage with the programmes on offer.
- We argue that the social welfare system in general does little to incentivise the general population to return to work or to education and recommend that a review of all social welfare

payments be undertaken. In the short-term we recommend that additional payments on top of social welfare payments should be commensurate with rates in other adult education programmes and that adults attending these units should not be singled for receipt of additional allowances or payments.

- We recommend that no time restraints are set on the array of part-time programmes on offer in the units.
- We recommend that the units run one full-time one year programme, a '*Preparation for Further Education Programme*' which would be open to Travellers and members of the settled community. This programme should provide taster modules, work placements and the opportunity to 'sit in' on a variety of FETAC and other higher education programmes in a variety of educational settings. Applicants would have the opportunity to take this programme once only. A Training allowance should be paid to those taking this programme.
- We recommend that an integration plan for the Traveller community be drawn up by all education providers within defined geographical areas. This plan should outline the specific goals or targets set for each sector and should be reviewed annually. It should also include a clear tracking system which would monitor the educational journey of Travellers from primary through to adult education.
- We recommend the implementation of positive discriminatory enrolment policies across all adult education providers such as VTOS, BTEI, PLC and Fás. This process would ring fence a set number of places for Travellers on all adult education programmes.
- We recommend the implementation of positive discriminatory policies which ensures the representation of Travellers and other minority groups in the operation of educational institutions which would include Boards of Management of Primary and Post Primary schools, Parents' Associations and on educational committees such curriculum advisory boards which inform the work of the NCCA .
- We strongly recommend the establishment of programmes which target male Travellers specifically and Travellers who have not engaged previously with adult education.
- We recommend that in the spirit of integration all academic awards are identified as coming from the main VEC or educational institution.

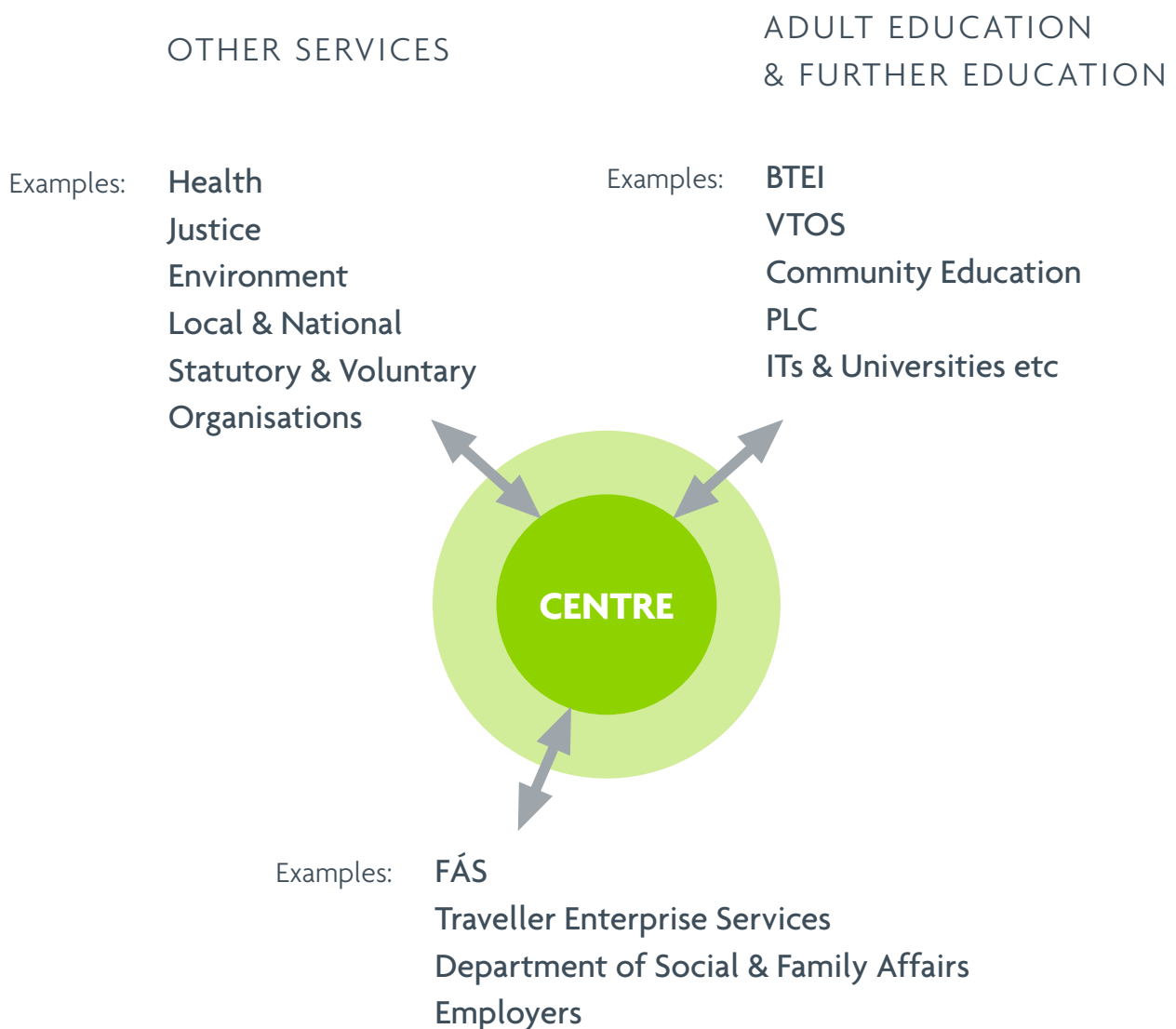
The research presented in this report highlights not only the continued exclusion of Travellers from the Irish education system but also the huge potential within the Traveller community in terms of their capacity to contribute to Irish society. The practical and inter-personal skills evident in interviewees and the richness of Traveller culture constitutes a very significant cultural resource in an Ireland which has become increasingly globalized (Keohane & Kuhling, 2005). In this context, the DES has a duty to ensure that adult Traveller men and women are provided with the resources, support and services necessary to allow them to realise their full potential as active, intercultural citizens of the Republic of Ireland.

- i The report *Integration is a Two Way Process* which focused on asylum seekers describes a model where: From the refugee's perspective, integration requires a willingness to adapt to the lifestyle of Irish society without abandoning or being expected to abandon one's own cultural identity. From the point of view of Irish society, it requires a willingness to accept refugees on the basis of equality and to take action to facilitate access to services, resources and decision-making processes in parity with Irish nationals. Interdepartmental Working Group on the Integration of Refugees in Ireland 'Integration is a Two way Process'. (Dublin: Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 2003).

# APPENDIX 1

## Diagram

### INTEGRATION MODEL



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