

A STUDY OF THE INVOLVEMENT OF TRAVELLER PARENTS IN TRAVELLER PRESCHOOLS IN IRELAND

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Statement of originality

I hereby certify that this material which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of PhD is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save, and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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To Liam, the love of my life

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ABSTRACT

A study of the involvement of Traveller parents in Traveller preschools in Ireland

Anne Boyle

This study examines the involvement of Traveller parents in Traveller preschools in Ireland. Travellers are a distinct cultural group in Ireland who have traditionally experienced educational disadvantage. Parental involvement is widely acknowledged as having a positive impact on children's school success. Traveller preschools were established from the 1970s onwards, as an educational intervention for Traveller children, and continued until 2011 when the Department of Education and Skills withdrew funding.

This thesis sets out to answer three main questions: What was the historical and policy context for Traveller preschools? What are Traveller parents' perspectives on schooling? In what ways were parents involved in Traveller preschools?

The methodology is mainly qualitative, drawing on interpretivism, social constructivism and critical theory. A variety of methods is employed, including document analysis, focus group and individual interviews, and a questionnaire survey. This study is significant as the only major study to investigate Traveller preschools.

Findings show that there was an evolution in policy concerning Travellers from a focus on deficit and assimilation in the 1960s and 1970s to a growing recognition of Traveller culture and identity.

While Traveller parents' own school experiences were largely negative, they wanted this to change for their children. They were positively drawn to education and they wanted their children to complete formal education. Traveller preschools were experienced as protected enclaves where parents felt welcome and accepted. They were involved on an individual and familial level with the preschools. They visited them, talked to teachers, and helped out on preschool outings and in other ways. They praised and encouraged their children, were interested in their schooling and worked at home with them to support their learning. Involvement at management level was minimal. Where it did occur, however, there was evidence that it was successful and parents contributed to decision-making.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN TRAVELLER PRESCHOOLS

1.1 Introduction

The Traveller community in Ireland is a distinct cultural group and comprises just over half of one percent of the population (Central Statistics Office 2012). Its members have experienced, and continue to experience, social exclusion and educational disadvantage. Traveller preschools were established to help address the educational difficulties experienced by Travellers and received funding from the Irish Department of Education since the 1970s. This thesis presents the results of a qualitative study on Traveller preschools, focused on the policy environment in which the preschools developed, views and perspectives of Traveller parents in relation to schooling, and the involvement of parents in Traveller preschools. During the course of the study, the Department of Education and Skills withdrew funding for Traveller preschools, resulting in their closure.

1.1.1 Research aims

The research reported in this thesis explored the topic of parental involvement in Traveller preschools in Ireland. It had three aims:

1. To generate an understanding of the historical and policy context within which Traveller preschools evolved.
2. To generate an understanding of Traveller parents' perspective on schooling.
3. To generate an understanding of parental involvement practices in Traveller preschools.

These aims are interconnected. The exploration of government policy reveals an approach to Travellers generally, and in relation to education, which denied Traveller culture and identity and aimed to dismantle the Traveller way of life and absorb Travellers into the majority population. Historically, Traveller children were drawn into schools where they experienced isolation, discrimination and a lack of

recognition for their identity and culture. The majority left school early, with little achievement, and with many illiterate. Although assimilationist policies were later abandoned, the legacy of this approach is still felt today.

The second aim explored the experiences and views of Traveller parents who were part of this regime, and how they expressed what their schooling meant to them. It also examined their views regarding their own children's schooling and their aspirations for their children in a time of change.

The third aim was to examine particular parental involvement practices within Traveller preschools. This was deemed important since the involvement of parents in education is seen as one way of tackling educational disadvantage. It may be particularly important for Traveller parents because of their difficult relationship with the educational system.

1.1.2 Rationale and scope

The motivation for my engagement with the research reported here comes from several sources. I have taught in a Traveller preschool throughout my working life and through this I became aware of issues of equality and social justice which deserve to be explored. Travellers experience prejudice, discrimination and rejection on a daily basis. Their children tend to leave education early, many with poor literacy skills. This prompted me to seek to illuminate issues concerning Traveller parents' perspectives on schooling. Because of the targeted nature of Traveller preschools, the parents in my study were all members of the Traveller community. Overall, I was provided with an opportunity to engage in research on an enclave, a Traveller-only setting. It allowed me to provide a unique snapshot of a service which was not extensively researched and which no longer exists.

I chose a qualitative research approach, as the focus was on telling a story. I found that an approach drawing on interpretivism and social constructivism suited this task, while drawing on aspects of critical theory (Habermas 1970, Fraser 1995) helped to ensure that the story was framed as one of social justice. For the field research it was necessary to bring together the perspectives of parents and practitioners, but I felt early on that this story could not be told without engaging in an investigation into the policy background that informed and framed practice.

The closure of Traveller preschools in 2011 means that the data presented in this thesis represent an important moment in time, one when Traveller children's first encounter with the educational system was with other members of the Traveller community. As Traveller preschools no longer exist, this also means that the findings of this study cannot contribute recommendations for their development. Rather, it is my hope that the findings will be of interest to any service providing preschool education for Traveller children, while recognising that findings in relation to Traveller-only preschools may not transfer to integrated settings.

1.2 Parental involvement

In seeking to explore parental involvement in relation to Traveller preschools, this thesis draws on literature of parental involvement and democratic participation, particularly in relation to educational disadvantage. It investigates such models of community participation as that of Arnstein (1971), and considers how they might apply in relation to preschool education. This provides a focus for a consideration of involvement as a form of democratic practice, as the right of parents to contribute to decision-making in relation to their own children. At the same time, a model such as that of Epstein (2011) includes decision-making as just one of six types of involvement and focuses more on the value of parental involvement as a way of improving educational effectiveness. Literature related to parental involvement practices within a number of educational programmes (Holland 1979, Lewis and Archer 2002, Archer and Shortt 2003, Whalley 2007) is also reviewed.

Parental involvement is not a unitary concept and can be influenced by the experience that parents have of the education system. Crozier (2001, 2012) warns that a 'one size fits all' approach to parental involvement does not necessarily meet the needs of all parents. Lareau (2000, 2011), in similar vein, notes that the relationship of middle-class families with the school tend to be characterised by interconnectedness, while relationships for minority parents or working-class parents tend to be characterised by a separation between family and school life. Such considerations can serve as a reminder that parental involvement needs to be understood within the particular context in which it develops and operates.

1.3 Traveller preschools

Traveller Preschools developed in the dual context of Government policy regarding the education of Travellers and the emergence of international research in the 1960s regarding benefits that might be gained from a high-quality supported preschool intervention aimed at compensating for educational disadvantage. It had become apparent in the wake of the *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy* (Government of Ireland 1963) that Travellers were not receiving adequate schooling. The Commission also investigated other aspects of Traveller life and concluded that Travellers should be encouraged to “settle down” and be absorbed into the majority population. Following on from the Commission, volunteer Itinerant Settlement Committees were established across the country (Fehily 1974). One activity of these committees was to set up classes, staffed by volunteers, to teach Travellers to read and write.

The Department of Education (1970) identified young Traveller children as a category that would benefit from preschool education by acquainting them with the routine of school, thus making it easier for them to settle into primary school. The Department offered financial support and various voluntary groups applied for it and set up preschools around the country (Nunan 1993). The funding initially consisted of 70% of the teacher’s salary, plus transport costs for the Traveller children. In 1984, the Department increased its funding for the teacher’s salary to 98% and it also paid an equipment grant. While management committees were advised to hire qualified primary school teachers, this was not always possible because of the relatively poor conditions of service in the preschools compared to primary schools (INTO 1992). The Department of Education left it to the discretion of the management committee to hire a suitable person where it did not prove possible to recruit a primary school teacher.

The preschools opened for three hours a day for 185 days a year and were staffed by a teacher and a childcare assistant. No curriculum guidance was provided by the Department. Boyle (1995, p.78) found that teachers engaged in a wide variety of activities, including circle time, table-top activities, stories, music and movement, sand and water play and she went on to conclude that “what is clear is that children

in the preschools for Traveller children engage in stimulating activities appropriate to their stage of development”.

In the 1980s, there was an expansion in the number of preschools. By 1988 they numbered 45, fifteen of which had been sanctioned by the Department of Education in 1987 (Dwyer 1988). In 1992, the Department introduced inservice training for teachers in Traveller preschools. This initiative created an opportunity for the teachers to develop skills and to share ideas, and it also provided a forum which reduced the isolation in which they worked. This isolation of preschools from each other, and the lack of direct involvement of the Department, had led to policy implementation varying greatly from one preschool to another (Nunan 1993).

The establishment of the Traveller-only nature of the preschools was at the direction of the Department of Education, which wanted to ensure that funding was targeted towards Traveller children. This separate provision was supported over the years by Traveller parents. For example, Catherine Joyce, a prominent Traveller activist, spoke of her own support and that of other Traveller parents to whom she had spoken. She claimed that Traveller children felt more secure and that they developed confidence in a preschool where they were with other Travellers (Boyle 1995). Also, the Task Force on the Travelling Community regarded Traveller preschools as having a positive role in introducing small children to a new environment and saw their potential to act as a bridge in preparing the children for integration at primary level (Government of Ireland 1995).

Until 1994, the only two categories of preschool, or educational provision for children younger than four years of age, that were supported by the Department of Education were the Rutland Street Project¹ and Traveller preschools (Department of Education 1994b). In 1994, the Early Start Preschool Project was piloted with the opening of eight preschools, and this was expanded in subsequent years.

Meanwhile, the Task Force on the Travelling Community (Government of Ireland 1995) recommended that an evaluation of Traveller preschools be carried out. The evaluation was undertaken in the school year 2000/2001, with the report issuing in

¹ The Rutland Street Project is a Pre-School project for three to four year old children established by the Department of Education in 1969 and attached to the Rutland Street Primary School in Dublin.

2003 (Department of Education and Science 2003). The evaluation dealt with a range of areas, with its primary stated purpose being to promote good practice in Traveller preschools. It noted a lack of clarity about who held responsibility for the preschools, and it recommended that this weakness be addressed. It also found the existence of a tension between the efforts at inclusiveness within society and the existence of separate provision, advising that “the location of further preschools in places that mark them out for the exclusive use of Travellers should be avoided” (Department of Education and Science 2003, p.35).

The evaluation found that only a few preschools had parent representatives on their management committees and recommended that “membership of the management committees should include Traveller parents elected by parents of children attending the preschool” (Department of Education and Science 2003, p.78). It also suggested a range of mechanisms for parental involvement, which should be carefully chosen and be sensitive to Traveller culture. In addition, the OECD (2004) recommended that Traveller parents and their organisations should be involved in many aspects of Traveller preschools. However, no resources or training were provided by the Department to support the implementation of parental involvement in the preschools.

Attitudes towards the preschools changed with the adoption by the state of the Traveller Education Strategy (Department of Education and Science 2006a, p.34) which recommended that “no new Traveller preschools should be established” and that Traveller children should be catered for through general preschool provision. It was recommended that “Traveller children should have access to an inclusive, well-resourced, well-managed, high quality early childhood education, with an appropriately trained staff, operating in good quality premises” (Department of Education and Science 2006a, p.32). It was further recommended that the phased amalgamation of Traveller-only preschools with existing and future early childhood education services be undertaken. It was envisaged that half of all existing Traveller preschools would be amalgamated within five years, and the remainder within ten years.

In fact, Traveller preschools ceased operations before the deadline envisaged in the Traveller Education Strategy, and no effort was made to amalgamate different

preschool services. The Department of Education and Science withdrew funding from Traveller preschools and they closed in summer 2011.

At the same time that the Department of Education and Science was withdrawing funding for Traveller preschools, another initiative in early childhood education came about in 2010. The Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs implemented a universal preschool provision scheme providing a free preschool year for all children of the relevant age.

1.4 Underpinning concepts

Concepts of equality and social justice are fundamental to this research which is positioned in what Lynch (1999) refers to as a radical liberal framework which aims at ensuring equality of access, participation and outcome for Traveller children. Although Lynch identified an even more radical position of equality of condition, consideration of the economic and political changes required to achieve this are beyond the scope of this study. Rather, the focus is on the right of parents to be involved in their children's preschool education, and on the possible contribution that parental involvement in Traveller preschools can make towards equality and towards improving educational outcomes for Traveller children.

1.5 Document research and field research

A variety of methods was employed to address the three aims of the study. They included document analysis, questionnaire research, individual interviews and focus groups.

A document analysis of policy documents, set out in chapter 4, provides a body of knowledge that demonstrates how past policies and practices in relation to Traveller education have an impact on the present. It also describes the historical and policy context of Traveller preschools. A full analysis of each document was not attempted. Instead, the focus was on aspects which were deemed to be relevant to Traveller identity, to Travellers and education and to Traveller preschools.

The field research was mainly qualitative in approach, augmented by basic quantitative data on the extent of current practices. A major element consisted of a set of focus group and individual interviews with Traveller parents who, at the time the interviews were conducted, had children attending Traveller preschools. The purpose of these interviews was to determine Traveller parents' perspectives on schooling, as well as their perspectives on parental involvement practices within the preschools. In addition, a questionnaire survey was carried out with teachers in Traveller preschools to estimate the nature and extent of parental involvement practices within the preschools and also to elicit the perspectives of teachers on involving parents. This survey was followed up with a number of interviews with teachers and managers, for further elaboration of some points. A detailed exposition on the methodology is provided in Chapter 3.

1.6 Thesis outline

Chapter 1 has provided an introduction to the research, detailed the context and stated the three research aims. Central concepts underpinning the research and the methods used to carry out the research were briefly outlined.

Chapter 2 contains a review of literature related to the three aims of the thesis. My focus on social justice required an exploration of concepts of equality and the emergence of a politics of recognition, particularly significant for studying groups who have been the subject of prejudice and discrimination. I briefly explore issues related to Travellers and education. I then discuss parental involvement under two headings: as a right of parents to involvement in their children's education and as a strategy for improving effectiveness of education. In doing so, I recognise that parents are not homogeneous, but are raced, classed and gendered (Vincent and Martin 2005). Also, I consider a range of models and practices associated with parental involvement in education.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the methodology of the study reported in later chapters. The overall paradigm within which the research is conducted is interpretivism, but it is also informed by critical theory. Addressing the three aims of the research which are interpretivist in nature, required the use of a variety of methods: document analysis of major policy documents related to Traveller education and Traveller preschools,

interviews and focus group research with Traveller parents, a questionnaire survey of teachers, and interviews with teachers and managers. I also discuss my approach to the analysis of the data.

Chapter 4 addresses the first aim of the research by presenting a document analysis of policy documents related to Travellers and education, from the 1960s onwards. This analysis shows an evolution in policy from a focus on absorption and assimilation in the early documents, to policies based on inclusion and cultural recognition in later ones. These policies provided the background against which Traveller preschools developed from the 1970s until 2011.

Chapter 5 presents my findings related to the second research aim, namely to generate an understanding of Traveller parents' perspectives on education. It presents for the cohort of parents studied, their reflections of their own experiences of school, which they had generally found to be an alien and unfriendly place that did not accommodate their identity. They had achieved little and they looked back in dismay and disappointment on their experiences. They claimed that the low teacher expectations which had characterised their own schooldays still existed for many of their children and they wanted this to change. They expressed determination that their children should receive an education, although they were also concerned to protect them from the hurt that they themselves had experienced. Aware that outcomes from schooling for Traveller children are still below those of their settled² peers, they wanted equality. Some saw acknowledgement of their culture within the classroom as vital, although others were wary of any attention being drawn to Traveller culture, or identity, because of the attitudes of settled people.

Chapter 6 presents my findings related to the third research aim, namely, to construct an understanding of parental involvement practices in Traveller preschools. A range of parental involvement practices had been tried in the preschools and parents were, to a significant extent, willing to engage with them. Parents also advocated on behalf of their children. They visited preschools for parent-teacher meetings, and also for parties and plays. They helped out on school tours. They showed an appreciation of the value of the education that their children received in the preschools and they

² 'Settled' is the term used to denote non-Travellers in this thesis.

supported them in various ways. In most cases, however, parents had little knowledge of management.

Chapter 7 presents a conclusion to this thesis. It provides an overview of the findings of the research and outlines some of its limitations. Implications for policy development and for practice are outlined and recommendations are made for further research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW: EQUALITY AND TRAVELLER PARENTS

2.1 Introduction

Underpinning this thesis is a concern for equality and social justice. Equality can be interpreted in many ways, and the related notion of a “politics of recognition” is of particular interest. Travellers are a distinct cultural group whose identity has been denied and misrecognised. Issues concerning the origins and educational experiences of the Traveller community stimulated the desire to engage in the study reported later in this thesis. This chapter reviews literature on three related foci of the study: policy context within which Traveller preschools evolved, Traveller parents’ experiences and views of education and parental involvement practices in Traveller preschools.

The chapter is in five parts. First, concepts of equality and social justice are considered. Second, issues related to Travellers and education are examined. Third, definitions of parental involvement are explored. Next, a rationale for parental involvement is established. Finally, models and practices of parental involvement are discussed.

2.2 Equality and social justice

The approach to parental involvement adopted for this study draws on equality theory, with a focus especially on the unequal experiences and achievements of Travellers within the education system. Equality is not a simple concept and there are many different views concerning what, precisely, a commitment to equality implies. A range of positions on equality are now presented and discussed, including equality of opportunity, access, participation, outcomes and condition. A shift in equality politics from a focus on redistribution to a focus on recognition is also considered.

2.2.1 Different concepts of equality

There are many interpretations of equality. Generally, it can be said to imply fairness and social justice, and to be concerned with levelling out advantages and disadvantages. Lodge and Lynch (2002, p.5) note that “equality is a fundamental principle underpinning the operation of all democratic societies”. Yet there are different ways of understanding equality and different ways in which the state administers it. The institutional interpretation of equality influences how we act, how we treat people and the life chances of all.

Historically, researchers concerned with disadvantage focused on class inequalities. In the 1960s, however, various political movements began to focus attention on such non-class based inequalities as gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and so on, which have been the basis for prejudice, discrimination and oppression experienced by many people. These movements did not seek the mere abolition of inequalities concerning these attributes. Rather, they sought that those oppressed should construct a collective identity which would provide a new and positive evaluation of difference as the basis on which they suffered discrimination (Callinicos 2000). These contrasting conceptions of equality can be referred to as claims concerning redistribution and claims concerning recognition (Fraser and Honneth 2003). Although separate concepts, they are sometimes closely related, in that members of groups denied positive recognition often experience disproportionate economic difficulties, as can be seen, for example, with Travellers in Ireland or with African Americans in the United States.

2.2.2 Distribution of educational benefits

Issues concerning the distribution of educational benefits are now considered, followed by a consideration of what Taylor (1994) refers to as “the politics of recognition”. Lynch (1999) sets out a continuum of equality objectives, ranging from a minimalist position of equal formal rights and opportunities to what she refers to as equality of condition. This continuum is summarised in Table 2.1 below:

Table 2.1 Continuum of equality objectives (Lynch 1999, p.288)

Equal opportunities and equal formal rights	Equality of participation	Equality of outcome	Equality of condition: to create equality in the living conditions of all members of society.
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Basic equality

Radical equality

Lynch (1999) views the first three categories in Table 2.1 as comprising different levels of a liberal concept of equality, while equality of condition goes beyond liberalism. The operation of liberal equality requires a focus on access, opportunity, participation and outcomes for particular groups in society. In liberal thinking, Lynch suggests, the individual is regarded as having the problem and the focus is on the individual rather than addressing problems with institutions. Radical perspectives go beyond this, and focus on structural and economic factors.

Callinicos (2000) notes that equal opportunity is compatible with the persistence of structural inequalities, because of the impact of past inequalities. Equality of opportunity can imply meritocracy, in which status is achieved through ability and effort, rather than being ascribed on the basis of age, class, and gender (Marshall 1998). Talent and effort combine to determine the distribution of income; rewards are unequally distributed but access to them is presumed to be open and those who succeed are regarded as deserving of success (Lynch 1999). However, the stratified nature of our society makes it difficult to differentiate between ascribed and achieved qualities. Students from better-off homes, where the home culture is like that of the school, are automatically advantaged (Lynch 1999, Baker *et al.* 2004), while those from disadvantaged backgrounds do not derive the same benefit from school, leading to intergenerational disadvantage. Walker (2005) describes a case of the latter, where young people in the 1990s from low-income families left home earlier, achieved less educationally, and were more likely to become unemployed than their more affluent peers. Equality of opportunities and access do not address the educational needs of Travellers, nor do they assure educational success.

Those who advocate equality of participation seek to achieve more than those who stress equality of opportunity. They seek to ensure that the student population reflects the general population in terms of social class, race, and gender by providing

extra support for particular groups. However, simply enabling and encouraging participation does not ensure it. As Lynch (1999, p.292) puts it:

Policies promoting equal participation will favour the relatively advantaged among the disadvantaged as they will be in the strongest position to avail of whatever services and supports are offered.

Those who seek equality of outcome stress more than participation, using affirmative action and quotas to ensure success for those most in need. Attempts are made to equalise conditions in order that those from all backgrounds compete on an equal basis. However, as Baker *et al.* (2004, p.151) point out, when efforts are made to improve the educational prospects of disadvantaged groups these efforts can be neutralised by more advantaged households who use their wealth and resources to copperfasten their advantaged position; “these people with greater economic capital are able to buy valued credentialised culture capital that others cannot afford”. For example, wealthy parents can purchase additional tuition for their children to ensure better performance in examinations.

One consequence of the success of strategies for equality of outcome is the potential displacement of people already in the system, who would be likely to resist such change (Lynch 1999). In this context, an Irish student sought in 2008 to circumvent the Central Applications Office (CAO) points system for the allocation of third level places in medicine (*Irish Independent* 2008). Places for Irish students are allocated on the basis of points achieved in the Leaving Certificate Examination, and the students are not required to pay fees. However, additional places are made available to students from outside of the EU, who pay a commercial fee. The student sought to circumvent the points system by paying the fees that would be levied on non-EU students, and when this was refused the case was taken to the court. However, the student lost his case, with Mr Justice Peter Charleton saying that if he were to allow the case it would turn the current scheme into “a market free-for-all based on money” and would upset the principle of equality of access to education. This case demonstrates how action for equality can be challenged by those with access to resources.

Another difficulty can arise for groups, such as Travellers, who, because of their relatively small numbers in the population, would be deemed to have successful outcomes if even a few Travellers were successful. The difficulty here, as with other liberal strategies, is that the more advantaged Travellers would be successful and the majority would be left behind. Lynch (1999) also points out that another challenge to an equality of outcome approach is the practice of targeting a group without targeting all subgroups within that group. Despite these criticisms, achievement of equality of participation and outcome could represent significant success for Travellers who have so far gained little from education.

Equality of condition is a radical form of equality which seeks to create equality in living conditions for all members of society, and where all goods, privileges and resources are distributed equally according to need. Callinicos (2000) emphasises that this does not mean uniformity; the aim of equalising those circumstances over which individuals have no control is to leave them free to pursue their goals and, because goals differ, so too will outcomes. In order to bring about equality of condition, there would need to be changes in the law, economics and politics, as well as social structures.

While equality of condition is presented as an ideal, there are objections to the types of changes it would require. One standard objection is that the redistribution required would undermine economic efficiency (Callinicos 2000). With income inequality gone, workers would produce less and this would lead to reductions in the income of all. Rawls's difference principle seeks to address this objection by authorising inequalities where these benefit the worst off in society (Rawls 1971, Callinicos 2000). A further objection, noted by Lynch (1999), is that those who occupy positions of power are unlikely to want change and would resist it. A particularly pertinent objection is that, however desirable and just one might consider equality of condition to be, it is beyond the scope of any purely educational initiative to seek to create such a society. This requires economic and social changes outside of the educational system.

2.2.3 The politics of recognition

Traditionally, as noted above, discussions of equality and justice have centred on questions of distribution – on how the benefits of society may be redistributed in a fairer and more equal manner. Recent decades have witnessed a shift, however, towards increased appreciation of the importance of a “politics of recognition” – of respect for people’s identity and culture. This shift is reflected in Taylor’s (1994) “Politics of recognition”, and is considered by Fraser (1995), Benhabib (2002), and Fraser and Honneth (2003). The issue of recognition holds particular significance for Travellers in education, since Traveller culture has often not been reflected or recognised in the schools.

2.2.3.1 Non-recognition as oppression

Benhabib (2002) traces the term “politics of recognition” to Taylor (1994), who pointed out that many contemporary social movements aim for the recognition of particular identity claims. According to Taylor (1994, p.25), “non-recognition or misrecognition ... can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted reduced mode of being”. Beyond simple lack of respect, it can inflict a grievous wound, saddling people with crippling self-hatred. Due recognition is thus not just a courtesy but a vital human need, he holds. This claim is echoed by Benhabib (2002) when she notes that individuals in a group may lose self-confidence and internalise hateful images of themselves when their identity is denigrated in the public sphere. It is interesting that she singles out “Gypsies” as a group experiencing such denigration today, since the culture and life experiences of Gypsies are, in some respects, similar to those of Irish Travellers.

While these references highlight the importance of recognition for psychological well-being, Fraser (2003) chooses not to focus on psychological dimensions in her discussion, but rather to treat recognition as a problem of injustice, in which certain groups or individuals are denied the status of full partners in social interaction. She argues that such an approach shifts attention from subjective feelings to “institutional patterns of cultural value” (Fraser 2003, p.31).

2.2.3.2 Distinct concepts or aspects of the same?

One issue that must be faced is the relationship between a politics focused on distribution and one focused on recognition. They may be viewed as different aspects of a single concept, in that recognition can be viewed as an aspect of redistribution, or vice versa. Fraser (2003, p.16) rejects a view of recognition and distribution as “mutually exclusive alternatives”. However, she also rejects the view that either is reducible to the other. While noting that issues of recognition and distribution may be intertwined, Fraser takes the view that they are analytically distinct and treats justice as a two-dimensional concept involving both recognition and redistribution. Against this, Honneth (2003, p.114) argues that both are the same, and that “even distributional injustices must be understood as the institutional expression of social disrespect”.

Whether the two are, in fact, analytically distinct or whether they are reducible to a single concept, it seems reasonable to treat them as separate for practical purposes, as each suggests different priorities for policy. If both are not borne in mind when developing policy, it is possible that the pursuit of one objective could lead to people experiencing hurt or damage on the other dimension.

2.2.3.3 Participative parity

A further issue to consider is how is to distinguish between justifiable and unjustifiable claims with respect to recognition. Fraser (2003, p.37) argues that “not every claim for recognition is warranted”, and she seeks a criterion for drawing a distinction between claims. She rejects the notion that claims are justified simply on the basis that having them recognised would enhance the self-esteem of the claimant, since such an approach would accept racist identities, where, for example, poor white Europeans could maintain their self-worth by “contrasting themselves with their supposed inferiors” (Fraser 2003, p.43). She settles on “participative parity” as her criterion. Misrecognition occurs when institutionalised patterns of social interaction cast some people as “inferior, excluded, wholly other, or simply invisible” (2003, p.29). Claims for recognition are accepted, she suggests, if claimants can show that lack of recognition prevents them from participating on a par with others in social life, and if the changes they require can bring them redress “without unjustifiably creating or worsening other disparities” (2003, p.39).

2.2.3.4 The claims of culture

Claims related to recognition are pursued by various groups in society. Fraser (1997, p.11) mentions, for example, “nationality, ethnicity, ‘race’, gender and sexuality” and Benhabib (2002) explores issues of recognition specifically in relation to culture. Benhabib does not think of cultures as pure and discrete wholes, but rather as “complex human practices of signification and representation ... which are internally riven by conflicting narratives” (Benhabib 2002, p.ix). Culture is not fixed. Rather, it changes over time; its borders are porous, it borrows and evolves, and it develops through interaction and negotiation. Benhabib (2002, p.ix) goes on:

If we accept the internal complexity and essential contestability of cultures, then struggles for recognition that expand democratic dialogue by denouncing the exclusivity and hierarchy of existing cultural arrangements deserve our support.

In taking this position, she argues that the right to cultural self-expression needs to be grounded upon, rather than seen as an alternative to, universally recognised citizenship rights. Democracy is expanded when cultural expression is facilitated. At the same time, for Benhabib, recognition of culture does not mean support for cultural separatism. She seeks an approach to recognition which allows for critical dialogue and reflection to take place in public on the nature of cultural groups. She supports Fraser’s (2003) approach which, she says, allows for “democratic dissent, debate, contestation, and challenge” (Benhabib 2002, p.71) and which recognises the fluidity of culture and the fact that individuals may have several affiliations, such that tensions “have existed and continue to exist between various collectivities” (Benhabib 2002, p.53).

2.2.3.5 Pragmatic and dialogical approach

Fraser (2003, p.44) holds that in a democracy, justice is not an externally imposed requirement and notes that “it binds only insofar as its addressees can also rightly regard themselves as its authors”. She argues for a pragmatic approach, rooted in dialogue, to recognition as an issue of justice. Such an approach can avoid both the claim of some liberals that justice requires limiting public recognition only to those capacities which all humans share, and the contrasting claim that everyone always

needs to have their distinctiveness recognised. Recognition should not be such that it “reifies identities, encourages separatism and masks intra group domination” (Fraser 2003, p.87). Taylor (1997, p.230–231) also puts dialogue central to the concept of identity, saying that “the crucial feature of human life is its fundamentally dialogical character” and “my own identity crucially depends on my dialogical relations with others”. Identity is dynamic and continually evolving and a dialogical approach allows for this evolution.

The question of recognition and of dialogic engagement has implications for equality in education. Lynch (1999) points out how, without dialogue, targeted equality initiatives can be “colonised” by professional interests. Too often, the voices of minorities such as Travellers are mediated by professionals who speak on their behalf. Also, such professionals can too easily present a static view of Traveller culture, without taking into account its dynamic and evolving nature. For genuine engagement to take place, Travellers must be allowed to speak for themselves and to contribute to decision-making in relation to policies and practices.

2.3 Travellers and education

This section presents an exploration of Traveller history, culture and identity, with particular reference to the relationship between Travellers and the education system. It provides commentary on the origins of the Traveller community. Features of Traveller culture, such as Traveller nomadism, are considered, particularly in light of contemporary challenges. The section ends with a consideration of Travellers and education.

2.3.1 The Traveller community

Travellers are a traditionally nomadic people, distinct from the majority population. This is due to such factors as “family structure, language, employment patterns and a preference for mobility” (Hayes 2006, p.9). The Department of Education and Science (2002a, p.7) acknowledges Travellers as “a distinct minority group in Irish society”, while also being “as fully Irish as the majority population”. The Department recognises that Travellers have a common ancestry, share fundamental

cultural values and traditions, have a language of their own and are seen by themselves and others as distinct and different.

The following are some summary figures concerning the Traveller community drawn from the 2011 census (Central Statistics Office, 2012):

- The number of Travellers enumerated was 29,573, accounting for 0.6% of the total population.
- The average age of Irish Travellers was 22.4 years, compared to 36.1 years for the general population. Over half of all Travellers (52.2%) were aged under 20 years and a third were under the age of five.
- Among 15–29 year olds, 33% of Travellers were married compared with 8.3% of the general population.
- 69% of Travellers who had completed their education were educated to primary level at most, including 507 persons aged 15–19 years.
- 55% of Travellers who had completed their education had ceased by age 15.
- The number of Travellers who had completed third level was 115, or 1% of the adult population, compared with 30.7% of the general population excluding Travellers.

2.3.1.1 Origins

There are contrasting views on the origins of Travellers. Although Acton (1994) argues that the proper response to the origins debate is to deconstruct the necessity of defining Traveller identity, it is worth giving this question some attention as beliefs concerning origins can affect how Travellers are perceived and can have policy implications. The question must be approached with caution, however, because of the dearth of authoritative historical sources. A non-literate people with no possessions and no home territory leaves neither archaeological remains nor a written record. In investigating the history of Travellers, Bhreatnach (2006, p.3) points out that “nomads appeared only when their actions affected the interests of government record keepers or when they impinged on public consciousness”.

Ní Shúinéar (2004) notes that there was no consensus concerning the origins of the Traveller community when the Irish Folklore Commission carried out research in 1952. However, by the 1960s a consensus seemed to emerge that contemporary Travellers were just two generations or so removed from the settled population. Ní Shúinéar (2004) states that this new consensus had no basis in research, but served a political end, as State policy targeted the absorption of Travellers into settled society. It was a view that continued to be influential decades later. Mac Gréil (1996, p.32) claims that “what is generally accepted is the fact that [Travellers] are of Irish ethnic origin whose cultural traits had much in common with that of dispossessed peasants”, and he links them to the displacement of people during the plantations and the Great Famine of 1845–48.

It should be noted that at all times there were contrary views. As early as 1967, Puxon and Puxon (1967, p.5) were arguing that this view of Travellers as poverty-stricken members of the settled society was not conducive to addressing the particular problems faced by Travellers:

The problem posed by the presence of itinerant families has been tackled ... as if it were in the same category as that of poverty stricken or maladjusted families in settled society. But [this] has further fragmented the minority group by ignoring its separate culture and identity and by regarding these differences as totally irrelevant to the problem.

There are several strands of evidence which show that a distinct Traveller identity is very old (Ní Shúinéar 1991). An early example is an English law of 1243 aimed at curtailing the “Wandering Irish”. A similar law was passed in 1413 under Henry V and another in 1422 under Henry VI. Besides these laws, there is other evidence that Travellers formed a distinct group for centuries. Ní Shúinéar (1991) refers to an account book which a Co. Antrim vicar kept between 1672 and 1680 which contained frequent references to ‘tinklers’ and ‘tinkers’. The vicar described annual visits of a family group begging for food and clothing. He described the women as being strikingly distinct from the general population, with very dark hair and brightly coloured plaid skirts. A further strand of evidence is found in the Travellers of Irish

descent in the US who left Ireland in 1847, and who share cultural traits with Travellers in Ireland, and also share the Cant language (Ní Shúinéar 1994).

2.3.1.2 Nomadism

A key feature of Traveller culture is nomadism. McDonagh (1994) suggests that, for Travellers, accommodation is always seen as a stopping place, whether the stay turns out to be long or short. He describes how many Travellers react with horror and distress if they feel they do not have the option of moving, although they do not necessarily exercise this option when it is available.

Travellers travel not only to pursue economic opportunities, but also for social and cultural reasons. It is a way of keeping in contact with extended families “keeping up with the news, building contact, [and] strengthening relationships” (McDonagh 1994, p.97). It can also be a way of avoiding people, and a form of conflict management when arguments become serious.

As industrial and economic developments undermine the viability of many traditional Traveller occupations, Travellers adapt to change by seeking out new opportunities. The main characteristic of the Traveller economy is not any particular craft or trade, but the concept of self-employment based on travelling (Gmelch 1979). However, scope for adaptation is continually being narrowed by decisions of the majority population. A nomadic way of life does not fit in well with current society, where property is owned and individual status can also be defined by the amount a person owns. Throughout the development of modern Ireland, Travellers have found their traditional sites built on or blocked by boulders.

In addition, Travellers found that legislation limited their right to camp, from the Road Safety Act 1961 which banned camping on roadsides, to the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2002 which makes trespass on public or private land a criminal offence. Nomadism has not been seen as a valid cultural expression, but rather as a problem to be solved through settlement programmes.

2.3.1.3 Tackling itinerancy

Nomadism was viewed as itinerancy by the majority population and this was seen as a problem to be tackled. From the mid-twentieth century, there was a large

movement of Travellers to the cities and towns where they camped on the perimeters (Gmelch 1985). It was proving difficult to accommodate Travellers within the dominant institutions of post-independence Ireland (Mac Laughlin 1995). At best, they could be assimilated into settled society. At worst, their way of life was criminalised. Living conditions for most Travellers were poor and a view emerged among certain groups in society that if Travellers gave up their traditional way of life and settled down then their lives would be better. It was in such an environment, where Travellers were regarded as a problem, that the Commission on Itinerancy was established in 1960. In a speech on the establishment of the Commission, the then Parliamentary Secretary Charles Haughey said “there can be no final solution to the problems created by itinerants until they are absorbed into the general community” (Government of Ireland 1963, p.111)³. The Commission viewed Travellers as failed settled people who needed to be settled down and viewed the Traveller way of life, particularly nomadism, as contributing to the disadvantages that Travellers experienced. Absorption of Travellers into the majority population was seen as the solution, and this involved bringing Traveller children into the education system as a means of settling the families. In light of the motivation for the Commission and its subsequent findings, it is not surprising that educational initiatives based on this thinking were not successful.

2.3.2 Travellers’ experience of education

The relationship between Travellers and the educational system has been fraught with difficulties. Prior to the 1960s, Travellers saw little relevance in school learning; they had little need for literacy or the other skills and knowledge imparted by the schools. The main value of school was perceived to be in the preparation it provided for the sacraments of First Holy Communion and Confirmation. Their nomadic culture meant that they did not stay for long in any place. Traveller children were trained within the family for their future roles. At the same time, schools made few attempts to adapt to the needs of Travellers. There were low levels of enrolment and poor attendance and achievement for those who did enrol.

³ The use of the term “final solution” is particularly chilling, given the then recent history of the genocide of Roma people in Europe.

Following the Commission on Itinerancy, the Department of Education (1970) issued a report which set out the special educational provision to be put in place for Traveller children. The Department of Education and Science (2002a, p.11) described some of the provisions that had been introduced subsequently to address the needs of Travellers:

Five special schools were established and mainstream schools were encouraged to set up special classes. Junior Training Centres were established to cater for children over twelve years of age and were funded by the Department of Education. During this period Traveller preschools were set up by voluntary agencies and grant-aided by the Department.

Other later initiatives included resource teachers for Travellers and a visiting teacher service. With all of these initiatives, there was increasing participation by Travellers in the school system and this has continued to the present day. Almost all Traveller children now enrol in primary school and an increasing number complete second level education. However, completion and achievement levels for Travellers are still low compared to figures for non-Travellers (Weir and Archer 2011)⁴. The Traveller community has little to show for five decades of engagement with the school system.

The failure of Travellers to benefit from education can be related to their unequal position in Irish society where they experience high levels of prejudice and discrimination (Mac Gréil 1977, 1996, 2011). Until the introduction of the Employment Equality Act 1998 and the Equal Status Act 2000, it was quite common for Travellers to be openly discriminated against in employment and services. Prejudice against Travellers actually increased in the years between Mac Gréil's first two studies (Mac Gréil 1996). He describes the substantial deterioration in attitudes towards Travellers as a classic case of severe anti-minority prejudice; on the social distance scale, 10% of respondents would go so far as to deny Travellers citizenship. Mac Gréil's findings were echoed in research for the Citizen Traveller project⁵

⁴ "In 2007 and 2010 the average test scores for pupils from the Traveller community were significantly below those of non-Travellers at every grade level in both reading and mathematics, and the magnitude of the difference between the scores of the two groups is large in every case" (Weir and Archer 2011, p.45).

⁵ Citizen Traveller was a government-funded information and public awareness campaign.

which showed that 44% of Irish people would not accept Travellers as members of their community, while 73% would not accept a Traveller as a friend (Collins 2001). It is also clear that Travellers do not occupy positions of power or influence in society; they are underrepresented, for example, in the fields of education, health and the law.

2.3.2.1 Separate provision

An issue that emerges at an early stage is an apparent contrast between stated intentions and means in relation to education policy. The intention was assimilation and integration. The means chosen were separate classes and separate schools.

The Commission envisaged the total assimilation of Travellers into the settled population. On the one hand, Travellers were viewed as defective settled people and the purpose of education was to repair this defect. On the other hand, the major feature of the education that emerged was that of separate provision – special schools and special classes in mainstream schools. It was intended that this separate provision would be short term. According to Bewley (1974, p.22):

Few of the children can go straight into the normal classes and take their proper place in them. Many are already past the normal age for starting school. They are not used to sitting down and concentrating for long periods ... A time of preparation is therefore necessary before they can join a normal class and benefit by it.

However, separate provision was not short term, and many Traveller children were isolated from their non-Traveller peers in segregated classes, with different break times and different standards through to the late 1980s. In many cases washing facilities were provided, which further isolated the Traveller children and helped reinforce negative stereotypes about them.

Travellers' experiences of school at that time left a legacy of mistrust and dissatisfaction with the education they received and the method of its delivery. There was no recognition of Traveller culture and Traveller children were denied their identity.

2.3.2.2 Intercultural approach

There was a change of thinking starting in the mid-1990s following on the *Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community* (Government of Ireland 1995). The Department of Education and Science (2002a) stated that an intercultural approach to education was a key Department policy. Department guidelines also explicitly called for parental involvement, claiming that it is crucial to a child's success in school. Traveller culture can be acknowledged, it was stated, by giving Traveller parents a voice within the school and by reaching out to the wider Traveller community.

Issues concerning participation and outcomes for Travellers were recognised by Government and addressed, for example, in the *National Development Plan (2000–2006)* (Government of Ireland 2000, p.99), which states that:

The objective for Traveller children is to encourage each Traveller child to participate and benefit from the education system and to develop his/her potential, to increase the retention level of Traveller pupils to completion of post-primary senior cycle and to provide them with further education/training progression options.

Provision for Travellers in education has been negatively affected by educational cutbacks in recent years. A major plank in educational policy for Travellers had been the provision of two Traveller-specific support services – visiting teachers for Travellers and resource teachers for Travellers. The first visiting teacher was appointed in Galway on a pilot bases in 1980 and the scheme became permanent in 1982. There were a total of 40 visiting teachers for Travellers in 2011. In the same year there were 709 whole-term equivalent posts of resource teacher for Travellers. However, financial cutbacks led to the closure of both of these services by the 2011–2012 school year. At the same time, funding was also withdrawn for Traveller preschools. Pavee Point (2013a) estimates that spending on targeted educational interventions for Travellers fell by 86% as a result of cuts.

2.4 Definitions of parental involvement

A major theme running through education policy documents since the 1990s has been the desirability of involving parents in their children's education (Department

of Education 1995, Department of Education and Science 2003 and 2005a). However, these documents are often vague about how precisely parental involvement is to be achieved, what precise benefits can derive from it, what types of involvement are desirable, and how the challenges associated with implementing models of parental involvement can be met and overcome.

In order to consider the meaning of parental involvement, the two components of the term, parent and involvement, are discussed in this section. It is shown that each encompasses a range of meanings, so that the term parental involvement can refer to a range of different practices, both inside and outside of school.

2.4.1 Parents – ‘raced, classed and gendered’

Parents are not a homogeneous group; they belong to different social and cultural contexts and groups in society. Parents’ engagement with education is raced, classed and gendered (Vincent and Martin 2005, Lareau 2011, Crozier 2012, Lunneblad and Johansson 2012). Epstein (2011, p.4) writes that:

Students’ families ... are not all the same. Some students live with two parents, and others have only one parent at home; some parents are working and some are unemployed; some speak English and some speak other languages.

These contexts manifest themselves in different ways for the various parties and have a bearing on how parents deal with their children’s schools, and the extent to which parents are able to negotiate with the schools on behalf of their children. They also affect how the schools view parents and the extent to which they may be prepared to listen to parents and allow them to voice their needs and concerns.

2.4.1.1 Gender

The use of the unitary and ungendered term ‘parent’ hides the gendered nature of parenting (Reay 2005, Crozier 2012, O’Donoghue 2013). While schools refer to ‘parents’, it is generally the mother who has traditionally been most involved in dealings with schools. In the past, when fewer mothers worked outside of the home, this was considered a convenient and appropriate way of operating. With both parents now working in many families, it is still generally the mother who takes on

the role of parent in relation to the school. According to Vincent and Martin (2005, p.115), “research on all aspects of parental involvement with schools shows that mothers take the responsibility for liaising with the school and also for their child’s achievement and progress.” However, changed employment patterns for women mean that they are less available to schools, whether for volunteering, attendance at meetings, or other activity (Phillips 2005). Participation of women in the labour market has increased over recent decades. In the second quarter of 2013, 78.3% of women aged 25–34 and 71.5% of women aged 35–44 were participating in the labour market in Ireland (Central Statistics Office 2013).

These high levels of labour market participation can pose challenges for teachers and schools, who must adapt to the changing nature of the family. Parental work patterns and other circumstances may need to be taken into account in organising appointments and meetings in order to facilitate the involvement of parents. For example, family circumstances were taken into account by staff in the Pen Green Centre⁶ to ensure that parents could attend group meetings at the Centre (Whalley 2007).

2.4.1.2 Fathers

There is a widespread perception that fathers are less involved in their children’s education than are mothers. Reay (2003) found that lack of paternal involvement crossed class differences. Where a father was involved, it was generally in a minor supporting role when the mother was too busy, or by providing advice, rather than taking an equal responsibility with the mother. However, Hanafin and Lynch (2002) found that views of fathers who were primary carers for their children were similar to those of mothers in relation to education. They suggested that parental involvement is shaped by being primary carers of children, as well as, or as much as, by gender. Fitzgerald (2004) points out that, although discussion of parent involvement is generally gender-neutral, it is often perceived as meaning mothers, and he suggests that fathers can feel rebuffed.

There may be cultural reasons why fathers do not involve themselves to the same extent as mothers in their children’s education. The care of children has traditionally

⁶ The Pen Green Centre is a multi-functional service for children and their families established in 1983 and based in Corby, Northamptonshire, England.

been seen as women's work and this extends to parental involvement in school. Reay (2003, p.147) asserts that "fathers are often distant from the day-to-day maintenance of home-school relationships". Back in 1979, Holland reported how both mothers and fathers of children attending the Rutland Street Project regarded any involvement with school as women's work. Expectations within society concerning the respective roles of men and women have undergone significant changes in recent decades, but it is still widely accepted that fathers are less involved than mothers. When the Pen Green Centre for the under fives set out to encourage greater involvement by fathers, it was discovered that "mothers initially assumed that their partners would not want to be involved, and fathers assumed that their partners did not want them to be involved" (Whalley 2007, p.77). Whalley commented that, in the majority of cases, these assumptions were not well founded. Fathers did get involved in the work of the Pen Green Centre, supporting their preschool children's learning. Whalley argued that, regardless of gender, parents are prepared to work in partnership with early years professionals.

2.4.1.3 Changing nature of family

The nature of parenting can be affected by the changing structure of the family in contemporary society. Tovey and Share (2000) noted several trends in relation to family structure in Ireland, including fewer legal marriages and higher rates of separation and divorce. These trends were mirrored internationally. For example, Utting and Pugh (2004) discerned similar trends in the UK.

Policies on parental involvement cannot be based solely on the idea of the two-parent family in a lifelong union based on marriage, but must accommodate one-parent families, blended families, and separated and non-married families. There may be issues of access and custody; some children may spend time in two different households while others become part of a different household with step-siblings and step-parents. A further point to note is that the concept of parent in relation to parental involvement policies can be profitably extended to include, in addition to fathers and mothers, grandparents, older siblings and members of the extended family, as well as, in some cases, caregivers who look after children while parents work. If one purpose of parental involvement is to help provide some continuity

between home and school, then other significant individuals in the life of the child need to be included.

2.4.1.4 Class and cultural identity

The influence of class and cultural identity is significant for parenting and for relationships with school. Children from middle class homes acquire skills and abilities at home that allow them to transfer seemingly effortlessly to school, taking advantage of the similarities between their homes and the school to achieve academic success and to acquire the benefits from their education that allow them to eventually convert this to economic gain. This is the concept of cultural capital, as proposed by Bourdieu, who investigated how having the appropriate cultural capital was vital for success in the French university system in the 1960s (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990). Bourdieu (2003, p.47) described the value of cultural capital as follows:

A theoretical hypothesis which made it possible to explain the unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from the different social classes by relating academic success to the distribution of cultural capital between the classes.

Middle class parents have always found ways of advocating on behalf of their children; they have the advantage of sharing class status with the teachers (Crozier 2000, 2012) and they possess the right type of cultural capital (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990) to allow themselves and their children to fit seamlessly into the school system. As parents, they have come through this system successfully and can negotiate it on behalf of their children. Working class children and minority children possess different social and cultural capital to the schools and teachers. Not only is it different, but the types of knowledge and skills that they have acquired may not be valued by the schools, which can leave them with a sense of not belonging. This is a manifestation of a separation between school and home (Lareau 2000, 2011, O'Donoghue 2013). In this vein, Hanafin and Lynch (2002) argued for working-class voices to be heard in relation to school. Their research illustrated how working-class parents often felt “uninvolved, unrepresented and powerless” (2002, p.45).

Similar issues can arise with respect to members of minorities, who may not find their culture recognised or represented within the schools.

2.4.1.5 Traveller parents

Traveller parents are affected by many of the same issues mentioned above in relation to the general population and there have also been changes in parenting patterns and family structures within the Traveller community. For example, education and training opportunities targeted at women mean that an increasing number of Traveller women are not at home during the day. Childminding in such cases falls to others in the family, such as the fathers, grandparents, older sisters and members of the extended family. Any assumptions concerning the availability of Traveller mothers for involvement activities within preschools may thus need to be questioned. Also, contemporary Traveller families include many one-parent families and blended families, as with other sectors of society. Any links that preschools might construct with families must accommodate the complexity of the modern family.

Along with these factors that Travellers share with the majority population, the particular relationship that the Traveller community has with the education system also influences parental relationships with schools. Many Traveller parents did not have positive experiences of school when they themselves were children, and this influences how they view education for their own children (Fanning 2002, Mac Aonghusa 1991). McDonagh (McDonagh, W. 2000), a Traveller woman, suggested that this poses a particular difficulty for those who were educated in segregated classes. Factors such as this can have an alienating effect on Traveller parents and can influence the type and amount of contact and involvement that they have with their children's schools.

2.4.2 Types of involvement

It has been shown above that the relationship between parents and schools is affected by various factors, including class, gender and minority status. Having considered the multiple nature of parent, the concept of involvement is now explored.

Parents are involved in providing for, and in guiding, their children. This role is expected of them, and it is generally what it means to rear children. It is formulated as a duty in the Irish Constitution (Bunreacht na hÉireann 1937), although the State reserves the right to intervene where parents do not fulfil their duties to their children. Education is compulsory and schools provide care and education for children outside of the home. Parents have the right to privately provide education, but few parents have the resources to do this (Department of Education 1995). Thus, the child is generally situated within both school and home culture. The *White Paper on Education* (Department of Education 1995, p.219) acknowledges that, “in entrusting their children to the schools ... it should not be assumed that parents have in any way waived their constitutional rights”. It is reasonable to expect that a child should be able to negotiate his or her way, using the skills and learning acquired at home in order to achieve success in school. To this end, school should become more home-like, rather than the other way around (Hallgarten 2000). Children should find their lives reflected in the school. This would involve a commitment, on behalf of schools, to engage with the families and communities that they serve, allowing teachers to familiarise themselves with, and to recognise and reflect, the diverse cultures of children within school, while allowing the parents to see ways in which their children can be prepared and supported to succeed in the school environment.

2.4.2.1 Citizen participation

Parental involvement can be understood as a form of citizen participation. During the 1960s the word ‘participation’ became part of the popular political vocabulary (Pateman 1970). Arnstein’s (1971) ladder of citizen participation, developed initially in 1969 as a tool to analyse citizen participation in government programmes in the United States, can be used to examine parental involvement in schools and to categorise the degree and quality of the various kinds of involvement. Arnstein’s seminal model has been used and adapted to analyse participation in various contexts, including parental involvement in education (Howard 1994, Lewis and Naidoo 2004). The degree of involvement of anyone in Arnstein’s ladder moves up eight steps from manipulation at the bottom to citizen control at the top (Figure 2.1).

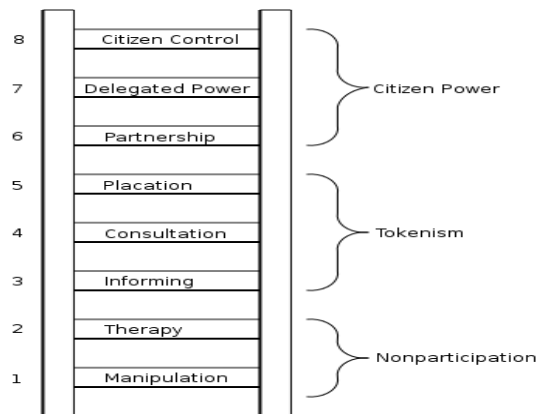


Figure 2.1 Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation

The lowest rung is manipulation. Arnstein gives an example of manipulation as the placing of people on “rubber stamp” advisory committees. People think they are involved, but instead they are being manipulated. She places therapy on the next rung. She cites the example of group therapy, masked as citizen participation, which she regards as both “dishonest and arrogant” (1971, p.4). The focus is on “curing people” of their perceived inadequacies, rather than on addressing the conditions that cause their problems. Arnstein labels both of these steps as non-participation. Steps 3, 4 and 5 are, respectively, Informing, Consultation and Placation. Arnstein regards all of these as degrees of tokenism. She describes informing as an important step, but one which too often takes the form of a one-way flow of information. Consultation is also important, but is not enough, she considers, if it is not combined with other forms of participation. Placation is moving towards partnership, but it is still token participation as it usually takes the form of appointing a few handpicked individuals to a board. The next three steps in ascending order offer degrees of citizen power. These are Partnership, Delegated Power and Citizen Control. They account for the redistribution of power and decision-making authority in a particular programme and citizen control is where communities are in full charge of policy and managerial aspects of a programme.

2.4.2.2 Arnstein's ladder in relation to schools

Using Arnstein's ladder to examine parental involvement in schools, it seems that practices such as parenting classes might be categorised as therapy. These are a

regular aspect of schemes such as the Home-School-Community Liaison Scheme⁷ (Ryan 1994). One reading of such courses would be that they are based on a deficit view of parents, and that, rather than engage with parents as equal partners, the school sets out to cure them of their deficit parenting practices. Vincent and Warren (2000, p.67) suggested that such courses can be understood as “attempts to ‘train’ parents to interact with their children in particular ways, while ignoring the context for that interaction and the material basis underpinning many families’ circumstances”. However, Vincent and Warren’s interpretation was not quite so negative when they investigated a particular parent education class as part of their study. Contrary to their prior expectations, they found much of value in it, although they did call for a shift “away from the women’s behaviour to that of schools and teachers” (Vincent and Warren 2000, p.85). They suggested that the course might focus more on questions of how schools operate and how they respond to parents’ concerns: “Tackling such issues would not only involve informing the women about the education system, but also encouraging them to critically assess the current provision and ethos of their children’s schools” (Vincent and Warren 2000, p.85).

Forms of tokenism, according to Arnstein’s model, include informing and consulting. Informing involves one-way communication from the school to the parents, through such means as posters, newsletters, and so on, with no opportunity for feedback. It is important that schools should inform parents concerning issues that affect them and their children, but one-way communication is not enough. Arnstein also designated consultation as tokenism. She stated that this step can lead to participation, but only if it is not just opinion-gathering for the sake of being seen to consult with the citizens. The information gathered through consultation must significantly affect the decision-making. These steps of ‘informing’ and ‘consulting’ can be seen in various school practices. Crozier (2000, p.64) noted how teachers often maintain control over the dialogue in parent-teacher meetings, finding “little opportunity for parents to ask questions and even less to make an observation or put forward their own point of view.” The time allocated may be minimal – perhaps five

⁷ The Home-School-Community Liaison (HSCL) scheme was established by the Department of Education in 1990. HSCL coordinators liaise between the home, the school and the community as part of an integrated services approach to children’s educational welfare.

to ten minutes per teacher⁸. Crozier claimed that even confident parents cannot raise anything of note with teachers in such a forum. A parent may not feel sufficiently comfortable to confront the teacher about his or her concerns due to time constraints and consideration for other parents queuing after him or her. This type of involvement does not allow the parent to exercise agency, although it is not explicitly excluded.

Walker and MacLure (2005) noted how teachers at such meetings sometimes sought undertakings from parents to help their children in specific ways – help with homework or with behavioural problems, for example. While parents were pleased to have something to do as a result of the meeting, they were generally less successful in securing undertakings from the teachers. Nonetheless, Walker and MacLure (2005, p.103) reported that “productive negotiation was possible” and some undertakings were gained from teachers. Although such practices are limited, they may be seen as steps towards fuller involvement by parents. Within these meetings there is a recognition and acknowledgement of parents by teachers. The meetings also demonstrate willingness on the part of parents to cooperate with the school.

Schools sometimes identify “good” or “right” parents, as described by Crozier (2000, p.10) and single them out to represent other parents. This may occur where there is no parent willing to self-nominate, or nominate another, and can allow for a certain type of parental representation. Since the representative is chosen by the school, and at the discretion of the school, this cannot be seen as a genuine partnership approach where parents would be facilitated to overcome resistance and reticence and take an active part in selecting and electing management of their children’s schools. In Arnstein’s terms, this may be described as placation.

Partnership, in Arnstein’s (1971, p.5) model, involves power being “redistributed through negotiation between citizens and power holders”. In the school context, it can be seen in parent membership of boards of management. It can also be seen in membership of parents’ committees or parents’ councils, to the extent that these exercise power. The quality of partnership exercised by these bodies would depend

⁸ In Crozier (2000) consultations lasted ten minutes. MacLure and Walker (2005, p. 100) assert “consultations are typically scheduled to last five minutes”.

upon the extent to which parent representatives are accountable to their fellow parents and on whether they have the resources to truly contribute. Epstein (2011, p.4), a major theorist of parental involvement, described how partnerships in education involves “educators, families and community members [working] together to share information, guide students, solve problems, and celebrate successes”. The concept of partnership has been a feature of the Irish education system in recent decades, particularly since the Education Act 1998.

Arnstein’s (1971) concepts of delegated power and citizen control do not seem to have any strong application in the field of parental involvement in preschool. Although it is possible for parents to set up their own preschools and assume full responsibility for running them, the teaching is still done by teachers and questions remain about the appropriate relationship between parents and teachers and about what each brings to the relationship. Neither delegated power nor citizen control offer anything to the parental involvement model as it is not the transfer of power from one group to another that is desired, but an appropriate sharing of responsibility and knowledge, through partnership. A partnership process is appropriate in the preschool context, where both parents and preschools engage in dialogue to make decisions together for the education of the children.

2.5 Why parental involvement?

Arguments for parental involvement fall into two major categories – the rights of parents as citizens in a modern democracy, and the effectiveness of parental involvement in improving the educational experiences of children and in helping them to achieve improved outcomes. Both of these justifications are explored in this section, beginning with a consideration of parental rights, and moving on to consider the impact of parental involvement on educational outcomes.

2.5.1 Parental rights

According to the *White Paper on Adult Education* (Department of Education and Science 2000, p.29), the citizen in a modern democracy is expected to do the following:

Take an active role in shaping the overall direction of the society – culturally, socially, economically and environmentally – and to engage proactively in community and societal decision-making.

This active role applies to education and supports the democratic rights and duties of parents regarding their children⁹. Parents are not homogeneous and not all parents will wish to exercise their rights and duties in a similar way due to diverse backgrounds and diverse values and beliefs. According to Vincent and Martin (2005, p.124), because schools are made up of children from diverse cultural and social backgrounds, and in order to “maintain a legitimate and democratic authority”, the schools “must engage in dialogue and negotiate with families”.

As previously noted, parents have a constitutional right and duty to provide for the education of their children. The Irish Constitution (Bunreacht na hÉireann 1937) recognises that families are the natural and primary educators of their children. Given this role, parents should not have to operate on trust in order to ensure the education of their children, in the belief that the school will have their children’s best interests at heart. This is especially true for parents of minority and working class children who do not traditionally benefit from schooling to the same extent as middle class children. Indeed, the very nature of school can have a detrimental effect on some children’s lives and life chances. For example, over twenty years ago, lack of recognition of Traveller culture in school has been cited as a cause for the alienation of many Travellers from education who went through school in the past (Mac Aonghusa 1991). Over the years, there have been few identifiable positive outcomes from education for Travellers, and this can result in Traveller parents having negative views and lack of confidence in dealing with schools on behalf of their children. Another repercussion of this alienation was referred to by O’Hanlon and Holmes (2004, p.31) as “an indictment of our society” where, they claim, for the most part, those Travellers in British schools who have achieved educational success

⁹ The voices of the children should also be heard. This theme recurs in various policy documents, such as the National Children’s Strategy (Department of Health and Children 2000). This is especially so in relation to older children, but is also true in relation to preschool. It should always be remembered that children are not objects to be shaped by parents and teachers, but are individuals in their own right.

have achieved it by passing themselves off as members of the settled community¹⁰. They were motivated to do this for fear of hostility, prejudice and rejection.

Democracy demands that education should be responsive to the needs and wishes of parents, and that it should be designed to serve the best interests of parents and their children. To ensure this, the education system must engage explicitly with parents, especially with minority and working-class parents. The constitutional rights of parents with children in formal education are given some support in Ireland's Education Act 1998. National Parents' Councils are recognised, and parents have rights to establish parents' associations in schools and to have parent representatives on boards of management. Possibly due to the more informal nature of early childhood education, such legal requirements have not been explicitly set out in respect of preschools, although parental involvement is one element of the Síolta standards for early childhood education (Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education 2006).

2.5.2 Effectiveness

A second type of justification for parental involvement is based on its effectiveness in improving the child's experience of school or outcomes from school. Where parents are involved, it may be expected that benefits will be seen in the children's education, and that the extent of involvement will be associated with the extent of the benefits. Research can shed light on this relationship.

When parents are involved in their children's education, they have the opportunity to exercise their right to advocate on behalf of their children. Their involvement offers them a better understanding of how the school works. They can build relationships with teachers and influence policy and practice to benefit all. However, parental involvement is a complex area. Crozier (2012) cautions of the need to recognise the social, economic and cultural factors that affect involvement. O'Donoghue (2013) shows that working class mothers' social and educational capitals distance them from their children's school even when they try to become involved.

¹⁰ The concept of "passing" is also seen in other stigmatised groups (Goffman 1963). In the 2003 film, *The Human Stain* [Benton, 2003], Anthony Hopkins played the part of a light coloured African American who passed himself off as white in order to advance his academic career.

Parental involvement programmes require the commitment of time and resources on the part of schools, and may be perceived by some school personnel as a costly and unnecessary extra, something which takes time and effort from the main task of teaching the children. Crozier (2000, p.82) reported some teachers and middle managers complaining of “the amount of effort put in [on parental involvement] for disproportionately low results”. For these and other reasons, it is important to see the extent to which research has been able to estimate the benefits of parental involvement.

2.5.3 Benefits of parental involvement

Claims of benefits from parental involvement are found in evaluations of many programmes, including such Irish programmes as the Rutland Street Project (Educational Research Centre 1998), the Early Start Preschool Programme (Lewis and Archer 2002) and the Home-School-Community-Liaison Scheme (HSCL) (Ryan 1994). A table summarising these schemes is included in Appendix L. However, although the claims are strong, it should be noted that the evidence presented often consisted of the perceptions of participants rather than more objective measures. Evaluations show that the Rutland Street Project had brought benefits to the children. A crucial factor of this success was ascribed to parental involvement aspects of the programme (Educational Research Centre 1998).

The Early Start Preschool Programme was based on guidelines developed for the Rutland Street Project (Educational Research Centre 1998). It incorporated a three-fold element of parental involvement: (1) parent membership of an advisory group in each school, (2) parent participation in day-to-day running and organisation of classes, and (3) parents joining children in classroom activities. Evaluations of this project did not isolate the effects of parental involvement, but the 1998 evaluation stated that parents demonstrated their positive attitudes to the project by becoming involved with it (Educational Research Centre 1998). Lewis and Archer (2002, p.22) reported on the views of principals concerning perceived benefits of the preschool project for parents: “Parents [were] more confident, friendly, open, supportive and relaxed”. Principals also believed that parents found the preschool less intimidating than primary school and this consequently led to a more informal relationship between parents and teachers. A greater awareness of educational issues and growing

participation by parents in their children's education was also perceived. Early Start participants were judged to be superior to comparable non-Early Start children in cognitive and language abilities, according to Junior Infants teachers in their adaptation to classroom procedures and their general readiness for school (Educational Research Centre 1998).

Evaluations of the HSCL (Ryan 1994, Conaty 2002, Archer and Short 2003) indicated that progress had been made in raising parents' awareness of their abilities to enhance their children's education and assist them in developing skills. Parents were better able to help with their children's homework and also experienced increased self-confidence. Conaty (2002, p.130), in a commentary on the HSCL, cited a parent as saying that, "it makes a difference to children to know that you are there".

Teachers' perceptions of parents and indirectly of their children can be influenced by parental involvement (Crozier 2012). On this, Whalley (2007, p.8) stated that she and the Pen Green team "were aware that young children achieve more and are happier when early years educators work together with parents". Similarly, Vincent (2000, p.82) reported the views of a parent that her involvement had led to increased confidence in her children: "I've got two little'uns who are so confident; they're totally different to the two older ones".

While all these claims concerning the benefits of parental involvement are encouraging, it is also important to look for more objective results. It must be stated that, since parental involvement is usually an element of an overall strategy, it can be difficult to identify benefits that can be ascribed solely to the parental involvement element of a particular programme. For example, the Early Start Programme was comprised of a curriculum geared to the children's needs, equipment was designed to stimulate learning and staff were highly trained and qualified for the project. They were based in classrooms in primary schools, and were relatively well-resourced compared to many other programmes for the age group. The preschools were able to avail of the services of the HSCL coordinator in the school, as well as other staff. All these combined to make the project successful. It is therefore difficult to pinpoint the precise benefits from the parental involvement component.

Also, the definition of parental involvement employed can skew the understanding of what is being evaluated or claimed. Difficulties arise when parental involvement is measured by the view of a third party concerning what parents believe or think, such as the principals' views of parent perceptions of the HSCL Scheme (Archer and Short 2003). Parental impact was established through the views of principals and coordinators, and the first-person views of parents were not included in this evaluation.

Nearly two decades ago, Edwards and Knight (1997) pointed out some of the difficulties with attempting to prove that parental involvement programmes are beneficial. They suggested that "control and experimental groups are impossible to establish for sound comparisons between different types of involvement and non-involvement" (Edwards and Knight 1997, p.65). They claimed that such evaluation would take more time than can usually be paid for. Nonetheless, they maintained that there is a consensus among early years practitioners that parental involvement is valuable.

However, in addition to such subjective perceptions, we have, for some time now, had more empirical evidence that parental involvement at various educational levels provides benefits for children's educational outcomes. Malaspina (1993), in a review of research on parental involvement in the US stated that parental involvement is positively related to achievement, and further claimed that the earlier the involvement, the better. Marcon (1998) found that parents whose children attended Head Start were more likely to be involved in their children's subsequent education, and that current involvement was associated with higher grades, while past involvement had a positive impact on achievement test scores and school competence. William Jeynes (2004, 2005) investigated the effects of parental involvement in both elementary and secondary education in two meta-analyses. A meta-analysis of 41 studies in the US confirmed that parental involvement in elementary school was positively correlated with achievement, and a meta-analysis of 52 studies of secondary school also found that parental involvement was positively correlated with higher student achievement. Also in the US, Miedel and Reynolds (1999) investigated the relationship between parental involvement in early intervention and children's later school competencies. The results indicated the number of activities parents participated in when their children were attending

preschool and kindergarten were significantly associated with higher reading achievement, lower rates of grade retention and fewer years in special education. Findings thus support benefits for parental involvement in early childhood programmes.

2.6 Models and practices of parental involvement

In this section, various models and practices of parental involvement are examined, with a view to establishing how they can inform the development of parental involvement for Traveller parents in the preschools that their children attend. Practices, typologies and models of participation and involvement are explored and examined, especially, but not exclusively, in the area of parental involvement in education. Although some education examples considered here are in the area of early childhood education, many are from other areas. They have been chosen for consideration because they provide a focus on particular aspects of involvement. This examination will help to categorise types and levels of parental involvement and identify factors in the school environment that facilitate involvement.

Some models, such as Espinosa's (1995), are specifically focused on particular ethnic communities. While this might seem to limit their usefulness, ideas introduced may be adapted for use with other minority groups, such as the Traveller community. Terminology differs in different models, so that a term used in one context might have a different meaning in another. Of particular interest is the term "partner", which refers to an equal and collaborative relationship between schools and families. In contrast, Vincent and Martin (2005) use the term partner to refer to a limited form of involvement in which the school holds the power, and they choose the term "citizen" for the fuller type of parent involvement based on equality and collaboration.

Not all parents may be able or willing to involve themselves in their children's preschooling, even at a minimal level, either through circumstances or choice. In some cases, this may be because of mistrust or misunderstanding. Such parents may need extra assistance in overcoming personal and other barriers to their involvement and may need to be allowed to participate at a chosen level, while being encouraged and facilitated to increase their involvement. While the ideal may be a participative

relationship based on rights, equality and partnership, it may be feasible to achieve it through stages, and various practices may provide valuable steps towards the ideal and may be beneficial in their own right.

Different theorists have different perspectives on parental involvement and so categorise parental involvement practices in different ways. The models and practices selected for examination in this section are organised in two groups. The first group consists of a set of approaches where the focus is on creating an environment within a setting that can help parental involvement to take place in a productive way. This consists of models by Collins (1995), Espinosa (1995) and McWilliam *et al.* (1998), all of which set out ways of encouraging parental involvement, although they may not detail what involvement consists of, nor do they necessarily lead to partnership. The second group consists of typologies which map out different categories of involvement; some rate practices on a continuum, while others describe different practices without implying any hierarchy. Models by Epstein (2011), Edwards and Knight (1997), Pugh (1987) and Vincent and Martin (2005) are considered, and many factors are identified which contribute to a fuller understanding of parental involvement.

2.6.1 Creating an environment

In order to build partnerships with parents, it helps to have an environment which is supportive of warm and friendly relationships between parents and schools. This is the focus of the first group of models considered here, comprising those of Collins (1995), Espinosa (1995) and McWilliam *et al.* (1998). Major characteristics of these three approaches are set out in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2 Models focused on creating an environment

Collins (1995)	Espinosa (1995)	McWilliam <i>et al.</i> (1998)
Support for school and parents	Personal touch	Family orientation
Welcoming atmosphere	Non-judgemental	Positiveness (thinking the best of families)
Appreciation	Perseverance in maintaining involvement	Sensitivity (“put themselves in the parents’ shoes”)
Consideration of parents’ needs	Bilingual support	Responsiveness
Communication	Strong leadership	Friendliness
Church/school connection	Staff development	Child and community Skills
	Community outreach	

All three approaches proposed that parents need to be supported. McWilliam *et al.* (1998, p.206) suggested that preschools should think the best of parents and put themselves “in the parents’ shoes”. Espinosa (1995), whose focus was on Hispanic parents of children in early childhood programmes in the US, stated that parents need to be supported for their strengths rather than focus on perceived failures. Collins (1995), whose research was carried out with primary and second-level schools in Newfoundland, found that teachers created a welcoming atmosphere, considered the needs of parents and fostered two-way communication with them. She added another dimension and suggested a move towards partnership when she included parents in the supportive role. She referred to one school in her study where parents were the driving force behind involvement.

Noting that the concept of parental involvement had initially implied that parents should participate in activities that professionals deemed important, McWilliam *et al.* (1998) claimed that a shift had occurred in the 1980s to the building of partnerships in which parents had decision-making powers. They devised a model based on family-centred services (see Figure 2.2) which summarises the qualities required to achieve a family orientation in early childhood services, including preschools.

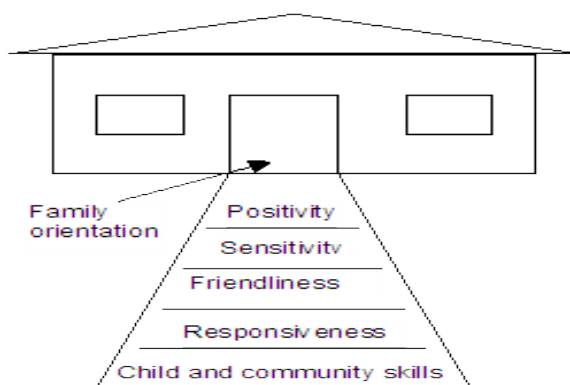


Figure 2.2 Family orientation doorway (McWilliam *et al.* 1998)

According to McWilliam *et al.* (1998), the preschool needs to have a welcoming atmosphere. They referred to “opening the door” and treating parents as friends. This need for a welcoming atmosphere was echoed by Collins (1995) and Espinosa (1995). Collins stated that personal contact is the most effective method of communication, and both she and Espinosa supported gearing contact to parents’ needs and interests. For Espinosa this included staff development in relation to Hispanic culture and bilingual support, as her model was focused on supporting Hispanic parents. Her concern was to bridge the cultural gap between home and school in order to provide a basis for future school success.

Espinosa (1995) emphasised that individual teachers on their own cannot achieve the aims of involving parents, and they thus need support from the administration and the principal. Espinosa also stated that the school can serve the community in an outreach policy while McWilliam *et al.* (1998) advocated child and community skills, and Collins (1995) mentioned the value of church-school links as a way of communicating with the community. This involvement with the wider community is a feature of all three models.

Three main themes emerge from the models proposed by Collins, Espinosa and McWilliam *et al.*:

- Support for both parents and teachers.
- The need for a welcoming atmosphere in the preschools/schools.
- The possibility for linkage with the wider community.

These themes could be used to inform early education provision for Traveller children. Values of positivity, sensitivity and friendliness, as specified by McWilliam *et al.* (1998) could help Traveller parents feel welcome. A preschool that cultivates links with the Traveller community should show its recognition of Traveller culture and so help break down the gap between home and preschool. On this, the *Preschools for Travellers National Evaluation Report* (Department of Education and Science 2003) noted that many Traveller preschools operated open-door policies, with parents free to drop in at any time, although few preschools had structured policies for encouraging involvement by parents.

2.6.2 Types and levels of involvement

While a warm and welcoming atmosphere may open doors and set the scene for involvement, there must also be a focus on different types and levels of involvement. This focus on structure is found in the next group of theorists considered, namely, Epstein (2011), Edwards and Knight (1997), Pugh (1987) and Vincent and Martin (2005).

2.6.2.1 Overlapping spheres of influence

The first model considered in this group is that of Epstein (2011). A major theorist of parental involvement within the United States education system, Epstein has been working in the area of parental involvement since the early 1980s. Initially focused on elementary school, she later extended her work to high school. She noted that three distinct perspectives guide practitioners concerning the relationship between home and school:

- Separate responsibilities of families and schools. This perspective assumes that families and schools have separate goals and responsibilities which are best achieved independently.
- Shared responsibilities of families and schools. This perspective stresses the coordination, cooperation and complementarity of families and schools.
- Sequential responsibilities of parents and schools. This perspective assumes families have responsibilities for educating the young child before the child

enters formal schooling, after which educators assume the major responsibility.

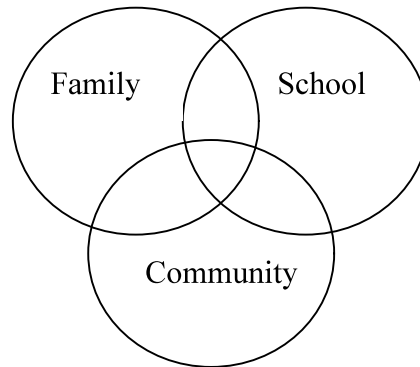


Figure 2.3 Overlapping spheres of influence (Epstein 2011)

Epstein developed an integrated theory in which she envisaged the child's life as occurring within three overlapping spheres of influence (see Figure 2.3 above): the family, the school and the community. These are affected by a variety of forces, such as the child's age and stage of development as well as the various practices and beliefs current within the family, the school and the community. The different spheres of influence are never completely separate, she claimed, but the amount of overlap varies depending on circumstances. The maximum overlap occurs when schools and families operate as true partners. However, there is never total overlap because both families and schools maintain some practices that are independent of each other.

Based on her model of overlapping spheres of influence, Epstein identified six major types of involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and collaborating with the community (see Figure 2.4). Each type includes many different practices of partnership.

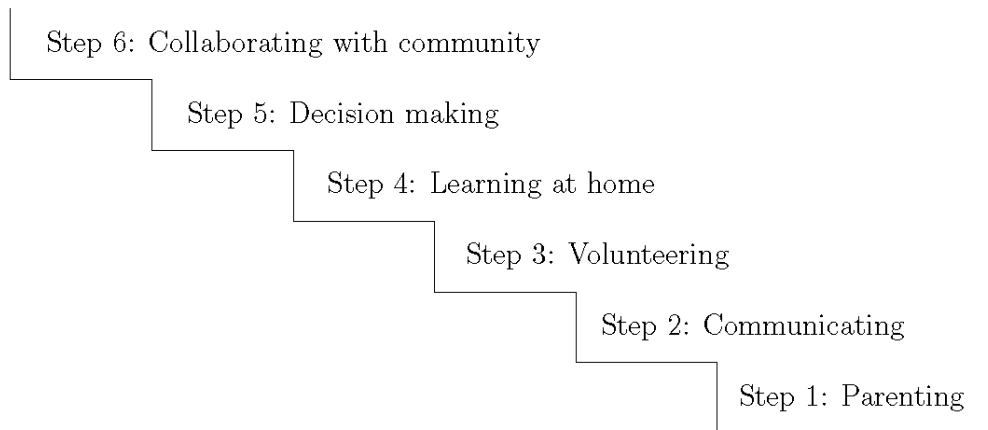


Figure 2.4 Epstein's (2011) six steps

Epstein holds that, while there can be different practices of partnership, all should include these six types:

1. Help families to establish supportive home environments.
2. Design effective forms of communication between school and home.
3. Recruit and organise parents' help and support.
4. Help families to help students learn at home.
5. Include parents in school decisions.
6. Engage with the wider community.

Epstein (2011) draws attention to studies that explore the strengths of parents and communities with various racial, ethnic and cultural characteristics. She notes that resources – such as traditions, values, aspirations and identity – can provide natural supports for children in families that would be labelled 'poor' or 'deficient', if only economic factors were taken into account.

Although Epstein writes in the context of US education, her framework is more generally applicable and demonstrates that parental involvement is a multi-layered concept. Her work poses a range of questions that schools can ask when devising parental involvement programmes, and demonstrates the range of practices that are available. She shows also that parents are, in the main, willing and able to involve themselves in their children's education.

2.6.2.2 Partners and clients

Edwards and Knight (1997, p.66) discussed parental involvement specifically in relation to early years education and cautioned as follows:

Parental involvement is often pursued under the banner of providing equality of learning opportunities with children. However, unless it is carefully managed it can become a vehicle for undermining the value systems of some social groups through implicit criticism of what these groups hold dear, whether dialect or craft skills.

They noted that some early arguments on parental involvement were based on “a deficit model of working class parenting which might be improved by increasing contact between home and school” (Edwards and Knight 1997, p.66). They argued that this view rested on assumptions concerning the supremacy of middle class attitudes and values. They cautioned that, although theorists no longer explicitly use a deficit model, one can still find deficit in the guise of difference.

Edwards and Knight (1997) represented parental involvement as a range of positions on a continuum from “Parents as clients” to “Parents as partners” (see Figure 2.5).

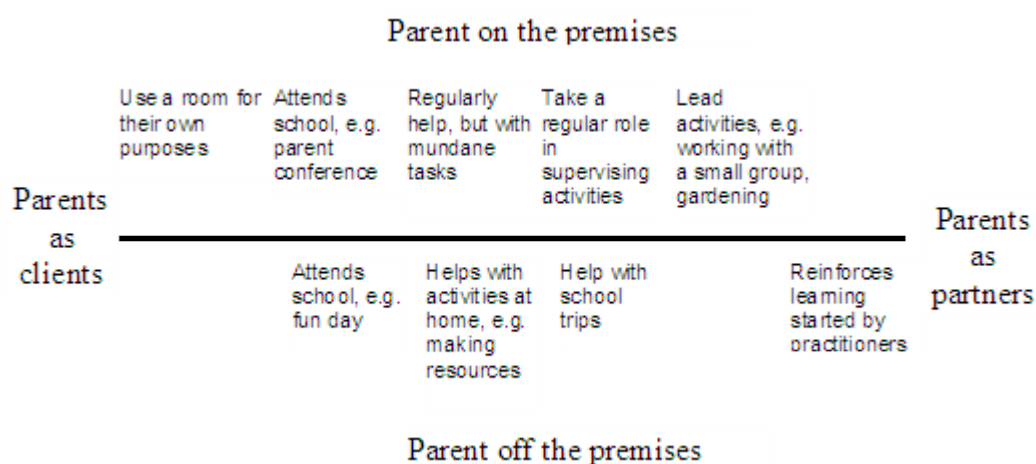


Figure 2.5 Parental involvement – client-partner continuum (Edwards and Knight 1997)

Various activities that parents potentially engage in, both inside and outside of the school premises, can be mapped onto this diagram, as shown in Figure 2.5. Where parents are clients, they are expected to comply with the demands or suggestions of the school and they have no voice to influence how policy develops; parents serve

the school agenda. Where parents are partners, they help set the agenda. Edwards and Knight (1997) were interested in how parents might be able to move from the relationship of client, as represented on the left of this diagram, to a position of partnership. They suggested that it is necessary to know parents' current level of involvement if the intention is to help them move towards a position of partnership, and that considerable bridge-building may be necessary. However, in developing parental involvement initiatives, they cautioned against approaches which create models of ideal parenting against which parents "are judged and usually found wanting" (Edwards and Knight, 1997, p.75). Instead, they suggested that a "relaxed climate of mutual respect ... may be the context in which the most useful and meaningful of conversations between practitioners and parents may occur" (1997, p.75).

Fitzgerald (2004) suggested that the Edwards and Knight (1997) model can provide a useful guide for early years practitioners for increasing partnership, although he noted that moves towards partnership can involve a blurring of traditional roles between parents and practitioners, which, while it can bring benefits, may also be a source of conflict and tension. This model does not explicitly address the kind of dialogue between the parties, nor does it address school governance.

2.6.2.3 Dimensions of involvement

Pugh (1987) set out a framework of dimensions of parent involvement in preschool centres. Her framework mapped different kinds of involvement that parents may have. She perceived two categories of non-participating parents: (1) Active non-participant parents, who actively decide not to participate, possibly because they are working or they want time off from their children, and (2) Passive non-participant parents who might want to participate but are unable, such as through lack of confidence or illness. She also recognised that some parents may support from the outside by, for example, fundraising or providing materials for the preschool, attending social events, or providing moral support. Other parents may be involved as helpers within the preschool, under the supervision of staff. She sought to engage parents in the ways that they themselves wish. For example, she said that "one parent may find herself ... managing the library, but not involved at all with working with her child. Involvement may change over time." However, the concept of partnership

is important for Pugh, which she defines as “a working relationship characterised by a shared sense of purpose, mutual respect and the willingness to negotiate” (1987, p.5).

2.6.2.4 Involvement as the exercise of citizenship

Vincent and Martin (2005) identified three categories of parental roles in education: parent as partner, parent as consumer and parent as citizen. They use the term ‘partner’ to denote a different kind of practice than that denoted by the term elsewhere in this thesis. For them, the essence of parent as partner is the concept of support – supporting the child and supporting the school – while elsewhere in this thesis partnership is defined by concepts of equality and dialogue. Vincent and Martin defined partnership as “working with one’s own child to support their education” and as “supporting the school” (2005, p.117). They noted that UK schools increasingly sought to harness and develop the abilities of parents to work with their own children. However, they recognised an “entrenched professional/lay division”, where schools/teachers regard themselves as experts, and also in some cases an “entrenched deficit approach to parents” (Vincent and Martin 2005, p.117). These views limited the scope for involvement: “there is no sense of sharing or negotiation around the aims of the school” (Vincent and Martin 2005, p.118), and so partnership, by their definition, is not enough.

Vincent and Martin’s (2005) second category of parent as consumer implies choice, and presupposes no significant difference between school and any other consumer purchase. It is based on “the supposed power of exit as a sanction” (Vincent and Martin 2005, p.119). This view of education came to the fore in the UK in the 1980s, with parents being seen as consumers of education, and with free choice of school seen as important. Gewirtz *et al.* (1995, p.22) found that the choice process “tends to discriminate against low-income and less educated families”. Vincent and Martin referred to practical and emotional barriers for choice within the school context. Also, they noted that there is no clear relationship between choice and involvement; choice of school “does not necessarily result in greater parental involvement within the school” (2005, p.119).

The third category is parent as citizen, where parents exercise their rights to participate in school life. Vincent and Martin (2005, p.120), writing in the UK context, suggested that “it is the collective right of representation on school governing bodies” which is distinctive about parent-as-citizen¹¹. Although they noted difficulties in some areas, they judged the move to involve parents in school governance as a qualified success. However, while many parents can be involved, these tend to be a minority and are “largely white and middle class and mostly mothers” (2005, p.121). They noted that many parents appear to have little appetite for participating in the decision-making of schools and they wonder why, when structures have been put in place in schools for parents’ representation, parents have not more robustly asserted their rights. To investigate this question, they drew on literature on citizenship and deliberative democracy, and they considered “the circumstances in which dialogue around educational issues would flourish” (Vincent and Martin 2005, p.126). They concluded on a rather pessimistic note, that parents will only exercise agency in education when conditions are created for a more equal and a more deliberative society.

2.7 Conclusion

Throughout this chapter various concepts relating to the three aims of this study were explored. Different conceptions of equality were considered and a concept of radical liberal equality, promoting equality of participation and outcome, was regarded as capable of underpinning an educational initiative such as the introduction and extension of parental involvement in Traveller preschools. The importance of a politics of recognition was also emphasised, in which Traveller cultural identity can be acknowledged.

The origins, history and culture of the Traveller community were briefly explored. It was noted that Travellers experience high levels of prejudice and discrimination in Irish society. The relationship of Travellers with the education system was examined. Education for Travellers in the past was marked by separate provision and a lack of recognition for Traveller culture. Although policy now supports inclusive

¹¹ In Ireland, as noted elsewhere, the Education Act 1998 promotes parents’ councils and parental representation on Boards of Management.

and intercultural education, participation rates and outcomes for Travellers are still poor.

It was noted that the term 'parent' can hide the way that parents' engagement with education can be affected by race, class and gender. Also, families and parenting are changing in contemporary society, with women increasingly participating in the labour force and with changes in family structure. Any effective model of parental involvement must take these issues into account. It was also shown that involvement can range from token activities to delegated power. It was argued that parental involvement should be a partnership process in which all parties contribute for the benefit of the children.

There are many reasons for parental involvement, but these reasons generally fall into two categories. On the one hand, parents as citizens in modern democratic society have a right to involvement in decisions which affect them or their families. On the other hand, research shows many benefits for children's learning when parents are involved.

Various models and practices were explored. It was noted that models by Espinosa (1995), Collins (1995) and McWilliam *et al.* (1998) highlight the need to create a warm and welcoming environment to facilitate involvement and to provide support for parents and teachers. These models provide a starting point for partnership, although they do not necessarily imply it. A second group of models, by Epstein (2011), Edwards and Knight (1997), Pugh (1987) and Vincent and Martin (2005) show that parental involvement can be viewed as a continuum or as a typology of different categories of involvement.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the research methodology used to investigate the three aims of my study on parental involvement in Traveller preschools is described and discussed. Traveller preschools were a targeted early education intervention for the Traveller community. As a teacher in a Traveller preschool for over twenty-five years, and having been involved with various Traveller organisations, I developed an understanding and respect for the Travellers I encountered on a daily basis. I also saw the effects of the poor quality of education that the parents of my pupils had received. Their own parents had sent them to school on the understanding that they would achieve an education and that this would benefit them. Instead, many now struggle with basic literacy. This has led to feelings of inadequacy and loss in respect of this part of their lives. It was impossible not to recognise the injustice and inequality in this and not to see these problems as linked to a lack of recognition within the educational system for their cultural identity. Many of the parents had a limited understanding of how the education system operated and often had to trust that the school would do the best to help their children to achieve in a way that they themselves had not.

Having encouraged the parents of my pupils to become more involved in the preschool, and seeing how this enriched the preschool experience for the children, I decided to investigate background policy, along with the level and type of involvement of Traveller parents in other Traveller preschools, and to explore the parents' and teachers' views on involvement. One factor that must be taken into account when considering my research is that I was a member of the majority population researching a minority group (Worby and Rigney 2002). A further factor is that, as I was a practitioner in the sector that I was researching, the study could be seen as an example of practitioner research. However, I decided not to research

specifically my own practice, but rather to explore the issue of Traveller parent involvement in the wider context of the Traveller preschool sector.

Clough and Nutbrown (2006, p.17) urge the researcher to approach method as “being constructed ... rather than selected”. This is reflected in the approach I adopted. A variety of research methods were adapted to the specific needs of the research. The overarching methodology adopted is mainly qualitative. In writing about qualitative research, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) suggested that a research methodology involves five phases: (1) Researcher, (2) Research paradigm, (3) Research strategy, (4) Research methods, and (5) Interpretation and Evaluation. This chapter addresses these phases with reference to the research reported. The context of the research has already been established. Accordingly, the research paradigm is first outlined, including the ontological and epistemological framework which provides a foundation for the methodology. The research strategy is then discussed. The research plan and implementation, including necessary research instruments, is then described. Finally, issues related to analysis and reporting are considered.

3.2 Research paradigm

All research takes place in the context of a research paradigm. Two main research paradigms are positivism and interpretivism, with many variations existing on both of these (Denzin and Lincoln 2005). The paradigm framing this research can be described as broadly interpretivist while drawing on a third paradigm, namely, critical theory (O'Donoghue 2008). It draws on critical theory because of the concern for equality and social justice that informs it.

Two elements of a research paradigm are its ontology and epistemology. Ontology refers to how one views the world. While positivism regards the world as an objective reality which is the same for everyone, interpretivism regards the world as being socially constructed, and so experienced differently by everyone. Thus, it needs to be interpreted. This latter view is adopted in this research. Epistemology is theory of knowledge; it refers to what we know and how we know it. If the world is socially constructed then allowing for dialogue is an important aspect of knowing.

3.2.1 My ontological position

My ontological position stems from the observation that different people experience the world in different ways. Acknowledgement of this fact was particularly important to me when carrying out research with members of the Traveller community. Each experiences the world differently, depending on the culture in which one lives, one's family experiences and one's individual encounters with the world. We each construct our understanding of the world through our interactions with others. Thus, the world can be interpreted in different ways by everyone. The differences may seem particularly apparent when comparing cultures, but there are also differences within any particular group, as its members are not homogeneous. Thus I adopted an interpretivist stance which supported the view that reality is socially constructed.

A further aspect to my ontological position is a personal commitment to equality and social justice. While maintaining that the world is socially constructed and is experienced differently by everyone, I also noticed that there are power relations in society which can serve to advantage or disadvantage different groups. For this reason, aspects of critical theory informed my ontological position. Critical theory derives from Marxism, with Jürgen Habermas being its best known contemporary exponent. Habermas divides knowledge interests into three categories: technical, practical and emancipatory (Cohen *et al.* 2011). Technical knowledge corresponds to positivism and practical knowledge corresponds to interpretivism. The emancipatory interests are concerned with exposing the operation of power and bringing about social justice, and this corresponds to the critical theory paradigm. This is significant as the research being reported here was to advance social justice, through advancing understanding of the experiences of Traveller parents. The research methods adopted were interpretivist, and critical theory was used to inform a complementary layer of analysis, as a lens through which we can come to understand how the experience of Travellers is shaped by the distribution of power in society.

3.2.2 My epistemological position

Epistemology depends on ontology. If I understand the world to be socially constructed, this means there are boundaries on what can be known and how it can be known. There are a number of different ways we may gain knowledge. One way

is through prior experiential knowledge. When investigating the perspectives of Traveller parents, for example, I could have prior experiential knowledge if I were a Traveller parent. However, since I am a non-Traveller, this way of knowing is largely closed to me. As a teacher in a Traveller preschool for twenty-five years, I did bring some prior knowledge that helped form my thinking. As my preschool was located in the heart of the Traveller community, I had daily contact and interactions with the families of the children attending the preschool and with the wider Traveller community. The classroom assistant was a Traveller woman whose three older children had attended the preschool. Through our friendship and by working together I gained a further depth of knowledge about the Traveller community. I developed a positive disposition towards the Traveller community and a conviction that its members are entitled to be treated equally and fairly in society.

Another way to gain knowledge is through reading the literature. Accordingly, my literature review, considered in Chapter 2, includes some insights based on my reading of the research of others. This helped to inform me on issues of identity generally and on Travellers in particular, to provide a context for my direct research. Reading also underpinned the analysis of policy documents outlined in Chapter 4 that addresses the first aim of the research.

A third way of knowing is to ask the parents themselves. My research regarding my second and third aims relied largely on talking to, and listening to, Traveller parents. My epistemological approach is based on equality and dialogue. Dialogue can help to reduce the hierarchy between researcher and those being researched (Byrne 2000). What I attempted in my research was not simply the gathering of data, but a dialogical engagement with the key stakeholders – parents, teachers and managers. The methods of data collection chosen in relation to aims two and three provided opportunities for dialogue with participants. For example, one method used with Traveller parents was the focus group, in which data was generated by discussion amongst a group of Traveller parents. This method is interactive and informal and its “dialogic possibilities ... help researchers to work against premature consolidation of their understandings and explanations” (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis 2005, p.903). Likewise, interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach (Cohen *et al.*

2011), with an outline interview schedule and the opportunity to engage in dialogue with respondents on areas of interest.

3.2.3 Research strategy

The methodological approach adopted was informed by my ontological and epistemological positions and was one that allowed the participants' voices to be heard. The research method chosen for research question number one was a document analysis of relevant State policy documents. Research questions two and three were investigated by conducting a case study, focusing on the involvement of Traveller parents in Traveller preschools. The research strategy is discussed in detail in 3.3 below. The research methods used were mainly qualitative and interpretive, although some quantitative data were collected to help to describe the context. I listened to, and recorded, what the participants were saying about their experiences and views, and I scrutinised the data in light of what others had said and in the context of the literature. I also took account of my own position within the research as a member of the majority population, outside of the Traveller community but with personal and professional ties over a long period. An interpretive approach was deemed to be the one best suited to the research in relation to question two and three, as I was taking an in-depth look at a small number of people. The aim of the research in relation to these two questions was to explore how a group of individuals who belong to a minority group experience and view the world, with particular reference to a specific aspect of their lives.

3.2.4 Researching a minority group

The case study component of the research for this study involved research by a member of the majority population with members of a minority group. Such research is fraught with ethical issues. According to Worby and Rigney (2002, p.27), "the dynamic relationship between givers and receivers of knowledge is a reminder that dealing with indigenous issues is one of the most sensitive and complex tasks facing teachers, learners and researchers at all levels". I engaged with Traveller parents, as members of a distinct group with its own culture, different from the majority culture, to elucidate their experiences and views with respect to Traveller preschools. According to Smith (2005, p.97), for marginalised groups "research ethics is about

establishing, maintaining and nurturing reciprocal and respectful relationships”. She noted that “research is a site of contestation, not simply at the level of epistemology or methodology, but also in its broadest sense as an organised scholarly activity that is deeply related to power” (Smith 2005, p.87).

McDonagh (McDonagh, R. 2000), who is herself a Traveller, raised some issues concerning her experiences as a Traveller of being ‘used’ by researchers in ways that she believed would not be tolerated by settled people, adding that it can be the case that Traveller culture is viewed through a microscope of racism and stereotypes, thus alienating Travellers from their own experiences and devaluing their sense of identity. Of the research in which she participated, she said that, while the title of the subject matter was usually presented to her, her only role was in answering questions. She added that in Traveller-related topics, research is often the first mechanism used to perpetuate racism. She argued that the nuances in both cultures may be ambiguous to the other and that this can lead to the exploitation of Travellers, especially where researchers want to get what she termed “the authentic Traveller voice” (2000, p.241). She cautioned against pitfalls of interpreting Traveller culture from the researcher’s settled perspective. Similar issues in relation to research with Maori people, in which research had displaced Maori lived experience with the ‘authoritative’ voice of the expert, were noted by Bishop and Glynn (1999, p.168) who claimed that “Western-based research has undervalued and belittled Maori knowledge ... in order to enhance [that] of the colonisers”. These observations highlighted for me the need for caution and care in my research with Traveller parents.

3.2.5 Reflexive methodology

McDonagh (McDonagh, R. 2000) contended that a reflexive methodology could not only prevent perpetuating stereotypes but also help prevent researchers from projecting their particular points of view into different cultural contexts. MacNaughton *et al.* (2004, p.123) also discussed reflexivity and described how it can “refer to an understanding of the impact of the researcher in the study” and pointed out that for practitioner researchers, “reflexive self-awareness demands the capacity to separate oneself from the field of study to gain the distance that allows a fresh examination of familiar events”. They advised that researchers should be aware

of the balance they want to achieve between “engaged commitment to the field and the capacity to offer an informed research-based interpretation of it” (2004, p.124). Research demands the capacity to step back from the current situation and to achieve some distance from it.

Higginbottom and Serrant-Green (2005) say that reflexivity involves a process of self-awareness that should clarify how one’s beliefs have been socially constructed and how these values have an impact on interaction and interpretation in research settings. Higginbottom (2005) describes how, although she sees herself as identified by her own ethnicity and social background, she is seen differently by the ethnic minority who are the subject of her research. She identifies herself as being from a lower socio-economic background and her parentage is African-English, yet the participants, whose social background and ethnicity were the same as her own, saw her mainly as a ‘professional’.

Smith (1996, p.195) noted that “one reading of reflexivity emphasises an awareness of the researcher’s own presence in the research project”. According to Cohen *et al.* (2011, p.255), reflexivity suggests that researchers should acknowledge and disclose their own selves in the research and should be aware of how their “selectivity, perception, background and inductive processes and paradigms shape the research”. They should monitor closely their own interaction with participants and discover other matters that might bias the research. Writing of research in the context of African Americans, Tillman (2002, p.6) called on researchers to “carefully consider the effect of their own cultural knowledge, cross-race and same-race perspectives and insider and outsider issues related to the research process”. She said that it is “important to consider whether the researcher has the cultural knowledge to accurately interpret and validate the experiences of African Americans within the context of the phenomenon under study” (Tillman 2002, p.4).

Indeed, one might question whether any ‘outsider’ can successfully conduct research within a culture to which he or she does not belong, and whether research should only be conducted by ‘insiders’. However, Bridges (2001, p.372) points out that “the insider researcher will always be something of an outsider in his or her community by virtue of becoming a researcher, especially in any community which is itself remote from the world of academe”. Also, Merriam *et al.* (2001, p.415), in outlining

some of the issues in relation to insider/outsider research, argued that “not only will the researcher experience moments of being both insider and outsider, but that these positions are relative to the cultural values and norms of both the researcher and the participants”. McDonagh (McDonagh, R. 2000, p.243) stated in relation to research with Travellers that “the question of whether the researcher is settled should not be an issue”. She called for researchers to “develop their knowledge of Traveller culture and create a relationship with a Traveller organisation in order to ensure they are not being racist or using unethical methods in conducting research” (2000, p.244).

My own position, as already stated, is that I am a member of the majority population who has worked for twenty-five years in a Traveller preschool and who has had an ongoing relationship and involvement with members of the Traveller community and with Traveller organisations. This position affected decisions and interpretations made in relation to the research process, and these decisions and interpretations were kept continually under scrutiny by me during the research process. The methods used for aims two and three of the study, namely, focus groups and individual interviews, helped to ensure that the voice of the Traveller participants was the dominant voice. This was a major concern during the analysis and reporting phase of the research.

3.2.6 Ethics in research

Ethical issues pervade research. Various principles of ethical research are discussed in the literature and are also set out in institutional guidelines, such as St. Patrick’s College guidelines on research ethics which governed the conducting of this research project. Smith (2005, p.97) noted how institutional ethics are grounded in international agreements and national laws, and she cited the Nuremberg Code as the “first major international expression of principles that set out to protect the rights of people from research abuse”.

The following is a consideration of some ethical questions that were deemed relevant to this research:

- Negotiating access: What right does the researcher have to approach a particular group? On this, Cohen *et al.* (2011, p.82) have stated that “achieving goodwill and cooperation is especially important where the proposed research extends over a period of time”. Permission must be sought

from gatekeepers (Mason 2005), if appropriate, and from the intended respondents. In this research, permission was required from Traveller parents and other respondents in relation to their own participation. Several focus groups were organised through Traveller organisations whose permission and cooperation had to be secured, in addition to that of the individual participants.

- Informed consent: Participants need to understand the purpose of the research and their position within it. Traveller parents taking part in this study were given written and verbal explanations of the research when their consent was sought. Verbal explanations were necessary due to the varying levels of literacy amongst the Traveller participants. A letter explaining the research was written in ‘plain English’, was proofread in advance by a member of the Traveller community, and was then read out to participants before commencing to ensure understanding (Appendix C). A consent form was signed by respondents, or by witnesses in cases where the respondents were not literate, making sure that the respondents understood what was being signed on their behalf. A consent form itself can present challenges, in that it “makes the power relations between researchers and researched concrete” (Smith 2005, p.99). On this, Cannold (2004) pointed out that, while an informed consent form can be reassuring for educated respondents, it can be disconcerting for others and give rise to increased suspicion of the research. In the case of this research, a small number of parents did query as to why they had to sign the consent form. When this happened I explained again the reason why I needed their written consent.

There are dissenting views as to the necessity for written consent in social research. Christians (2000, p.147) suggested that “informed consent, mandatory before medical experiments, is simply incongruent with interpretive research which interacts with human beings in their natural settings”. A cover letter explaining the research accompanied each questionnaire in the survey of teachers in Traveller preschools (Appendix G). Teachers and managers who were interviewed for the study also received explanations of the research and they signed consent forms (Appendix F).

- Confidentiality and anonymity: Participants need to understand whether and to what extent these will be assured. Confidentiality means that participants will not be identified in reports of the research. Anonymity is a stronger protection, in that even the researcher cannot identify the participant (Cohen *et al.* 2011). Regarding the interviews and focus groups for this research, such anonymity was not possible. One assurance of confidentiality is that I transcribed the interviews myself (Barry *et al.* 2013). Also, pseudonyms are used when referencing individuals, groups and locations.
- Research Ethics Committee: Field research for this study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of St. Patrick's College Drumcondra.

3.3 Research strategy

In determining a strategy or design for this research, a case study approach was deemed an appropriate choice to address aims two and three. A case study involves identifying a single phenomenon and investigating it within a particular bounded context (Miles *et al.* 2014). The phenomenon studied, following the document analysis, was the involvement of Traveller parents in Traveller preschools. A study of this phenomenon meant engaging with its context: the identity and culture of Traveller parents, their own educational experiences and achievements, the staff and management of Traveller preschools, and their approaches to parental involvement and Traveller culture. The wider context, including government policy, also had a bearing on determining how parental involvement might be facilitated or hindered, and for this reason it was deemed appropriate to include a document analysis of relevant policy documents to address aim one of the study.

Case studies attempt to portray how things are in a particular situation, to describe with richness the reality of participants. According to Cohen *et al.* (2011, p.290), “it is important for events and situations to be allowed to speak for themselves rather than be largely interpreted, evaluated or judged by the researcher”. For this reason, it was important that the voice of the participants were allowed to come through in the final report of this research.

Cohen *et al.* (2011) set out strengths and weaknesses of case study research. The case study approach is strong in how it portrays reality. It can deal with complexity, and it is not restricted in its ability to portray discrepancies and disagreements between parties. It can also incorporate unanticipated happenings and events and can portray unique features of a phenomenon. On the other hand, it produces detail that may not be easily generalisable. The results cannot always be checked and might be subject to observer bias. Furthermore, care is needed to avoid distortion, selective reporting and blandness. Also, since there is so much detail, it is easy for the researcher to get lost, so that the big picture is missed. On this, Stake (2003) points out that not everything about the case must be portrayed, nor, indeed, can be. It is necessary for the researcher to select and to make decisions about what to concentrate on and what is significant. If these issues can be managed, however, the final report of the case, as Cohen *et al.* (2011) suggest, can be in a format that is accessible and readily understood by a wide audience.

Having decided on case study as the approach for aims two and three, it was necessary to make other methodological choices to develop the research design. Various authors categorise case studies in different ways. Yin (1984) proposed three categories of case study: exploratory, descriptive and explanatory. From this perspective, the case reported here is best understood as a descriptive case. Stake (2005) also proposed three categories of case study: intrinsic, instrumental and collective. An intrinsic case is studied for its own sake, while an instrumental case is studied in order to provide insight into an issue or to help redraw a generalisation. The collective case study involves investigating a number of different cases, and is not relevant to this research.

The case studied, and reported in later chapters, fits best with the intrinsic case study, as it was undertaken to gain a better understanding of the case rather than for any immediate instrumental purpose. However, it was hoped that learning from this case might advance the cause of social justice and equality for Travellers, although this was not an immediate aim.

A case may be understood as a specific example of a wider category, although Stake (2005) states that this is not always necessary where a case has intrinsic interest. In relation to this study, it was not necessary to portray this case as representative of a

wider class, although depending on one's perspective, it could be. For example, it could be seen as a case of a government initiative in the area of preschool education, or as an educational initiative for Traveller children. It could also be seen as a case of how Traveller identity and culture affects parents' involvement within the education system. Further, it could be seen as a case of how government policy has shaped Travellers' lives, and brought them to where they are today. The case is all of these things. Accordingly, it was felt necessary to explore aspects of the wider context in order to understand the overall issue of parental involvement in Traveller preschools.

A single case has various component parts (Stake 2003). It is necessary to set out and describe these parts. In the case of the involvement of Traveller parents in Traveller preschools, parts include the parents themselves, the teachers, in-school activity and out-of-school activity, among other features. Identifying and describing these may help to build up the picture of the case and to identify what data needs to be gathered and how it might be gathered.

Figure 3.1 shows a map of the major issues it was felt necessary to explore in order to characterise this case. Some of this exploration was dealt with through the literature review, while some informed the data gathering for the document analysis and the field research.

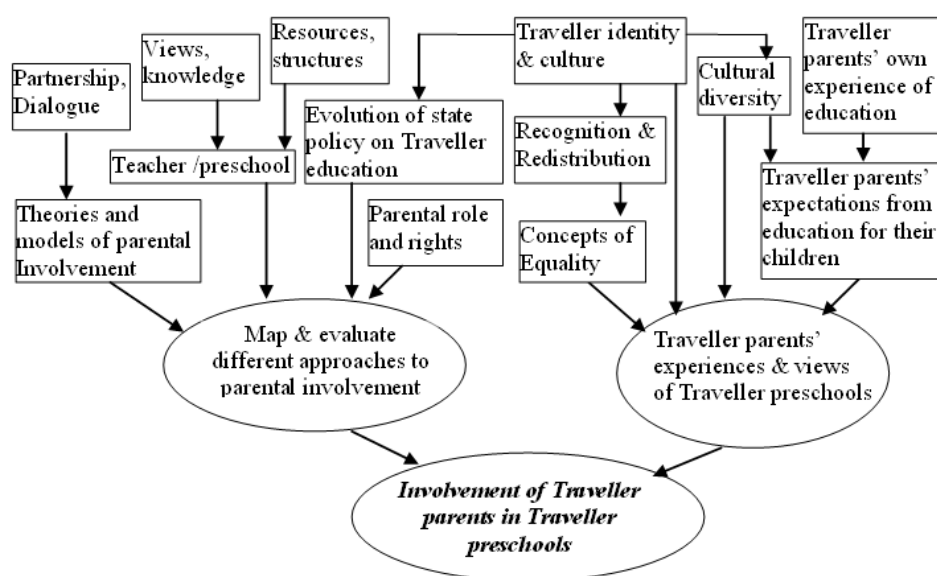


Figure 3.1 Component parts of research topic

3.3.1 Document analysis

Government policy provides a context for the Traveller parents' perspectives on schooling. Thus, I believe that an analysis of relevant state documents is necessary to understand this context. The *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy* (Government of Ireland 1963) provides a natural starting point for this analysis, as it was the first major state document on the Traveller community. The *Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy* (Department of Education 2006) was the final document considered.

Noting that documents have often been valued in the past because of their supposed objectivity, Charmaz (2007) points out that they are not simple facts but contain definitions and assertions that are contestable. It is important to place documents in the wider context in which they were produced and to read them critically (Shine and O'Donoghue 2013).

3.3.2 Scope and limitations

This study explores the involvement of Traveller parents in Traveller preschools by investigating three interrelated aims: the policy framework in which they developed, the relationship of parents with the education system, and the involvement practices that were used in Traveller preschools.

There are several limiting factors in this research. The data gathering was carried out during the years 2005 to 2008 and there have been changes and developments in relation to Travellers and education since then. Traveller preschools have since ceased to operate which has implications for the transferability of my findings. The sample for the research was influenced by opportunity and availability and represents a small subset of the population. Also, not many fathers were included in the focus groups and interviews. Thus, the representativeness of the data can be questioned. The parents were members of a distinct cultural group of which I am not a member, which presents particular challenges, such as the insider/outsider issues discussed above. Also, I taught for many years in a Traveller preschool, so I was not a totally disinterested observer. While I have endeavoured to present an unbiased account, my background no doubt influenced decisions I made in relation to the

research. Finally, the qualitative methodology used limits the ability to generalise from the data.

3.4 Data gathering – rationale for methods

Stake (2005) points out that case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied. Once one has identified a phenomenon to be studied, questions remain about the specific methods to be used for data gathering. The rationale for the data gathering methods used in this research are discussed below. These methods included individual in-depth interviews and focus groups with Traveller parents, along with interviews with a number of teachers and managers in Traveller preschools. A questionnaire was also distributed to teachers which included questions about the preschool, about levels and types of parental involvement and about Traveller culture (Appendix H). This section concludes with a brief discussion of sampling.

3.4.1 Interview method

Interviews were held with Traveller parents, with teachers in Traveller preschools and with preschool managers. Clough and Nutbrown (2006) advise that the first question the researcher should ask when considering data gathering through interview is whether the interview is the best method for the purpose. Cohen *et al.* (2011) claim that interviews allow greater depth than is the case with other methods of data collection. According to Punch (2005, p.168), “the interview is one of the main data collecting tools in qualitative research. It is a very good way of accessing people’s perceptions, meanings, definitions of situations and constructions of reality”.

Interview types can range from informal conversational interviews to highly structured interviews with closed questions determined in advance. Bryman (2012) identifies a number of interview types, among them focused interviews and semi-structured interviews, types deemed most relevant for this research. According to Bryman (2012, p.213), focused interviews use “predominantly open questions and ask interviewees questions about a specific situation which is relevant to them and of interest to the researcher”. Semi-structured interviews are where the interviewer has

a series of questions that are in the general form of an interview schedule, but is able to vary the sequence of questions. Also, the interviewer can ask additional questions in response to what are seen as significant replies.

Fontana and Frey (2005) set out a guide for unstructured interviews, including gaining access to the setting, understanding the language and culture of the respondent, deciding how to present oneself, locating an informant, gaining trust and collecting empirical materials. This guide provides a useful checklist of things to think about when planning data collection. A further requirement is the achievement of rapport with interviewees which, Bryman (2012) claims, is a delicate balancing act. It is important to achieve a level of rapport where the informant wants to answer questions and continue with the interview. This is helped by the interviewer putting the respondent at ease, although Bryman suggests that too much rapport may result in the interview going on for too long and the respondents suddenly deciding that too much time is being spent on the activity. For this study, a time limit was agreed with each respondent in advance of the interview to try to avoid this problem.

Because of my ontological and epistemological stance it was necessary to engage with the participants in a way that respected their narratives and allowed for them to be part of the process, rather than simply be an information gathering exercise where the imbalance in the relationship between the researcher and the participant would be highlighted. Therefore a highly structured, closed format of questionnaire was not deemed suitable. However, the nature of the research was such that, because specific information was needed, a fully unstructured format would also not have been suitable. Thus a semi-structured format was utilised, which allowed for questions to be posed but the answers not necessarily having to fit into a pre-specified pattern. It also allowed for points of interest raised to be followed up on. An example of this is in the case of Lucy (parent, Lisnashee) where it became apparent during the course of the interview that her own school experiences of discrimination had a definite impact on the way she managed her son's schooling, and that her experiences influenced how she strove to protect her son and to ensure that he received an education. If a closed format had been used data on this would not have emerged.

Finally, on a practical note, Punch (2005, p.176) advises that if interviews are recorded, then the researcher "must be adept at working the equipment". He also

refers to the need for researchers to develop note-taking and transcription skills. These are issues that are also relevant in relation to the focus group method.

3.4.2 Focus group method

The focus group method is one of the methods used in this study for research with Traveller parents. This was considered an ideal format for preliminary research, as Cohen *et al.* (2011) suggest that focus groups are good for developing themes, topics and schedules for subsequent interviews and/or questionnaires. Also, it seemed an appropriate method since the data sought were the lived experiences (Bryman 2012), the hopes and fears of Traveller parents in relation to education generally and more specifically in relation to their involvement in their preschool children's education. The initial focus group provided a forum for parents to discuss issues in a mutually supportive setting. Because of the quality of the data gained from this initial focus group and because the participants were at ease with the process, it was decided to use the method for further research with parents.

A focus group allows for interaction among the people involved and can help to flesh out views and information (Punch 2005). It puts the researcher in a somewhat peripheral role, with the important information coming from group members' interactions with each other (Cohen *et al.* 2011). Focus groups can reveal aspects of a topic that might not emerge from individual interviews. Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005, p.903) claim that "because of their synergistic potential, focus groups often produce data that are seldom produced through individual interviewing and observation, and that result in especially powerful interpretive insights". In the focus group the researcher does not play a central role. Rather, he or she acts as a facilitator. The participants in the group can engage equally with the process. Kamberelis and Dimitriadis argue that focus groups can facilitate the democratisation of the research process and the adoption of a self-reflexive stance by the researcher.

Fontana and Frey (2005, p.704) note particular advantages of group interviews (the focus group is one form of group interview) over individual interviews: "(a) they are relatively inexpensive to conduct and often produce rich data that are cumulative and elaborative, (b) they can be stimulating to respondents and aid in recall, and (c) the

format is flexible". Kitzinger (1995) writes of several additional advantages: they do not discriminate against people who do not read or write; they can encourage participation from those who are reluctant to be interviewed on their own (such as those intimidated by the formality and isolation of a one-to-one interview); and they can encourage contributions from people who feel they have nothing to say.

The groups in this study were composed of Traveller parents who shared a common culture, and many of whom already knew one another. This familiarity can help focus group members to feel at ease with each other and can aid in the free flow of discussion, so that participants can provide information concerning their feelings, beliefs and aspirations. The natural course of the discussion can lead to exploration of areas that had not previously been considered by the researcher and the analysis of the transcripts may suggest areas that should be included in further research. Such considerations helped inform the decision to use focus groups for this research.

One advantage of using a focus group format with Traveller parents is that individual participants have varying abilities and literacy skills. In discussion, they can clarify terms for one another so the chance of ambiguity is minimised. In the initial focus group, members had clarified terms and issues for one another in the course of their discussions. This was one factor that influenced the selection of this method for the subsequent research. A number of parents in the group were non-literate and contributed equally with those who were literate. Through careful prompting, shy participants were encouraged to contribute.

A particular benefit of the focus group in this research was that ideas could be put forward and developed by the participants in a discursive way, with the researcher using prompts and open questions to promote dialogue. Focus groups allow for unexpected issues related to the subject matter to emerge. For example, the initial focus group exposed strong feelings by parents concerning their own schooling and an equally strong desire that their children should achieve in school. This aspiration was echoed by all participants and helped to shape the subsequent research.

There are a number of challenges and potential problems associated with the use of focus groups. One is that the focus group needs to be managed to allow for all to make a contribution. Fontana and Frey (2005, p.704) note the following three

specific problems for facilitators of group interviews: (a) keep one person or small coalitions of persons from dominating the group, (b) encourage recalcitrant respondents to participate and (c) obtain responses from the entire group to encourage the fullest coverage of the topic. The facilitator must simultaneously be concerned about the questions to be asked and be sensitive to the evolving patterns of group interaction. Because the researcher is not fully in control, the discussion can take a direction of its own. For example, participants may go off the point of the research, or one individual may dominate and another may feel shy or uncertain about contributing (Bryman 2012, Leedy and Ormrod 2013). Citing Janis's (1982) concept of groupthink, Bryman (2012, p.518), notes that "as a group comes to share a certain point of view, group members come to think uncritically about it and to develop almost irrational attachments to it". This can tend to suppress alternative valid views within the group and poses a challenge for the facilitator.

Limitations of the focus group also include the fact that confidentiality or anonymity cannot be fully guaranteed. This is because, due to its open nature, information is shared with other members (Gibbs 1997). Confidential information may be more forthcoming in an individual interview. Bryman (2012, p.517) also notes limitations on gathering and analysing the data pointing out that "focus group recordings are particularly prone to inaudible elements which affect transcription". Transcription can be time-consuming because of variations in voice pitch and the need to take account of who says what. To counter this, I transcribed the focus group recordings for this study very shortly after each focus group session while the discussion was fresh in my mind.

Bryman (2012, p.505) also cautions that, "it is unlikely that just one group will suffice the needs of the researcher, since there is always the possibility that the responses are particular to that one group", although he also holds that too many groups will be a waste of time. He suggests that no more groups are necessary in a study once comments and patterns begin to repeat and little new information is generated. This is the criterion of saturation. The focus groups in this study were comprised of Traveller parents who had a shared culture; while they were not homogeneous, they shared a common background and generally a common educational experience.

More detail on the focus groups in this research is included in section 3.5.1 below.

3.4.3 Questionnaire research

The self-administered questionnaire is a method that is commonly associated with positivistic quantitative research and is of limited value for interpretive research. It can, however, provide a broad picture of a topic (Clough and Nutbrown 2006). In this study its main value was in providing a descriptive profile of Traveller preschools and the involvement practices in use, as a background to the more in-depth interviews and focus group research. Because of the limited number of Traveller preschools (fewer than 40 at the time the study was carried out), it was considered feasible to send questionnaires to all preschools rather than to a limited sample. For this reason, it can be more accurately seen as a census rather than a survey, although similar factors are involved.

A self-administered questionnaire offers a number of advantages and disadvantages for a researcher. It is a relatively quick and cost-effective way of gathering data from a large and geographically dispersed group of respondents. Since the same questions are asked of all respondents, it is easy to aggregate, compare and analyse the data. However, since the questionnaires are completed without the researcher being present, it is possible that respondents may interpret questions differently, which may have an impact on the validity of the findings.

Questions can be closed or open. Closed questions can reduce the scope for ambiguity and are easier to analyse, although this means that the researcher must specify a range of possible responses. It is important to also include open questions to allow respondents to elaborate, and to gather information that the researcher may not have anticipated. It is often found, however, that the information provided in response to open questions on self-administered questionnaires is limited and shallow, rather than rich or deep. Respondents may not put great thought or time into their responses (Cohen *et al.* 2011).

The questionnaire used in this research was a self-administered questionnaire to teachers in Traveller preschools. They were distributed by post and were to be completed and returned by post using an enclosed stamped and addressed envelope. The literature suggests that response rates can be low for postal questionnaires, and

that this can affect the validity of a survey (Cohen *et al.* 2011). However, this did not prove a problem in this study, where a response rate of 64% was achieved. This was possibly because I had informed the teachers at an inservice training day that I would be sending them the questionnaires, and also because they knew me as a colleague.

The development and administration of the questionnaire for this study is described in 3.5.2 below.

3.4.4 Sampling

Miles *et al.* (2014, p.31) highlight the necessity for sampling in research, noting that “we cannot study everyone everywhere doing everything” and that “sampling is crucial for later analysis”. According to Punch (2005), sampling in qualitative research is usually “purposive”, meaning it is done in a deliberate way with some purpose or focus in mind. He points out that appropriate qualitative sampling strategies can contribute to the overall validity of a research design, saying that the sample must fit in with the other components of the study, and that there must be internal consistency and coherent logic across the study’s components. Miles and Huberman (1994) make the point also that in qualitative research samples are not wholly pre-specified as they can evolve during the course of the fieldwork. They set out a Typology of Sampling Strategies in Qualitative Inquiry, drawing on Kuzel (1992) and Patton (1990), in which they identify sixteen types of sampling. Several of these sampling types were used to select participants for the interviews, focus groups and questionnaire surveys undertaken as part of this study.

The focus groups comprised mainly Traveller parents who at the time had children attending Traveller preschools. This is an example of “criterion sampling” in that “all cases meet some criterion” (Miles and Huberman 1994, p.28). In fact, a small number of focus group participants did not fulfil this criterion. This arose because of the reliance on others to organise the groups.

Since each focus group was comprised of parents from a particular area who generally already knew one another, these were also homogeneous samples, a type of sample that “focuses, reduces, simplifies and facilitates group interviewing” (Miles and Huberman 1994, p.28). The focus groups were drawn from different geographic locations throughout the country to ensure broad geographic representation, and to

incorporate differences of experience, perspectives and aspirations between different sets of parents. While Miles and Huberman (1994, p.28) identify this as maximum variation sampling which “documents diverse variations and identifies important common patterns”, issues of convenience and opportunity were also important factors in selecting groups.

Parent interviews were held to augment information from focus groups and to gain additional information to that which emerged in the focus group setting. Parents who met the basic criterion that they had children in Traveller preschools were sought out for interview based on convenience and opportunistic sampling. Punch (2005) notes that very often research must take whatever sample is available and that the incidence of convenience sampling is growing in qualitative research. The initial focus group had consisted entirely of mothers. Some later groups included both fathers and mothers, although mothers were always in the majority. This was to be expected, since mothers are generally more likely than fathers to be involved in their children’s schooling (Reay 2005).

The self-administered questionnaire issued to teachers utilised what Miles and Huberman (1994) refer to as comprehensive sampling, which means that the entire population of teachers in Traveller preschools was included. Due to the low numbers of such teachers, it was decided that issuing a questionnaire to each teacher would be manageable. Such a comprehensive approach, it was felt, would increase confidence in the questionnaire findings. The questionnaires also provided an opportunity for teachers to identify themselves and to put themselves forward for further contact, should this be deemed desirable. Three teachers who indicated their assent were followed up for interview.

3.5 Schedule of research

Having set out above the rationale for the data gathering methods used in this research, this section details the data gathering process itself. There were two main strands to the field research component for this study:

- Research with Traveller parents, which consisted of focus groups and individual interviews.

- Research with teachers and managers in Traveller preschools, which consisted of self-administered questionnaires and individual interviews.

The research described in this chapter took place during the years 2005 to 2008. Initial exploratory research, consisting of a focus group of Traveller parents and in-depth interviews with three teachers, was carried out in the school year 2005/2006. The initial focus group and interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, and the transcripts were scrutinised and analysed to extract data concerning various themes, including views on and experiences of parental involvement and perspectives on the representation of Traveller culture. Reports of this pilot research helped to inform the development and planning of subsequent research which was carried out throughout the school years 2006/2007 and 2007/2008.

Initial interviews with teachers informed the development of the self-administered questionnaire sent to teachers in all Traveller preschools. The questionnaire was developed from a consideration of findings from the pilot interviews and from iterative trials of draft questionnaires with three teachers. Results from the questionnaire survey allowed for the development of an inventory of parental involvement practices already employed in the preschools and the views of teachers on Traveller cultural representation. Teachers were asked to include their contact details with the returned questionnaires if they wished to make themselves available for follow up interviews. Interviews were carried out with three of these teachers, which produced richer data than would have been possible from the self-administered questionnaires alone. Three interviews were also held with preschool managers.

Appendix A presents a summary of data-gathering methods utilised, while Appendix B presents a list of location and participant pseudonyms for the respondents in this study. Methods are discussed more fully throughout this section.

3.5.1 Research with parents

Research with parents consisted of a series of focus groups and individual interviews. An initial pilot focus group was held in October 2005 and this was followed up by further focus groups and interviews held during the school years 2006/2007 and 2007/2008.

3.5.1.1 Initial focus group

The initial focus group comprised six mothers of children attending Castletown Traveller preschool. It was decided to invite mothers specifically, rather than mothers and fathers, as it was felt that, as this was the first meeting of its type, the mothers would be more comfortable with one another and would be more open to discussing issues than they would be if in a mixed gender group. The childcare worker in the preschool, herself a Traveller, assisted in the facilitation of the focus group and was particularly helpful in explaining any concepts or phrases to the participants that were unclear or ambiguous to them. The focus group was held in the evening in the same premises as the preschool. Adult sized chairs and tables were made available, and tea and snacks were provided to encourage an informal atmosphere.

Four key questions were devised for exploration in the focus group, along with associated prompts. These questions related to the following: (1) Participants' knowledge of the preschool, (2) Perceptions of Traveller identity and culture, (3) Perceptions of parental involvement in the preschools, and (4) Participants' own experiences of education. These areas were selected for the initial focus group to ascertain how much involvement parents felt they had in the preschool and how much they would like. To do this, it was necessary to ascertain information about their relationship with the preschool, such as why they chose it, how much they knew about the programme that was followed, and the perceived benefits to the child of his or her attendance at the preschool. This was the first question raised with the focus group. The second question regarded Traveller culture and its representation in the preschool. The third question concerned how involved parents perceived themselves to be with the preschool and the type of involvement they would like to have. The mothers' perception of the type and amount of involvement fathers might have in the preschool was also briefly explored. The final question concerned the mothers' own experience of schooling. Parents' experiences of school, particularly negative experiences, can influence their involvement in their children's education and the likelihood that they will engage with the schools and advocate on behalf of their children (Draper and Duffy 2001).

The focus group was held just before the preschool's mid-term break. Two audio recorders were used to record proceedings, lest one should break down. Prior to the start of the focus group a letter was distributed to each participant and this letter was also read aloud (Appendix C). It described in plain English what the research was about and it included a guarantee that each individual's identity would remain confidential. A general background description of Traveller preschools was also read out (Appendix D).

In the days after the focus group, transcripts of the discussion were prepared. These transcripts were analysed and scrutinised for the main themes that could be generated from the discussion and a report of findings was prepared. Themes identified included the following: a positive perception of the preschool; the desire of parents for involvement in the preschool, including in management structures; a cultural chasm between home and formal schooling; children not achieving in school; school seen as unaccommodating; and the importance of recognition of Traveller culture, including the Cant language.

The data received from the focus group was extensive and showed a group of mothers who were committed to education, well aware of what their expectations from the educational system were, and disappointed generally with the educational achievements of their children. Contrary to views sometimes expressed in relation to parents of underachieving children (Crozier 2000), these mothers were deeply interested and hopeful for their children's school success. They were aware of their limitations in areas outside their expertise, such as communicating with officialdom. This initial focus group helped inform all subsequent research. Indeed, it was because of the quality of data achieved from this group that a decision was made to use focus groups as a major data gathering tool in subsequent research.

3.5.1.2 Further focus groups and interviews

The initial focus group established that parents were interested in being more involved with their children's preschool education and it indicated some of the areas in which they would like to be involved. Further focus groups were organised, influenced by the view that multiple groups can help to corroborate and validate data

from a single group, to identify those issues which are reflected in all groups and those which might be unique to a particular situation.

Contact was made with a number of Traveller organisations throughout the country to organise focus groups and interviews. The nature of the research was explained to the contacts and they were asked to provide access to suitable groups of parents, that is, those who had children attending Traveller preschools. Assistance was required from the Traveller organisations to contact parents with a view to their participating in the focus groups. It was recognised that this form of contact carries risks, in that the gatekeepers may seek to control the direction or scope of the research, due to their relationship with their clients (Mason 2005). In fact, a number of issues in this regard did arise. Not all contact led to focus groups being arranged, often for logistical reasons. In some cases, interviews were substituted where it had not proven feasible to conduct a focus group. For example, on two separate occasions, in two different locations, I arrived at the site to conduct a focus group as arranged, only to discover that there had been a sudden death within the local Traveller community and most of the intended participants were not on site. In all, ten sites provided opportunities for either focus groups or interviews, including the initial focus group.

Focus groups provided detailed data, as expected. Parent interviews helped in fleshing out and elaborating on issues that arose within the focus groups. The interviews also provided more detailed and insightful information on the parents' individual stories than could have emerged in the focus group settings alone. Appendix E sets out the questions for parent focus groups with optional prompts and some of the rationale underpinning these questions. The same questions were used as a starting point for individual parent interviews.

3.5.2 Research with teachers and managers

Research with teachers comprised administering a questionnaire survey and conducting in-depth interviews. An initial convenience sample of three teachers participated in pilot interviews. These interviews followed the initial focus group with Traveller parents, and the interview questions were informed in part by themes that were generated from this initial focus group. The self-administered questionnaire survey of all teachers in Traveller preschools was used to gather data

on the range of parental involvement practices in the preschools and to determine the views of the teachers on involving parents and on issues of Traveller culture. In-depth interviews were subsequently held with three teachers and three managers after the questionnaire survey had been analysed.

3.5.2.1 Initial teacher interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three teachers using an interview schedule based on themes from the literature and on issues that had emerged from the initial focus group with Traveller parents. The questions were divided into four areas: the teacher, the preschool, parental involvement and Traveller culture. These areas were chosen to provide a picture of the teachers and the preschools, to find out levels and types of involvement within the preschools, and teacher views on parental involvement and Traveller culture. As the preschools served the Traveller community and the initial focus group had stressed the importance of Traveller cultural identity, it was important to see how this was represented in the preschools and what the teachers knew about Traveller culture and what their views on it were.

For these initial interviews, a semi-structured interview approach was adopted, in which an interview schedule was prepared in advance, but with many open questions and with the possibility to probe further or to explain more where this was judged appropriate. The interviews were recorded and transcripts were prepared and analysed. On this, Cohen *et al.* (2011, p.411) note that one disadvantage of the interview is that it is “prone to subjectivity and bias on the part of the interviewer”. An interview schedule reduces the scope for this, although in qualitative research it is necessary to acknowledge that the researcher is always present in the research (Denzin and Lincoln 2005).

The three teachers in the pilot study had been teaching in their preschools for an average of 21 years and their commitment to the Traveller children they taught was apparent. They had varying types and amounts of involvement with parents of children attending their preschools and they were open to further involvement. Formal structures for involvement did not appear to be in place, but all three teachers stressed that they had the support of their management committees for involving parents. Traveller culture was represented to some extent in the preschools, although

the teachers admitted to a lack of knowledge in this area. Also, they largely saw Traveller culture as belonging to the past.

These initial interviews yielded valuable information. However, some questions were repetitious and others did not produce information that was particularly useful in the context of this study. Consideration of these initial interviews informed the development of questions for the questionnaire survey of the remainder of the teachers in Traveller preschools.

3.5.2.2 Questionnaire census/survey of teachers

The initial interviews indicated that teachers were supportive of increased involvement by Traveller parents and of Traveller cultural representation in the preschools. It was decided to follow up these initial interviews with a comprehensive questionnaire to determine the extent of parental involvement practices and the representation of Traveller culture within Traveller preschools nationally.

The questionnaire was developed by the following process:

- Scrutinising the interview schedule for the initial interviews and eliminating questions which were deemed not to have provided relevant information in relation to the research aims.
- Introducing questions on various parental involvement practices, in an attempt to discern what practices were already in use in the preschools. These questions were devised based on a review of the literature (Chapter 2) and on findings from the initial interviews.
- Converting several questions of a quantitative nature to a closed format. This was done in order to reduce opportunities for ambiguity, to make it easier for respondents to answer, and to facilitate later analysis (Bryman 2012).
- Ensuring an adequate number of open questions remained throughout the questionnaire to gather enhanced information on certain topics and to capture information and opinions that the researcher had not anticipated.

- Framing the questions in such a manner as to avoid various pitfalls highlighted in the literature (Cohen *et al.* 2011, Bryman 2012).

The rationale for the questions is included in Table 3.1 below and the questionnaire itself is in Appendix H.

Table 3.1 Questionnaire survey – Rationale for questions

Question	Topics	Rationale
1 to 6	These questions relate to 1. Location of preschool 2. Who enrolls the children 3. Non-Traveller children in preschool	1. Location can either facilitate or inhibit involvement. It will affect the amount and type of involvement. 2. Enrolment may be directly by parents or mediated by others (e.g. VTT). 3. Traditionally these preschools were Traveller only. A move to integration was evident in some preschools and was supported by the Traveller Education Strategy (Department of Education and Science, 2006).
7 to 8	Are there Travellers on the staff?	1. Traveller parents may feel more comfortable if there is a Traveller on staff 2. May have a positive effect on parental involvement 3. Traveller Education Strategy promotes recruitment of Travellers to ECE positions (2006, p.40)
9	Written policy on parental involvement	1. A written policy can ensure that parental involvement is promoted (Epstein Type 2). Recommended by Department of Education and Science national evaluation of preschools (Department of Education and Science, 2003)
10 to 20	Looks for extent of formal and informal contact with the preschool, before enrolment and during the preschool year	1. Build up a picture of the type of contact practices between preschool and parents. 2. Informal contact can imply a welcoming atmosphere (Espinosa, 1995) and willingness on behalf of parents. 3. Parent-teacher meetings provide a formal avenue for involvement (Epstein Type 2). 4. Consider involvement of mothers and fathers (Reay, 2003, notes that mothers tend to be more involved than fathers).
21 to 25	These questions are about take home materials and extending the work of the preschool in the home, whether initiated by parent or preschool.	1. This type of contact builds bridges between home and school, child has a common experience when parents build on schoolwork (Epstein Type 4). 2. Parents take active role in child's learning. Wood and Caulier-Grice (2006), "providing learning activities in the home is more important than becoming involved at the child's school" (2006, p.81).
26 to 36	These questions are about parents' involvement within the	1. This type of involvement can be a form of partnership (Epstein Type 3).

	preschool.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Parents have a sense of belonging if they are contributing to the operation of the preschool. 3. Children experience their parents and staff working closely together (Whalley, 2007).
37 to 43	These questions deal with communication between the preschool and the home, through notes, newsletter and visits	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This type of contact is especially important for parents whose children come to preschool by bus and who don't have daily contact (Epstein Type 2). Espinosa, 1995, "Personal touch". 2. Answers to 42 and 43 can indicate level of trust of the teacher by the parent.
44	This question ask about support personnel available to the preschool	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Services, such as HSCL or VTT, could support links between preschool and home and allow further relationships to develop
45 to 46	Courses for parents	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This is often seen as an aspect of parental involvement (Epstein Type 1) 2. Included in Early Start Project (Educational Research Centre, 1998)
47 to 48	The level of contact with wider Traveller community.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Shows level of embeddedness of preschool in Traveller community (Epstein Type 6). 2. This enhances acceptance and support of the preschool by the community (Whalley, 2007).
49 to 55	These questions relate to the management committee: Are there Traveller parent representatives? How many? Mothers or fathers? How chosen? Level of activity?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Management committee is the decision-making body for preschool. Parents input to decisions and feeling of ownership (Epstein Type 5). 2. Mothers and fathers and if selected rather than elected, which may dilute some of the benefits.
56 to 60	These questions concern teacher views on parental involvement.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Success of parental involvement initiative depends on teacher commitment. These questions give idea of teacher views.
61 to 64	These questions concern the representation of Traveller culture in the preschool and opportunities for using the Cant language.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It is important that preschools for Travellers reflect Traveller culture (O'Hanlon and Holmes, 2004)

The questionnaire was piloted in a sequential fashion through three iterations to fine-tune it. Since the total population of teachers in Traveller preschools was small, forty in all, the final questionnaire was distributed to all teachers in the preschools. No questionnaires were sent to the three teachers who had piloted the questionnaires, nor did I include my own preschool. Questionnaires were sent to thirty-six preschools, together with stamped addressed envelopes for return. After a few weeks I sent a reminder to all teachers, thanking those who had returned the questionnaire and urging those who had not yet done so to consider completing it at that stage. Twenty-one completed questionnaires were returned. Three questionnaires were returned

undelivered, as the preschools to which they had been sent had either closed or moved. With twenty-one questionnaires returned out of a possible thirty-three, this represented a response rate of 64%. Major findings from this questionnaire survey included an inventory of current and potential parental involvement practices, together with an indication of teacher willingness to engage with parents, and an account of how Traveller culture was represented in the preschools. The findings from the questionnaire survey are integrated into the discussion in Chapter 6 and results of only those questions that contribute to the discussion are included.

3.5.2.3 Teacher and manager interviews

The final question in the teacher questionnaire asked for contact information if the teacher was willing to be contacted for a follow up interview. Two teachers who provided this information were contacted by letter and they were asked if they would agree to be interviewed. A further teacher was contacted who had not completed the questionnaire as it had gone astray due to her preschool having moved premises. In addition to these three teachers, three managers in Traveller preschools were also contacted and interviewed. Access to the contact information for the managers was obtained through a Traveller organisation, a teacher in a Traveller preschool and a visiting teacher for Travellers, respectively.

All of these interviews were conducted using a relatively open structure, as the specifics of each preschool were unique and a structured interview schedule would not have been appropriate. Prior to each interview the teacher/manager was given a letter explaining the nature of the research and they were asked to sign their consent (Appendix C). In the case of Newtown, the teacher requested that the interview would not be audio-recorded, although she did agree to my taking detailed notes of her responses. All other interviews were recorded and transcripts were prepared.

3.6 Data analysis and presentation

Analysis of qualitative data involves a careful sorting, resorting and scrutinising of data gathered from documents, interviews, focus groups and other methods. The literature suggests many methods to support this scrutiny. Data reduction and data display are key processes (Punch 2005, Miles *et al.* 2014). Large amounts of raw

data need to be reduced to more manageable levels through editing, segmenting and summarising. It is then necessary to display this data in a way that the researcher can work with it – through tables, charts, highlighters, post-its, and other methods – allowing the researcher to draw conclusions.

These processes need not always be sequential. Miles *et al.* (2014) view qualitative data analysis as an interactive process in which the researcher moves back and forth through four components: data collection, data reduction, data display and the drawing and verifying of conclusions (Figure 3.2).

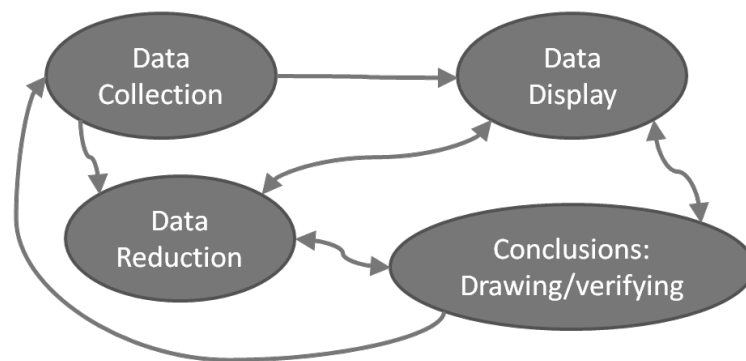


Figure 3.2 Components of data analysis (Miles *et al.* 2014)

Leedy and Ormrod (2013) also point out that in qualitative research, data gathering, data interpretation and data analysis are closely interwoven. Even the transcription of an interview involves interpretation, since the researcher must decide how to punctuate the interview and how to describe the way that something was said. Data analysis for a qualitative study is, they insist, a complex and time-consuming process, in that the researcher must process a great deal of information, some of which will be useful and some not.

Miles and Huberman (2014) offer a number of tactics for making sense of the data in a qualitative study. These include seeking out patterns and themes in the data, making comparisons and contrasts, seeing what aspects of the data can be clustered together and identifying links between variables. Through these tactics the researcher can build a logical chain of evidence and bring conceptual coherence to the data.

Conclusions can be checked through triangulation, by checking whether conclusions from one method or group corroborate those from another method or group. Triangulation allows the researcher to look at the field of study from a number of

vantage points and can thus provide a robust picture of events. According to Miles and Huberman (2014, p.299) “triangulation is supposed to support a finding by showing that ... independent measures agree with it or, at least, do not contradict it”. Denzin (1978) identifies four types of triangulation, two of which are relevant to this study. First, there is data triangulation, through the use of a variety of data sources. In this study multiple focus groups and multiple informants for interview ensure that data is not skewed towards a single individual or group. The other relevant form is what he refers to as methodological triangulation, which is the use of multiple methods to investigate a single problem. The use of multiple methods in this study – document analysis, questionnaires, interviews and focus groups – helps to ensure that the findings are robust.

3.6.1 Document analysis

Document research has a long history and was a core method for both Marx and Weber (Macdonald and Tipton 1996). Macdonald and Tipton (1996) suggest that criteria of authenticity, credibility and representativeness are important in selecting documents for analysis. In the case of this research, my focus is on the major government documents framing policy in relation to Travellers and education, and focusing particularly on Traveller preschools. As publicly available government documents, authenticity is guaranteed. The question of credibility is only slightly more difficult, in that it refers to the issue of whether the document is free from error or distortion. While the range of documents analysed in the study represent official thinking, I would argue that the early documents, particularly, are imbued with a distorted and impoverished view of the Traveller community. It is for this reason, among others, that they must be read critically. The question of representativeness is the same as that arising in relation to any research – how representative is the sample of the wider population? In other words, is the selection of documents analysed representative of the full set of documents on the topic? Since all the major policy documents are included in this analysis, the question of representativeness is satisfactorily answered.

A further issue that arises is determining the meaning of the documents. Some interpretation is required to uncover assumptions and beliefs that underpin the documents. Sometimes quantitative methods are used for this, such as counting the

occurrences of certain words, but this was not the approach I used. A close reading of documents was attempted which also gave attention to the context in which they were developed. For example, the language used by the then Parliamentary Secretary, Charles Haughey, when establishing the Commission on Itinerancy is a pointer to interpreting the report itself. Another example is the use of the term 'itinerant' in place of 'Traveller' in the earlier documents.

The first stage in the development of the document analysis in Chapter 4 involved identifying the major policy documents starting with the *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy* (Government of Ireland 1963). A list of documents was compiled and this was developed into the table in Appendix K, which attempted to identify, not just the document, but the philosophy underpinning it, the policy trends with which it was associated, and the major change it represented from previous documents.

Not everything in all documents can be included, so the selection of topics for investigation was important. When dealing with documents related to Travellers my main focus was on the topic of education, and particularly in relation to either parents or preschool. A close reading of documents was also supplemented where possible with commentaries by other authors.

3.6.2 Analysis of field data

Throughout the field research, audio recordings were kept of the various interviews and focus groups, except in the case of one focus group where the equipment failed and in the case of one teacher interview where permission to record was not granted, although consent was given for note-taking. Transcripts were prepared within days of the recordings, with the focus mainly on the words of the participants, so that tone and hesitations were mostly not included, except where these seemed particularly significant.

The transcripts were laid out in the centre of double-width pages, with wide margins on either side to allow for codes, comments and themes to be inserted. A constant comparison method was employed with the data (O'Donoghue 2007). The transcripts were reviewed and coded and themes were generated. Colour-coded highlighters were used to mark the transcripts with a visual indicator of the generated

themes. Common themes and major points were identified across the various transcripts and findings in relation to these themes were collated.

An example will help to illustrate aspects of coding, the process of attaching labels to the lines of text in order to enable the researcher to group and compare similar or related pieces of information. Consider this quotation from John, a parent in Cnocard, speaking of his own schooling:

I went to school until I was twelve or thirteen. I left because I couldn't be bothered with it and I was the only Traveller child sitting at school and I was isolated and I had no friends in it, so, and then the teacher hadn't much time for me so I ended up leaving.

Each code generated is a word or phrase that captures something of the main sense of a snippet from the transcripts. Wherever possible, I used *in vivo* codes, labels based on actual words used by participants, such as in the piece above, the *in vivo* codes "isolated" and "only Traveller child". I also used external codes such as "early school leaving" and "perceived lack of teacher interest/time" in the above passage. As I carried out the initial coding, I marked each one on the transcript by circling the appropriate phrase in the text (for example, left school at 12 or 13) and writing in the margins described earlier in this chapter the accompanying code "early school leaving". The initial coding of this piece from John's transcript produced the following codes:

- Left school at 12 or 13
- Couldn't be bothered with school
- Was the only Traveller child in the school
- Felt isolated
- Had no friends
- Teacher had no time for him.

Using this procedure for the initial coding enabled large quantities of raw qualitative data to be focussed and labelled. The next level of coding re-examined the initial

codes and further focussed the data by grouping codes for category development. For example, the codes mentioned earlier generated the following categories:

- Early school leaving
- Isolation in the classroom or school
- Teacher expectations.

In this case, the code “Only Traveller child” taken together with other elements including “felt isolated” and “had no friends” generated the category “Isolation in the classroom or school”. I studied in depth these initial coding labels and categories to develop themes and sub-themes. The coding examples above contributed to meeting the second major aim of the thesis which was concerned with developing an understanding of the Traveller parents’ perspectives on the educational system. A very similar coding sequence to that of John’s emerged from the transcripts of Cáit, Lucy and others, all together contributing to an understanding of “Difficulties of being the only Traveller in a mainstream class”, an element of the sub-theme “Life in the classroom: separation and bullying”. These various levels of coding, categorisation and thematic analysis made it possible ultimately to say that parents found their school experience alien and unfriendly and most recalled feeling isolated and unhappy when they were there.

Memos proved invaluable when I carried out the initial coding and I made good use of them subsequently when I carried out category development and thematic coding. For example, when I first looked at John’s statement above, I wrote a memo that included “what stands out for me is isolation. In the class he felt alone. He had no friends. This may help to explain why John left school early”. Later on, I grouped this set of codes with accounts by others about why they too had left early. Other participants mentioned a similar isolation. John felt that the teacher had no time for him, no interest in him. Again and again the parents spoke of the low expectations of teachers, the lack of interest, the teachers’ belief that Traveller children would drop out and that it was not worth putting in effort with them. This linked in with Rosenthal’s (Rosenthal and Jacobson 1968) idea of a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Another memo I wrote had to do with John's statement, "I left because I couldn't be bothered with it." Without context, this seems like he placed little value on his own education. However, when I put it with everything else he had to say – about Traveller culture and identity, parental influence, the centrality of traditional Traveller trades, nomadism, Cant, the importance of family and so on – I could see that the story was more complex, and this is what I tried to capture in my analysis. Through prolonged engagement with the data and through constant comparative analysis – comparing transcripts and codes, revising codes, generating categories, linking them to form themes, and searching for examples to confirm or challenge tentative conclusions – the final analysis took shape until I was able to present the account of what the participants said in Chapters 5 and 6.

A fair account of the views of respondents was assembled, with any redundancy removed. This was a major part of the data reduction in the analysis. The account was organised under headings representing the generated themes. Data which seemed irrelevant or extraneous was not included. This account was further developed with reference to memos and to the literature. Relevant commentary and references were included to highlight and enhance coherence and theoretical interest. Through this process the final accounts, as set out in the two findings chapters based on the field research (Chapters 5 and 6), were developed.

Analysis of the questionnaire survey of teachers in Traveller preschools involved setting out all responses as tabular data. Summary measures of quantitative data (closed questions) were calculated. Responses to open questions were set out in tables and scrutinised for significance. This data contributed particularly to addressing the third aim of this study, an account of parental involvement practices in Traveller preschools.

Credibility, authenticity and trustworthiness of the data, and subsequent analysis, were ensured through the adoption of three safeguards (Leedy and Ormrod 2013). First, researcher colleagues examined the data to ensure meanings were not forced onto the data. Second, participant teachers confirmed recognition of the data and analysis after verification. The third safeguard was an audit trail that was maintained throughout the data analysis (Barry *et al.* 2013).

This case study research was concerned with issues regarding the involvement of Traveller parents in Traveller preschools. Christians (2000, p.151) describes the mission of social science research as “interpretive sufficiency”, which means “taking seriously lives that are loaded with multiple interpretations and grounded in cultural complexity”. He argues that interpretive discourse is sufficient when it fulfils three conditions: it represents multiple voices, it enhances moral discernment and it promotes social transformation. The research undertaken for this study attempted to meet these criteria, by ensuring that the voices of all respondents were represented, that the study was respectful of the rights and identity of respondents, including their culture, and that the focus throughout was on highlighting issues of social justice in relation to education.

3.7 Conclusion

Throughout the chapter, the methodology for the research was detailed. An ontological and epistemological framework was established, drawing on interpretivism, social constructivism and critical theory. A document analysis was deemed an appropriate method to address aim one, while a qualitative case study approach was used to address aims two and three of the study. Further methodological issues were also explored, including ethical questions and issues concerned with researching a minority group. The scope and limitations of the study were outlined. The schedule of research was set out for three interrelated strands of research: document analysis, focus group and interview research with parents, and interview and questionnaire research with teachers. Questions related to the analysis of qualitative data were discussed and the particular methods of analysis used in this research were described.

CHAPTER 4

FROM ABSORPTION TO INCLUSION: THE EVOLUTION OF IRISH STATE POLICY ON TRAVELLERS AND EDUCATION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the first research aim of the study, namely, to deepen our understanding of the historical and policy context within which Traveller preschools evolved. A range of Irish State documents are analysed in order to provide an account of the evolution of official views and policies concerning Travellers, with special reference to those concerning Traveller education. This analysis demonstrates how past policies and practices continue to have an impact in the present. Official policy on Travellers is considered under three interconnecting themes:

- The way that Traveller culture is perceived.
- The policy of absorption and assimilation which is evident in early documents.
- The move over the years towards policies based more on concepts of equality and partnership.

Policy development in relation to the Traveller community did not occur in a vacuum, rather, the various reports that I discuss were influenced by the dominant perspectives of their time. In the early 1960s, when the Commission on Itinerancy was deliberating, Ireland was largely a theocentric state, just beginning to engage with modernisation (O'Sullivan 2005). With Ireland's accession to the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973, and increasing urbanisation and industrialisation, the country had changed significantly by the time the *Report of the Travelling People Review Body* (Government of Ireland 1983) was published. In the late 1980s, social partnership had come in the form of the *Programme for National Recovery* (Government of Ireland, 1987) and subsequent partnership programmes.

The concept of partnership informed the programme for partnership government established by Fianna Fáil and the Labour Party in 1993. This was part of the context for the deliberation of the Task Force on the Travelling Community. A further context for the Task Force was the contribution that Traveller organisations had made towards creating the conditions for new initiatives inspired by a partnership process. The late 1990s saw the emergence of the “Celtic Tiger” economy, resulting in net migration into Ireland and with it greater cultural diversity (McDaid 2007). This was the background against which *Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy* (Department of Education and Science 2006a) was published.

Throughout this evolution, certain theoretical perspectives recurred. Drudy and Lynch (1993) discerned themes of consensualism, essentialism and meritocracy in Irish educational policy documents. Society tended to be represented as an undifferentiated whole, where all were assumed to agree on the aims of education. Individuals were assumed to have a fixed nature, leading to a tendency to interpret differential attainment in terms of differences between individuals rather than to seek structural explanations. Although equality of opportunity was espoused, Drudy and Lynch (1993) suggested that this was often conceived narrowly, as a way of securing and selecting talent. Furthermore, while Drudy and Lynch’s analysis refers to pre-1993, it can be argued that more recent educational documents appear to recognise difference and promote intercultural policies and a more substantive approach to equality.

Traveller culture was not initially acknowledged by the state as valid, as evidenced in policy documents from the 1960s and 1970s. Travellers were regarded as “deviant, destitute dropouts from Irish society” (Lodge and Lynch 2004, p.93). Over time, problems associated with this thinking were identified. One straightforward criticism is that it did not, in fact, produce positive outcomes for Traveller children. Thus, more recent documents have been informed by an understanding that difference does not imply deficit and by a recognition of the validity of Traveller culture.

4.2 Report of the Commission on Itinerancy, 1963

The Commission on Itinerancy was set up in 1960 at a time when, according to Helleiner (2000), a massive shift was taking place in Irish social policy towards increasing state involvement in the provision of social welfare. She suggests that the *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy* (Government of Ireland 1963) (hereafter referred to as the *Commission Report*) can be read as an attempt to “redefine the ‘itinerant problem’ in such a way that a new policy of settlement and absorption of Travellers became part of the platform of the government goals of economic and social modernisation” (Helleiner 2000, p.76). Helleiner goes on to state that this policy of settlement and absorption did not arise from a careful consideration of the data it gathered, “but rather was predetermined by the Commission’s own terms of reference” (2000, p.78). The Commission’s views were also conditioned by the position it adopted in relation to Traveller origins. At that time, according to Ní Shúinéar (2004), there were various competing theories concerning the origins of Travellers. However, rather than investigate this issue, the Commission adopted, without enquiry, the theory that Travellers were dropouts from society. Ní Shúinéar suggests that its adoption of this “dropout” view was motivated by a government agenda to justify the assimilation of Travellers into mainstream Irish society. Indeed, the terms of reference of the Commission included the goal “to promote their absorption into the general community” (Government of Ireland 1963, p.110). In this context, it is not surprising that the Commission viewed the absorption of Travellers into society as the best solution for both Travellers and the wider public.

The *Commission Report* (Government of Ireland 1963) consisted of sixteen chapters, covering a wide range of topics, including accommodation, education, health, trespass, economic circumstances, and attitudes of the settled population to Travellers. My main focus now is on Chapter 10 of the report, dealing with education, although reference is also made to other chapters, where appropriate.

4.2.1 Traveller identity and culture rejected

The report expressed concern at the poor living conditions of Travellers and at the problems associated with these living conditions, some of which it set out in detail.

A striking feature of the report is its rejection and lack of understanding of Traveller identity and culture:

Itinerants (or travellers as they prefer themselves to be called) do not constitute a single homogeneous group, tribe or community within the nation, although the settled population are inclined to see them as such. Neither do they constitute a separate ethnic group” (Government of Ireland 1963, p.37).

The first thing to note is the clear rejection of the idea that Travellers constitute an ethnic group. This is done without any discussion or appeal to expertise (Pavee Point 2013). Another aspect of the rejection of Traveller culture is seen in the way the Commission regarded nomadism. The term “itinerant” is used throughout the report to refer to Travellers, even although the Commission acknowledges in the above extract that Traveller is the preferred term of the community itself. The definition of “itinerant” in the report was “a person who had no fixed abode and habitually wandered from place to place”. In this way, nomadism was presented as aimless wandering carried out by individuals, rather than as a cultural norm of the Traveller community.

As part of its census of Travellers, the Commission did enquire into their “travel habits.” It found that the vast majority travelled all year round, and most travelled in a fixed circuit. The Commission asked as part of its census whether Travellers wanted to settle, and it concluded that a majority would cease travelling if permanent accommodation was made available to them. Bhreatnach (2006) indicates several weaknesses in the research that supported this claim. Also, nomadism is now regarded in most academic studies as the kernel of Traveller identity (Hayes 2006). As McDonagh (1994, p.95) explains:

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.

It appears to have been the belief of the Commission that the only acceptable way forward for Travellers was for them to be reformed and to become like settled people, and to be absorbed into the majority population. This is seen, for example, in

the way that a recommendation on education is presented in the report as a way of promoting absorption:

It is urgently necessary, as a means of providing opportunities for a better way of life, of promoting their absorption into the settled community ... that as many itinerant children as possible receive an adequate elementary education (Government of Ireland, 1963, p.67).

4.2.2 Literacy

The *Commission Report* (Government of Ireland 1963, p.64) stated that “almost all itinerants are completely illiterate”. For the benefit of the Commission, a census of Travellers was taken in 1960 and another in 1961. These showed that approximately five out of every six Travellers in 1963 could not read or write. The Commission saw these statistics as an alienating factor for Travellers. It believed that this high level of illiteracy made it difficult for Travellers “to change over to the settled way of life” (Government of Ireland 1963, p.64).

The Commission enumerated some of the drawbacks of illiteracy, including poor chance of employment and difficulty in surviving in a society where literacy was such an important factor. For example, road signs had to be understood for driving, and forms had to be filled out for gaining access to healthcare and accommodation. It also noted that Travellers themselves were well aware of the disadvantages of illiteracy. One example given was their inability to read advertised vacancies for housing and thus missing out on opportunities.

4.2.3 Perceived lack of respect for social convention

The Commission believed that one effect of the Travellers’ lack of formal education was that they lacked “the respect for social conventions, law and order and for the rights of property” (Government of Ireland 1963, p.65). Traveller parents were not regarded as good role models for their children. In fact, the authors of the report possibly revealed a lack of understanding of the equal humanity of Travellers when they felt it necessary to note that Travellers were “very attached to their children” (Government of Ireland 1963, p.22), as though they would not be surprised if it were not so.

One suggestion to the Commission was that Traveller parents should be separated from their children, which would result in the disappearance of Travellers within a generation. The Commission rejected this view, which incidentally echoed practice in Australia in the 1930s, where mixed race aboriginal children were taken from their parents. It was believed, in these circumstances, that over a few generations their descendants would be the same as their fellow white counterparts (Pilkington 1996). The Commission also rejected the concept of compulsory settlement, stating: “It is not considered that any worth-while progress could be made by a policy of compulsory settlement, even if it were legally possible” (Government of Ireland 1963, p.106). Instead, Travellers were to be encouraged and induced to leave the road and “settle down”.

4.2.4 Education

Enquiries made by the Department of Education for the Commission showed that in November 1960 there were 160 Traveller children enrolled in primary schools. Of these, 114 were regular attenders. The Commission acknowledged that many Traveller parents “expressed a desire to have their children educated” but that they made no effort to follow this up (Government of Ireland 1963, p.65). Teachers who had Traveller children in their classroom, when interviewed by the Commission, stated that it was their experience that children who had received some formal education neither used it nor valued it. The majority of those Travellers aged fourteen years or older, who were asked, did not want to learn a trade or craft. The teachers’ observations and the fourteen year olds’ resistance to what was on offer to them can be seen as products of the monocultural approach to education at the time, an approach of measuring Traveller children against the aspirations and desires of the majority. The inquiries of the Commission seem to indicate that Travellers could see little of value in a school education. At the same time, the Commission itself could see little of value in the Traveller way of life.

4.2.5 Living conditions and education

The Commission believed that the conditions that Traveller children lived in had a bearing on whether they would succeed at school. As Hayes (2006, p.37) has pointed out, “the report equated Traveller poverty with itinerancy at every opportunity and

the settlement of Travellers was presented as a boon for them, such was the perceived squalor of their existence”. The nomadic way of life was regarded as being incompatible with educating children. The *Commission Report* (Government of Ireland 1963, p.69) expressed a “fear that little if anything can be done in the immediate future for the education of the children of those itinerants who continuously wander”. The Commission saw Travellers as isolated from the settled population and policies of assimilation and absorption were intended to help Travellers to change over to the settled way of life. The failure of Travellers to fit in with the dominant group in society was to be corrected.

Although the Commission promoted the absorption of Travellers into the general community, and although this became government policy, accommodation policy was held up as being the key to achieving this goal. Responsibility for accommodation was held by local authorities rather than by central government. Local authorities were often reluctant to provide accommodation for Travellers and they faced opposition and protests from local people whenever they did. Helleiner (2000) describes some of the difficulties involved in providing accommodation for Travellers in the decades following the publication of the Commission report. Indeed, this point was referred to in the *Report of the Travelling People Review Body* (1983), which stated that “despite repeated restatement of policy by the Minister, compliance by some local authorities was marked by tardiness” (Government of Ireland 1983, p.35).

The Commission aimed to get as many Traveller children as possible into schools, with the aspiration that it would improve their lives. The Commission saw education for Traveller children as “both a means of providing opportunities for a better way of life and of promoting their absorption into the settled community” (Government of Ireland 1963, p.67). The education system was largely fixed. Traveller parents had no input into it and had to adapt to avail of it. The notion of consultation was absent. The Children’s Act 1908 and School Attendance Acts informed policy on dealing with absenteeism. Under Section 118 of the Children’s Act 1908, parents who moved about, thus preventing their children from attending school, were liable to be prosecuted. The Commission recommended that this provision should be enforced.

The Commission envisaged a role for voluntary organisations in respect to education. Such organisations could convince parents of the value of school, make arrangements to enrol children and ensure regular attendance. These tasks, it suggested, could only be adequately achieved by “an efficient local voluntary organisation whose members recognise the depth of the problem and the necessity for charity and understanding in its treatment” (Government of Ireland 1963, p.70). This call for charity is echoed elsewhere in the report, when it refers to the need “to foster a spirit of Christian charity and goodwill” (1963, p.104). The reliance on voluntary action and the call for charity may be understood in terms of the strong influence of religion on social policy at the time. Itinerant settlement committees emerged in the 1960s following the publication of this report (Fehily 1974).

4.2.6 A focus on hygiene

The Commission did make some suggestions concerning the education that Traveller children were to receive, taking into account their living conditions and degree of nomadism. It recommended that “a curriculum to meet the special needs of these children be devised” (Government of Ireland 1963, p.68). Along with reading, writing and arithmetic, the curriculum for the boys should include manual training, and for the girls housework. Hygiene was to be taught to both boys and girls. The curriculum subjects recommended for boys included the skills that Traveller fathers passed on to their sons anyway. The same situation prevailed regarding young Traveller girls who were trained in the art of childminding and housework by their mothers.

There was an absence of any contributions from the children or their parents in discussions on type or content of the curriculum. Although the curriculum was designed “to meet the special need of these children” (Government of Ireland 1963, p.68), there was no definition of what that need was. Certainly, hygiene seems to have been very important to the Commission. On this, it was reflecting the provision in the Netherlands, which members had visited as part of their deliberations, and where housekeeping, child hygiene and laundry were offered. The Commission recommended the provision of wash basins and showers in specially designated school buildings “because of the necessity to promote hygiene as a practice as well as a subject” (Government of Ireland 1963, p.68). The focus on hygiene fed into a

stereotyping of Travellers as being dirty. The practice of washing Traveller children and changing their clothes subsequently became commonplace in primary schools. Flynn (1993, p.81), a Traveller woman, gave voice to her experience of this as a child, and how upsetting she found it, when she stated:

You see, even though we came into school clean and tidy, the school had a policy that each of us should have the chance of a shower and change of clothes before starting school. It was done to each of us whether it was needed or not.

4.2.7 Conclusion

Travellers were not regarded as partners in proposals which were to have a huge effect on their way of life and there were no Traveller representatives on the Commission, a lack of which had been criticised even at the time (Bhreatnach 2006). Crowley (1999, p.247) noted that the objectives that flowed from the Commission were focused on rehabilitation and assimilation, and that “what was defined as a failure to live according to the norms of the dominant group was to be corrected”. Hayes (2006, p.35) states that the Commission “was to have far-reaching consequences by virtue of its subsequent influence on public policy”. The view of the Commission was that a problem of itinerancy existed and that they would develop approaches to deal with it. O’Hanlon and Holmes (2004, p.5), writing about Traveller education in a UK context, suggested that it was “Ireland’s attempts in 1963 to bring in policy to settle families in houses” that led to large numbers of Irish Travellers leaving Ireland for Britain at that time.

The Commission undertook to develop a policy for the education of Traveller children, albeit with scant regard for the views of either the children or parents. It did not anticipate the difficulties that would arise for Traveller children by being put into a school system that did not respect or acknowledge, let alone reflect, their culture. Traveller children who enrolled and attended school also found little in the classroom that acknowledged their culture. This lack of acknowledgement of the distinct culture of Travellers may have had repercussions for many years afterwards. For example, Lodge and Lynch (2004) claim that lack of visibility of Traveller culture in school texts contributed to a sense of isolation and exclusion experienced

by young Travellers. It was to be some time before Travellers articulated their own views concerning their rights in respect to education, for example, in the *Charter of Traveller Rights 1984* (National Council for Travelling People 1984, Article 7 No.3) which demanded that, “Education of Travellers shall attempt to give them a deeper sense of their own individual worth, and a pride in their cultural experience”.

4.3 Committee Report: Educational Facilities for the Children of Itinerants, 1970

In response to the *Commission Report* (Government of Ireland 1963), the Department of Education set up an internal committee to plan for the education of Traveller children. The report of this committee was published in 1970 (Department of Education 1970). The philosophy guiding it was the aspiration that by educating the Traveller children in integrated settings, Travellers as a community would become integrated into the greater society. On this, it was stated:

The general aim in regard to itinerants is to integrate them with the community and the Department accepts that educational policy in regard to their children must envisage their full integration in ordinary classes in ordinary schools (Department of Education 1970, p.3).

Traveller children were regarded as ‘backward’ because they were seen as belonging to a culturally impoverished group where the nomadic way of life prevented them from integrating into society. The report stated that “the educational problems of itinerant children are similar in many respects to those of other educationally retarded children, but aggravated by social disabilities and the consequences of a vagrant way of life” (1970, p.4). The nomadic expression of Traveller culture was regarded as deviance, which, combined with “social disabilities” of the Traveller children, allowed for comparison with “backward children”.

4.3.1 Three categories of Traveller families

Traveller families were categorised in the *Committee Report: Educational Facilities for the Children of Itinerants* (Department of Education 1970) (hereafter referred to

as *Committee Report*) into three groups for the purpose of targeting educational resources, as follows:

- A. Families who were housed or in quasi-permanent sites.
- B. Families who moved in a narrow circuit, generally unvaried.
- C. Families who moved in a wider circuit.

With category A families, in cases where the number of children involved was small, it was expected that the children would attend local schools. Where numbers warranted it, it was recommended that they attend special classes attached to national schools. The report suggested that through these the Traveller children would become accustomed to other children, thus easing the transfer to ordinary classes. Participation in special classes, it suggested, would be a “prelude of preparation for their integration in classes in ordinary national schools, consonant with their age and progress achieved” (Department of Education 1970, p.4).

Bewley (1974, p.22), an activist on Traveller issues in the 1960s and 1970s, noted as follows in regard to separate schooling:

Few of the children can go straight into the normal classes and take their proper place in them. Many are already past the normal age for starting school. They are not used to sitting down and concentrating for long periods.

He envisaged separate provision as a short-term measure; “A time of preparation is therefore necessary before they can join a normal class and benefit by it” (Bewley 1974, p.22). He suggested that teachers with large classes could not give children the individual attention which they would need, and that this should be provided beforehand. He referred approvingly to an arrangement in Finglas in Dublin where 45 Traveller children were admitted to two special classes in a local primary school and within two years all were transferred to normal classes. The *Committee Report* (Department of Education 1970, p.5) also envisaged special classes as a temporary measure, stating that “when the children are prepared and ready for placement in ordinary classes, they should be encouraged to make the transition”. Fanning (2002)

claimed that the segregation of children was justified by perceived qualitative differences in the educational needs of Traveller children compared with other children. In fact, separate provision became the norm for Traveller children for a number of years. O’Hanlon and Holmes (2004, p.16) noted that there were debates in Britain about “whether separate provision enabled children to develop confidence, competence and self-esteem in learning, or whether it served to compound their social exclusion and marginalisation”, and it was only with an awareness of equality of opportunity and other factors that these classes were phased out.

Category B families, those who moved in narrow circuits, according to this report, could be serviced by one or more designated school(s), after consultation with “the manager, the principal teacher and interested voluntary organisations” (Department of Education 1970, p.6). There is no reference to consultation with parents, although the location of the designated schools was to be tied with the families’ itinerary. There was a noteworthy attempt here to align educational provision with the families’ nomadism.

It was not considered that the nomadism of those who travelled a wider circuit could be accommodated. The final category of families, Category C, posed the greatest challenge, and it was suggested that for them, “little can be done over and above that which has been done down the years through casual enrolment in local schools” (Department of Education 1970, p.6). The solution for these families was seen in prevailing upon parents to limit their travelling, at least during the school year.

4.3.2 Education in ordinary classes

It was envisaged in the *Committee Report* (Department of Education 1970, p.4) that Traveller children would generally “proceed through school in a normal way”. It was reiterated in this report, as in the Commission report, that the “general aim in regard to itinerants is to integrate them with the community, and the Department accepts that educational policy in relation to Traveller children must envisage their full integration in ordinary classes in ordinary schools” (Department of Education 1970, p.3). There were guidelines on age appropriate placing and separate educational provision, where necessary. Traveller culture was not regarded as being valid, in that the report makes reference to “culturally-deprived children, and itinerant children

can be regarded as coming within that category” (Department of Education 1970, p.47).

The concept of cultural deprivation was developed in the USA in the 1960s as a way of understanding the lack of school success for children from certain sections of society (Crow *et al.* 1966). Bruner (1996) described how this view emerged as a result of Lyndon Johnson’s war on poverty, where programmes such as Headstart were developed to “compensate for what many of us then thought of as the ‘deficit’ created by ‘cultural deprivation’” (Bruner 1996, p.xiii). In line with the committee’s view of Travellers as culturally deprived, there was reference in the report to provision of “facilities similar to those in a normal home for social, cultural and physical activities” (Department of Education 1970, p.48). Traveller parents, or the home life they provided for their children, were not regarded as being of an acceptable standard (McDonagh 2002). McDonagh (2002, p.132) referring to the “hierarchy about Travellers who settled”, noted that the more Travellers emulated settled people, the more acceptable they became to society.

4.3.3 Role of voluntary groups

As had the Commission before it, the *Committee Report* (Department of Education 1970) envisaged a significant role for voluntary groups in the implementation of its objectives for Traveller education. Voluntary groups already provided part-time classes and “training in social habits and activities” (Department of Education 1970, p.6). While it was considered that some of this educational work provided by voluntary groups would no longer be required once Traveller children were enrolled in schools, the report envisaged that continuing tasks for these groups would include visiting Traveller families in order to develop trust and to encourage them to avail of the education facilities offered. Voluntary groups were also involved in providing evening classes, including classes on home management and childcare for women and classes on “stimulating recreational activities” (Department of Education 1970, p.9).

This dependence on voluntary groups was necessary, according to the committee, because there was “no machinery at departmental level for initiating schemes at local level” (Department of Education 1970, p.9). Although not stated, this approach could

also be justified by the principle of subsidiarity drawn from Catholic social teaching, which can be taken to mean that the State should not attempt to do something that can be adequately handled by local voluntary effort. In fact, Bhreatnach (2006) claimed that the *Commission Report* (Government of Ireland 1963) had marked a new departure in which two distinct approaches, voluntary organisation and state welfare support, were drawn together and which attempted to combine “the flexibility and humanity of charity with the funding resources and legal machinery of the state” (2006, p.120).

Further insight into the work of voluntary organisations with Travellers can be gained from a report prepared by the Society of St Vincent de Paul (1979). The Society saw its role as requiring a firm commitment to “improve and extend its work with travelling people in order to alleviate their immediate needs but also to discover and redress the injustices that they have experienced for too long” (1979, p.5). It mentioned cooperation with other organisations involved with Travellers, such as Itinerant Settlement Committees¹², and it also mentioned the task of persuading authorities to improve services for Travellers. One context for the report was a statement from the Irish Bishops’ Pastoral on Justice of September 1977 that “[Travellers] are still the most discriminated-against minority in this country” (Society of Saint Vincent de Paul 1979, p.8).

4.3.4 Preschool

The *Committee Report* (Government of Ireland 1970) also envisaged a role for voluntary groups in the provision of preschool education. This report is the first to mention preschool for Traveller children. It was at this stage that a preschool project was set up by the Department of Education in Rutland Street in Dublin as part of its examination of “pre-school education for culturally deprived children” (Department of Education 1970, p.6). Pending results of this examination, it was thought that voluntary groups could get involved in “the training of children in social habits as a preparation for attendance at school” (Department of Education 1970, p.6). This limited aim became the basis for Departmental support for Traveller preschool education.

¹² Itinerant Settlement Committees emerged in the 1960s, subsequent to the report of the Commission on Itinerancy (Fehily, 1974).

4.3.5 Role of parents

The *Committee Report* (Department of Education 1970, p.8) mentioned parents as backup or support for the efforts of those trying to improve their lot, such as voluntary groups; “Any scheme for the education of itinerant children will depend to a large extent on the co-operation of their parents”. There was also a direction that parents should be consulted if children were to be transferred to regular classes from special classes. The report further stated that the “involvement of the parents in the work of education should influence the attendance considerably” (Department of Education 1970, p.49). It was claimed in the report that teachers on their own may not be able to involve parents in the work of the schools, and it is suggested that social workers and welfare officers, working in collaboration with the schools, may be able to help.

The type or extent of involvement or consultation envisaged was not elaborated on. There were no specific guidelines about the type of consultation, but the level of involvement envisaged appears quite limited. Participation may be represented (Arnstein 1969, 1971) as ranging from token involvement to citizen power, and the type of consultation envisaged in this report was on the lower end of the scale of participation.

4.3.6 Perception of Travellers as culturally deprived

In this report, Travellers were merely seen as disadvantaged and deprived. Based on this view of Traveller children as deprived, a grant was payable to schools for “installation of the equipment necessary for the teaching of home management and of extended personal washing facilities, including showers” (Department of Education 1970, p.7). The presumption of deficit was obvious and reflected thinking which was widespread at the time. Consider, for example, the following statement by Dwyer, National Co-ordinator for the Education of Travellers, that a Traveller “child is never taught to speak – it picks up what it can from the limited vocabulary it hears used by the older children and adults” (Dwyer 1974, p.94). A related view was expressed by McCarthy (1972), who considered that Travellers constituted “a sub-culture of poverty” and who influenced thinking about Traveller culture in the 1970s. According to McCarthy (1972, p.55), “the poor material culture is reflected in the children’s vocabulary and indeed in the vocabulary of all Travellers”.

McCarthy (1994) was later to repudiate the sub-culture of poverty theory as it relates to Travellers, which she described as a product of the thinking within sociology at the time. The concept of a (sub)culture of poverty had been introduced by Oscar Lewis (1959) within a study of five poor Mexican families and this had become a popular way of understanding poverty. Theories of language deficit and cultural deprivation were influenced by thinking in the US, especially concerning African American children, whose failure to progress in school was blamed on their home environment and on a widely accepted view “that lower class negro children have no language at all” (Labov 1978, p.24).

This report, as with the Commission report, did not acknowledge Traveller culture, and this was reflected in educational provision. Traveller children never saw themselves or their lives reflected in their classrooms. Mac Aonghusa (1993, p.111), deploring the exclusion of Traveller children from the curriculum, claimed that there was “no surer way to damage a child’s self-image than to ignore his very existence”. She also said that “we alienate our Traveller pupils by rejecting their speech, their dress, their standards of hygiene” (1993, p.110). She claimed that Travellers wanted the benefits of education, but that they were “unable to breach the wall of an alien culture which lies between them and access to new knowledge” (Mac Aonghusa 1991, p.29). In this context, it is no surprise that participation in schooling did not provide the benefits for Traveller children that had been expected.

4.3.7 Conclusion

The *Committee Report* (Department of Education 1970) carried the same message as the *Commission Report* (Government of Ireland 1963). Travellers, because of their nomadism, were regarded as not doing their duty by their children educationally. The view was that Travellers needed to be socialised and that, through education, they would be absorbed into settled society. Travellers had good reason to be suspicious of the Government’s actions on this. Plans were made to deny them their identity and their way of life. Also, parents who complied with the authorities and sent their children to school with expectations that they were being educated often found that these expectations were not justified. This was shown by continued poor educational outcomes for Traveller children in the decades following this report.

4.4 Travelling People Review Body, 1983

The Travelling People Review Body was established “to review current policies and services for the travelling people and to make recommendations to improve the existing situation” (Government of Ireland 1983, p.1). This report differed in a number of ways from the *Commission Report* (Government of Ireland 1963). One notable difference was that there were a number of Travellers and representatives of Traveller organisations on the Review Body. The Review Body was asked to examine a number of issues, including:

- The needs of travellers who wished to continue the nomadic way of life.
- The organisational arrangements to ensure that travellers were represented in decision-making affecting them at local and national level.
- The way in which barriers of mistrust between the settled and travelling communities could be broken down and mutual respect for each other’s way of life increased.

In setting out the context for the report, the Review Body noted the many changes in Ireland since 1963. Ireland had experienced “economic and social change of a kind and at a pace never previously experienced” (Government of Ireland 1983, p.17). Although not spelled out in the report, these changes included increased industrialisation, free second level education and accession to the European Economic Community (EEC).

Despite all this change, the *Report of the Travelling People Review Body* (Government of Ireland 1983, p.17) (hereafter referred to as *Review Body Report*) stated that Travellers were “receiving diminishing consideration” and that there were “still too many families living in deplorable conditions”. This report represented a change in outlook from that of the Commission, which had regarded Travellers as deviants and settled people were urged to be ‘charitable’ towards them. In a commentary on the Review Body, O’Connell (2002, p.50) claimed that “concepts such as absorption, settlement, assimilation and rehabilitation were no longer acceptable and were rejected in this report”.

The *Review Body Report* (Government of Ireland 1983) covered a wide range of issues related to the Traveller community. While Chapter 7, dealing with education and training, is of most relevance to this study, reference is also made to other parts of the report where appropriate. In particular, the position of the Review Body in relation to integration is considered.

4.4.1 Change in terminology and outlook

The *Review Body Report* (Government of Ireland 1983) used the term “traveller” instead of “itinerant”, which had been used by the Commission. While this term was not capitalised, as is now the norm in official documents, it represented a significant shift, in that Travellers were now referred to by the term that they themselves used. The Review Body acknowledged that the term itinerant was unacceptable to Travellers and accepted that “travellers” was how the community identified themselves. The Review Body also developed a descriptive definition of Travellers:

They are an identifiable group of people, identified both by themselves and by other members of the community ... as people with their own distinctive lifestyle, traditionally of a nomadic nature, but not now habitual wanderers. They have needs, wants and values which are different in some ways from those of the settled community (Government of Ireland 1983, p.6).

Crowley (1999) claimed that this description would suggest an ethnic status for Travellers. He also noted that the Review Body did not go that far, “partly because they saw cultural difference as a focus for individual choice rather than collective rights” (Crowley 1999, p.247). Crowley further claimed that, although the Review Body encompassed a range of perspectives, the dominant view was one of “a community in need of reintegration whose difference was a product of disadvantage and poverty” (Crowley 1999, p.248).

4.4.2 Integration

Integration was the long-term goal of the Review Body, although it regarded this as an option to be taken by individual Travellers, rather than by Travellers as a whole. It was perceived that some Travellers would opt for total integration and to be

indistinguishable from the settled community. Others would wish to “continue the Traveller lifestyle” (Government of Ireland 1983, p.7), while adjusting to changed conditions. Still others would adopt many elements of the lifestyle of the settled community while retaining Traveller traditions. The Review Body also stated that the term ‘traveller’ designated membership of a group, rather than a description of nomadic behaviour, so that abandonment of the nomadic way of life did not entail renunciation of membership of the Traveller community. It also stated explicitly that the wishes of Travellers who wanted to remain on the road must be respected and “serviced sites must be provided to allow them to continue that form of life with such dignity and comfort as it allows” (Government of Ireland 1983, p.15). Along the same lines, one of the principles underpinning the recommendations was that Travellers “have a right to preserve, if they so wish, their traditional culture and way of life” (Government of Ireland 1983, p.73).

Helleiner (2000) noted that, by speaking of integration rather than absorption, the Review Body acknowledged the possible retention of Traveller identity and traditions. In fact, it explicitly stated:

The concept of absorption is unacceptable, implying as it does the swallowing up of a minority traveller group by the dominant settled community, and the subsequent loss of traveller identity (Government of Ireland 1983, p.6).

While the Review Body presented a more positive outlook towards Travellers than the *Commission Report* (Government of Ireland 1963), Travellers’ nomadism was still regarded with some suspicion. The report stated that Travellers who were not housed could not hope to receive an adequate education. It stressed the importance of permanent accommodation for school attendance. If an adequate education was only available to those with permanent accommodation, nomadism was being labelled as inadequate and inferior. Christie (2004, p.154) suggested that the Review Body viewed Travellers “as individuals who have similar needs to any other Irish citizen that are most effectively met through integration in the settled community” and that it viewed Traveller difference as “a product of disadvantage and poverty that can be left behind only by adopting settled ways of life”. It seems that a nomadic lifestyle was still considered deviant, although not named as such. This view received further

support in the recommendation that “newly-wed couples should be considered extra sympathetically for housing to lessen the risks of *regression* to a travelling way of life” (Government of Ireland 1983, p.45, italics not in original). This encouragement of Travellers to adopt a settled way of life had been one of the aspirations of the *Commission Report* (Government of Ireland 1963). It is hard to read this as anything other than that Travellers were being invited to abandon the kernel of their identity. Here, one is reminded of Freire’s (1972) reference to cultural invasion which in order to succeed must convince those “invaded” of their intrinsic inferiority and consequently regard the invader as superior.

A further aspect to the aim of integration may be seen in the way the Review Body viewed traditional Traveller skills. It recommended the adaptation of traditional Traveller skills for use in modern light industrial employment. Crowley suggested that the members of the Review Body displayed a limited understanding of what culture was, in that they “limited their focus on culture as being what people do” (1999, p.248). They missed the point that the important thing for Travellers is not the skill itself, but the way that activity is organised.

The Review Body did examine the needs of Travellers who wished to continue the nomadic way of life. While it claimed that the vast majority of Traveller families wished to be accommodated in houses, it recommended the provision of serviced sites for those who wished to continue travelling. Yet, Crowley (1999, p.248) noted that “no particular provision was identified as necessary to resource nomadism”. Travellers were still regarded as a subculture of poverty and their low attainment at school was blamed on their living conditions (Lodge and Lynch 2004).

4.4.3 Education

The overall goal in the Review Body in relation to education was that each Traveller child would be “educated to the level of his/her ability and aptitude” (Government of Ireland 1983, p.62). The report suggested teacher contact with parents so that “teachers may know what are the particular home problems of the child” (Government of Ireland 1983, p.65). There was also mention of extra classes to “compensate for deprivation” (Government of Ireland 1983, p.65) of the child’s background. This report, like its predecessors, saw the need to change the Traveller

child and the family who, because they were Travellers, were perceived to have problems. Family circumstances and home environment seem to have been envisaged only as a source of deprivation, and not in any positive manner. The report noted the appointment of a visiting teacher in Galway and Dublin, on a pilot basis and called for more such appointments. The report was supportive of special education for Traveller children – in special classes and special schools – since a majority of Traveller children did not come from “reasonably normal home conditions” and did not attend “with reasonable regularity” (Government of Ireland 1983, p.65). It insisted, however, that “special classes should be seen as an interim measure rather than as a permanent feature of Traveller education” (Government of Ireland 1983, p.67).

The Review Body noted that only 10% of Traveller children remained on at school after the age of twelve and that Traveller parents considered their children to be adults at that age. It stated that these twelve to fifteen year olds should be persuaded “that education has something worthwhile to offer them – more worthwhile than the freedom of their lives outside school” (Government of Ireland 1983, p.68). However, in light of later experience, it is worth considering what exactly education had to offer to them. Increased participation over the years did not, in fact, lead to particularly positive outcomes. McDonagh (2000) reported a young Traveller, Marie, as saying, “no matter how much we went to school, not one of us has a good job” (McDonagh, W. 2000, p.159).

4.4.4 Parents and Traveller preschools

The Review Body sought an expansion of the number of Traveller preschools, from the 30 then existing, to “cater for all who are able to avail of preschool education” (Government of Ireland 1983, p.64). It stated that “the role of parents in the education of preschool children should be recognised and their participation in the preschool encouraged” (Government of Ireland 1983, p.64). This aspiration for parental participation in the preschools was not echoed in the recommendations in regard to primary education. The Review Body did not elaborate on what the parents’ role in the preschools might be nor did it provide details on how their participation could be accommodated or, indeed, encouraged, or on what levels or types of involvement were envisaged.

Education provision for Traveller children at the time was compensatory. It included preschools, special classes and special schools. Traveller children were not seen as able for ordinary classes because of their “social deprivation” (Government of Ireland 1983, p.64) and they needed at least a year in preschool to help to counteract this. Considering the importance placed on preschool and the suggestion of parental involvement, it would have been helpful if recommendations had been made on how to encourage, implement and resource such involvement.

4.4.5 Subsequent developments

The *Review Body Report* (Government of Ireland 1983) differed from previous documents in a number of ways. Travellers were involved in the Review Body and their right to be referred to as Travellers was acknowledged. In relation to preschool education, there was a call for expansion in the number of Traveller preschools, and a call for participation in these by Traveller parents. The official view of Travellers had developed considerably since the Commission on Itinerancy in 1963, but Travellers were still seen as belonging to a sub-culture of poverty whose living choices and conditions prevented them from benefiting from what was on offer to them.

Five years after the Review Body, the National Co-ordinator for the Education of Travellers issued a report entitled *The Education, Training and Employment of Travellers: 21 Year On* (Dwyer 1988). According to this report, Department of Education support for Traveller preschools had been increased, and the number of preschools had grown from 30 to 45 over the previous five years. The visiting teacher service had also expanded and Dwyer noted that an increasing number of Traveller children were attending mainstream classes in primary schools. However, she said that there were minuses as well as plusses in this development. In mainstream classes, the education could not be rooted in the culture of the Traveller children and she decried “armchair critics” who suggested otherwise. She claimed that teachers in mainstream classes, with maybe one or two Traveller children in a class of forty, would not be able to give much time to the special heritage of the Traveller child. She said that the critics were “simply out of touch, and not living in any real world” (Dwyer 1988, p.10). She reported that the majority of special teachers operated on a withdrawal system, with the children enrolled in the

mainstream classes for as much of the day as their needs seemed to warrant. This, she argued, provides some opportunities for the ‘special’ teacher to provide education within the context of the Traveller children’s own history and culture.

The *Green Paper on Education: Education for a Changing World* (Government of Ireland 1992) reported high enrolment of Traveller children in primary schools, although it expressed serious concern that only a minority continued in school beyond the age of twelve. The Green Paper also reported on plans to provide a module on Traveller culture in the preservice education of teachers, and to draw up guidelines for publishers so that material on Traveller culture could be included in school books.

4.5 Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community, 1995

The Task Force on the Travelling Community reported in 1995. As with the Review Body, membership of the Task Force included a number of Travellers and representatives of Traveller organisations. There were fewer representatives of the voluntary sector on the Task Force compared with the earlier reports. This, according to Fanning (2002), reflected a shift in focus from a welfare approach to a rights-based approach inspired by a partnership process. A consideration of this report should be placed in the context of other developments at the time. The concept of partnership had been a major feature of national discourse since the social partnership agreements of the late 1980s and early 1990s. The concept of social partnership was being extended, leading, in the year after this report, to the inclusion of the social and community pillar in the partnership process (Larragy 2006). Government had begun to see a greater role for citizens in relation to decisions which affected them. For example, the *White Paper on Education: Charting our Education Future* (Department of Education 1995) stressed the issue of parental rights and duties in relation to their children’s education.

The *Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community* (Government of Ireland 1995) (hereafter referred to as *Task Force Report*) sought, according to one of its terms of reference, “to explore the possibilities of developing mechanisms to enable Travellers to participate and contribute to decisions affecting their lifestyle and

environment” (Government of Ireland 1995, p.10). According to the Task Force, Traveller parents played a fundamental role in their children’s educational development, and should be encouraged and assisted in this role at all stages, from preschool to second level. The Task Force encouraged Traveller parents to take responsibility for their children’s education. Of the 341 recommendations in the Task Force report, 167 were in the area of education.

4.5.1 Recognition of Traveller culture

Whereas previous reports had regarded Traveller culture as a subculture of poverty that prevented Travellers from assimilating with the settled community, the Task Force recommended that the distinct culture and identity of the Traveller Community be recognised. It stated that mutual understanding and respect could be brought about by increased contact between Travellers and the settled community, which in turn should lead to a better understanding of Traveller culture and an appreciation of what cultural diversity brings to society.

The Task Force referred to the growth in the number of Traveller organisations in the decade prior to the report, and to the increased recognition of concepts of culture, ethnicity, racism and discrimination in debate concerning the situation of Travellers. This recognition of the importance of culture, it suggested, had resulted in a redefinition of the Traveller situation in terms of cultural rights, rather than being seen merely as a poverty issue. In a preface, Task Force Chairperson, Senator Mary Kelly, referred to Travellers as “being seen as passive members of Irish society” for too long and she indicated that the report’s recommendations would allow Travellers greater participation in society (Government of Ireland 1995, p.6). This perceived passivity of the Traveller community was reflected in education policy, where the State had acted in a paternalistic role in relation to Travellers since the 1960s.

4.5.2 Equality of opportunity

One of the guiding principles and recommendations of the Task Force was that equality of opportunity must exist so as to ensure that Travellers have access to all forms of education. The Task Force report noted Drudy and Lynch’s (1993) criticism that liberal concepts of equality can seem to identify the individual as the problem, whereas public policy may be the reason for lack of participation. It quoted their

claim that “there can be no real equality of opportunity in education without equality in people’s economic, political and personal circumstances, otherwise, there are simply too many barriers for those without resources to pass through” (Drudy and Lynch 1993, p.32). This report recommended that Travellers should participate fully in both decision-making and policy development for the education of their children.

The Task Force affirmed that Traveller children, as with all other children, have a right to appropriate and adequate education. This proposal echoed Article 42 of the Irish Constitution (Bunreacht na hÉireann 1937) and Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations 1989). According to Lodge and Lynch (2004), the continued lack of representation of Traveller culture within schools contributed to the sense of isolation experienced by many young Travellers.

4.5.3 School attendance

The *Task Force Report* (Government of Ireland 1995, p.155) acknowledged that “despite a significant improvement in recent years” lack of regular school attendance was a problem for Traveller children. Compulsory school attendance had long been prescribed by statute, where children were not receiving recognised education at home. As far back as 1924, the Department of Education issued a document defining elements of educational policy. Education was to be extended to a larger proportion of the population, to be achieved through compulsory school attendance for all between the ages of six and fourteen years, and the provision of continuation schools for those over the age of fourteen (Ó Buachalla 1988). Later, the School Attendance Act 1926 (Section 4.1) stated that:

The parents of every child to whom this Act applies shall, unless there is a reasonable excuse for not so doing, cause the child to attend a national or other suitable school on every day on which such school is open.

Despite this legislation, many Traveller children were not regular attenders. The *Commission Report* (Government of Ireland 1963) had noted difficulties with enforcing attendance for Traveller children whose parents travelled for economic reasons. The Task Force noted that school attendance remained a problem within the Traveller community. It endorsed the recommendations of a Department of

Education working group on school attendance and truancy, and it called for implementation to be placed “firmly and sensitively in the context of the human rights of the child” (Department of Education 1995, p.155). The working group had developed its recommendations in the context of the right of each person to develop his or her potential through education. It had explicitly stated that any legislation or services on school attendance “should apply equally to the children of the travelling community, having regard to their particular social circumstances, so as to ensure continuity of their education” (Department of Education 1994a, p.16). The Task Force supported a strategy which had been adopted in Galway to improve attendance, and which had involved a team approach including the visiting teacher for Travellers, members of the Gardai and others at community level (Government of Ireland 1995). However, Traveller representatives were not included as part of that team.

4.5.4 The visiting teacher service for Travellers

The *Task Force Report* (Government of Ireland 1995) recognised the important role of the visiting teacher for Travellers in encouraging Traveller parents to send their children to preschool, primary school and second-level school. The visiting teacher service for Travellers was set up to develop a system which would help Traveller parents to engage effectively with schools whilst complying with their duty to send their children to school. One of the main objectives of the service was to consult with Traveller families. The Task Force recommended that each Traveller family should need to deal only with one visiting teacher, regardless of whether their children were attending primary or second-level schooling. This would allow families and their visiting teacher to develop a better bond than if the family had to deal with several visiting teachers for children attending different schools.

In guidelines issued by the Department of Education in 1994 on the education of Traveller children in National Schools, it was stated that “consultation with the parents of the pupils, either directly or through the visiting teacher, will constitute an essential element of the school’s action with regard to children with behavioural difficulties” (Department of Education 1994b, p.23). The Task Force recommended that parents should get involved in whatever way they could in the schools, so that contact would not be limited to when problems arose. It recommended that, should

problems arise in the education of the Traveller children in the school, the visiting teacher should be informed. The visiting teacher should then inform the parents and encourage them to deal directly with the school. The report noted that the lack of parental involvement is seen in the low level of knowledge that Traveller parents appeared to have regarding the children's schooling. It noted that Traveller parents who might lack knowledge in school subjects might feel embarrassed, which could be a barrier to communication with teachers.

4.5.5 Communication between parents and the school

The Task Force stated that the method of communication between the Traveller home and the school should be accessible to Traveller parents. It noted that some parents' lack of literacy and unfamiliarity with the language of the school could be an obstacle to communication and participation. It called for increased involvement of Traveller parents in education. For example, it referred to homework programmes that assisted Traveller children with their homework and stated that such programmes could provide an opportunity for parental involvement, as a way for parents to become more involved with their children's schooling. However, it cautioned that without parental involvement, such programmes could lead to a further removal of Traveller parents from their children's education. It also recommended that the non-Travellers involved in such programmes should be adequately trained to ensure sensitivity to Traveller culture. The employment of Traveller parents as childcare workers in classrooms would help parents to get to know what went on in school, and thus be beneficial to them. Parents could also become members of committees in schools, thus contributing to decision-making.

The Task Force urged Traveller parents to join the Boards of Management and parent bodies and it also called for the National Parents Council to include Traveller representatives among its membership. While acknowledging the value of these recommendations, there were likely to have been difficulties for Traveller parents in this. These structures belonged to the majority population, and Travellers might not possess the appropriate cultural capital to engage with them successfully. They were made up of rules and regulations familiar to the majority population, and especially to higher social categories. This brings to mind Baker *et al.*'s view that "upper class and middle class families ... exercise more control over how schools operate" (Baker

et al. 2004, p.151) and that control is more difficult for parents from lower social groups or from minority communities. Participation can be particularly difficult for Traveller parents. They may find that the majority of representatives on Boards of Management share a common language and outlook from which Travellers feel excluded. A Traveller parent may feel disempowered, or at a disadvantage in the surroundings.

4.5.6 Inter-cultural focus

The *Task Force Report* (Government of Ireland 1995) mentioned the assimilationist approach previously taken by the Department of Education, where minorities, including Travellers, were seen as belonging to deficit cultures. It was believed that absorption into the majority population would improve their circumstances. It also referred to an integrationist approach which acknowledged the need for supports for minorities. However, this was to allow them to integrate into the majority and create a homogeneous society. Although the report does not say so, these approaches can be seen to correspond roughly to the positions in the *Commission Report* (Government of Ireland 1963) and the *Review Body Report* (Government of Ireland 1983), respectively. Both of these approaches were based on the perspective of the majority, which did not recognise the validity of Traveller culture. The Task Force recommended an inter-cultural focus on the curriculum for schools, where experiences of minorities would be presented accurately and positively, and in such a way as to avoid focusing on exotic customs and practices of Travellers and other minority groups. It recommended that texts should be monitored to avoid ethnocentric and racist interpretations. It stated that research showed negative and racist attitudes were formed at an early age and stated that the curriculum needed to address this.

An addendum to the Task Force report signed by four non-Traveller members portrayed Travellers, as in previous reports, as being responsible for the disadvantage that they experience and also explicitly rejected Traveller nomadism. This minority report demonstrated that earlier views had continued to exist, although their influence on the Task Force was weak.

4.5.7 Implementation of Task Force recommendations

The Task Force report represented a change in the way Travellers were regarded, due in some measure to the inclusion of Traveller members on the Task Force. Various aspects of Traveller lives were explored and recommendations made. The need for an inter-cultural approach to education based on human rights was put forward as an alternative to previous models. A total of 341 recommendations were contained in the report, 167 of which dealt with education and training. A committee was established by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform to monitor and co-ordinate the implementation of the recommendations of the Task Force. This committee issued two progress reports, in 2000 and 2005. The first progress report (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform 2000) presented a detailed review of progress to date with respect to each of the recommendations. Amongst other items, it reported on the introduction of the Employment Equality Act 1998 and the Equal Status Act 2000, which together outlawed discrimination in employment and services on nine grounds, including membership of the Traveller community. It also reported on the establishment of the government-funded Citizen Traveller campaign, a communications programme which sought “to address the underlying causes of mistrust between Travellers and the settled community and to promote a greater understanding between both communities” (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform 2000, p.28).

The first progress report proposed the establishment of an educational strategy to ensure that services to Travellers were managed in a co-ordinated and integrated manner. By the time the second progress report (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform 2005) was issued, a Joint Working Group had been established to develop the Traveller Education Strategy, details of which are discussed in 4.7 below. The second report also mentioned the completion of the *Preschools for Travellers National Evaluation Report* (Department of Education and Science 2003), which is considered in 4.6 below. It also reported on the issuing of Guidelines on Traveller Education in both primary and second-level schools (Department of Education and Science 2002a and 2002b) and the issuing of a report on *Intercultural Education in the Primary School* (NCCA 2005).

The progress reports gave grounds for optimism in many respects. However, Crowley (1999) claimed that while policy making in the second half of the 1990s was informed by the *Task Force Report* (Government of Ireland 1995), policy implementation continued to be informed by the thinking of the Commission and the Review Body. In a wide ranging critique, McVeigh (2007a, p.91) also suggested a resurgence of anti-Travellerism in Ireland and a “disturbing recrudescence” of assimilationist ideas and practices in state policies towards Travellers. He drew particular attention to four aspects of government decision-making. First, in section 24 of the Housing Act 2002, the government criminalised trespass, a measure which McVeigh (2007a) stressed was directly aimed at criminalising Traveller nomadism and which O’Connell (2006) described as an exercise in non-consultation. Second, when the Citizen Traveller campaign objected to this Housing Act, drawing attention to its implications for Travellers, the government responded by winding up the Citizen Traveller project. Third, the government removed equality cases involving licensed premises from the Equality Tribunal, thereby eliminating one avenue of redress that was open to Travellers who had experienced discrimination. The final point mentioned by McVeigh (2007a) was the ongoing refusal of the Government to recognise Travellers as an ethnic group, a refusal which he argued had serious implications for Travellers’ struggle for recognition. The Irish Traveller Movement had been seeking Government recognition for Travellers as an ethnic group and presented a petition to government, supported by the Equality Authority, Amnesty International and the National Consultative Committee for Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) (ITM 2007). For McVeigh (2007a), the denial of ethnic status for the Traveller community was particularly worrying, since without this status, the basis on which Traveller ‘cultural difference’ should be respected and recognised was unclear. He saw in this the potential for a return of assimilationist policies.

4.6 Preschools for Travellers: National Evaluation Report, 2003

The Task Force recommended that an evaluation of Traveller preschools be carried out. In 2000, the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science selected a sample of 23 Traveller preschools, from a total of 52 in the country, for evaluation and the *Preschools for Traveller: National Evaluation Report* (Department of

Education and Science 2003) (hereafter referred to as the *Evaluation Report*) was published in 2003.

4.6.1 Profile of Traveller preschools

Since the 1960s, voluntary committees have set up preschools for Traveller children with a view to reducing the educational disadvantage that they experience within the educational system (Boyle 1995). The voluntary committees received early encouragement in the *Committee Report* (Department of Education 1970). Subsequent to this, the Department of Education began to help fund the voluntary Traveller preschools, initially paying 70% of the teachers' salaries, plus transport costs. At the time that the *Review Body Report* (Government of Ireland 1983) was issued, there were 30 preschool classes throughout the country, catering for about 300 children. This report stated that early education for Traveller children was of "paramount importance" (Government of Ireland 1983, p.64). Also, subsequent to the publication of the report, the Department of Education increased its support for the preschools from 70% to 98% of the teachers' salaries. Where possible, the Department of Education had required that a primary teacher be employed. Preschools also employed childcare workers, whose wages were funded in a variety of ways, such as through grants from the Health Service Executive (HSE) or through FÁS placements. The Department of Education never issued curriculum guidelines for the preschools, and the preschools continued to be managed by voluntary committees. The number of Traveller preschools had varied over time: at the time of the evaluation there were 52 preschools, of which 23 were selected for evaluation.

4.6.2 Method of evaluation

In order to conduct the evaluation, a steering group was formed from members of the Inspectorate of the Department of Education, the National Education Officer for Travellers and representatives of the Department of Education and Science Special Education Section. This steering group approached the evaluation informed by the *Task Force Report* (Government of Ireland 1995), the *Report of the National Forum for Early Childhood Education* (Government of Ireland 1998) and *Ready to Learn: White Paper on Early Childhood Education* (Department of Education and Science 1999). The steering group requested visiting teachers for Travellers to submit their

views on best practice in preschool education for Travellers and to advise on the curriculum, methodologies, accommodation and links between preschools and parents. From the consultations and investigations that the steering group conducted, a number of themes emerged. These included management, accommodation, funding, curricula and staffing, and the effectiveness of links between the preschools and Traveller parents.

Inspectors visited the selected preschools. The evaluation process included gaining parents' views on the preschools. These views were gathered through interviews conducted by the Inspectorate with parents of children attending the preschools and with management committee members. Individual evaluation reports on each preschool were prepared and these were issued to the management of the relevant preschool. An overall national report was also prepared, and it was published in 2003.

4.6.3 Management of the preschools

The evaluation shows that, while most preschools had a management structure, these structures varied widely from one preschool to the next. The evaluation found that representation of Travellers in the management of the preschools was not universal. Some preschools indicated that Traveller parents were on their management committees, but a number of committees did not have any Traveller members. In some instances, the childcare worker, who was a Traveller, was on the management committee. While the report claimed that their involvement helped to ensure Traveller representation on the management of the preschools, it recommended that Traveller parents should be specifically included to ensure that their interests were represented. These recommendations were supported by an OECD report (2004) which argued for further involvement of the Traveller community and the families of the children, in line with 'good practice' in this field. The *Evaluation Report* (Department of Education and Science 2003) recommended that guidelines be drawn up and published detailing the composition, establishment, duties and operations of the management committees for Traveller preschools. Representatives of the Traveller parents, among others, should be consulted in the development of these guidelines.

4.6.4 Attendance and involvement

Attendance varied at the preschools surveyed. While, for most, attendance averaged out at 70% of pupils on the roll, in two preschools attendance was below 30%. The *Evaluation Report* (Department of Education and Science 2003) stated that careful monitoring of attendance should have a positive effect on attendance, as would the cultivation of close links with parents, especially those who did not live adjacent to the preschool. The work of the visiting teacher for Travellers was also mentioned as a factor which could improve attendance. The involvement of parents in the life of the preschool was also seen as contributing to good attendance.

4.6.5 Location of preschool

Traveller preschools were located mainly in urban areas, where large numbers of Travellers resided. The preschools were intended to prepare Traveller children for primary school and “at the same time to promote greater connection between Traveller parents and the education system” (Department of Education and Science 2003, p.34). The report suggested that the location of the preschool could have an influence on the links that needed to be fostered between Traveller parents and mainstream schools. It cited responses from a number of management committees which supported the incorporation of Traveller preschools within the local primary school or primary school campus. It stated that some inspectors’ reports suggested advantages where preschools and primary schools worked closely together. It cautioned that care should be taken in designating space in schools lest the classroom had been used as a segregated classroom in the past and might hold negative memories for parents.

The *Evaluation Report* (Department of Education and Science 2003) raised the prospect of integration and suggested that a preschool based in a halting site could not facilitate this. It was not clear from this report if parents interviewed expressed views on this issue. The reporting and recommendations did not reveal parental preferences. It may be the case that the interviewers did not seek such views or that the interviews were carried out in such a way that the language used and the environment may not have been conducive to parents stating their preferences on this issue.

The *Evaluation Report* (Department of Education and Science 2003) recommended that, where feasible, consideration should be given to establishing preschools in, or adjacent to, primary schools in order to foster closer links between the Traveller Community and mainstream schools, and that vacant classrooms should be used to accommodate Traveller preschools. It recognised that these proposals depended on the goodwill and cooperation of patrons and Boards of Management of these schools. Primary school Boards of Management did not have to accept a preschool on their premises.

4.6.6 Parental involvement

The *Evaluation Report* (Department of Education and Science 2003) noted that while many of the preschools claimed to have an open door policy, few reported structured policies for encouraging parental involvement in the classroom. The most frequent contact was when parents dropped off or collected their children. There were only a few examples of parents on management committees and no examples of parental involvement in curriculum development. The report stated that this was not surprising, “given the acute difficulties that have been experienced in encouraging parents from marginalised groups to participate in the work of school communities” (Department of Education and Science 2003, p.66).

The Department of Education and Science had already highlighted in the *White Paper on Early Childhood Education* (1999) the value it placed on parental involvement, saying that it “helps to raise quality and participation rates and leads to benefits for children and parents alike” (Department of Education and Science 1999, p.102). Further, it asserted that “it is essential that parents of pre-school children should have significantly more involvement than parents at other levels” (Department of Education and Science 1999, p.117). Specifically in relation to Traveller preschools, the White Paper said that “Traveller parents should be encouraged and empowered to become involved in the management and administration of Traveller preschools” (Department of Education and Science 1999, p.105).

The *Evaluation Report* (Department of Education and Science 2003) claimed that the management personnel in preschools were conscious of the need to develop links

between parents and preschools. Some preschools did endeavour to foster links and some of the mechanisms used were as follows: information nights, open days, school concerts, newsletters and meetings. The report noted that the impact of these initiatives was unclear. Some teachers in Traveller preschools visited the children's homes. Parents stayed in the classroom with their children, especially in the first few weeks in some preschools. The report commented on the commitment of the preschool teachers to engagement with Travellers, as evidenced from their affiliation to Traveller organisations.

The *Evaluation Report* (Department of Education and Science 2003) recommended that each preschool develop and implement policy to encourage parental involvement and that this should be developed in consultation with parents. The policies should involve a range of mechanisms and be sensitive to Traveller culture. Preschools, it was held, should regard consultation with parents as part of the school planning process. The preschool premises should be used for other educational and community activities, where appropriate. Also, parents should be facilitated to engage directly with the education services rather than relying on support structures.

It also recommended that the practice of some teachers in Traveller preschools of visiting homes and "establishing direct personal links with parents and in encouraging involvement by parents in the preschools should be recognised and built upon" (Department of Education and Science 2003, p.87). However, no resources or guidance were ever provided to develop such links. Additional resources would be required to fund efforts to visit families and to further develop links with parents. Another recommendation was that preschool premises, where suitable, might be used for other education and community activities. What seems to have been envisaged here was adult education provision for parents to foster their capacity to engage with the educational system. While this seemed a reasonable aim, preschool premises are not generally appropriate for this purpose, as the fixtures and fittings are designed for the use of three-to-five year olds.

4.6.7 Curriculum

The *Evaluation Report* (Department of Education and Science 2003) stated that experienced practitioners in preschool education and in the education of Travellers,

as well as Traveller parents, should be among the groups involved in the development of curriculum guidelines. It suggested that Traveller culture as well as other cultures in the community should be reflected in the choice of curriculum.

When the steering group was setting the parameters for the evaluation, they sought the views of the visiting teachers for Travellers on best practice in preschool education and for home-school links. The views of the teachers in the preschools were not sought on these areas. Neither were there any parent representatives on the steering committee, which would have been expected in view of the importance that has been placed on partnership with parents both in this report and in the more recent of the earlier reports.

The *Evaluation Report* (Department of Education and Science 2003) acknowledged that because the preschools had the acceptance of parents and the Traveller community, they allowed for the targeting of resources to a community that experienced severe educational disadvantage. This acceptance by the Traveller community was one of the strengths of the preschools. The report stated that “any development of guidelines for the preschools should seek to preserve and enhance existing voluntary initiative and community ownership of the preschools” (Department of Education and Science 2003, p.78).

4.7 Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy, 2006

Irish schools continue to face significant challenges in relation to the education of Traveller children. As the Chief Inspector in the Department of Education and Science remarked, “despite the almost full participation of Travellers in primary education, the low achievement level of the majority ... is a matter for concern” (Department of Education and Science 2005b, p.v). The position in respect of post-primary education is even more bleak, with the Chief Inspector going on to note that, “the vast majority of Travellers are leaving post-primary schools early, and without qualifications” (Department of Education and Science, 2005d, p.v). This is despite the fact that since the 1970s resources and initiatives have been developed which target support for Traveller children in education.

Significant change took place in the population structure in Ireland in the period between the publication of the *Task Force Report* (Government of Ireland 1995) and the publication of the *Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy* (Department of Education and Science 2006a) (hereafter referred to as the TES). Throughout its history, the Irish State had traditionally experienced net outward migration, with only a very small proportion of the population coming from other countries. The “Celtic Tiger” economy, combined with the expansion of the EU, led to a reversal of this trend. At the time that the Traveller Education Strategy was developed there were more nationalities and ethnic groups represented in the population than ever before. McDaid (2007) notes the following elements of this changed context: an enlarged EU, large numbers in the labour force from outside the EU and an increasing number of refugees and asylum seekers.

The NCCA (2005) noted that these changes brought the issue of ethnic and cultural diversity to the forefront of national policy. The increased cultural diversity created a new context for the struggle by Travellers for cultural recognition, the implications of which are difficult to discern. Increased appreciation of diversity and the increased use of intercultural practices within schools might lead to improved outcomes for Traveller children. However, there have been criticisms of the approach to cultural diversity in school at the time (Bryan 2010, Kitching 2010), with claims that it had negative consequences for minority students, particularly for those least endowed with the cultural capital valued by the school.

It was against this background that the TES proposed major changes in educational provision for Travellers which, if implemented, could significantly change the way Travellers experience education. Although the TES covered all levels of education, my focus is on two areas in particular: parents and education (Chapter 4), and early childhood education (Chapter 5). The focus on parents derives from a belief that many of the educational difficulties experienced by Traveller children are due to a chasm between school and home, a chasm which might be bridged through increased involvement of Traveller parents with the schools. The focus on early childhood education derives from a belief that preschool, as the child’s first contact with education outside the home, is an ideal site in which to begin a process of involvement.

4.7.1 Core values

Core values underpinning the TES included a focus on the rights of the Traveller child and on the role of parents. The reference to the rights of the child represents an advance on the *Task Force Report* (Government of Ireland 1995) where children were viewed only in the context of Traveller women, as pointed out by the *Second Progress Report of the Committee to Monitor and Coordinate the Implementation of the Recommendations of the Task Force on the Travelling Community* (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform 2005). In setting out its position on the rights of the child, the TES referred to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations 1989) which compelled authorities to take account of “their needs and their culture in all aspects of education” (Department of Education and Science 2006a, p.10). The TES called for Travellers to be included in the mainstream education system in a way that respected their culture, including nomadism. It acknowledged that this would require equipping mainstream services to deal with diversity in a way that was “accessible, relevant, welcoming and competent to include Travellers in appropriate ways” (Department of Education and Science 2006a, p.10).

Concepts of equality and inclusion were also central to the *Strategy Report* (Department of Education and Science, 2006a). Equality was taken to be comprised of equality of access, participation and outcomes. This focus on outcomes was important, since increased participation by Travellers in education had not delivered satisfactory outcomes, as demonstrated in the *Survey of Traveller Education Provision* (Department of Education and Science 2005a) where it was pointed out that, despite the almost full participation of Travellers in primary education, a majority still experienced low levels of achievement in literacy and numeracy. Inclusion was defined to mean the integration of Travellers into mainstream education provision, sharing accommodation and other physical resources with non-Traveller learners, and with these resources being provided on the basis of identified need. This reflected developments which had been underway for the past few years, moving away from the separate provision for Travellers which had been common in the past, and which had been a source of resentment for many (Boyle 2006). Inclusive provision, it was claimed, would help to avoid creating dependency and isolation and would promote “interactive and interdependent engagement with the mainstream service” (Department of Education and Science 2006a, p.9). Each

educational setting would be required to include the “reality, needs, aspirations, validation of culture and life experiences of Travellers in planning the curriculum and in the day-to-day life” (Department of Education and Science 2006a, p.10).

An implication of the call for inclusion and equality was that all staff development for school personnel should be informed by these principles and that all involved in education should have an understanding of anti-discrimination and interculturalism. A further implication was the recognition of diversity within the Traveller community. For example, Travellers with disabilities and their parents, it was held, needed to be affirmed and supported and all Travellers should be able to experience education in a way that accepts and validates their identity while recognising their particular individual needs.

4.7.2 Traveller parents

The benefits of parental involvement in education have been well-established and are discussed in Chapter 2. For example, Jeynes (2004, 2005) demonstrated in meta-analyses benefits of parental involvement in primary and second-level education and there is widespread agreement that parental involvement is a key element in addressing educational difficulties faced by Travellers (Department of Education 2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2005d). In relation to Traveller education, schools contacted for the *Survey of Traveller Education Provision in Irish Schools* (Department of Education and Science 2005a, p.73) were said to have “appreciated the importance of fostering involvement by parents”.

In addressing the need for parental involvement in education it was deemed important to recognise the many challenges that Traveller parents faced. Noting that 9% of Travellers lived in unauthorised sites, the TES pointed out that living without access to basic services and being under threat of eviction could have a very negative impact on a Traveller child’s education. It suggested that parents’ capacity to engage with education could depend on such factors as their own educational and socio-economic background as well as, for many, “their negative experience in school, illiteracy and the widespread experience of exclusion” (Department of Education and Science 2006a, p.22). It also suggested that Traveller parents could not assume that their children would be treated fairly and respectfully in schools. The *Report of the*

High Level Group on Traveller Issues (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform 2006) noted that factors extraneous to the education system could have a positive or negative impact on educational attainment. Such factors included “cultural issues, housing standards, health, childcare and parental employment status” (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform 2006, p.44).

The *Survey of Traveller Education Provision* (Department of Education and Science 2005a) reported that most Traveller parents had high expectations for their children in the education system; more than half expressed concern about the attainment levels of their children, particularly in the area of literacy and numeracy, and were disappointed that their children were falling behind the other pupils in the class. Many parents reported that they themselves had missed out on education and “this had created barriers to their own advancement and to their ability to play a full role in society” (Department of Education and Science 2005a, p.64). They were anxious that their children should benefit from a good education, and they expressed the desire to gain more information on ways to support their children in achieving their potential. The TES mentioned two Department of Education and Science-supported projects, in Mayo and Ennis, which responded to this desire by seeking to upskill Traveller parents to support their school-going children with homework and to interact effectively with their children’s schools. It set out an overall objective for Traveller parents, that:

Traveller parents should benefit from a comprehensive and inclusive programme of community-based education initiatives which will empower them to understand the education system, to participate in it and to further support their children in education (Department of Education and Science 2006a, p.25).

The TES also recommended that Traveller parents should be encouraged and supported to participate in representative structures. Although desirable, representation needed to be meaningful and these structures needed to be examined to see how they operated and ensured that representatives could influence policy. Hanafin and Lynch (2002), based on research conducted with parents in a primary school in the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme in Ireland, noted that the role of parent representatives was quite limited. Members of parents’ councils reported that “once

they became involved in the council, they found that their role was less influential regarding policy and decision-making than they had first thought” (Hanafin and Lynch 2002, p.42). Parents’ perceptions of Boards of Management, likewise, were that “membership as a parent didn’t involve any opportunity to influence school policy” (Hanafin and Lynch 2002, p.43).

Although proposals for parents in the TES were positive, one could argue that they were based on an overly benign view of the education system. Parents were rightly urged to acquire “greater understanding of the value of education and of the education system” (Department of Education and Science 2006a, p.27), but this needed to be a critical understanding, in which parents would develop an awareness of how educational structures and practices could sometimes create obstacles to their children’s progress in school, and it should be complemented by a call on the education system to also consider the same issue. In this context, proposals for schools to facilitate dialogue with parents were welcomed. The TES recommended that schools provide a positive environment for Traveller parents, who should be “invited and encouraged to partake in all aspects of school life” (Department of Education and Science 2006a, p.26).

The TES called for the education system “to continue to evolve into an inclusive system that welcomes diversity in all its forms” (Department of Education and Science 2006a, p.27). It recommended that teachers receive training and development in the areas of equality and diversity, a call which was echoed in the *Survey of Traveller Education Provision in Irish Schools* (2005c, p.83) which claimed that “schools need support and training in relation to intercultural education”. Many schools were uncertain about how to incorporate Traveller culture in the school curriculum and environment and reported that “Traveller parents expressed conflicting views about presenting Traveller culture in the school setting” (2005c, p.75). This highlighted a dilemma for Traveller parents, who might have felt it was easier if their children were not identified as Travellers, thus denying their identity. Bhopal (2011) noted that negative behaviour towards Gypsy and Traveller pupils is one of the reasons why many pupils from these communities are unwilling to disclose their identity. In a related vein O’Hanlon and Holmes (2004, p.31) claimed that, “for the most part, Gypsy and Traveller children who have succeeded

in school and adult learning have done so mainly by denying their identity and presenting as members of the mainstream community, for fear of hostility, prejudice and rejection”. They noted that this denies positive role models to other Gypsies and Travellers in the community.

In the TES, parents were being asked to engage more fully with the education system, to consider further education for themselves and to participate more fully in the education of their children. Education providers were being asked to engage pro-actively with Traveller parents by including them as active partners in the education system.

4.7.3 Creating an inclusive preschool

The TES noted an increasing recognition of the importance and value of the early years for all children’s development. It went on to assert that investment in early childhood education was cost effective in tackling educational disadvantage, as it reduced the need for spending on remedial measures later in a child’s life. School principals also strongly backed the need for preschool education for Traveller children (Department of Education and Science 2005a). The Department of Education and Science had supported Traveller preschools since the 1970s. Recommendations in the TES related to Traveller preschool education should be read in conjunction with the *Evaluation Report* (Department of Education and Science 2003), since the TES called for the implementation of its recommendations.

These recommendations included a call for each preschool to “develop and implement a policy to encourage involvement by parents in the life of the preschools” and that this policy should be developed in consultation with parents and be sensitive to “the cultural characteristics of the Traveller community” (Department of Education and Science 2003, p.86). The evaluation had stated that preschools should regard consultation with parents as part of the school planning process and that parents should be facilitated to engage directly with the education services rather than rely on support structures. It should be noted that in the years following the publication of the evaluation report, little effort had been made by the Department of Education and Science to facilitate or resource the implementation of these recommendations.

4.7.4 Role of Travellers in early years education

The TES suggested that intercultural materials and resources in preschools should be developed in consultation with Traveller childcare workers and with children. This proposal seemed somewhat limited, in that it failed to mention the expertise of the teachers in the preschools, along with parental and community expertise which might be drawn on for such work. A further issue in relation to this proposal was the assumption that there would be a Traveller childcare worker in each setting, and, indeed, that the teacher would not be a Traveller.

In an integrated setting there could be no assurance that there would be a Traveller staff member, and it should be noted that within Traveller preschools, some of the teachers are members of the Traveller community. The TES called for positive action measures to increase access to professional training for Travellers for all roles in the early childhood sector, but even with increased employment of Travellers in these roles across the sector, it could not be assured that there would be a Traveller member of staff in any particular setting.

4.7.5 Intended outcome of Traveller Education Strategy

The TES intended that, within five years, Traveller children should have access to inclusive well-resourced and well-managed provision with appropriately trained professionals in quality premises. It called for expansion in the number of preschools “even beyond the proposed 150 DEIS sites” (Department of Education and Science 2006a, p.33). This call, going beyond its brief in relation to Traveller education, highlighted the underdeveloped nature of the preschool sector and drew attention to a danger implicit in this strategy, that by seeking to replace an imperfect but valuable current provision with a more perfect but at the time non-existent aspiration it could instead lead to the loss of expertise and experience built up in Traveller preschools.

The TES sought an end to separate Traveller provision in education, to be replaced by inclusive provision in integrated mainstream services. The core values of the report stressed the role of parents and the need for partnership and inclusion in the education system. Although the goals were admirable, much work clearly remained to be done to acknowledge Traveller culture within the education system generally, and to establish meaningful partnerships with Traveller parents. In the absence of

such partnerships, there is a danger that policies which are intended to be inclusive may not in practice acknowledge or respect Traveller culture and may instead foster a renewed assimilationism, of the type mentioned by McVeigh (2007a). The proposals in relation to early childhood education were dependent upon major changes in the overall provision of services in this area.

4.7.6 Subsequent developments

Perhaps the most significant factor influencing policy and practice in Traveller education subsequent to the publication of the Traveller Education Strategy was financial. The collapse in government finances following the bank failures of 2008 led to many significant changes. Funding for Traveller related interventions was disproportionately affected, with Pavee Point (2013) estimating that spending on targeted educational interventions for Travellers fell by 86%. Of particular interest to this research is withdrawal of funding for Traveller preschools, which led to their closure in 2011. Funding was also withdrawn for the visiting teacher service and for resource teachers for Travellers.

The introduction of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Free Preschool Year scheme in 2010 was also significant. This scheme, operated by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, had provided a free preschool year for all children meeting an age criterion, before the start of primary school.

4.8 Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, Irish State documents on Travellers and education have been reviewed. These have ranged from the *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy* (Government of Ireland 1963) to the *Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy* (Department of Education and Science 2006a). The documents demonstrate an evolution in official attitudes towards the Traveller community. In the 1960s and 1970s, Ireland was emerging from a society dominated by Catholic Church teaching and was becoming a modern welfare state, a process that continued with Ireland's accession to the EEC in 1973. In the early reports (Government of Ireland 1963 and Department of Education 1970), Travellers were seen as a people in deficit – a community of dropouts and deviants – and their culture was not

perceived to have any validity or importance. Later documents (Government of Ireland, 1983, 1995, Department of Education and Science, 2003, Department of Education and Science 2006a) demonstrated a growing recognition of Traveller culture and a determination to address issues concerning the education of Travellers in a spirit of interculturism and inclusion.

This evolution in attitudes was matched by parallel developments in State policies. The Commission on Itinerancy had seen a solution to the 'itinerant problem' in assimilationist policies and a paternalistic approach. By the time of the Task Force, concepts of partnership and participation had come to the fore and it was recognised that Travellers had a right to be involved in decisions that affected them. One recommendation of the Task Force was that Traveller parents should get involved in their children's schools. The *Evaluation Report* (Department of Education and Science 2003) recorded various efforts by teachers to involve parents in the Traveller preschools, although most preschools did not have explicit policies on parental involvement. It recommended that such policies be developed, although it did not address the resourcing implications of its recommendations.

The Traveller Education Strategy (Department of Education and Science 2006a) sought an end to separate provision for Travellers in education, including in preschool education. It called for Traveller preschools to be amalgamated with other services to provide inclusive anti-racist integrated preschool education, in settings where Traveller culture is respected and validated. It also called for increased involvement of Traveller parents in their children's education. These are worthy objectives; however, much work remains to be done to acknowledge Traveller culture within the education system, and, indeed, within Irish society generally, and to establish meaningful partnerships with parents within preschool education. There is also a concern that the aspiration for inclusion may, if not properly planned and resourced, lead to a new form of assimilationism. Ethnic-blind policies have led to massive reductions in education spending targeted at the Traveller community (Pavee Point 2013).

CHAPTER 5

TRAVELLER PARENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON SCHOOLING

5.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the second research aim, which was to generate an understanding of the Traveller parents' perspectives on schooling. One theme in relation to this is a focus on parents' perspectives on Traveller identity and Traveller culture and it provides a background and context against which their views on education can be understood.

A second major theme concerns the parents' own experiences of school, which they generally found to be alien and unfriendly. Many had spent little time in school and most recalled feeling isolated and unhappy when they were there. They expressed dismay and a sense of betrayal at the realisation that they had little achievement to show following their schooling. In trying to explain why this had happened they pointed to a number of factors, including their own parents' views on education, the views of their teachers and also the views and actions of their fellow pupils.

At the same time, they expressed hope and determination in relation to their own children's education, although they were concerned to protect their children from the hurt that they themselves had experienced.

5.2 Centrality of Traveller culture and identity

You are born a Traveller; you don't just become a Traveller.

Eva (parent, Avonard) echoed the views of other Traveller parents in this study in recognising Traveller status as ascribed rather than achieved. A recurring theme was pride in Traveller identity and culture: they indicated that they respected the culture and traditions that had been passed down to them. There were various indications of

this, such as the way they spoke of family and the traditional Traveller trades, and also the regard in which they held the Cant language.

As with all groups, there are pressures for change within the Traveller community, tensions concerning changes that are taking place, and differing opinions about the extent to which particular changes should be accepted or resisted. Some parents expressed criticisms of the actions of other Travellers, seeing them as emulating settled people and acting in ways they deemed not appropriate for Travellers, while others spoke of the constraints that they themselves had felt when they sought to move outside of the accepted norms for their community.

5.2.1 Proud to be Travellers

Parents said they were proud to be members of the Traveller community. Even in the face of discrimination and marginalisation, they were proud of their identity. They had a strong sense of being the bearers of a long and rich tradition. They had survived adversity and they saw themselves as a distinct group with cultural norms which they held in high regard. This pride was expressed by Sally (parent, Cuanmara) when she said: “I’m proud of who I am and would never change that for anything in the world ... But I’m happy.” Lucy (parent, Lisnashee) also expressed pride in being a Traveller: “I feel very proud, it doesn’t bother me who I am to be honest ... I am who I am.”

5.2.1.1 Fatalistic acceptance

Although they spoke with pride in their Traveller identity, many qualified their feeling of pride with a fatalism which indicated that, whether or not it was convenient, they were Travellers and this could not be changed. Deirdre (parent and childcare worker, Liosbeag) was emphatic in saying, “you are what you are and that’s it ... you are born what you are and you die what you are,” while Sara (parent, Castletown) declared: “Everyone is happy with their own culture and we can’t change it no matter what we are.” Similarly, Lisa (parent, Seanbaile) stated: “You are what you are. I like my children to know they are Travellers, ‘cause you cannot make yourself something you are not”, while Tara (parent, Avonard) said in relation to her children that “if they found out they are Travellers, what can they really do about it, like”.

Some of the fatalism seemed to be linked to an awareness of the negative view of Travellers often held by settled people. When talking about their identity as Travellers some did introduce the notion of shame, to deny that they themselves felt any shame. Tom (parent, Seanbaile) said: “I’ve never been ashamed, like, of who I am or what I am” and Deirdre (parent and childcare worker, Liosbeag), when referring to the possibility that her son might follow the traditional trade of his father and grandfather, said: “It’s not that I’d be ashamed of that”.

5.2.1.2 Identity and pride

Identity is complex and derives from many different influences (Hogg and Vaughan 2011). It is who we are and where we’re coming from (Taylor 1994). Traveller identity is that part of the self-concept of individual Travellers which derives from their sense of who they are and is distinguished from those parts of identity that derive from personality traits and individual experience. The concept of pride is tied in with identity, and is particularly important in relation to groups who find themselves subject to prejudice and discrimination. Many social movements, such as the US civil rights movement and the gay rights movement, have sought to promote pride in stigmatised groups to counter typical social responses (Britt and Heise 2000). Pride and shame arise from viewing one’s self from the point of view of another (Britt and Heise 2000). Taylor (1994, p.36), has discussed how people can come to internalise negative views: “The projection of an inferior or demeaning image on another can actually distort and oppress, to the extent that the image is internalised.” Parents in the study spoke of pride and acceptance, but they also mentioned shame. They were aware of the negative attitudes to Travellers held by many in the wider society¹³.

5.2.2 Culture expressed in family relations, nomadism, language, and traditional trades

Many Travellers nowadays live side-by-side with settled people in standard housing, especially in towns and cities. To the outside observer there might appear to be few differences between Travellers and the settled community. Although large numbers of Travellers have outwardly assumed aspects of the settled population’s way of life,

¹³ MacGreil tracks this negative evaluation over several decades (1977, 1996, 2011).

they regard themselves as a distinct community. As Sara (parent, Castletown) put it: “You are in a house like a settled person, your kids go to school like a settled person’s ... [but] both communities are different.” The difference is one’s identity and sense of belonging to a distinct culture. Tara (parent, Avonard) described how an awareness of the difference between Travellers and the settled community first occurred to her:

I was eight or nine before I even copped on that I was one ... I knew that they were all my people. I knew still I wouldn’t let anyone say anything about them; but you know from an early age, are you a buffer¹⁴ or are you a Traveller.

Traveller culture differs from that of the settled community, and is reflected in a distinctive approach to family relations, in the practice of nomadism, in the Cant language, and in the practice of traditional Traveller trades.

5.2.2.1 Family provides support

To Travellers, family is at the heart of the culture. They regard family highly and family ties tend to be strong, with marriages between first and double first cousins being common. These close ties strengthen the family. Travellers support other family members in times of adversity and in celebrations. Members of the extended family come together to provide emotional and financial support in times of difficulty. Sara (parent, Castletown) described how support from family manifests itself:

It’s the family, like, if you come from the Travelling community and the support when you’re sick or sore. All your family has all that support. They come to you and they comfort you and at least you know that you can turn back to them. Traveller families are very very close to each other when it comes to weddings or comes to deaths or respect or all that kind of way.

¹⁴ Buffer is a term used by Travellers to refer to settled people, sometimes used as a derogatory term.

Triona (teacher, Lisnashee) gave an example of where local Travellers had rallied round to bring home for burial a member of their community who had been living abroad and who had died in poor circumstances:

They'd a big funeral there last month. Six thousand they paid for the headstone ... They were so happy to bury her, to bring her home and to bury her. I mean, she was an alcoholic but they didn't deny her. They brought her home.

Indeed, this support from the Traveller community can sometimes give rise to tension and misunderstandings by others, as referred to by John (parent, Cnocard):

Family is the centre and for the burial everyone would chip in for the tombstone and [settled] people say – 'Ah, Travellers are rotten with money' and all this. They never see the poor side.

Travellers are expected to provide support to the extended family when needed and they put family loyalty above all else (Bewley 1974, Gmelch 1975, O'Hanlon 2010). As Mac Aonghusa (1993, p.102) put it, "families depend on each other for support in times of trouble and enjoy each other's company in family celebrations".

5.2.2.2 Sexual mores: girls and marriage

One aspect of Traveller family values referred to by parents is the need for Traveller girls to preserve their good name, not least so as to lead to a good marriage. Travellers traditionally marry young. Within Traveller culture, girls are traditionally allowed much less freedom than their brothers. They are expected to conform to particular behaviours lest they get a 'bad name'. The custom of early marriages for their daughters was not favoured by all parents, but the inevitability of marriage is unquestioned.

Hannah (parent, Seanbaile) spoke of the care that has to be taken to prevent a girl getting a bad name:

My young wan is only eleven. Imagine if she was thirteen or fourteen, walking around the town ... You've got to look out for

them ... one, bad company, two, you'll get the bad minded person who'll try saying something about your child.

Sally (parent, Cuanmara) also sought to protect her daughters: "If you get a bit of a name you'll never get married ... that girl has a bad reputation." Sally's mother had been very strict with her when she was growing up and, while Sally did not like it at the time, now that she is a mother of daughters herself, she has come to understand her mother's concerns and she continues this approach with her own daughters. She said that Traveller girls are not allowed to go to discos or clubs. Lisa (parent, Seanbaile) supported this approach, saying that Traveller girls are not allowed to have boyfriends until they meet their husbands-to-be. This is also linked with a tradition of early marriage within the Traveller community. Both women compared these Traveller practices favourably with what they perceived to be the excessive freedom that settled mothers allow their daughters. According to Lisa, "In the settled community, their kids fourteen or fifteen are allowed boyfriends," while Sally said that "settled girls go out night-clubbing at twelve and thirteen years of age." While these charges against the settled community are somewhat exaggerated, they serve to reinforce the perspective of the parents and to emphasise the cultural boundaries between the communities.

As with the majority population, beliefs and practices change, and on this Lucy (parent, Lisnashee) lamented recent changes that she perceived within the Traveller community:

There was a time before, there used to be no scandal ... there wouldn't be boyfriends or girlfriends. They'd be asked for marriage and after a few months they're married. They weren't allowed to kiss each other but now they're running away. They are having children before they get married. They're living in sin which one time nobody would do at all.

In fact, the practice of "running away" to get married is considered traditional among many young Travellers, who attempt to force their parents' hands and gain permission from them to marry. It is a traditional way of avoiding a match (Gmelch

1975, Helleiner 2000). Once a girl has over-nighted with a boy, parents feel that the girl is compromised and that they must agree to a marriage.

While early marriage was traditional in the Traveller community, not all parents wanted to keep the tradition of early marriage for their daughters, or viewed change in this area as negative. Both Sara (parent, Castletown) and Cáit (parent, Cnocard) spoke of their hopes that their daughters would experience life and work before settling down to marriage. Sara was older than most when she married at age twenty-seven and she spoke of her hopes for her daughter:

To see [my daughter] getting a good job for herself because in the Travelling community some little girls leave school at a very early age and they settle down and get married and have kids ...I would like to see [my daughter] going further and no talk about marriage until she is well over thirty.

Similarly, Cáit (parent, Cnocard) said that she wanted her daughter to see the world before she settled down and she hoped that she would then marry a Traveller man with a modern outlook on marriage:

I want them to get married to modern Traveller people, not traditional Traveller people where you have to sit in and Mammy can't go out and work.

While precise views on marriage varied, all seemed to see marriage as an inevitable outcome for their daughters.

Helleiner (2003) confirmed that there was pressure on Traveller women to preserve their sexual reputations and maintain a 'good name'. The issues of a girl getting a 'bad name' and the practice of early marriage are linked, in that families seek to ensure that their girls are married before they have a chance to become sexually active (Gmelch 1975). However, many Travellers are now questioning traditional practices. According to McDonagh (McDonagh, W. 2000, p.58), "it is very difficult to decide what we need to let go of and what we should hold on to". They are concerned about what is best for their young people.

5.2.2.3 Nomadism valued; less practiced than in the past

Nomadism is an important feature of Traveller identity, although the practice is severely curtailed nowadays and few families continue to travel regularly. While parents expressed a strong emotional affinity for this way of life, many also perceived nomadism as being incompatible with modern life.

Many parents in the study were reared on the roadside, moving from campsite to campsite. Lucy (parent, Lisnashee) recalled with pleasure her childhood when her family followed a nomadic tradition and she remarked on how this experience reinforced her Traveller identity: “I like the way when I was growing up that I could travel with the caravan ... I loved it. I felt I was a Traveller.” Lisa (parent, Seanbaile) was reared in a caravan, and she said: “I’m in a house now. I often said I’d like to be in a caravan. I miss the caravan.”

It is difficult to pursue a nomadic life nowadays, and many parents spoke of how they had limited or abandoned nomadism in their own lives. Some explicitly chose to limit their travelling to the school holidays in order to support their children’s schooling. John (parent, Cnocard) said: “I am nomadic myself but you have to make priorities for your children now and education is the way forward.” Some families did still travel seasonally, to keep up the tradition. John travelled during the school holidays with his family: “Me and the wife leaves the house and stuff and goes away in a caravan ... we go ... all over. We go away for a month or so.” Lisa (parent, Seanbaile) also travelled during the summer holidays, saying: “you’d be mad to stick yourself in a house for the summer ... I think all Travellers should travel in the summer.” However, there are many practical difficulties in maintaining nomadism, even for the summer. For example, where do you keep your caravan when it is not in use? Tom (parent, Seanbaile) said:

Travellers in the houses, they might leave for the summer, maybe two months or whatever, and they’re back for the schooling ...there is nowhere to go and you have to get a caravan brought out to the house, then the council goes mad.

Lisa pointed out that camping on the side of the road was no longer an option for Travellers as it had been in the past: “you have to leave the side of the road now, see,

it's private. You have no right to stay in it." Lisa also suggested that younger Travellers would find it difficult living in a caravan: "If the kids get too used to the houses and get married to a fella living in a caravan, do you know what I mean, they'd find it awkward."

In the past, nomadism was perhaps the most visible outward mark of the Traveller community, when family groups lived on the side of the road or on official and unofficial halting sites. Indeed, the name Traveller (or in the Irish language, An Lucht Siúl) refers to the tradition of travelling from place to place. Parents identified with nomadism, seeing it as part of who they are. However, the possibility of living a nomadic life has been severely constrained in contemporary society.

One reason for the demise in the practice of nomadism is the blocking or "bouldering" of traditional stopping places and the increased emphasis on the law of trespass¹⁵. The Irish Traveller Movement (ITM undated) suggests a "hostility to the concept of nomadism" among local authorities, which partially explains the limited availability of temporary sites.

While Kenny (1994) identifies nomadism as a core value of Traveller culture, she regards it as a mindset rather than necessarily an intention to keep travelling. For McDonagh (1994, p.95), too, nomadism is less about the practice of travelling than a way of looking at the world:

The physical act of moving is just one aspect of a nomadic mindset 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.

While nomadism is less practiced than in the past, it is still seen by parents as a core aspect of Traveller identity.

¹⁵ The Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2002 strengthened the law of trespass and made it more difficult for Travellers to occupy sites.

5.2.2.4 Cant: the Traveller language

Although Travellers speak English, they also have their own language, Cant¹⁶, which they regard as a distinctive marker of Traveller culture. Cant is a source of pride for Travellers. It has been passed down through the generations and symbolises their distinctiveness and their separateness from the settled community. All the Traveller parents in the study know some Cant, although they believe that they have much less than their forefathers. They expressed a fear that Cant may not survive long into the future.

Speaking Cant among themselves in the presence of settled people is a source of power for Travellers and speaking it at home allows them to discuss matters privately in the presence of children (Binchy 2002).

Parents described how they used Cant as a private language in the presence of settled people. Sally (parent, Cuanmara) said: “Say, now, you were in a place and there were settled people there, and you wanted to say something, you might say it [in Cant].” Similarly, Deirdre (parent and childcare worker, Liosbeag) said: “If there is someone around and I’m telling my son and daughter something ... that I don’t want someone else to know. Then I talk the Cant.”

This use of Cant relies on the fact that it is not known by those outside of the community and so it can be used to keep secret or private certain matters that are not meant to be shared. This gives a measure of discretion and control in relation to their communication with non-Travellers. Binchy (1994) noted this use of Cant as a private language and she compared it to the use of jargon by market traders, and members of other trades, to communicate with one another in the presence of customers.

The other circumstance where parents use Cant is when they want to speak privately together in the presence of their younger children. Lucy (parent, Lisnashee) said: “If I’m talking to [my husband] and I don’t want [the children] to understand ... If I’m trying to say something that is hidden, then I’ll talk Cant.”

Similarly, Sile (parent, Cnocard) said:

¹⁶ The Traveller language was referred to as Cant by the majority of the parents. It is also known as Gammon to some Travellers and linguists generally refer to it as Shelta.

Me and my husband use it but we normally use it in the home if we don't want the kids to hear what we're talking about, but they pick up on it and that's the way I was reared. I was never sat down and learned to do this.

Because of integration with settled people and changes in the Traveller way of life, Cant is now used less frequently than in the past. There was general consensus that present day Travellers have a poorer command of Cant than had their forefathers and many fear it will be lost if some action is not taken; they considered ways in which this could be remedied. Tom (parent, Seanbaile) said, "A lot of it is dying out. The old Travellers was great at it years ago, like. They used to always use it." John (parent, Cnocard) expressed his concern:

It's important to keep it up because if you don't keep it up it's going to die and that's the only thing the Travelling community [have left], because of their lifestyle, the Government legislation and the majority population and by getting crushed into a corner it's going to eventually probably ... die away and that's the unfortunate side of it.

Bernie (parent, Owenree) also expressed her concern:

My personal view on Cant, right, I think if it's not written down and documented we're going to lose it. As Travelling people, we're going to lose our language.

A different threat to the language is that settled people have picked up Cant words, so that Cant is no longer exclusive to Travellers. Annie (parent, Seanbaile) said that "a lot of settled people know the Cant" and Cáit (parent, Cnocard) said that "it's the Traveller language but it's not the hidden language any more to talk in private; everyone knows it." Síle (parent, Cnocard) had noticed this also, although she believes that the local settled people only have a few Cant words and that she can use more obscure Cant words to preserve its use as a secret language.

5.2.2.5 Cant in preschools and schools

Parents are in favour of Cant being used in Traveller preschools, to help preserve it. Annie (parent, Seanbaile) said that it had been introduced into her preschool: "[The

teacher] has a book with Cant and there's pictures beside it and the English.”¹⁷ The parents in Cnocard spoke of how they are working with the teacher to introduce and reinforce Cant within the preschool. They planned to make word charts with Cant words and corresponding pictures, which the teacher would incorporate into the preschool programme. They hope that this will help to preserve the language for their children. Síle (parent, Cnocard) expressed her fear as follows: “when they grow up they will only have bits of it and then when their children grows up they'll have none of it.” The Cnocard parents were contributing to the inclusion of Cant in the preschool curriculum in the hope of preserving it.

While parents are in favour of including Cant in Traveller preschools, they do not extend this thinking to primary or second level. They offered two reasons to be concerned. First, they want to preserve Cant as a private language for Travellers, and this will be defeated if settled children learned it. A second concern is that they fear that their children will be ridiculed by settled children if Cant were included in the schools.

The parents in Seanbaile fear that Cant will die out if it is not preserved in some way and they debated how this might be done. Initially, they considered that teaching it in school would help. However, as the Seanbaile parents continued to tease out this topic, they began to see disadvantages to bringing Cant into the schools. Hannah pointed out that she could now use Cant in the presence of settled people, secure in the knowledge that they would not understand her: “You'd know that they wouldn't know what you'd be saying.” However, if it were taught at school and if a Traveller were to use it in the usual way, according to Hannah, “you'd be embarrassed, wouldn't you?” Its value as a secret language would be lost. Grace also opposed the introduction of Cant into schools, on grounds that the Traveller children would “probably be embarrassed”. Hannah supported this view: “Not alone that, I think that the other children would be bringing it home and they would be making a laugh too.”

These comments reflected the realisation of parents of the lack of value placed by the majority population on Traveller culture, and also their concern to protect their children in the schools. Their comments echo Binchy's (1994) claim twenty years

¹⁷ This was a reference to the Kids Own Publishing Partnership (2003) book, *Can't Lose Cant*.

ago that many Travellers feared that, if settled people got hold of the language, they would use it to humiliate Travellers.

Cant is important to the parents. Binchy (1994) argued that Cant is not actually a secret language in the classic sense, as Travellers use it in circumstances other than to keep something hidden. She regarded the language as having an integrative function, to maintain and reinforce the boundaries of the Traveller community against settled society.

The dilemma about whether to use Cant within schools has been noted by others, such as O'Hanlon and Holmes (2004) who found that some Travellers would like to have their language openly recognised in schools, with educational materials available in the language, while others considered Cant to be private, exclusive to themselves. This may be linked to a distinction that Binchy (1995) identified, between those who want to hold onto the language for communicative purposes and those who value it for symbolic purposes. For the first group it is a functioning language whose utility would be damaged if non-Travellers were to learn it. For the second group, it is a core element of what it means to be a Traveller and it should be protected by any means necessary.

5.2.2.6 Respect for traditional Traveller trades

A variety of trades and forms of economic activity can be considered traditional within the Traveller community, and parents regard these trades with respect. Among the Traveller trades mentioned by parents are scrap collecting, copperwork, buying and selling, and horse-trading. The general consensus was that these traditional trades are under threat or are dying out because of the difficulty in making a living from them. Although parents regard them highly, many expressed the hope that their children will find better and easier occupations. They value education as a means towards achieving this goal.

The parents in Seanbaile believe that the traditional trades will not be available to their children and they lament their demise. According to Frank (parent, Seanbaile), "these are all gone now", and others in the group agreed. These parents were not opposed to their children pursuing traditional Traveller trades if this were to prove possible. They do not have a preference for jobs in the mainstream economy versus

traditional Traveller trades “as long as they’re happy.” However, they think that this will not be possible.

Some parents are sanguine about the demise of the traditional trades, referring to them as dirty work and hard work. Lucy (parent, Lisnashee) said of her husband: “He’s into scrap, now, the traditional way ... It’s a dirty job and he doesn’t like that. He’d rather a good job.” Deirdre (parent and childcare worker, Liosbeag) recalled her father, who had also worked with scrap: “My father was into scrap. Now they never made anything out of it only torture and punishment. It was definitely hard work.” Kitty (parent, Avonard) accepted that in a changing world Traveller men will have to adapt in order to make a living. She said: “I think it’s very hard for Travelling men, for anyone, to do what you were doing twenty years ago.”

Because of the difficulty in making a living from the traditional trades, and different expectations of life, they do not see them as viable for their children, although they regard the inherited skills as something the children could fall back on if necessary.

Síle (parent, Cnocard) said that while her husband deals in scrap and horses, she did not see this as offering a livelihood for her son when he grows up: “That’s a dying trade of collecting scrap ... when he comes, then, you are talking about ten years away ... I can’t see the opportunities being there.” Although she hopes that her son will not pursue this trade, she is not opposed to it: “If he doesn’t get a degree, which I wish he does, at least he’ll have his own trade that he inherited down through the years.” Deirdre (parent and childcare worker, Liosbeag) said:

If [my son] went in that direction, well, I wouldn’t mind it but at the same time, I wouldn’t like to see him go into that. It’s not that I’d be ashamed of that ‘cause there’s people that’s into that ... but I’d rather see him doing something ... more than what his father did and his grandfather did.

Travellers have traditionally had a preference for self-employment and they have developed expertise in occupations that facilitate this and that do not require a formal education. Gmelch (1979) carried out research with Travellers in the 1970s. She wrote: “most travelling people place a high value on their autonomy and independence. ‘I’m me own boss’ is a common boast” (1979, p.124). Many of the

traditional trades were also facilitated in the past by a nomadic way of life. Gmelch (1979, p.48) described how at the time that she was writing, Travelling men and boys made up a major portion of the bottom tier of Ireland's scrap metal industry:

By collecting discarded metal objects, such as car bodies, pipes, cables and appliances from private homes, petrol stations, small businesses, building sites, institutions and city tips, they recover material which would otherwise be wasted.

Bewley (1974) also discerned similar patterns and he mentioned scrap collecting, laying tarmac and antique dealing as Traveller occupations, adding: "All these occupations suit the Travellers as they do not involve working to routine, but can be done in their own time" (1974, p.25).

Opportunities have changed over the years on this. Pavee Point (2003) noted the negative impact of increasing regulation on Traveller participation in the scrap metal industry. Other traditional Traveller occupations are also under threat. This does not mean that young Travellers will not identify other self-employment opportunities that resonate with the traditional Traveller trades while also reflecting contemporary realities, although this is not what parents envisage.

5.2.3 Traditional way of life is changing

In common with the wider society, Traveller culture is changing and opinions among parents differ concerning particular changes. The various members of the Traveller community have their own ideas about what is or is not acceptable, and they show their approval or disapproval in their interactions with others. Traveller culture is not fixed; like other cultures, it is dynamic and changes over time in response to the various challenges it faces.

5.2.3.1 Preserving a distinctive Traveller way of life

Some parents expressed their disapproval of practices which they interpret as Travellers adopting habits or lifestyles that they associate with the settled population. They want to maintain their distinctive Traveller identity, and this leads them to view Traveller culture as static and to be wary about change. They regard certain behaviours as characteristic of Travellers, and others as characteristic of settled

people. This viewpoint can constrain Traveller parents who want to introduce change into their lives and those of their children.

Sara (parent, Castletown) was disapproving of Travellers who, she considered, acted like settled people. She argued that Travellers who acted in this way would become alienated from their own culture:

They'll lose out on culture. Some of them pretends they are really really a settled person but they're not and they'll act as a settled person but they're not, and they are losing out on that bit of their culture then.

However, she also portrayed the Traveller way of life as in some sense inferior to that of the settled population, when she continued:

I think that's a bit of showing off, from my point of view. I do. I think it is just like putting themselves a little bit higher than you are, when you're not.

Comparisons with settled people were also raised by members of the Seanbaile focus group who were critical of those of their peers who did not, in their estimation, behave in a manner appropriate for Travellers. Lisa (parent, Seanbaile) said:

When [some Travellers] get houses now they think they are country people¹⁸ ... [They] think they are high up and they think they are better than other people, like ... I often met Travellers and I know they would be Travellers, Traveller women ... there with their lipstick and their handbags and their high heels, and they think they're special and let on they don't know you.

Lucy (parent, Lisnashee) explicitly set out what she considered a correct way for a Traveller to behave:

Travellers shouldn't be posh but there's some Travellers out there that really are posh. You'd be afraid to go into their houses in case

¹⁸ Country people is also a term used by Travellers to refer to settled people. Unlike "buffer" it has no derogatory connotation.

your children would ever mess something belonging to them. That's to me – do you want to be proud like the settled people. But as a Traveller, I think you have to be rough and ready, that's it.

Hogg and Vaughan (2011) note that members of stigmatised groups often tend to internalise the negative evaluations of others, leading to an unfavourable self-image and low self-esteem, and some statements by parents suggest this. There is also a lack of recognition of how cultures change over time. Although Lisa's (parent, Seanbaile) comments referred to the fact that it was uncommon in the past for Traveller women to carry handbags, and it was seen as characteristic of settled women, it is now relatively common for Traveller women to carry handbags. This is just one small example of how cultural norms change and evolve over time. It also highlights a concern that Travellers have about the erosion of their culture and traditions.

5.2.3.2 Pressures for and against cultural change

Travellers are not an homogeneous group. Rather, they have different family structures that vary from place to place and this results in different viewpoints from family to family. Tom (parent, Seanbaile) is accepting of change and difference: "There's some Travellers there and they change their ways ... and there's some Travellers that like to keep to the old auld Traveller traditional ways." Tara (parent, Avonard) echoed Tom's comments, saying: "They are still Travellers; they might have a different way of living or they might move away from different things."

Maura (parent, Owenree) spoke of the pressures that individual Travellers experience, of the tightrope they must walk, when they seek to change practices:

When a person is constantly facing persecution ... from every side, from Travellers themselves as well because if they try to do something Travellers themselves turn around and say, 'oh, who do they think they are'.

Bernie (parent, Owenree) described how she had enrolled her daughter in a school which was not one that Travellers had traditionally attended. She said that she was criticised by her family and other Travellers for sending her daughter to what they

regarded as the “posh school” and they claimed that she was taking her daughter away from Travellers. She followed her instinct as she believed that this school would provide the best education for her child. Bernie rationalised her decision to break with local Traveller tradition:

I couldn't ask for a better secondary school, to be honest ... [my daughter] would actually be the first Traveller child to attend the school. I got a bit of criticism ... even from me own family to say why was I sending her over to the posh school and why was I taking her away from Travellers. The fact of the matter was, is, I wasn't taking her away. When I went into the school I explained that she was a Traveller. I sent her to that school purely for educational purposes.

The struggle of trying to comply with what is expected of a member of the Traveller community, by their peers and extended family, while trying to do the best for themselves and their children can be difficult and requires courage to follow through on. A need for change was identified by McDonagh (McDonagh, W. 2000, p.61):

Nowadays, Travellers are concerned about the future of their young people, about what is best for them in today's world, and there is a growing sense that things are changing and what may have been considered good and suitable in the past is perhaps not so good today.

This view is as relevant today as when it was expressed.

5.2.3.3 Hiding identity

Some Travellers seek to hide their identity and to pass as members of the settled community. Since individual Travellers may not be immediately identifiable as such in their interactions with members of the settled community, they face the question of whether, and when, to disclose their Traveller identity. It presents a dilemma for some, who know that if they are assumed to be settled people then their lives will be easier. However this carries a price and it is a difficult choice for those involved. Either way it has repercussions for the individual's self-concept. Parents gave

examples of people they know who felt compelled to hide their Traveller identity, although none admitted to hiding their own identities.

According to Bernie (parent, Owenree), “I wouldn’t blame anyone to be honest with you ... when a person is constantly facing persecution ... from every side.” Maura (parent, Owenree) also supported this viewpoint, adding: “Well would you blame anyone then from hiding when they are facing that the whole time.” Emma (parent, Owenree) added: “So you can see why Travellers don’t want to be recognised, it’s just in order to get through the world. It makes life easier.” Emma’s comment was echoed by Bernie who added: “It’s not that you are ashamed of who you are, it’s just in order to survive the world.”

Síle (parent, Cnocard) was equally understanding. As a Traveller community worker, she had come across examples of Travellers who had felt the need to hide their identity:

They are afraid ... I have come across that in my line of work ... there is Travellers who doesn’t recognise themselves as Travellers ... and school-wise it is the same, because them people experienced so much racism and discrimination and was denied an education and they are afraid to put their children through that as well and they think it is better to hide their identity ... although the teachers in the school know they are Travellers.

Although she is understanding of those who choose to hide their identity, Síle feels that it would impact negatively on them. She said: “I don’t think any positive can come out of hiding your identity because it always comes back to you.” Aine and Kathy (parents, Gleneeshal) also argued that it was unwise to hide one’s identity, with Sandra (parent, Gleneeshal) adding: “You can’t hide who you are.” Bernie (parent, Owenree) gave an example of a Traveller she knew who had gone through the school system and had qualified as a teacher, all the time passing as a settled person. Racist comments from fellow teachers regarding the Traveller children in the school caused her to eventually leave the teaching profession. According to Bernie, this woman “wasn’t strong enough at the time to come out and say, ‘well, look, I’m a

Traveller’,” although she added that the woman was now more confident in this regard and “she’s on the front line saying who she is.”

Bhopal (2011) refers to many Gypsy and Traveller pupils in the UK being unwilling to disclose their identity for fear of racism and bullying. We have known for a long time that denying one’s identity leads to problems and results in the person feeling like a traitor (Allport 1979). Passing as a member of a different ethnic group has costs for the individual. Similarly, Goffman (1963) held that attempts to pass can lead to feelings of isolation, fraud and fear of discovery, while Smart and Wegner (2003) claimed that withholding personal information about oneself can impede the development and maintenance of social relationships, insofar as self-disclosure is considered to be one of the essential ingredients to having meaningful relationships.

5.2.4 Teacher and manager views of Traveller culture

Teachers and managers in Traveller preschools also expressed their views concerning Traveller identity and culture. Although parents are clearly proud of their Traveller identity and want to see it represented in Traveller preschools, teachers and managers seem to be largely unaware that Traveller parents feel like this.

Nuala (teacher, Cuanmara) clearly has a close and respectful relationship with the Traveller parents. Sally, a mother whose child attended Nuala’s preschool, spoke highly of the respect that Nuala has for Travellers. However, while Sally spoke of her pride in being a Traveller, Nuala did not appear to be fully aware of the importance of this part of Sally’s identity. Nuala gave her view of Traveller culture:

Traveller culture to them is not something that they have; they are not very strong on it ... a lot of them don’t particularly want it. I suppose they are not that proud of the Traveller culture at the moment... and there are always going to be negative things about Travellers and it wasn’t something that they celebrate.

Yet, Sally had previously approached Nuala, seeking her help to create a float representing Travellers for the following St. Patrick’s Day Parade. This explicit visual expression of pride did not have an impact on Nuala to the extent that she might reassess her opinion of Travellers as “ashamed of being Travellers.” Nuala

offered the view that Travellers are in a process of development, but that they are “not there yet.”

Carmel, the manager of the Avonard preschool, had similar views to Nuala. She spoke of Travellers moving away from their culture and she said: “I’m not so sure about Traveller culture here among these parents. I have never heard them talking about Traveller culture.” Yet, at a focus group of these parents they spoke proudly of their Traveller identity and Traveller ways. Carmel’s views seemed at odds with the parents’ expressed views. She said: “I don’t think they want to be too recognised any more as Travellers.”

Lily, manager of the Cnocard preschool, does not hold this view. The Cnocard parents had spoken confidently and proudly of their culture in individual interviews and Lily was clearly sensitive to the views of parents and she spoke of the need for those working with Travellers to accept Travellers as an ethnic group. The parents were involved with management and decision-making in this preschool. Lily described how the teacher sought approval and information regarding the representation of Traveller culture within the preschool. She respected the input from parents on cultural issues, saying: “Without the parents we wouldn’t know.”

Like Lily, Triona (teacher, Lisnashee) did recognise the pride that Travellers have in their Traveller identity. She spoke of how this was apparent, particularly at weddings and funerals, and how she included this within the preschool:

We celebrate ... We’d have a special day. They’d bring in their own video, their weddings and their christenings and all that. We’d have everything there to do with them. Last week there we had all to do with the different things they sent in. They love that ... it’s great.

Triona also recognised the pride that parents of the children in her preschool have in their Traveller identity: “They’d never say they weren’t Travellers, never, never! They’ll tell you they’re Travellers. Oh, yes, they’ll never hide it.”

Michelle (manager, Carraigmore) has regular contact with Traveller parents and she described her preschool as having a “very strong value base here as well, around

equality and meeting people's needs." She expressed her views on the attitudes of the parents to Traveller culture:

I think they know there might be a slight bit of rebellion against their own culture and maybe people's perceptions of the Traveller culture. That's what they may be rebelling against.

Although the teachers and managers are clearly well-meaning, some are not aware of the extent to which parents value Traveller identity and culture. Believing that they already know the parents' views, they do not appreciate the need to engage parents in dialogue. However, they view Travellers through a settled lens, and so there was divergence between their views and those of parents.

5.3 Parents have little to show from their own schooling

Parents spoke of their own experiences at school which left them feeling hurt and betrayed and with little achievement. According to John (parent, Cnocard):

I went to school until I was twelve or thirteen. I left because I couldn't be bothered with it and I was the only Traveller child sitting at school and I was isolated and I had no friends in it, so, and then the teacher hadn't much time for me so I ended up leaving.

This quotation encapsulates many aspects of the school experiences of the parents. School had felt like an alien place for John, and he left in order to escape from the isolation and the sense of not belonging. Traveller children entered schools where the teachers, pupils and the school environment represented the settled population, and where there was no recognition of Traveller culture.

Parents in the study reported that their own childhood experience of school had been neither happy nor successful. Some had attended school regularly, being supported by their own parents who wanted them to get the education which they themselves had not received. Others spent just a short time in school in order to make their First Holy Communion and Confirmation, which had been a priority for their parents. Generally, they had left school, either of their own accord or at their parents' behest, at between twelve and fourteen years of age. A few had transferred to second level

but none had stayed for long. School was not welcoming and difficulties arose because of the cultural differences between themselves and the settled people, whether teachers or other children. The limited schooling of Travellers is seen in the 2011 census (Central Statistics Office 2012) which shows that 81% of Travellers aged 35–54, whose full-time education had ceased, were educated to primary level or less. This grouping would include most of the parents in the study.

5.3.1 Effects of nomadism on participation

Many parents had been enrolled in school only for short periods. When they were enrolled, their attendance and participation tended to be poor and they now have little to show for their time in school.

A nomadic way of life, by which their families moved from place to place, influenced the extent to which the children could participate in the school system.¹⁹

Deirdre (parent and childcare worker, Liosbeag) attended school for a short time and left without being able to read and write. Deirdre's family fitted into Category C as defined by the Commission on Itinerancy (Government of Ireland 1963); they moved around a lot and there was no provision in the education system to ensure that a nomadic Traveller child like Deirdre could follow an educational programme. Nonetheless, it has always been important for Travellers that their children receive the sacraments and they enrol them in schools to facilitate this²⁰. Deirdre recalled:

When we were growing up there was no such thing as education for me. My father and mother was all the time moving around and into school just to make the First Holy Communion and Confirmation ...
I'd say for all my schools they sent me for two years, in and out.

¹⁹ The Commission on Itinerancy (Government of Ireland, 1963) identified three categories of Traveller family. Category A families more or less stayed in one place. Category B families travelled in a small circuit, while families in Category C travelled in a wide circuit. The Commission envisaged provision for Categories A and B, but stated that little could be done for children in Category C. The best hope lay in convincing the parents to limit their movements.

²⁰ Dwyer (1974) wrote that until the mid 1960s very few Traveller children attended school apart from the few weeks in early summer when they attended in order to prepare for First Holy Communion and Confirmation.

Josie (parent, Avonard) also believed that she missed out on school because of family nomadism. She contrasted her pattern of education with that of Traveller children today:

People don't travel around so much now. The younger ones have a better chance than we had years ago. We were always moving from one place to another. Our generation had no education at all. I can't read or write.

Other parents had similar stories. Chrissie (parent, Avonard) told of how her family had "moved around a lot" during her childhood. Annie (parent, Seanbaile) explained how she had left school at age thirteen: "I couldn't get on with the waiting at school, travelling around you didn't go to secondary school." Similarly, Lisa (parent, Seanbaile) recalled that she had only started school at age eleven, "to make me Holy Communion and Confirmation" and she had finished by the time she was "eleven and a half." She said: "It wasn't my fault. I loved school. My parents didn't allow me to go." She said that she would have liked to have continued at school because "there's a lot of books I'd love reading." She spoke poignantly of how her lack of literacy skills affected her ability to support her children in school: "The thing is, I can't help my kids now with homework or nothing." Hannah (parent, Seanbaile) told of how she had left school early: "I was close to twelve. I wasn't allowed to go to school." When these parents spoke of their infrequent school attendance several referred to the fact that it was not their decision and that later they became aware of the disadvantages they experienced because of a lack of education.

5.3.1.2 Some stopped travelling for the school year

It was not the case that all of the families had moved around so much. Bernie's (parent, Owenree) parents were convinced that education would be beneficial for their children and they chose to settle in one place during the school year. This would place her family in Category A, as set out by the Commission on Itinerancy (Government of Ireland 1963). Bernie said:

My parents were very adamant because they weren't able to read and write themselves and they wanted to make sure that we did. Now, we

didn't travel around, we travelled around in the summer ... we went to school every day.

Despite this commitment by her parents, Bernie reported that neither she nor her siblings had received an adequate education: "Now, we were a family of seven. How come the seven of us got the same education and only two of us were able to read and write?" She expressed anger that the effort made by her parents to send their children to school did not bring the hoped for benefit. Sally's (parent, Cuanmara) parents had also tried to ensure that their children received an education: "My mother made sure I was in school every day." However, Sally dropped out of school at age twelve after making her Confirmation. She said: "I didn't get an education anyway. I didn't want to go back myself." Although, according to her own account, she wanted to leave when she was twelve, she now regretted this. She said: "I never got an education ... I can barely write my name now." Sally expressed the hope that her children will receive an adequate education.

5.3.1.3 Regrets for lack of schooling

Leaving school early, for whatever reason and with little accomplished, is now a source of regret for the parents. For Grace (parent, Seanbaile), the decision to finish school early had been her own, although she later regretted this: "I was dying to leave. I was sorry then. I didn't get no Junior Cert, no Leaving Cert or nothing. Not much I can do. You're just stuck."

John (parent, Cnocard) said that he left school at age thirteen as his parents saw more value in educating him in the traditional Traveller trades than in sending him to school. While they believed that this would be more beneficial for him, John felt that this had been a mistake even though school had been an unhappy experience for him. He went back to education in his twenties but was aware of the gap between him and his settled peers:

You know when you are a Traveller kid and your parents don't see the value in [schooling], not through their fault ... I can realise what my parents thought, 'no value ... you have to learn how to gather scrap, you have to learn how to sell stuff' ... I've done all that as well but on the other hand I'm sorry now when I look back on your life

and you say I should have gone through that because you are at the stage where people come out at twenty or twenty-three with diplomas ... you've missed that part of life.

Like Grace and John, Lucy (parent, Lisnashee) was conscious of the disadvantages of having left school early and now feels that it is too late to remedy this and that her options are limited. Lucy left school at age fourteen after making her Confirmation as her mother was diagnosed with cancer and Lucy and her sisters took care of her. She felt a sense of loss at her own lack of schooling and she said that she was determined that her children would succeed at school. Although she learned to read and write, she believes that an inadequate education has restricted her opportunities: "I now feel that I'm just waiting on a FÁS scheme²¹ but I would rather be waiting on a better job ... I'd like to be higher up than I am."

Apart from their own individual experiences, parents were aware that generally, Travellers had achieved very poorly within the education system. Annie (parent, Seanbaile) said: "There's a lot of Travellers that didn't get an education... that can't read or write." Emma (parent, Owenree) said that Travellers were hugely disadvantaged educationally compared with settled people:

With a lot of Travellers, the parents, the older generation, they wouldn't be able to read or write so the settled people have an advantage above Travellers because they are well able to read and write ... So we're starting from zero and we're down, so you have to come along and try and lift that.

Regardless of their reasons for leaving, as adults these parents have come to realise the educational gap between themselves and their settled peers and they regret not having achieved more from their schooling. They perceive a value in education for providing opportunities and choice and they know that they have lost out on this.

5.3.2 Life in the classroom: separation and bullying

Some parents were educated in separate Traveller classes and others were in classrooms with settled children. Either way, they tended to keep to themselves.

²¹ FÁS is a government body that operates training and employment schemes.

Their position in school replicated that of Travellers in the wider society, namely, as the outsider, ‘the other’. School was somewhat easier for those who had fellow Traveller children with them in class than for those who were the only Traveller child among a class of settled children. Almost all left school with little to show for their time there.

5.3.2.1 Separate classes

Segregated special classes and playtimes for Traveller children were a common feature of education for Travellers in the 1970s and 1980s, although by the 1990s the policy was for integration (NCCRI 1997). Traveller children in the separate classes were isolated from the school community. Bernie (parent, Owenree) described an aspect of this separation: “When my husband went to school ... there was a white line as well [in the playground]... they weren’t allowed to pass over this white line.” The white line in the playground was a powerful visual illustration of the segregated classes.

Síle (parent, Cnocard) spoke of her brother’s education in a special mixed-age class for Traveller children, which she felt was inappropriate²²:

My oldest brother started school, and he was in with his uncles [of] eleven [and] twelve ... he was only four ... school failed them. My three brothers can’t read or write.

The separate classes were especially resented by Travellers. They reinforced their implied inferior position in society. When they were introduced they were seen as a short-term measure to bridge an educational gap (Department of Education 1970, Bewley 1974), but they became a form of educational apartheid. An intervention designed to help only served to isolate the Traveller children further. Inclusion is now a core principle of Traveller education policy and segregated provision is no longer acceptable (Department of Education and Science 2006a).

²² *Committee Report: Educational Facilities for the Children of Itinerants* (Department of Education, 1970) set out details of the Department’s intentions in regard to special classes.

5.3.2.2 Difficulties of being the only Traveller in a mainstream class

Most of the parents had been educated in mainstream classrooms, although their experience of school was nonetheless different from that of their settled classmates.

Both Cáit (parent, Cnocard) and Lucy (parent, Lisnashee) were the only Travellers in their mainstream classes in school and both told stories of discrimination and of being subjected to negative stereotyping. Cáit left second level school after six months because she could not tolerate the name calling, taunting and bullying (Cáit's experience is set out under the heading of name-calling and bullying below). Lucy's school experiences left a deep scar:

The way I was treated and knowing that I was a Traveller, and knowing that I was different for years when I was in school ... If you are a Traveller, sometimes, that's when the bullying starts. For years I have been bullied in school over being a Traveller, and it's like, when anything goes missing, they look at you, you took it because you're a Traveller.

Lucy was of the opinion that, had she not been identified as a Traveller in school, she would not have had such a difficult time:

5.3.2.3 Advantage of being with other Travellers in mainstream class

School seems to have been a somewhat easier experience for those who were among other Traveller children in their classrooms. This, however, did not mean that they acquired a better education. Sally (parent, Cuanmara) said:

I know what I done when I was at school. There was six or seven of us Travelling girls together mixed in with ... the settled community. There was bullying going around; there was no interest, no work. So I learned through my mistake.

Síle (parent, Cnocard) also found that being with other Traveller children in school provided some protection:

There was a good crowd of us in school and in this area, a lot of Traveller children in that particular school and we didn't get bullied because there were so many of us in it.

However, while she had the support of the other Traveller children, school was still an alien place: "We seemed to be isolated to ourselves, or if it was a basketball day, you were left last at the back."

Another perspective on the classroom experience of Traveller children was provided by Bobby, a settled woman who attended a city co-educational primary school in the 1980s with a small number of Traveller children in her class:

I remember in our class there was a 'bold table' by the door. If you were bold you had to sit at this table. When the Travellers were in the class that was the table they sat at. So really, what happened was if you were bold you were punished by being sent to sit at the bold table with the Travellers ... That just doesn't seem right.

She also described being afraid of the Traveller children although, on reflection, she could find no justification for this.

5.3.2.4 Name-calling and bullying

Children from minority groups commonly experience name-calling and bullying, and it is no different for Travellers (Lloyd and Stead 2001). Lloyd and Stead found that teachers seemed unaware of the scale of the abuse experienced by Traveller children.

Travellers in the study were called derogatory names by the settled children in their classes. Hannah (parent, Seanbaile) was emphatic when she referred to this: "Years ago when you'd be going to school, Jesus, it was hurtful to be called names." Tom (parent, Seanbaile) also referred to name-calling, and spoke of how he had dealt with it: "You'd be called names and then you might go over and hit this fellow a slap and you'd be the wan that would be in trouble." Annie (parent, Seanbaile) identified with this, referring to the unfairness with which she felt that the teacher had dealt with such incidents: "And they're let off with nothing." Tom dealt with the name-calling as he had been taught at home, coping with it himself without involving the teacher.

This corresponds to research elsewhere which shows that Traveller children are encouraged by family to stand up for themselves in such situations (Derrington, 2007). Possibly because of the prevalent attitude to Travellers, Tom was regarded as the aggressor and was instantly punished rather than having the incident dealt with in an even-handed manner. Hannah (parent, Seanbaile) agreed that the Traveller was blamed no matter who was at fault. The alienation that the Traveller children felt was reinforced by this type of experience.

Cáit (parent, Cnocard) recalled how her classmates had made second level school intolerable, so that she felt that her only option was to leave after six months:

My parents wanted me to go to school but because of the discrimination that there was in secondary school, I left after six months of secondary school ... I just couldn't stick it. I was really good at school. I was never in trouble, I was never sent home ... They used to call me knacker²³, 'you're a dirty gypsy', 'go wash yourself'.

The comments were made by both boys and girls in her class, although she recalled particularly the taunts of one girl she remembered by name:

'You're a dirty knacker, go home and wash yourself. You have nits in your hair'. I'd say, 'I don't have nits in my hair'. We got washed every night of the week ... I felt horrible ... it doesn't matter how much you wash yourself or keep your hair clean in this place ... they wouldn't sit beside me and I was, like, 'oh please, you're embarrassing me', like, it was horrible.

The effect of bullying and name-calling was dramatic for Cáit, resulting in her dropping out of second level school when she was just thirteen. She felt that she could not go back even though her parents tried to persuade her. The discrimination and prejudice against Travellers that prevailed in the wider society (Mac Gréil 1977, 1996, 2011) was manifest in school, she felt, in the taunts of her classmates, so that she had found second level school intolerable.

²³ Knacker is a derogatory term used by some people to refer to Travellers. Travellers find it very offensive.

Name-calling isolates children and brings unwanted attention to them. Devine *et al.* (2008) noted how name-calling is used by some children to assert their status, and found that Traveller pupils were more consistently on the receiving end of such name-calling than others. Most children experience some negative name-calling, but for the worst affected it is strongly associated with physical bullying and its effects last into adulthood (Crozier and Skliopidou 2002). Because of the negative stereotypes of Travellers, this can be especially damaging. For example, all children in Lloyd and Stead's (2001) study conducted with Gypsy Traveller children in Scotland experienced constant name-calling and harassment in school, yet the schools did not appear to appreciate its scale. Where they did acknowledge name-calling, it was seen as the general give and take of school life.

Schools seemed not to acknowledge the historical and cultural context of prejudice against Travellers. Myers *et al.* (2010) also found that all the parents they interviewed said that name-calling and bullying remains a problem in schools, reflecting the prejudice that Travellers experience in wider society.

5.3.2.5 Little mention of Traveller culture

Traveller culture was rarely mentioned in the classroom, and when it was it was not always a positive experience. While Lucy (parent, Lisnashee) was proud of her Traveller identity, her school experiences left her with a desire to blend in with settled people. She recalled her embarrassment when a teacher addressed her class about the topic of Travellers:

They used to do that in school to me, and all the kids would be looking at me and I was so down and feel so hurt and I'd go back to my mother and father and tell them ... They wouldn't like it really, like, either ... why was everyone looking at me because I was no different to the rest of them to be honest! ... You feel more embarrassed when you know that there's a difference between settled people and Travellers.

As a result of her own experiences, she would prefer that her children not be explicitly identified as Travellers in the school. She said: "I'd like them to be reared

up as normal, like, mixing in with the settled people ... I'd like them all in one, if you know what I mean."

5.3.2.6 School as an alienating place for Travellers

Traveller families sent their children to school in the belief that they would receive an education. However, school was the domain of the settled people and the inequality in the relationship between settled people and Travellers in the wider society was reflected in schools. Writing in 1991, Mac Aonghusa (1991, p.110) referred to the alienation that Traveller children experienced in school:

We alienate our Traveller pupils by rejecting ... everything that distinguishes them from us ... There is no surer way to damage a child's self-image than to ignore his very existence.

Traveller children found themselves isolated and treated differently by staff and by their fellow pupils. There was no positive regard for the Traveller culture or way of life.

5.3.3 Teacher expectations

Research highlights the effect of low teacher expectations on children's behaviour and achievements. Students from minority cultures are at particular risk in this regard (Van den Bergh *et al.* 2010). Looking back on their own schooldays, parents in the study felt that they had been treated unfairly and that they had lost out on an education and the opportunities this would have provided. They were disappointed with their lack of school success. They believed that the teachers did not expect as much from them as from their settled classmates.

5.3.3.1 Low teacher expectations

The parents attributed their lack of school success, in part, to the low expectations of the teachers. According to Neasa (parent, Castletown): "We were normally put in the back of the class and if there was a maths test, say, she'd (teacher) say you didn't have to do it." The children had accepted and even welcomed this situation at the time, but they came to realise as adults that this treatment had contributed to their lack of school achievement.

Sally (parent, Cuanmara) said that she should have told her parents that she was not asked to do the work that the settled children did. She described her typical school day:

When we'd go into the school at nine in the morning the first thing I'd be sitting on my chair at my table, well all day through, I could have colours and a piece of paper... I felt out. I felt I wasn't wanted.

When she recalled her experience, she said she felt "very hurt and disappointed that I didn't get an education. Just if it was to read and write and that in itself, even just." Sally had since taught herself basic reading with the help of magazines: "I'll try to put word and word together."

This story of being put at the back of the class and allowed to colour pictures was echoed by others. Cáit (parent, Cnocard) cited the example of her husband who, she said, had been put colouring at the back of the class. He was now thirty and could not read or write. At the time he had not minded, but later he had realised his loss. His mother had trusted the school to educate her children but she later thought that she should have been more involved²⁴.

5.3.3.2 Impact of positive teacher expectations

Parents told how they regretted that they had not been challenged or "pushed" by the teachers when they were at school. Recalling her time in primary school, Bernie (parent, Owenree) said that she had not realised that she was not being challenged:

I thought I was a special child, I thought I was great altogether, they gave me, like you know, blank pages and crayons and that went through primary school, right. I left primary school unable to read and write.

Bernie had a different experience at second level school where the teachers took an interest in her and she did learn. She said that when more was expected of her, she was able to rise to the challenge.

²⁴ This echoes the finding of Lareau (2011) in relation to working class parents who tended to let educators lead the way, as they did not have the experience of education themselves to take control. They assumed that by sending their children to school that they would become educated.

5.3.3.3 Low expectations: self-fulfilling prophecy

Dwyer (1974, p.97) described the reality for Traveller children in classrooms in the 1970s:

There are many cases ... up and down the country – Travelling children sitting at the back of crowded classrooms, their names ticked in the register but learning little or nothing.

She foretold that Traveller children would seek to escape this environment of boredom and frustration, that their attendance would become spasmodic and that they would leave school early, illiterate and with little of value from their time in school. This was how it turned out.

The role of teacher expectations in children's school success is well established (Rosenthal and Jacobson 1968, Rist 1970, Robinson 1995, Van den Bergh *et al.* 2010). Teacher expectations act as a self-fulfilling prophecy: low expectations lead to poor performance, while high expectations can raise performance levels. The view of Travellers as a people in deficit, which prevailed in the wider society, continued in the classrooms. Little was expected of the Traveller children in school and they achieved little. This is not just of historical significance because, as will be seen in the next section, parents believed that teachers continued to have low expectations for Traveller children.

5.4 Parents value schooling for their children

Despite their own unsatisfactory experiences of schooling, parents expressed strong support for education and they wanted school success for their children.

5.4.1 Parents want schooling that will lead to employment

Contrary to what Hamilton *et al.* (2007, p.7) refer to as “the pernicious view that Travellers do not want to be educated”, the parents in the study wanted not only that their children should be able to read and write, but that they should go all the way through the school system, taking school examinations and coming out with an education equal to that of their settled peers and which prepared them for employment.

Sally (parent, Cuanmara) expressed what she wanted for her children thus:

I would love my children to get educated, get exams and get a nice job ... They should be asked as much as a settled child. The Travelling child should be in the same way as the settled.

Maeve (parent, Liosbeag) had a similar aspiration for her children: "I'd like to see them doing all the secondary school ... 'cause I never done all mine ... their father didn't have any either, so he'd like to see them going further." Deirdre (parent and childcare worker, Liosbeag) also wanted this for her children: "Oh, guaranteed, I want mine to go on and make something of themselves." Likewise Brigid (parent, Avonard) wanted her children to "go all the way" and finish school. Edel (parent, Avonard) commented on the value of schooling for getting a job. She wanted her children to, as she put it: "Go all through their schooling ... [and] to do something they'd get from their schooling. It's getting time now, like, everyone needs an education."

Sara's (parent, Castletown) daughter had just completed Senior Infants, but Sara and her husband were already making plans for the remainder of her schooling. They both wanted her to complete "Junior Cert, Leaving Cert, the whole lot!" Sara continued:

I know not many Travellers will keep pushing their child, but us ourselves, we are definitely concentrating on [our daughter] going the whole way into it ... I'd like to see her get a good job ... I'd like to see her hairdressing, childminding or working in a crèche.

Lisa (parent, Seanbaile) linked her own lack of education with her hopes for her children: "I'd like them to do something with their lives, not like me now. I didn't go to school and I got no education."

Deirdre (parent and childcare worker, Liosbeag) was proud of her son's progress in education, and his ambition to be an accountant:

He'd like to be an accountance and he was saying that he's very good at accountance work. Now, I haven't got a clue what

accountance is. I'm just going by him. He said he'd love to be an accountance ... I feel great about that, because when we were growing up there was no such thing as education for me.

Hannah (parent, Seanbaile) also wanted her children to complete second level schooling: "It would be nice to see your children going along, right, doing their Leaving Cert, the whole lot, getting something out of it in the end."

Bernie (parent, Owenree) saw education as a capital that she wanted for her children, arguing:

I think education is the key to power. I believe that if one generation of Travellers get off the ground in terms of education we'll never look back after that. We'll get our Travellers into positions where they'll be guards, solicitors, whatever and that's when the real change is going to happen for Travellers, and it's through education.

All of the parents wanted their children to go to school, sit examinations and come out equipped to get jobs that would provide them with an income. This resonates with Lareau's (2011) finding that all parents value educational success.

Parents were explicit in their support for schooling, wanting their children to go "all the way" through the education system. This is consistent with the results of other research (Bhopal 2004, Hamilton *et al.* 2007) where some of the parents had similar aspirations. However, these studies also recorded that some parents were not convinced of the need for an academic education, and while they wanted literacy and numeracy, they felt that a practical 'hands on' curriculum would be more appropriate for their children (Bhopal 2004, Hamilton *et al.* 2007), or that a basic level of education would be sufficient (Myers *et al.* 2010). On the contrary, parents in this study wanted their children to study the same curriculum as the settled children and to complete second level. Bernie's (parent, Owenree) comment on education as the key to power went further than the other parents who wanted education that would lead to employment for their children. Bernie wanted this, but she also viewed the benefits of education as a capital that would enable Travellers to access positions of power, status and control in society, positions that are currently denied them.

An important issue for parents in other studies (e.g. Bhopal, 2004) was the threat of erosion to the culture by attendance at second level school, where the children would be exposed to bad influences. O'Hanlon and Holmes (2004, p.29) described this worry in relation to Traveller parents in the UK:

Secondary school is seen by many parents as a threat to their cultural and moral codes and practices. Fears of boy and girl contact, sex and drugs education ... all conspire towards parents seeing secondary schooling as a potential eroding influence on their young people's commitment to the continuing traditions and way of life.

This fear of cultural erosion arose in relation to attendance at third level by the Seanbaile group of parents but it was not an issue in relation to participation in second level school for any of the parents in this study.

5.4.2 Traveller parents desire educational equality

Equality is a multifaceted concept, involving, for example, equality of access, equality of participation and equality of outcome (Lodge and Lynch 2002). Although the past two decades have seen improved participation of Travellers in the education system, equality of educational outcomes is not yet a reality for the Traveller community.

Improvements in participation are significant, with the vast majority of Traveller pupils now transferring to second level school (Department of Education and Science 2006a). However, there are still major problems in relation to retention at second level and the majority of Traveller pupils fail to complete senior cycle post-primary education, with most completing their full-time education by the age of fifteen (Pavee Point 2013).

Parents were aware that Traveller children were not achieving in school to the same extent as settled children, and they wanted parity. Bernie (parent, Owenree) said:

Traveller children at the minute are not achieving to the same extent as settled children are and I think that needs to be addressed. There needs to be some kind of system in place to monitor Traveller

education ... We need to see our children achieving the same as the settled, get the qualifications, finish school.

Emma (parent, Owenree) echoed this:

Some of the teachers have no interest ... they are supposed to be getting the same education but yet the Traveller children is coming out with a different education.

While she suggested here that teacher interest was at fault, Emma also acknowledged that the issue was more complicated: “I think we should be trying to see why is Travelling children leaving school with a less standard than the settled community.”

John (parent, Cnocard) was explicit in calling for his children to get an education equal to their settled peers:

I hope they get an adequate education, that they come out educated at the end after their term at school. That they don't come out with a lesser degree of education than the settled kids. So I'll be looking for some kind of equality of education.

Parents are deeply concerned that their children are not achieving to the same extent as their settled peers and they seek equality for their children.

5.4.3 Problems of the past persist

Many of the problems that the parents had experienced in relation to their own schooling are still causing difficulties for their children. They mentioned in particular the issue of low teacher expectations for their children and the high incidence of bullying and racist name-calling that their children endured.

5.4.3.1 Low teacher expectations a factor

Parents believe that teachers have low expectations for their children, and that they do not ‘push’ them sufficiently. This resonates with their own school experiences.

Because of the parents’ reliance on the teachers and schools to help ensure educational success for their children, they are sensitive to the attitudes of teachers,

and how these attitudes could work in a positive or negative way. Many feel that their children are not ‘pushed’ sufficiently by the teachers, and that if they were ‘pushed’ they would achieve more. Some spoke of the advantageous treatment that they thought the settled children received compared with their own children. Some believe that teachers do not treat their children fairly, or do not treat them as well as their settled peers, or that teacher expectations for their children are low.

John (parent, Cnocard) suggested that lack of success for Traveller children is due to low expectations and lack of interest on behalf of some teachers:

I think basically what happens is ... low expectation for Traveller children. I’m not saying all teachers is the same, but there is some schools with lower expectations for Traveller children. They are thinking, ‘they are not going to go long here anyway so there’s no point in educating them’.

Cáit (parent, Cnocard) expressed a similar view. Her ambition for her son is that he would become a guard (policeman). However, she said: “I think teachers don’t expect Travellers to do well. They are not pushed to do well.” Maura (parent, Owenree) also said: “Traveller children are not being pushed”. Similarly, Aine (parent, Gleneeshal) said: “I think Traveller children don’t do well in school because there isn’t proper teaching for them.” This was similar to Tara’s (parent, Avonard) perception that the school her niece had attended “didn’t really have much time for her” because they presumed she would drop out. Tara said:

I’ve a niece. She’s only after finishing her Leaving Cert now ... but she’s training now to be a social worker. The whole way through, before she went to do her Junior Cert, the school didn’t really have much time for her, ‘cause they thought the whole time ‘she’s going to drop out now, she’s dropping out, she’s dropping out’. They never had any time for her till she finished her Leaving Cert and awful negative things said.

Maisie (parent, Castletown) spoke of her son’s difficulties with his homework. She could not support him with them because of her own lack of literacy. She said: “he

doesn't mind [that he cannot complete his homework] because his teacher doesn't care."

The reality of low expectations of teachers for their Traveller pupils is borne out by the Inspectors Report (Department of Education and Science, 2005d, p.20):

The Inspectors observed that [Traveller] pupils were frequently assigned low level tasks that did not challenge and extend them sufficiently. Many pupils did not engage in whole-class activities, especially in such areas as history, geography or science.

The link between teacher expectations and achievement has been well established. At the heart of it is a self-fulfilling prophecy. Rosenthal named two related effects, the Golem effect and the Pygmalion effect (Rosenthal and Jacobson 1968, Babad, Inbar and Rosenthal 1982). The Golem effect states that when low expectations are placed on a person, achievement will be poor. In this regard, Traveller pupils are trapped in a vicious cycle where low expectations lead to low achievement, which informs teacher expectations and which in turn produce low achievement. This cycle must be broken, by educating teachers to harness a Pygmalion effect, by which higher expectations can lead to improved achievement. Research indicating that preservice teachers in Ireland tend to believe that Travellers value education less than others (Leavy 2005) also provides a challenge for equitable education for Travellers. There is a need for culturally responsive teaching (Ladson-Billings 1995, Burtonport 2002, Causton-Theoharis *et al.* 2008) which respects Traveller culture and feeds positive expectations for Traveller pupils.

5.4.3.2 Travellers still experiencing prejudice and name-calling

Parents told how their children continue to experience the prejudice and name-calling that they themselves had experienced when they attended school. The parents empathise with their children and worry that these experiences will turn them against school and result in their leaving without qualifications. According to Emma (parent, Owenree):

Travellers ... want their children to go further [in education], but yet when they get there, there's a big barrier ... the boys and girls are

getting sick of school because of the way they are being treated and then they have no interest in school and then they leave it ... There is discrimination going on. I mean, this thing of being called knacker ... and when they go in to school it does go on.

Maura (parent, Owenree) corroborated this claim, and commented:

If they're facing it in school, if they are called knackers, the first word that's said is the same word that was said when we were in school. 'Names won't hurt you' – that's taught to the children inside in school. Well know that it is hurting you if you're called 'knacker'.

Maura, referring to her children in second level school, continued: "It's worse as they get older as they realise it more ... I think it's worse for boys anyway." Chrissie (parent, Avonard) made a similar point: "I've a few children now going to the big school ... When they went into the big school 'twas then they started having the problems."

Emma (parent, Owenree) believed that teacher attitudes influenced those of the settled children:

If you have a teacher that doesn't like Travellers, it can affect how she speaks to the child and how she acts with the child. ... and the other children then kind of picks up on how the teacher is approaching this child, so it's down to the teacher.

Eva (parent, Avonard) spoke of how she advised her child to deal with the issue of name-calling:

My little one ... she's twelve, she was telling me there this morning that some of the rest of the children in her school was calling her a knacker, do you know what I mean. And I told her, like, to go up to the teacher and explain to the teacher, for to tell the teacher, like, what they were calling her. She doesn't like it; do you know what I mean?

Children cannot be expected to thrive in an environment where they are subject to name-calling and bullying. Parents were hurt and deeply concerned for their children when they spoke of this issue. The widespread nature of the problem suggests that it is not taken seriously by schools. There is a belief that schools show greater sensitivity to racist name-calling against other minority groups (Myers *et al.* 2010). Schools need to better appreciate the corrosive effect of name-calling and take it more seriously. Name-calling and bullying are widely acknowledged as major disincentives to educational attainment for Travellers (Lloyd and Stead 2001, Hamilton *et al.* 2007, Foster and Norton 2010).

5.4.4 Support their children in school

Parents believe that, in addition to sending their children to school, they also have a role in supporting them to achieve school success. They do this to the best of their ability.

Lucy (parent, Lisnashee) is determined that her sons will go all the way through school, and to this end she said: “I’ll make sure to put them on that path.” In relation to her older son in primary school, she said: “He’ll go to school and, say, higher education or whatever,” adding that she would always seek any help and advice necessary in the pursuit of her goal of success for her sons.

Hannah (parent, Seanbaile), referring to her children’s schooling, said that “it’s up to the parents to push them,” a belief that would resonate with John (parent, Cnocard), who said in relation to his children’s education:

I’m on top of it and me and the wife keep a close eye on the children’s progress at school, around what they are doing, around the homework they have, and stuff like that and what it involves.

Some parents spoke of helping their younger children with homework, and particularly with their reading. Josie (parent, Avonard) said: “We do the paired reading with them.” Sara (parent, Castletown) said: “I often sat down to do her reading with her, no problem ... often spent an hour doing her reading with her.” Emma (parent, Owenree) also supported her children with their homework, but she found this difficult as her children grew older: “There’s a lot we’d be able to help

with, but then there's a lot of new stuff that's come in we wouldn't have a clue ... different age groups, too, it's hard." Her limited education affected her ability to continue to provide support for her children.

5.4.4.1 Concerned and advocating for their children

Traveller parents identify the ways in which Traveller children can be marginalised: low teacher expectations, bullying, name-calling and being blamed unfairly. While they want their children to achieve in school, another concern is to help them to survive it. They offer emotional and practical support to their children in their journey through school.

Sally (parent, Cuanmara) was worried about her daughter who was not making progress, a worry that was intensified by Sally's own lack of education. She explained that her daughter was almost eight and had recently been referred for assessment due to her lack of progress:

I'm under a lot of stress with that because I never got an education ...
My heart goes out to my child for when she comes back she says,
'Mommy, I can't do the stuff the other kids are doing.' She cries.

Sally had gone to the school to talk with the teacher about her daughter's progress, and she said, "I'm hoping for the best for my kids because I never got an education and my husband didn't either."

Emma (parent, Owenree) supported her son when he had difficulties with a particular teacher:

What I said is. 'Don't give her the satisfaction, go in there and do your best' but like he was coming home and he was saying, 'but how can you do your best if she's on your back every minute of the day?'

Deirdre (parent and childcare worker, Liosbeag) spoke of her concern about a need to advocate for her daughter in relation to a particular teacher:

I reckon she doesn't like Travellers, to be honest. Now, I have a daughter and she's absolutely terrified in case she gets her in

September ... if she does get her I'm going to have to go in and talk ... she has a year to go [in primary school] and I think it spoils her for [second level school].

Deirdre elaborated on how she supported her children:

You learn them to be what they are, accept what they are, and that's it. Proud of what they are. You also learn them for to respect other people. You are also learning them as well for to give their opinion and speak up and not be shy.

These parents provided emotional support to build their children's confidence to help them cope with school and life.

5.4.4.2 Call for enforcement of school attendance

Not only do they support education for their own children, but several parents expressed explicit support for the enforcement of school-attendance laws. John (parent, Cnocard) expressed a belief that Travellers who, like himself, did not receive an adequate education were wronged by the system:

They were denied their education and it's through the government's fault even if the Traveller parents wasn't sending their children. Why was there not the liaison person to go out there and go summons the father and mother and say 'the children have to go to school whether you like it or not'?

Other parents also support stronger action to enforce school attendance. Sara (parent, Castletown) welcomed the fact that school attendance is now taken more seriously by the authorities than when she was a child: "It's the best thing that ever happened," while Frank (parent, Seanbaile) said:

If I got the chance again, I wouldn't have left ... this new rule that they are bringing out now about kids not going to school. I think it's great. You have to send your kids to school.²⁵

²⁵ The reference here is to the Education Welfare Act 2000.

Parents support their children's schooling, encouraging them with their homework and advocating for them with their teachers. Beyond their commitment to their own children, they see access to education as a right, as shown in their support for stricter enforcement of attendance regulations. They hold the authorities largely responsible for past experiences of neglect in this area.

They also provide emotional support for their children, offering praise and a listening ear. They see themselves as advocates for their children's education and they work hard to try to help them and to intervene on their behalf. O'Brien (2007) finds that mothers particularly perform, what she calls, "educational care work" for their children seeing it as a moral imperative. It was mostly mothers who were consulted for this study and they strove to provide emotional and practical support for their children.

5.4.5 Views on third level education

Differing views emerged when parents spoke of the possibility of their children receiving a third level education. Some are in favour of this, and, indeed, some of these parents already have children at college. However, others are less positive, seeing college as posing a challenge to Traveller identity.

5.4.5.1 Aspiring towards third level

Many of the parents of younger children talked about their hopes that their children would attend third level, realising that this level of education would provide the means of entry to professional positions in society where Travellers had not been represented in the past. Síle (parent, Cnocard) wanted her children to go to college and to train as professionals:

I would like them to go to college. I would like them to be professionals ... I would like them to be barristers and solicitors and doctors and nurses. [My son] said, 'Oh no, I'm not going to college. Daddy and you didn't go to college ... you didn't do it Mommy, so why do I have to', and I say to him, 'you get nowhere in life unless you have it.' I want the best for them. The best of education for my children.

John (parent, Cnocard) had attended a third level college as a mature student. He expressed his hope that his children would go to third level: “I’d like to see them go onto college. I’d definitely like the young fellow and the girls go onto college and making something of their life.”

5.4.5.2 Attending third level

There were examples of children attending third-level and their parents attributed their success, in large measure, to the support and encouragement of their teachers. Both Bernie and Emma (parents, Owenree) recounted how their daughters, who attended two separate schools, had sat their Leaving Certificate examinations and advanced to third level. In both cases, they were the first members of their respective families to get to this level. According to Emma:

The teachers in there (the two schools) took the interest ... and because they took the interest, they (the two girls) worked their way up ... they pushed them and helped them to go further and they went to college.

The fact that teachers in two different schools were praised for the interest they took in the girls shows that positive teacher expectations can yield positive results.

5.4.5.3 Sceptical towards third level

For some parents the notion of their children leaving home to attend college was uncomfortable or unacceptable, especially for their daughters. It was counter to the traditional role for Traveller girls, in particular, the idea of their staying away from home overnight. The Seanbaile parents are generally not in favour of their children going to college, citing two grounds. First, it would necessitate moving away from home and from their parents’ influence and control. Second, they fear that their children may become too much like settled people and would abandon their Traveller ways.

Grace (parent, Seanbaile) was opposed to third level education for Travellers:

The way of life is lost altogether the day they start going to college ...
I wouldn't like them now to go to college ...they'd get too much of
the settled way of life.

Grace questioned the need for a college education, particularly for Traveller girls, saying: "If you're marrying a Traveller, college wouldn't be bothering you". She worried about the influences that her children would be under if they went to college:

Parents aren't there watching them all the time, drinking, discos,
young ones ... It's not that you wouldn't trust them, but there's too
many bad influences and ... drugs and everything.

She felt that it is important "to remind them that you're a Traveller, you have a different culture." Lisa (parent, Seanbaile) agreed, saying, "Or me, now, like there'd be a lot happening in college ... oh no, I wouldn't like them to go to college". Tom said that he would allow his children to go to college, but only if it was possible to attend locally. Grace agreed, saying, "If you got home the same day."

5.4.5.4 Protecting a way of life

Grace's (parent, Seanbaile) suggestion that "the way of life is lost altogether the day they start going to college" provides a context for the scepticism that some parents expressed about third level education. There is an implicit curriculum in education which seeks to acculturate as much as it teaches (Cemlyn *et al.* 2009). Third level education can be seen as an apprenticeship for a middle-class settled person's way of life. For many parents, professional qualifications are not seen as incompatible with being a Traveller, but others are less sure. They fear that Traveller culture will be eroded and family values will be undermined, a factor which has also been noted by others (Bhopal 2004, Hamilton *et al.* 2007, Lloyd and McCluskey 2008, Myers *et al.* 2010).

5.4.6 Traveller culture recognition in schools

People need to be recognised for who they are in order to feel part of the society in which they live. For Travellers, this entails recognition and inclusion of their culture within the schools.

Some parents argued on grounds of equality for the recognition of Traveller culture in schools. This recognition should be seamless: it should be part of the life of the classroom and it should be included in school texts. This would allow their children to be acknowledged as different but equal. They believe that this recognition will have a favourable impact on the non-Traveller children and reduce the likelihood of discrimination and bullying.

Other parents fear that, by being explicitly identified as Travellers, their children will be victimised or ridiculed. They believe that by playing down their children's Traveller identity they will improve their chances of getting an education equal to that of settled children, believing that they have to choose between cultural recognition and a good education.

5.4.6.1 Traveller cultural inclusion would help the children's schooling

Parents who believe that Traveller culture should be recognised in the school spoke of how this would benefit their children. According to Bernie (parent, Owenree), "the schools were designed for a settled person's approach. They were never designed for Travellers, ever." Bernie believed that education for Traveller children, and relationships between Traveller and settled children, would be enhanced if Traveller culture were included in the schools:

If the Traveller culture was included in the school curriculum, it would make all the difference, do you know what I mean. It would break down the barriers between settled and Travellers ... I think it should be introduced as young as preschool and then that barrier wouldn't be there right through the school. If we knew about each other ... settled people, how they live and Travellers, how they live and we could celebrate our culture and show what it's all about. Then, I think, the barriers would be broken down.

Tom (parent, Seanbaile) said that although Traveller children are in the same class as settled children, studying the same subjects, school is different for them, "because the Travellers have a different culture, you know, and have their own ways." According to John (parent, Cnocard), Travellers are failing within the schools due to

lack of “inclusion of diversity, including Travellers, in the school curriculum.” He said that this situation could be improved if school was “more inclusive around ethnic minority groups.” John noted that Ireland has changed in that there is more diversity in the population than there has been in the past because of immigration. Although this had led to more diversity within the schools, he felt that Travellers are still excluded:

They are not including their own people and their own culture with the Traveller community in it. If you look through the texts there is nothing about the Travelling people in our schools, so the lack of awareness.

John argued that everyone involved with Travellers – the parents and the Traveller organisations – should write to the Department of Education about including Travellers in the curriculum, “then it wouldn’t make Travellers so different.” John stated that making Travellers more visible within the school curriculum could have a positive impact on outcomes for Traveller children.

Like John, Síle (parent, Cnocard) argued for the recognition of Traveller culture within the curriculum:

And I have a girl ... in National School. There’s no learning there to educate other children about the Traveller community and that gives a barrier all the time. If there was, like, a curriculum of culture and Traveller included in that it would break down barriers.

Síle spoke of how Traveller culture had not been recognised or included at an intercultural day in a local school. She found it hurtful to see the school recognising and celebrating other minority children, while the Traveller children were seemingly assimilated with the settled children in the school and their Traveller culture not acknowledged:

Like one school here did an intercultural [day] and the media went down and there was Traveller children in the school and there was nothing made of Travellers and there was photographs took of all the different cultures and where was the Travelling children sitting?

With the settled people ... I think when the Government recognise that Travellers are an ethnic group and have their own culture, society will start changing slowly.

Even with increased diversity and a commitment to interculturalism within schools, Traveller can still find themselves assimilated with the settled children, rather than recognised for their distinct culture. Síle regarded the acceptance by the government of Traveller's demand for ethnic status as a necessary step on the way to recognition.

5.4.6.2 Cultural inclusion would negatively impact on schooling

Some parents felt that any discussion of, or drawing attention to, their children's Traveller identity in the classroom would result in upset and embarrassment for the children.

Grace (parent, Seanbaile) told how her daughter was the only Traveller child in her class. She said that settled people laugh at the Traveller culture and that her daughter would be embarrassed if Traveller culture was discussed in school or if any attention were drawn to it:

Country people would only look down on Travellers and say, like, they are only dirt, and you know, and it's making them stand out more if you're bringing it up in school. You know, you don't hear nothing about settled community and their culture, do you know what I mean, you are making them stand out more, the children themselves ... if you were teaching it at school, now, like a lot of country people would make a laugh of it.

Tom (parent, Seanbaile) added, "You don't know how it would affect the kids in school" and Hannah (parent, Seanbaile) said:

Probably feel embarrassed when they're teased about it ... Do you know something now, too, I know my eldest two wouldn't like to learn the Cant in school. I know they wouldn't, no way!

Lucy (parent, Lisnashee) also believed that school would be easier for her son if Traveller culture were not highlighted:

No, I wouldn't, no. Because to me, you'd feel more embarrassed when you know that there's a difference between settled people and Travellers. I'd like them to be reared up as normal, like. Mixing in with the settled people.

Cáit (parent, Cnocard) was ambitious for her son in school and equated the recognition of Traveller culture in the schools with a lower standard of education:

Just once my son gets treated with respect that he deserves and gets educated the way he should, I'll have no problem with Traveller culture. Because if you start focusing on 'you should do Traveller culture' and you're getting taught Traveller culture and you're getting taught Cant language but yet you're being treated like crap and you're not being pushed the way you should be ...

Kitty (parent, Avonard) struggled with the dilemma of wanting her child to express herself as a Traveller, without negative consequences, while simultaneously receiving an education equal to that of the settled children:

I want my child to go to the National School, and I want her to be treated as everyone else in that place. I want my one to wear earrings in her ears, or she's not allowed go to certain places ... It's an awkward question. How far do you go? I think you'd like them to be treated the same, say the likes of education wise, not to have them labelled or being pointed at, 'oh, you're a Traveller'.

Parents felt an inner struggle in not wanting their children to be labelled, yet wanting them to maintain their Traveller identity and Traveller values.

5.4.6.3 Reflecting culture inappropriately

Deirdre (parent and childcare worker, Liosbeag) had taught her children to be proud of their Traveller heritage and she said that they would not hide this in school. Her daughter felt secure about being a Traveller but was embarrassed when the topic of Traveller culture came up in class:

My daughter came back once and she's doing, I think it was geography and there was a little piece in it about Travellers; now in that they were called tinkers²⁶. Well she came back ashamed of her life, but that was the first time in her school time that there was anything mentioned ... about Travellers ... she didn't want to go to school because she said everyone started looking at her and her friend.

Problems arise when cultural identity is isolated from the general experience of school and included as almost an exotic oddity. This puts the focus of attention on Traveller children, making them feel unusual and ill at ease, an approach that has been criticised by others (e.g. Myers *et al.*, 2010).

5.4.6.4 Recognition of Traveller culture in schools

Schools in Ireland are required to operate an intercultural curriculum. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)²⁷ issued guidelines (NCCA, 2005) on intercultural education and provided explicit advice for teachers, although support for implementation of the guidelines has been minimal (Children's Rights Alliance, 2011). Parents were conflicted regarding the question of recognition of Traveller culture within the classroom. Many felt that children are affected in a negative manner by the lack of recognition, while others preferred for this issue not to be mentioned. All expressed pride in their Traveller identity, but some were concerned that "a good education" may not be compatible with cultural recognition, with some preferring to leave Traveller culture to the home and family. Parents who support the inclusion of culture see it as a right for their children to see themselves reflected in the life of the school in a similar way as the settled children do.

This dilemma over cultural recognition has been referred to by others. Reluctance on the part of some Traveller families concerning the inclusion of Traveller culture in schools was discussed by O'Hanlon and Holmes (2004), citing two main grounds: that the families could teach the child all they needed to know about their culture, and that settled teachers might teach the wrong things.

²⁶ The term "tinker" is a term used in the past for Traveller and which is now considered derogatory.

²⁷ The NCCA advises the Minister for Education and Science on curriculum and assessment issues from early childhood to the end of second level.

Not recognising or including the cultural life of the child in the classroom creates a barrier for the Traveller child. One must, however, recognise the danger of exoticising Travellers, of positioning them as the exotic 'other', leading to embarrassment and making acceptance by the other children more difficult. This is seen in the possibly inappropriate references to Travellers which had engendered embarrassment in some children such as Deirdre's (parent, Liosbeag) daughter mentioned above.

Bryan (2007) frames the issue of Traveller representation in education as a form of curricular justice. Curricula can be unjust to the extent that they perpetuate social inequality. On this, her analysis of texts used in the Civil, Social and Political Education (CSPE) programme shows that mis-representation of Travellers is common.

5.5 Conclusion

Traveller identity was central to the parents' accounts of their own schooling and their perspectives on education. They spoke of the importance for them of various aspects of Traveller culture: family relations, nomadism, the Cant language and traditional Traveller trades. They were proud of their Traveller identity, though they were aware of the low valuation placed on this identity by others.

Parents in this study attended school at a time when there was little respect or appreciation for Traveller culture, either within schools or in the wider community. Some had spent just short periods in school while others spoke of how their own parents had stopped travelling in order to facilitate their attendance at school. Either way, most told of how they had left school early having achieved little. They believed that teachers expected little of them and several spoke of being left at the back of the class colouring while the settled children were progressing with their lessons. Their relationships with settled children were often marked by name-calling and negative stereotyping. They had little to show from their schooling and they expressed regret for this and for the missed opportunities that it led to.

Schools today operate under intercultural guidelines (NCCA 2005) and Traveller culture is recognised as valid. However, parents reported that their children still

experience name-calling and bullying in school on account of their Traveller identity. Traveller children are still not achieving to the same level as their settled peers.

Parents are adamant that their own children should receive an education equal to that of their settled peers. They support their children in school and want them to complete second level, which would give them advantages that they themselves had missed. The parents' declared commitment to supporting their children in education provides a promising basis for parental involvement initiatives. Such initiatives are explored in the next chapter with particular reference to Traveller preschools.

CHAPTER 6

INVOLVEMENT PRACTICES IN TRAVELLER PRESCHOOLS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the third aim of the study, namely: to explore involvement practices within Traveller preschools, which were the first introduction to schooling for many Traveller children.

Data for this chapter is drawn from the focus groups and individual interviews with Traveller parents, interviews with a selection of teachers and managers in Traveller preschools, and the teacher questionnaire survey.

The variety of involvement practices experienced across the preschools was extensive: parents visited preschools for parties and plays, attended parent-teacher meetings and helped out in the classroom and on school tours; they displayed good knowledge of the work of the preschool and in some cases expanded on this work in the home; teachers visited family homes and used written communications in addition to face-to-face methods. In one preschool parents were involved in the management and decision-making, although in other cases parents displayed little knowledge of management. While parents were generally glad to be involved in their children's preschools, some spoke of factors that inhibited their involvement.

6.2 Warmth and Welcome

It is vital that preschool presents as a warm and welcoming place, in order to create a level of trust and a sense of parity between parents and preschool staff (Espinosa 1995, McWilliam *et al.* 1998, Fitzgerald 2004). Traveller parents in the study deemed this to be particularly important for their children, given their own mainly negative school experiences and the fact that the preschool staff were generally drawn from the settled community. The creation of a welcoming environment,

therefore, would be an important first step in involving parents within the preschools.

6.2.1 A sense of belonging

Parents did feel welcome in Traveller preschools. Entire families of Traveller children attended their local preschools. In some instances mothers and fathers of children attending a preschool had themselves attended the same preschool as children. Lily (teacher, Cnocard) said: “Some of [the parents] were children in the preschool themselves.” According to Sile (parent, Cnocard):

The preschool is there for 25 years ... children have to go in and meet their own people, like, members of the Travelling community and get used to them.

Orla’s (parent, Castletown) son was the fifth child in her family to attend the Castletown preschool. She compared her dealings with the preschool to dealings she had had with the local primary school that her older children attended:

I’d feel comfortable, you’d go to the [primary school], I don’t know, I find that I can talk to [the preschool teacher] easier than what you can do to the other teachers. [They] don’t seem to understand as much ... You’d get a straight answer [in the preschool] there’s a different vibe in it. [The teacher] can explain more.

The familiarity of the teacher and the preschool created a sense of belonging for the Cuanmara parents. According to Nuala (teacher, Cuanmara), “It’s the school that they know and they trust me. They know their kids are safe with me because they know me.” Sally (parent, Cuanmara) felt a sense of belonging in this preschool and had built up a rapport with Nuala. Sally’s daughter was attending this preschool and her older children had also attended. Sally left school without literacy skills and she was aware of the cultural and social differences between herself and Nuala. She was accustomed to a lack of acknowledgement and respect for her Traveller identity in the wider community. It was different in the preschool, and she also contrasted the preschool with the primary school:

There's a welcome there for you. There's no objection the minute you walk in, shake hands, a big smile on the face, 'would you like a cup of tea or coffee', it means a lot ... [The primary school is] not as [welcoming] as the preschool. It's very comfortable here ... When I come in here I get the world of respect from that teacher. She knows I'm a Traveller, she knows my culture, like with the kids, the same thing.

Lucy's (parent, Lisnashee) son attended the Traveller preschool that his brother had previously attended and Lucy felt welcome in her dealings with the staff. Having had a difficult time at school herself, she was determined that her children would not have similar difficulties, and this accounts for the particular attention she paid to staff interaction with her son. She described the morning routine when he was collected by the bus and the teacher was warm and even tactile with him. She valued this particularly because the teacher was a member of the settled community and her own school experiences had been so different. She said:

When they pick him up, it's like, a settled teacher, we'll say, it's like, they hug the children ... it means a lot, to be honest, because there's one teacher in [my son's] school that's very, very nice ... It wouldn't make a difference if [my son] was settled or Traveller because the minute she takes them out of the bus she ends up giving them a kiss or a hug.

The Seanbaile parents attended a training centre adjacent to the Traveller preschool and they felt a sense of ownership of the preschool. The teacher had taught in the preschool for a number of years and parents knew and liked her. Their older children had attended the preschool too and some of the mothers had undertaken work placement there as part of a childcare course. They had a lot of direct contact with the preschool and they felt that they could visit whenever they wished. Their relationship with the teacher was open and they spoke highly of her:

Annie: "The teacher does a great job."

Lisa: "She is very good."

Hannah: “She does a good job with the children.”

Frank: “The kids love going in there, like, they look forward to it”.

Annie: “I’ve seen when the preschool is closed, the kids do be crying to get in the door.”

Hannah: “If you see the way they do react in there with the children, the women, I’m telling you, and how [the children] are getting on.”

Tom: “All my children went to the preschool.”

It was clear from the Seanbaile parents’ responses that they were happy to leave their children in this preschool; they said that the teacher was good with the children and that the children were learning. The close proximity of the training centre to the preschool facilitated the bonds that had built up between parents and teacher.

When the Traveller parents spoke of the preschools they spoke of a sense of belonging and of positive trusting relationships with the teachers. This resonates with Myers and Bhopal’s (2009) study of a particular local school in the UK identified as a “Gypsy school” attended by a large number of Gypsy Roma Traveller²⁸ children. Parents in that study felt ownership and attachment due to their long-standing relationship with the school and the fact that it was located within a space in which they felt comfortable. Similar factors were evident in Traveller preschools.

The all-Traveller nature of the preschools, the fact that they were often located close to the community, such as being adjacent to Traveller halting sites or on group housing schemes for Travellers, and that families had long-standing relationships with the preschools, all contributed to the sense of belonging that parents had for their preschools, which they viewed as enclaves of acceptance, respect and trust. This is similar to Chávez’s (2011) account of protected enclaves, although in the particular setting of preschool education. Some parents explicitly contrasted their positive dealings with the preschools with less positive experiences of primary school. An additional factor was that many of the teachers had long years of

²⁸ This is the terminology used by Myers and Bhopal (2009).

experience within Traveller preschools. For example, the three teachers who took part in the initial teacher interviews had an average of twenty-one years each in their respective preschools. The teachers built trusting relationships with parents making it easier for the parents to leave their small children with them.

6.2.2 An open door

One way of welcoming parents is by implementing an open-door policy, meaning that parents are free to visit whenever they wish in order to raise issues or to seek information, or just to see what is going on.

All teachers responding to the questionnaire survey said that parents could visit the preschools (Questionnaire Q10). Most reported that parents, both fathers and mothers, did visit the preschool either often or occasionally (Table 6.1).

Table 6.1 How often do parents visit? Q19 and Q20 (n=21)

Parental visits	Often	Occasionally	Rarely	Never	No response
Mothers	6	12	2	1	0
Fathers	2	9	7	2	1

Triona (teacher, Lisnashee) said that her preschool was open and welcoming and that she and her staff were also available to parents outside of preschool hours:

We always say we have an open door and they'll come in and have a cup of tea, which they often do, especially if they want to talk. They'll come in and they'll phone you up at night-time and have their chat on the phone.

This availability, out of preschool hours, showed the strong commitment of the teacher to the children and families and the good relationship and trust that had developed between parents and teacher.

John (parent, Cnocard) told of how he occasionally dropped into the preschool that his children attended:

I just go down, dropping the kids off in the morning. Stuff like that. There you see the nice buzz around the place, happy environment.

You see the children happy to get there. If you see your child happy to get up in the morning, happy to go somewhere, their education actually gets better.

Parents value the open door, which allows them to visit the preschool and see what their children do there.

6.2.2.1 Open door – reality and perception

The open door is not perceived in the same way by all parents. The contrasting ways in which it may be perceived are shown in the cases of Maeve and Deirdre in Liosbeag preschool. Deirdre, a parent who also worked as a childcare worker in the preschool, said that parents were welcome to visit and speak with the teacher, and that some did. Maeve's son was her second child to attend Liosbeag preschool and she praised the staff. However, she was reluctant to drop in to enquire about her son. She did ask the childcare worker who accompanied the children on the preschool bus about him, but while she would have liked to have asked the teacher about him, she did not. Maeve explained: "I wouldn't come in and ask how he got on. Just if he was coming home on the bus, I'd say 'how was he today' ... They do be always busy with all the kids." Maeve felt unable to interrupt the activity in the preschool and the teacher was unaware of her interest and her desire for information. Deirdre, on the other hand, did not perceive such an obstacle for parents:

My point of view, if there is a problem ...the fathers and the mothers will find out about it... It's always very open ... [the parents] comes here to the door and [the teacher] always goes out and have a little word ... you couldn't get nicer. You're always welcome.

Deirdre's comments indicated that, from her perspective, Maeve's experience was not the same as that of other parents who visited the preschool freely. While other parents did approach the teacher, Maeve left contact regarding her son to the teacher's discretion: "If they wanted to meet up with me [they'd say]... 'Maeve would you come in tomorrow' or that, I'd come in." Shy and not as confident as others, Maeve felt uncomfortable at the prospect of disrupting the smooth running of the preschool. This barrier that Maeve perceived was not necessarily there for other parents, showing how openness is experienced differently by different parents.

6.2.2.2 Closing the door

An open door has the potential to disrupt the routine of the preschool, and this happened in Avonard and Cuanmara. Carmel (manager, Avonard) said that the preschool had been open to parents, but she reported how one parent had taken this opportunity to regularly go into the classroom in the mornings to talk to the teacher. She said that he “had delayed so long ... he lingered, he’d be there for ages talking.” In order to deal with this, it was decided to lock the door leading to the classroom. Both manager and teacher felt that this was the only course of action open to them in order to facilitate the smooth running of the preschool, but it removed the opportunity for casual morning visits. Nonetheless, some parents at this preschool did overcome the barrier of the locked door. Tara (parent, Avonard) said:

If you want to see the teacher, you’d go in and ask her how the child is getting on ... if you wanted to ask the teacher she’d tell you exactly what they do.

The type of disruption the parent caused in Avonard was also experienced by Nuala (teacher, Cuanmara) in her previous premises which had been on a Traveller halting site. Parents dropped in when they wished and Nuala said: “I did at times find it challenging and it did hold me back ... They did join in with the work, but I still found they would be interrupting to tell me stories.”

Both examples above show the need to strike a balance with regard to parents’ use of the ‘open door’. Some of the schools in Collins’s (1995) study had an understanding between parents and teachers, a code of practice, whereby the parents did not interrupt the instruction when they came in.

6.2.2.3 Designing open-door policies

An open-door policy would seem to be an essential requirement for a Traveller-friendly preschool, and a majority of preschools in the *Preschools for Travellers: National Evaluation Report* (Department of Education and Science 2003) claimed to have such a policy. However, two types of difficulty arise. On the one hand, less confident parents may need more proactive encouragement than simply someone stating that they can drop in when they wish. This is seen in the case of Maeve

(parent, Liosbeag), highlighting the need for preschools to go beyond open-door policies, to reach out in an active way to parents and to arrange opportunities for them to engage, in addition to the ongoing possibility of having an open-door policy.

On the other hand, the comments from Carmel (manager, Avonard) and Nuala (teacher, Cuanmara) show that unfettered access can be disruptive, a point that was acknowledged in *Ready to Learn: White Paper on Early Childhood Education* (Department of Education and Science 1999). It had suggested the designation of specific days for access or the introduction of a rota system for parents. These contrasting concerns show the need for care and planning in designing open-door policies for preschools, rather than simply declaring that the preschool is open to parents. The qualities of a setting that can lead to a genuine open door were set out by McWilliams *et al.* (1998) as family orientation, positiveness, sensitivity, responsiveness and friendliness, arguing that services based on these qualities lead to an open door.

6.3 Parents visit preschool

Rather than being an end in itself, a welcoming environment can be a foundation for more substantial parental involvement. One aspect of involvement is when parents visit the preschool; as seen above, parents do, to a great extent, feel free to visit Traveller preschools. This section examines in more detail the circumstances in which parents visit. Parents call in to enrol their children, and to deliver and collect them, and they also drop in at other times, to enquire about a child's progress or to provide information about a child. They also visit when they are invited to do so by the teacher. Arranged visits include parent-teacher meetings, open mornings, school tours, plays and parties.

6.3.1 Reaching out

Lily (manager, Cnocard) explained how she seeks parents out to speak with them when they visit the preschool to drop off their children. She sees these occasions as opportunities to draw parents in. She spoke of the importance of establishing a rapport with those parents who had little contact with the preschool, "to greet them, meet them in the morning and for them to get to know you."

Michelle (manager, Carraigmore) also spoke of the opportunities to get to know parents when they dropped off their children:

Families [are] coming into the centre ... so they are more involved; they drop the children off, they attend meetings here, they pick up the children ... They have the opportunity in the corridor to mix with [other] parents. They have that daily feedback from us and also they know where their children are, what their room is like, what type of play materials they have.

This claim of daily feedback may be overstated, but it can be facilitated by the small numbers in the preschool and the relative informality of the dropping and collecting rituals, giving time for informal exchanges that provide both information and reassurance to parents.

6.3.2 Enquiring and giving information about the child

Parents visit the preschool to keep informed of the child's progress and to notify the teacher of any difficulties or illness that the child might be experiencing. Grace (parent, Seanbaile) visited to check on her child's progress, saying, "we'd visit too to see how they are getting on, what progress they are making." Lucy (parent, Lisnashee) visited the preschool when she had concerns about her son: "If I had a complaint, I'd go down there, to be honest ... and have a chat with Triona (the teacher)." She visited too when her son was having eye and ear tests, and also to sign forms. Making the teacher aware of issues at home that might affect the child in the preschool was spoken of by some parents. Lisa (parent, Seanbaile) said, "If he wasn't feeling well in the morning I'd go in and see." She added that the teacher would approach her also. "If there was any problem [the teacher] would come up and tell us. We'd just be over there", she said, indicating the building adjacent to the preschool where the Seanbaile parents were attending a course.

Cáit (parent, Cnocard) feels that it is important to tell the teacher if there are family difficulties that might affect her son:

If I think that he's having a bad patch for a couple of days, I'll go down and speak to [the teacher] and I'll say 'he's a bit off colour at

home, how is he down here?’ If there’s anything happening in my house ... a death in the family, I’ll go down and explain all that to her, so she knows if he’s having a hard time.

The teacher questionnaires also confirm this type of contact; in nineteen out of twenty-one preschools, the teachers held informal discussion with parents either often, or occasionally (Questionnaire Q 15), and twelve teachers out of twenty-one reported that parents had requested meetings with them (Questionnaire Q18).

This doorstep contact incorporates basic elements of dialogue, as parents both enquire about their children and provide information to the teachers, in an attempt to ease their children’s passage through preschool. However, Hallgarten (2000) cautions against exclusive reliance on such informal methods, as opportunities for such contact are not equal for all parents and tend to favour the more assertive.

6.3.3 Arranged visits

In addition to parent-initiated informal visits, parents also visit the preschools by arrangement, on invitation from the teachers.

6.3.3.1 Enrolment

Triona (teacher, Lisnashee) requires parents to come to the preschool themselves to enrol their children. Enrolling one’s own child provides an initial opportunity for communication between the parents and the preschool. However, parents do not always enrol their children themselves. The questionnaire survey showed that, while parents enrol their own children in fourteen preschools, this task was mediated by others in the remaining seven preschools, with children being enrolled by the Visiting Teacher for Travellers or others (Questionnaire Q4).

6.3.3.2 Informal events as involvement

Parents were invited to attend plays and parties in some preschools. The teacher questionnaires showed that parents attend parties in sixteen preschools. In eight of these, parents also attended for plays. In the remaining five preschools parents attended neither parties nor plays. The questionnaire was not sufficiently detailed to

determine whether there were parties or plays held in those preschools where parents did not attend.

Table 6.2 Do parents visit the preschool to attend a play or party? (n=21)

	Yes	No
Q32 Do parents ever come to the preschool to attend a party?	16	5
Q33 Do parents ever come to the preschool to attend a play?	8	13

Nuala (teacher, Cuanmara) invited parents into the preschool on four occasions each year:

Halloween ...we have a dressing up day and we invite the parents in...Christmas we do a big play ... we incorporate songs ... we have a period before that where the kids show the parents what they have done. Then at Easter again ... and at the end of the year we have a graduation.

At each of these occasions Nuala organised the classroom so as to display the children's work to date. This allowed parents insight into some of the activities that their children had engaged in.

Michelle (manager, Carraigmore) asked parent to come in for one day at the beginning of the year to spend time with their children:

We hold open mornings for the child and the parents, so we let them come in and spend as long as they need to spend ... Those are the places that we found that the Traveller parents have asked us the most questions because they are more comfortable in the one-to-one small scale and the child is there as well.

She also invited parents into the preschool for "play days" but she had encountered difficulties and found that more preparation would be required if she were to continue with these:

You'd invite a parent in for a day, that they could play ... we had some negative experiences over disciplining of the children, around

taking information and using it outside, you know, so there were issues of confidentiality. And there's also issues for parents around some level of training beforehand, a little bit of induction training. We don't always have time to do that, but we are very conscious that's something we would like to happen.

Chloe (teacher, Newtown) held a graduation ceremony at the end of each preschool year, where the children received certificates and had their photographs taken. On one occasion, some years previously, the parents had been invited to attend the ceremony. However, only one mother had attended, and because of the poor response, although graduation ceremonies had been held every year since, parents were not invited again.

6.3.4 Parent-teacher meetings

Parent-teacher meetings provide an opportunity for parents and teachers to share information about a child, to develop bonds and to work together for the good of the child.

Table 6.3 Informal meetings on child's progress Q15 (n=21)

	Often	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Q15 Do you engage in informal discussion with parents about child's progress?	14	6	1	0

Table 6.4 Formal parent-teacher meetings Q16 Q17 (n=21)

Q16 How often are formal parent-teacher meetings held		Q17 If applicable, what time of day	
Never	14	During preschool hours	6
One per annum	3	Outside preschool hours	1
Two per annum	1	Not applicable	14
One per term	3		

Table 6.5 Parents requested meetings Q18 (n=21)

	Yes	No
Q18 Have individual parents ever asked for a meeting with you?	12	9

In some cases these meeting were relatively informal, taking place at some convenient point when parents were delivering or collecting their children (Table 6.3). Teachers in fourteen preschools often engaged in informal discussion with parents concerning their children's progress and did so occasionally in a further six preschools. Furthermore, teachers in twelve preschools reported that individual parents had asked for meetings with them (Table 6.5).

Apart from informal discussions at the school door concerning a child's progress, a minority of preschools held formal parent-teacher meetings (Table 6.4). Three held these once a year, a further three once a term and one held such meetings twice a year. Six teachers held the meetings during preschool hours, one held them outside preschool hours. Flexibility in the timing of meetings facilitates greater involvement by parents.

6.3.4.1 Format of parent-teacher meetings

Lily (manager, Cnocard) was pleased that the vast majority of parents in her preschool attended the parent-teacher meetings organised by the teacher. She attributed this to the considerable abilities of the teacher to communicate with parents:

She is able to identify the children's needs and she sat and spoke to the parents about their children individually. They were overwhelmed by how much their children could do.

Cáit (parent, Cnocard), one of the parents who attended parent-teacher meetings in Cnocard, bore testimony to this:

She has parent-teacher meetings ... and they are excellent. She'd have a big sheet in front of her from, say, January. She'd say [my son] hadn't very good motory skills ... and in March she could see him blooming because she could see him down there in the corner with those bricks ... She's just a very very good teacher. She is very good with detail and she notices everything, keeps a note of it and tells us.

The factors contributing to the success of the parent-teacher meeting are clear in this case. The teacher is prepared, having observed and recorded information on each child. She tracks the development of skills and notes the child's progress so that she is able to give a detailed account which is appreciated by the parent.

Michelle (manager, Carraigmore) said that the focus that she and her staff placed on parent-teacher meetings was on "socialisation" rather than "on the formal academic end of it." She said that parent-teacher meetings provided:

An opportunity for us to hear from parents, if they have anything they want to contribute to the service or feel they would like to give us a bit about their culture and stuff like that, you know; it is very much a sharing of information.

She spoke of difficulties in getting parents to engage in parent-teacher meetings, and how she had sought to overcome these. The meetings were normally held in the evenings, but some parents requested day-time meetings, when they collected their children from the preschool: "We facilitate that because it's important that we do it." She said that Traveller parents often had nobody to take care of other children at home to allow them to attend evening meetings. She recognised the dilemma facing the parents and accommodated them and provided a staff member to care for their children on the premises so as to allow parents to attend parent-teacher meetings during the day. This flexibility was key to the success of parent-teacher meetings in this preschool.

Michelle had used video in an effort to engage some of the parents:

We had taken some video footage of the kids playing, engaged in different activities and we asked the parents' permission to do this, and then we brought them in for an evening, just a social evening and we showed them some of this as well ... they loved it. They actually even looked for copies.

Triona (teacher, Lisnashee) spoke of the need to be flexible and persistent regarding the holding of parent-teacher meetings. She also brought in parents to share the progress reports kept on each child:

They come in, we show them everything; we've always asked them to come in every term ... They are not the easiest to get in ...[but] we are determined ... because we have to show the reports we are going to send to [primary] school with them.

She said that when parents did not attend on the day arranged, the staff reminded them on an on-going basis until they did come. Lucy (parent, Lisnashee) described the parent-teacher meeting in this preschool as she had experienced it: "They tell you ... there's all sheets there if I want to pick up one but I've no need for them once they tell me."

6.3.4.2 Formal and informal opportunities

A minority of preschools held formal parent-teacher meetings and some were flexible with regard to timing, to try to ensure that all parents attended. There was evidence of innovative practice, such as the use of video in one preschool. Such an approach would be endorsed by Whalley (2007) who found video a valuable tool for informing parents of the activities that their children engage in and as an opportunity to encourage discussion. Parents were appreciative of the efforts of teachers in respect of these meetings and the feedback they provided on their children's progress.

Organised parent-teacher meetings provide relatively formal opportunities for a teacher to communicate with individual parents about their child. A great strength is that they ensure that all parents have equal access to information and an opportunity to contribute. Each parent gets specific feedback on his or her own child. Although the parents in this study, who commented on the meetings, did appreciate these opportunities, it should be noted that Hallgarten (2000) found that both parents and teachers at primary and second level tend to find such meetings unsatisfactory and Crozier (2000) found that even confident parents cannot raise anything of note at them. Parent-teacher meetings do not remove the need for more informal open door opportunities for parents.

6.3.5 Help in the class

Table 6.6 Do parents help in the classroom? (n=21)

	Yes	No
Q28 Do parents volunteer in the classroom by working with their own children?	4	17
Q30 Do parents volunteer in the classroom by working with a group of children?	1	20

Parents helped in the classroom in a number of preschools (Table 6.6). One preschool had a system whereby “parents attend on a rota basis and are familiar with the routine and ... curriculum.” Parents in this preschool worked with groups of children as well as with their own child. In two further preschools, parents helped to settle their children in at the beginning of the year. Although minimal, this allowed them to gain some familiarity with the operation of the preschool. One teacher noted the opportunities that this practice provided for “telling parents about what’s happening in school and encourage them to do the same [at home]”. Another teacher noted that “some parents have helped in the classroom when requested if extra help was required.”

A number of teachers commented on the benefits for the children of having their parents in the classroom, seeing it as bridging the gap between home and preschool, resulting in a better preschool experience for the children. Some teachers referred to the parents’ own negative experiences of school, and expressed a belief that their presence in the classroom could help them to better understand the value of preschool. A further benefit mentioned was that the greater involvement of parents led to a better understanding and awareness of Traveller culture on the part of the staff, which in turn helped to inform preschool practice and resulted in an overall better experience for the children. There were no examples from the focus groups or interviews of parents volunteering in the classroom, although parents in Seanbaile had undertaken work experience in their preschool as part of a childcare course.

Helping in the classroom is not the only way that parents can directly help with the preschool. In four preschools parents helped to repair, renovate or build equipment for the preschool, and in six preschools parents made materials for use in the preschool (Table 6.7).

Table 6.7 Do parents make or repair preschool equipment? (n=21)

	Yes	No	No response
Q26 Do parents ever help to repair, renovate or build classroom equipment?	4	17	
Q27 Do parents ever make materials for use in the preschool?	6	14	1

Nuala (teacher, Cuanmara) described the help that some of the parents had provided in her preschool:

They would have come into me and helped me to clean up, they would have hung pictures for me, put in nails ... I had one parent who painted chairs for me.

This sort of DIY support showed a good relationship with the preschool and demonstrated the value that parents placed on it.

6.3.6 Help out on school tours

Several preschools held school tours, and parents sometimes helped to organise these and also helped out on the day. Because of the desirability of having a high ratio of adults to children on outings, these can provide a practical as well as a fun and enriching opportunity for parental involvement.

Table 6.8 Do parents help on the school tour? (n=21)

	Yes	No
Q37 Are parents involved in the planning of the school tour/outing?	6	15
Q38 Do parents help out on the day of the outing/tour?	13	8

Teacher questionnaire responses indicated that parents helped with the planning of the school tour in six preschools, and that they helped out on the day of the tour in thirteen preschools (Table 6.8). All those who planned also helped out on the day. Figure 6.1 incorporates data from questions 28, 37 and 38.

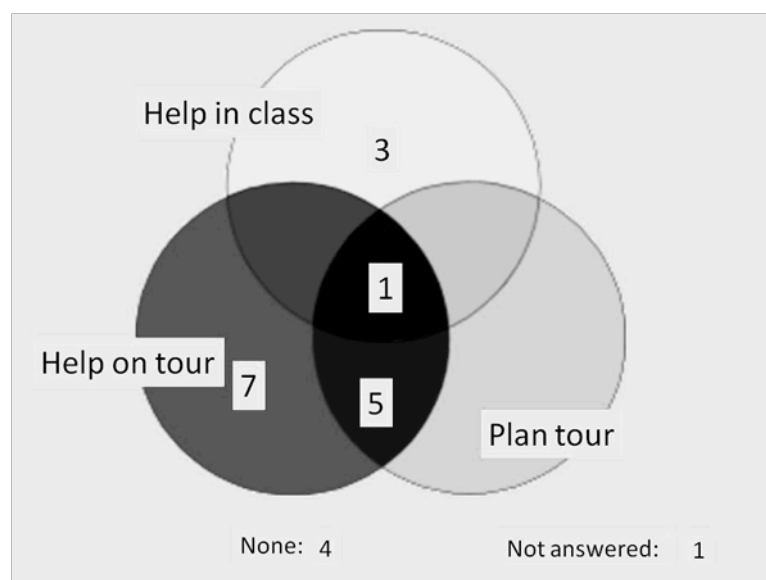


Figure 6.1 Plan and help on school tour and help in classroom

Michelle (manager, Carraigmore) described how parents in Carraigmore had input as to where to go on the school tour:

We did a questionnaire as well of where they would like to go ... and the feedback we got is [they want to go back to the previous year's location] again this year. The parents come with us ... it's the mummies who come.

Thus, in Carraigmore parents were involved both in planning the tour and in helping out on the day.

Triona (teacher, Lisnashee) said that some parents accompanied her preschool on the school tour. However, the need to comply with vetting regulations had limited the extent to which parents could be involved. "We are crippled with the vetting," she said. Her understanding was that every adult, including parents, must be vetted prior to their being allowed to stay in the classroom or accompany the children on the school tour.

Nuala (teacher, Cuanmara) said that it is the older siblings rather than the parents who accompany the class on the school tour:

I would invite everyone. I'd say everyone is welcome, but generally you'd have older siblings. The older sisters would all come. The

problem is, I have to make sure that they are not staying at home from school [in order to go on the tour].

It is also the older sisters who go on the tour in Avonard. Carmel (manager, Avonard) said: “They used to come with us ... not the parents but the ... older girls always come.” Older sisters within the Traveller community have traditionally had more responsibility for their younger siblings than their settled peers, and would be regarded as suitable to accompany the children as caregivers. However, a difficulty can arise as indicated by Nuala, if the tour is held on a school day for older children.

Although the Liosbeag preschool did not organise a school tour, Maeve (parent, Liosbeag) spoke of how she would have liked to accompany her son if there had been one: “Yeah, ... I’d love now coming in and they’d be going on a tour – going with him, and that.” While it would not suit all parents, Maeve’s response suggested that there were opportunities for preschools to tap into parent enthusiasm by involving them in tours and outings, providing opportunities for the children to see their parents and the preschool staff together.

6.3.7 Work placement

Some of the Seanbaile parents took part in work experience in their preschool as part of a childcare course. Annie (parent, Seanbaile) described this: “We are doing a childcare course. We used to be going in day by day. We used to be encouraged to go in and help.” The participation of Grace (parent, Seanbaile) in the course and her placement in the preschool helped her to understand how young children learn:

It’s not like books, now, real hard, just like there’s [the teacher], how she does it. She still is teaching them education but it’s in all games ... learning colours, you start a colour, everything has to be red. Still teaching education.

Michelle (manager, Carraigmore) described the situation in her preschool where a Traveller woman, who was not a mother of any of the preschool class, completed her work placement in the preschool:

We did have a Traveller student on work experience here, there’s great advantages ... She worked out well. She was part of the

Primary Health Care course that was here and she was doing a childcare module. ... it was great because the thing I noticed ... the Traveller children knew her so they would look for a lot of help off her ... we had the impression that it was very settling for them ... very helpful for them to have somebody that they know.

Michelle observed that the children felt drawn to the Traveller woman. The Traveller woman's presence helped to bridge the cultural gap between the Traveller homes and the preschool.

The above examples fall into the category of 'participation', as defined by Pugh (1987), bringing together two elements of 'parents as helpers' and 'parents as learners'. While this is a special case that does not reflect general participation by parents, it may be appropriate for some Traveller parents as a way of linking their own training and personal development with the education of their children. When a parent is placed in a preschool as part of a course, his or her presence in the classroom can help overcome some of the structural barriers identified earlier, such as passivity, perceived or actual lack of time, or lack of structured opportunities to participate. A shortcoming, however, is that the primary goal of the placement is not parental involvement, but vocational training for the parent, and this goal might not be aligned with the goal of improved parental involvement.

Where placement students are not parents of the children, but are members of the Traveller community, there nonetheless may be benefits for the children. Most teachers in Traveller preschools were not themselves Travellers so there was a gap between the preschools and the culture of home. Travellers on placement helped to reduce this gap.

6.3.8 Some parents reluctant to be involved as helpers

Not all parents would welcome the opportunity to help in the classroom or on outings, for a variety of reasons. On this, Sally (parent, Cuanmara) said:

I would [come in] but then my child would be too much distracted because I'm there. She'd feel she could do what she wants in here if I

was here, what she'd do at home, and I don't think it would be fair on the other kids.

Similarly, Josie (parent, Avonard) stated that her presence would have an adverse effect: "If I went in, probably the children would play up." This concern that their presence might be disruptive was echoed by others. Tara (parent, Avonard) felt that she herself would disrupt the teacher's work, saying, "She's the teacher in there and I find I'd just mess everything up if I walked in ... ruin the whole routine."

Parents who offered these views implied that they would make an effort if it were required of them, but that they were anxious in case it might not work out. Other parents saw the time that their children spent in preschool as their opportunity to do other things. Edel (parent, Avonard) said: "We put them into school for a break, not to go in with them." Kitty (parent, Avonard) had similar views, although less trenchant. She said: "I would [go in], yes, maybe an odd time. I wouldn't like to go in all the time ... I think the only time you have is when the children is in school." Likewise, Gillian (parent, Castletown) said: "I feel the time is very short ... you just have them out the door and you have them back." Lucy (parent, Lisnashee) said she would do anything she could to support her children. However, she resisted the notion of helping out in the classroom:

To be honest, I have too much of my own ... it would be lovely if you had the time to be honest but I just don't. If I had the time in my own spare time I would like to go down.

Although she said that she did not have the time to help in the classroom, she remarked on how positive it was for her child to see her in the preschool: "[My son] loves to see me in his school ... they love to see me there and it delights my heart that I can do something for them."

6.3.9 Two types of non-participant

Parents visited the preschools to find out about a child's progress or to help out in some way. Younger children, especially, like to see their parents in school (Conaty 2002, Whalley 2007). It helps them to see continuity between home and preschool and helps parents to gain knowledge of preschool learning.

Pugh (1987) identified two types of non-participants, in relation to parental involvement. Active non-participants decide not to participate, perhaps because of other commitments or from lack of interest. Passive non-participants, however, might like to be involved but perhaps do not know how to become involved or lack the confidence to do so. Both types of parent were seen in this study. Parents have other legitimate demands on their time and preschools should not have unrealistic expectations. For some parents, however, it was lack of confidence or a fear that their presence might be a disruption that made them reluctant to get involved.

6.4 Teachers reach out to parents

Teachers in Traveller preschools understand the value of developing relationships with the parents of the children and they reach out to the families in a variety of ways, including visiting the homes and sending out notes and newsletters.

6.4.1 Teachers visit family homes

Teachers visiting family homes can help to build relationships with families and bridge the gap between home and preschool, although caution should be exercised to respect the family's privacy. The questionnaire survey (Questionnaire Q42) showed that teachers in seventeen out of twenty-one Traveller preschools visited family homes to provide and seek information, or to discuss problems that a child was experiencing in the preschool. Visits were undertaken also to discuss enrolling children in the preschool and the transition to primary school. In some cases, regular daily contact between families and preschool was not possible when children travelled to and from the preschool by bus, and teachers visited the children's homes to ensure contact with the families. A number of teachers visited families simply to keep in touch, when a new baby had been born or when there was illness in the family. Teachers also visited to help parents to fill out forms or to read mail that they had received.

Nuala (teacher, Cuanmara) called on the families of the children in her preschool a number of times a year: "I would always call up, always to wish them Happy Easter and Happy Christmas." Some teachers in the questionnaire survey mentioned

visiting “when we have concerns about a child and the parent does not come to the school” or “to encourage families to be involved in the child’s school activities.”

Lily (manager, Cnocard), although she visited family homes herself, expressed some cautions in relation to home visits. She spoke of the need to respect the parents and for them to be comfortable with visits: “You have to build a relationship to get to know parents before they’ll feel comfortable with you going to their home.” This comment highlights a view that visits should take place in a context of equality between preschool and family, and that teachers should recognise the need for respect when entering the private domain of the family. Lily’s second concern was that demands should not be placed on the teachers outside of preschool hours:

It’s very difficult because [the teacher] is just paid for contact hours
... and ... it’s a bit hard for me to ask her to do home visits as well,
but to be fair to her she will if she feels it will benefit her job.

The evaluation of the Traveller preschools (Department of Education, 2003, p.87) had commended the actions of some teachers in visiting homes:

The valuable work undertaken ... in visiting homes, in establishing
direct personal links with parents and in encouraging involvement by
parents in the preschools should be recognised and built upon.

This recommendation was made in the context of the perceived benefits of teacher-parent-family contact. Although teachers in the preschools were not resourced to visit the families, both the evaluation and this study confirm that such visits did take place. The value of home visitation is recognised in many intervention schemes and is described as being at the heart of the Home-School-Community-Liaison Scheme (HSCL) (Department of Education and Science 2006b). The justification for visitation in the HSCL was to counter the reality that many parents did not feel able to visit schools, due to such factors as lack of confidence, alienation from the education system or lack of time. Boulton (2006) sees benefits in home visits also for the educators, in that they learn about the home context for the children. Teacher visits help bridge a gap between the school and the home. Despite the potential benefits for both sides, sensitivity and caution is appropriate, as suggested by Lily

(manager, Cnocard). HSCL coordinators (Department of Education and Science 2006b) have noted the need to be sensitive to family situations.

6.4.2 Written communication

Written communication can augment face-to-face communication. Ranging from informal notes to more sophisticated newsletters and parent booklets, this can be an important way to keep in contact with parents and to inform them of events and developments in the preschool. However, written communication can present problems for some Traveller parents who may have poor literacy skills. Teachers in the preschools showed sensitivity to this fact, although they did perceive value in written communication.

Table 6.9 Written communication (n=21)

	Yes	No
Q39 Do you send notes home with the children?	17	4
Q40 Does the preschool produce a newsletter or booklet?	13	8

Teachers in seventeen out of twenty-one preschools sent notes home (Table 6.9). Thirteen preschools produced a newsletter or booklet for parents. Similar topics were covered in the newsletters and booklets (Questionnaire Q41), including preschool policies, opening and closing times, holidays and days off. One teacher indicated that she included mention of the preschool's open-door policy, while another included an invitation to parents to visit the preschool. The newsletters and booklets also drew attention to the preschool activities engaged in by the children. In some cases advice was offered to parents regarding healthy eating habits and appropriate clothing and footwear for the children.

There were also references to written communications in the interviews and focus groups. According to Síle (parent, Cnocard), "they send a sheet home every month ... of what songs they are doing and the words of the songs."

Michelle (manager, Carraigmore) explained that her preschool produced a bi-monthly newsletter which incorporated photographs of the children engaged in activities. Indicating a copy of the newsletter, she explained that it "gives dates for

the service and we have points of special interest ... child development, photos of the kids.”

6.4.2.1 Notebooks provide daily feedback

The Newtown preschool was located in a large building that was relatively inaccessible to parents. Coupled with this, a bus was provided for the children which resulted in a lack of direct contact between the parents and the preschool. This was the only example of a preschool that was isolated from the families and where parents did not visit regularly. Possibilities for involvement were extremely limited in this case. The teacher, Chloe, developed a system which kept parents informed of what the children were doing in preschool through the use of individual notebooks.

Chloe provided a notebook for each child, which he or she took home each day and brought in the following morning. In the notebook she detailed the activities that the child had undertaken that day, with relevant commentary and also any specific messages or requests that she wanted to communicate to parents. When Chloe organised a Teddy Bears’ picnic, she put a request in the notebooks asking parents to send in a Teddy Bear with each child the following day. All parents did so, which reassured her that they read her comments in the notebooks.

6.4.2.2 Noticeboard as communication tool

Teachers and managers made efforts to communicate in other ways to ensure that their messages reached the parents. Michelle (manager, Carraigmore) displayed photographs of the children engaged in various preschool activities, titles of storybooks being read to the children and the words of songs and rhymes on a notice board in the hallway of the preschool. She explained:

The point about it is, sometimes they might not have all the information, or sometimes you have to keep reaffirming opening times, closing times, and literacy would be a big issue. So sending out letters isn’t always the best medium. And some do have quite good literacy skills as well, but it isn’t always the best medium.

Teachers and managers in Traveller preschools strove to reach out to parents and to communicate with them in various ways. They visited families and built

relationships with them. They used notes, newsletters and notice-boards, augmented with verbal communications, to ensure that parents knew what was happening in the preschools.

6.5 Parents support children at home

Parental involvement also occurs when parents support their children at home in relation to the activities in the preschool, by talking to them about their day, listening to their songs and rhymes, and showing the children that they value their learning.

6.5.1 Expand on preschool learning in the home

One of Epstein's (2011) six categories of parental involvement is to involve families in learning activities with their children in the home. She describes it as a strategy for increasing the educational effectiveness of the time that the parent spends with the child in the home.

Teachers encouraged parents to expand on the work of the preschool at home in eighteen out of twenty-one preschools (Questionnaire Q24). In six preschools parents borrowed items such as books and jigsaws (Questionnaire Q23). Some teachers asked parents to support the preschool work by reinforcing concepts and by practicing skills such as naming and identifying colours. One teacher said: "Mostly when they are doing their counting and their colours, I encourage parents to continue this at home so that the children won't forget."

Many teachers sent home the words of songs and rhymes and encouraged parents to practice them with their children. One teacher wrote: "the parents will often tell me they have been singing certain songs." Other teachers referred to asking parents to talk to their child about their day or to display the work that the child brought home, or to show interest in other ways. Questionnaire responses included the following comments:

I encourage parents to ask the child what he/she did in school on the day.

Talking about what activities are done, to show interest and to display work.

We inform parents and guardians of our monthly activities and theme songs and rhymes and ask parents to encourage child in all activities.

When dropping children home on the bus we will tell the parent what the child has learned and encourage them to ask the child to sing for them.

Some teachers mentioned asking parents to help when a child had a particular difficulty in the preschool:

If I feel a child has slow language development I would encourage parents to practice rhymes and songs. Also to read stories to the child.

If a child is having difficulties with colours etc I will explain to the parent and give them ideas how to teach the child with play.

Teachers sent home materials in all preschools that took part in the questionnaire survey. In some cases they loaned books or puzzles which the children brought back. However, one teacher said that “parents dislike to borrow for fear of books damaged at home.” In this case the preschool gave out books and puzzles without wanting them to be returned.

While Michelle (manager, Carraigmore) did not explicitly ask parents to work with their children on the songs and rhymes, she displayed them on the noticeboard in the hallway. She said: “I’d prefer the child to go home singing the songs. Sure, you are hoping and depending that parents will listen to them and take it on board.” Nuala (teacher, Cuanmara) asked parents to reinforce colours at home: “I would say to the parents to talk about colours ... point out colours in the house, talk about what colour he’s wearing and all that.” She also said that when one of the children in her class had difficulty with colouring in, she addressed this with his mother’s help: “I have

been asking ... even been giving her ... paper, you know, that he can colour in with or scribble on to get him used to using the crayons.”

The teacher in Cnocard regularly sent the words of the songs home. Síle (parent, Cnocard) said that the teacher “sends a sheet home every month or every fortnight of what songs they are doing and the words of the songs.” Síle sang these songs with her children, saying: “You need to have an interest in them.”

Lucy (parent, Lisnashee) was asked by her son’s teacher, Triona, to work at home with him. This had given Lucy an understanding of the benefit of the preschool activities for his development. She explained: “What I’ve tried to start now was to do more with his hands and his actions ... Tell him a story, play with him and show him how to do things.” Lucy took this task seriously, trusting that the teacher’s advice would help her son in his education. Parent involvement in learning activities in the home can enhance learning and also help the child to perceive similarities between home and preschool (Epstein 2011).

6.5.2 Take-home materials

Parents spoke enthusiastically and positively about material which their children brought home from preschool. This material came under two headings. First, there were the folders of work which the children had completed throughout the year and which some teachers sent home during, or at the end of, the year. Second, there were the crafts and cards that the children made to celebrate occasions throughout the year and which the children took home immediately. Many parents described how they displayed these materials in the home. Some kept the folders for years and it was clear from listening to them that they understood the significance of these materials for their children. They could see that the children had put effort into their work and they sought to support them and reassure them.

6.5.2.1 Parents place a great value on their children’s work

Maeve (parent, Liosbeag) kept all the material which her son had brought home: “I love keeping them. I keep all the stuff ... my husband does be at me. I have bags of them, yeah, up in the loft.” Deirdre’s (parent, Liosbeag) children had moved on from

preschool but recently she had found “a little flower that my son done and he was only in the preschool.” Deirdre had held onto this flower for several years.

The Avonard parents said that their children brought home folders containing all the work that they had done over the year. The parents told of how they had kept the folders. Chrissie said, “You’d keep it,” and Josie, whose older children had previously attended the preschool also, said, “I’ve bits and pieces for mine since they were in the preschool here, the three younger ones. The folder and that. I’ve all them.”

The teacher in Seanbaile made scrapbooks of the children’s work and presented them to the parents at the end of the year. Annie (parent, Seanbaile) explained that the scrapbook for her child contained “photos of birthdays, Christmas, Halloween and of the outings” and she had kept it. Lucy’s (parent, Lisnashee) son brought home his folder: “He’ll have a big folder and their colouring and all the things they’ve made.” Lucy put the contents on display at home. Children at the preschools made cards for their parents to mark festivals and special days during the year. Lucy explained that, “Every year, on Valentine’s day or Mother’s day... he’ll always bring a card or something that he makes. Sally (parent, Cuanmara) said, “I’m proud of what [my daughter] is bringing back to me because I can say to her, ‘that’s very good, you’re doing very very well. Mommy is proud of you today’.”

Both Tara (parent, Avonard) and Shane (parent, Avonard) spoke of the paintings that their children brought home and they said that they displayed them on the wall. Tara said of these paintings: “We can’t make them out, but they can,” while Shane said: “It gives them confidence.” Síle (parent, Cnocard) said that her children brought home pictures from the preschool which she praised them for and which she displayed on the wall at home.

6.5.2.2 Parents’ use of encouragement and praise

The Seanbaile parents also encouraged and praised their children’s efforts when they brought material home from the preschool. In relation to the children’s attitude to what they brought home, Annie (parent, Seanbaile) said: “They think the world of these little cardins and things that they made.” Annie and the other parents told how they admired what the children brought home, and how they praised the children for

their efforts and kept the materials. They were conscious that the preschool was their children's introduction to schooling and they knew that they needed to support them. According to Annie, "you praise them," while Hannah (parent, Seanbaile) added, "you try to encourage them."

Orla (parent, Castletown) said of the materials the children brought home: "I find them very interesting. They put their hearts into it. He brought home a picture. 'My Family' was written on it. I thought it was like the father and mother. I said, 'what's that?' He said, 'I done that down in school'." John (parent, Cnocard), too, was very interested in what his children brought home. "Their songs and stuff like that. There's great craic doing their songs." John spoke of the importance of preschool as the first introduction to learning:

I think it's very important. It's the first stepping stone to school. It learns them a lot ... What you learn in the first stepping stone you carry forward for life.

6.5.3 Parents talk to the children when they come home

Parents spoke of how they talked to their children when they came home from preschool, asking about their day and listening to their stories. Edel (parent, Avonard) reported, "[I] ask him what did he do and what did he eat and did he learn any songs, and he'd tell you." Similarly, Maeve (parent, Liosbeag) said:

I always ask him, 'what did you do today' and he does be singing a song. Yesterday he came home and he was singing Mr Sun. [He] said, 'if you sing that now, Mommy, the sun will come out.' He sings all them when he comes home.

Lucy (parent, Lisnashee) told how her son talked about his day in preschool, "[He] will always tell us. Somebody hits him now in school, or what he did ... we always sing the songs." Sally (parent, Cuanmara) commented on how happy her daughter is after her day at preschool:

The way our kids come home happy, smile on their face, 'we learned this song today' ... She comes back every day she has something different to tell me about the preschool.

Deirdre (parent and childcare worker, Liosbeag) was speaking not only from the perspective of being a childcare worker but also as a parent whose children had attended the preschool in the past. She stressed that asking the children about their day was important for monitoring their progress:

If you don't talk to them when they come home, anything can be wrong with them and they won't let you know about it and I'm sure talking to them you'll find out if they have any little problems in preschool or worries or if they're really learning or if they are falling behind.

Cáit (parent, Cnocard) talked of her son's efforts to get stickers from the teacher for good behaviour:

This last few weeks I've been saying to him, 'are you going to get a sticker today?' 'I'm going to get one. I promise I'm going to be really good for teacher all day. I'm going to get a sticker' and he's been getting stickers loads. He's going, 'I'm going to do this and I'm going to help teacher clean up' and all this stuff. He's all excited.

Cáit was particularly concerned about her children being mannerly and well-behaved, in order to counter negative views of Travellers:

When I'm raising the kids, a lot goes into being mannerly to people, 'do not curse', you know, because people on the outside expect Travellers to be violent, have bad language. They are scared of them. So that's why I bring my kids up to be very good and very well behaved.

Nuala (teacher, Cuanmara) spoke of the feedback she received from parents about activities she had been doing in the classroom:

Recently I got feedback about ... the kids telling about what they're doing in class, which is lovely. Like, '[He] came home and he was talking about a butterfly' or 'he was singing the song about the rabbit' ... [or] 'if you're out and you know it clap your hands'. A few

of the parents said, you know, ‘they are all singing that at home and they made us sing it’. And that’s the first time I’ve got feedback about oral stuff, which is very exciting.

Nuala’s account provided a vivid illustration of parents taking an interest in their children’s preschool learning.

6.5.4 Knowledge of preschool activities

Many parents showed a keen awareness and spoke knowledgeably and positively about their children’s preschool experiences. They showed an appreciation of the skills and knowledge that the children acquired in the preschool.

Sally (parent, Cuanmara) stated that the preschool supported the children’s development in a number of different areas. She explained:

They are learning a lot here and I think it is a good experience for them because they’re doing their painting, they are coming back telling their stories, they’re singing songs. They know how to mix in with the other children and being polite... so I think the preschool is very well education for the kids.

Tara (parent, Avonard) explained how children develop and extend their vocabulary through activities:

Like their speech, things they do ... picture recognition ... they go for a story and then they listened to what the child is saying, learn the child how to listen. So they’ve all their different things, they just have them broken up during the day.

Maisie (parent, Castletown) stated that the preschool provided an opportunity for children to mix with others. She said that “getting used to people” was a useful skill. Hannah (parent, Seanbaile) expressed this view also, and Tom (parent, Seanbaile) added, “and make friends.” Grace (parent, Seanbaile) supported this and said, “They know how to work in a group and with one another.” Shane (parent, Avonard) said: “They learn how to share and be civil to each other.”

Lisa (parent, Seanbaile) commented on the skills acquired by her son in preschool, such as tidying up and putting equipment back in its proper place. She said that this had positively influenced his behaviour at home: “When he’d eat anything he’d put the things in the sink after him and he’d help me with the washing up and clothes and put them in the machine.”

Maisie (parent, Castletown) told how her daughter role-played the preschool activities when she came home: “My [daughter] sits by herself and talks to herself. ‘I’m the teacher, you’re the child’ with a book and copy. She’d be doing this [I’m a little] teapot thing.”

Cáit (parent, Cnocard) was awed by the depth and scope of her son’s learning at the preschool:

We were looking at a TV show, it was about animals. He said, ‘they are arctic animals, polar bears and penguins’. He was telling me about walruses, and walruses had tusks, you know. So he’s doing really well. He can count. He compares colours. What they look like and everything. He learns a lot. He’s very good at his colours. Now, if he doesn’t remember the name of a colour, he’ll say, ‘oh, that’s like the top you’re wearing.’ And then he’ll tell me about loads of stuff. He learns an awful lot down there. He learns a lot about respecting other people, about sharing. I know that they are just simple little things, but sometimes they are good things to learn.

The parents’ knowledge of the preschool came from preschool visits and communication with the teacher, and also from talking and listening to their children when they came home from preschool.

6.5.5 Most significant learning in the home

According to Stern (2003, p.49), “parents know more than teachers about their children and are likely to have taught them more too”. The most significant learning in the child’s life happens in the home, particularly at preschool age. When parents and educators support one another’s efforts, learning is improved and the gap between preschool and home is reduced. Hallgarten (2000) cautions on the need to

avoid home being “colonised” by the school. He expressed a view that “the aim must be to mould the fabric of home learning to ensure that it retains its richness and diversity; home-based learning must aim to be family-like, not school-like” (2000, p.63). On this, the parents in this study were aware of the benefits to the child’s learning of supporting and encouraging them at home.

6.6 Traveller culture in the preschool

The questionnaire survey of teachers in Traveller preschools included questions on the representation of Traveller culture. Ten out of twenty-one teachers had discussed this issue with parents (Questionnaire Q64). Teachers were asked to list ways that Traveller culture was represented in their preschools (Questionnaire Q63). Items on their lists included posters, jigsaws, models and storybooks on Traveller themes. Some teachers mentioned home-corner activities reflecting Traveller lives. One mentioned the use of videos of baptisms, weddings and other Traveller family gatherings. Another mentioned the use of an anti-bias curriculum and the need to nurture in children “cultural awareness through a strong sense of identity.” One teacher said that Traveller parents did not want Traveller culture represented in the preschool, while one said that Traveller culture was not discussed in the preschool as “young children don’t know the meaning of Traveller culture.”

As seen in Chapter 5, parents differed in their views concerning the inclusion of Traveller culture within primary and second level schools, with some believing that it was vital, while others feared that they had to choose between cultural recognition and a good education. Some also believed that references to Traveller culture in the classroom would cause the settled children to ridicule the Traveller children. Although there were also differences with respect to this issue in relation to preschool, these were much less pronounced due to the all-Traveller nature of the preschools and parents felt comfortable about the inclusion of Traveller culture. Most wanted their culture represented while others were ambivalent rather than opposed. Some parents placed themselves central to the representation of their culture in the preschools.

John (parent, Cnocard) believed that the Traveller preschool that his children attended supported and affirmed their Traveller identity through interaction with other Traveller children:

I think the biggest importance they learn at Traveller preschools is they are with other Traveller children, they are learning the culture ...

I think it's the first stepping stone towards education.

Cáit (parent, Cnocard) wanted her son to do well in preschool but she was also conscious that as a Traveller another dimension was added to his experience there. She explained:

We want the children to go down there and do well and not get discriminated and we probably never emphasised so much on their culture because we wanted them to just try and learn as much as they can.

Nonetheless, she viewed the inclusion of Traveller culture in the preschool programme as a bonus. She explained how the teacher had built on her son's love of horses by incorporating this interest into his learning activities. For example, he had learned how to make a sulky from pipe cleaners. She continued:

He learns a lot about horses at preschool too ... [the teacher] knew that Bill was big into horses she started doing a lot with them about horses. When the children mention stuff she starts to do a lot of research.

Michelle (manager, Carraigmore) spoke of how the teacher in her preschool endeavoured to reflect Traveller culture by making books with the children:

We make little books for the children and there's a little guy here and he loved horses, and he'd be telling us all about the different parts of the horse, so we, along with him, cut out pictures and made a little book and he talks about this.

Síle (parent, Cnocard) stated that it was important to reflect Traveller culture in the preschool:

I've two girls in preschool now Because it's a Traveller preschool I think Traveller culture is really important and they do things of Traveller culture in different ways. They have themes of horses, caravans ... Because it is a Traveller preschool I think it's very important that Travellers have that space for Travellers – Traveller culture – and they know it but just to get them learning about it in school makes them familiarise with school.

Síle further added: “I think when you go into that preschool you should know automatically looking around the room that it is a Traveller preschool.”

Sally (parent, Cuanmara) also wanted Traveller culture reflected in the preschool that her daughter attended, although like Cáit (parent, Cnocard), her primary concern was about education:

Let them know they are still Travellers. Carry on the Travellers' ways. It's hard to do it in the preschool, very hard when your child is coming in for an education, very hard because if you send your child in you want [him or her to] get an education for themselves, whatever, but even hang pictures up, back in the 50s and 60s, that was your way, that was your family's way.

Chrissie (parent, Avonard) supported the representation of Traveller culture in preschool, saying that, “it would be nice to be seen, it's going back for generations with the Travelling people.”

Deirdre (parent and childcare worker, Liosbeag) she said that Traveller culture was reflected in the preschool through pictures, jigsaws and diversity posters. She was unsure how apparent this representation would be to the parents of the children attending the preschool:

It all depends on how someone would look from the outside, coming in. Being a Traveller here, I can see little things that does represent the Travellers.

Grace (parent, Seanbaile) said that she would like to see “a bit more about their culture and things” being taught in the preschool, although she added:

[The teacher] brings it in already and she goes ‘oh are you going on your holidays now in your van and your trailers’ and she’ll be on about the horses ... [She also brings in] pictures of wagons, trailers and things – bringing in the culture, like.

Contrary to their views on Traveller culture in primary and second level, parents wanted their children to experience their preschool education in an environment that was home-like and that reflected their culture.

6.6.1 Parents central to the representation of culture

Grace (parent, Seanbaile) put herself and other parents central to the inclusion of Traveller culture in the preschools, saying that Traveller parents could give “our ideas about what we might like to be taught.” Grace also suggested that there should be a Traveller on the staff of the preschool, which was not the case in her preschool:

I think as well it would be good if a Traveller was in there because they know what Travellers teach; a settled person wouldn’t really know the values as much as the Traveller.

Similarly, parents in Castletown suggested that the Traveller childcare worker could teach the Traveller traditions, or that they themselves could go into the preschool to do this. Sara (parent, Castletown) said: “Bring in a Traveller, bring in parents. That’s what they do in [local second level school]. I’d do it. I’d have no problem talking to the children here.” Orla (parent, Castletown) suggested that an older Traveller could be brought in, saying “old people know more, like.”

The parents in Cnocard were consulted on the inclusion of Traveller culture in their preschool. According to Cáit (parent, Cnocard):

The teacher and manager will tell the parents what they are going to do concerning, say, Traveller culture and ask if the parents agree and if they are going about it the proper way.

One aspect of cultural inclusion in the preschools is the use of the Cant language. In the questionnaire survey, twelve out of twenty-one teachers felt that they could incorporate Cant as part of the preschool programme (Questionnaire Q65), although whether they were actually doing so was not explored in the survey. The parent focus groups revealed that Cant had been introduced in the preschools in Seanbaile and Cnocard and parents were supportive of its introduction in Castletown.

Some parents were not interested in the inclusion of Traveller culture in the preschool. Lucy (parent, Lisnashee) was pleased that the staff behaved positively towards her son and that they did not discriminate against him on account of his Traveller identity. However, she would prefer to keep her son's Traveller identity separate from his schooling. Cultural traditions could be passed on at home, she held. On this, she said:

It wouldn't bother me to be honest because we have our own tradition at home and there's things that we like, say, horses, wagons. If they are on television, we watch them. But that's not saying the likes of [my son] is going to be interested in these things, do you know what I mean?

Lucy's own school experiences have left her hurt and anxious to protect her children from a similar fate. To protect them, she wanted to keep their culture separate from their schooling.

6.6.2 Reflecting the culture of the Traveller child

The *Preschools for Travellers: National Evaluation Report* (Department of Education and Science 2003, p.84) recommended as follows:

Schools and teachers should be reminded of the need to provide some educational resources that reflect Traveller culture, while at the same time enabling the child to explore a wide range of experiences.

Most of the preschools in this study did try to reflect Traveller culture, in the toys and materials they used and in preschool activities. They used posters, jigsaws and books with themes of particular interest to Travellers, such as horses, trailers and the Cant language. Although the all-Traveller nature of the preschools should provide

scope for this, the fact that most of the teachers were non-Travellers posed a challenge. It is only by working with parents that this can be overcome, as suggested by some teachers and parents in this study. This is especially the case since culture is complex and not easily pinned down. McDonagh (1994) gave voice to this twenty years ago, when he stated: “My culture is everything about me, how I think, how I act, how I make decisions, and everything else that is important to me.” It is important that this reality is reflected in a way which is natural and not just token. Yet, it is important also that the Traveller child should see his or her culture reflected in the preschools. This calls to mind the recollection of Gussin Paley (2001, p.xv), a kindergarden teacher in the US, of her memories of school as a young Jewish child and the gap between school and home:

In the schools of my childhood, attended by the children of emigrants, nothing that might connect me to a certain people or place was ever mentioned. Whatever I learned at home about myself as a Jewish child was left at the schoolhouse door. Suddenly, at five, I became a stranger in a world that belonged to others.

Traveller children should not feel like this in their preschools, and through dialogue, parents and teachers can work together to ensure a Traveller-friendly environment.

6.7 Parents and decision-making

Parents’ involvement with decision-making can be achieved through the inclusion of parent members on preschool management committees and parent committees. It is arguably the most important aspect of parental involvement, as it respects parents as partners in the preschool. Although the questionnaire survey showed that parents were represented on almost half of the management committees, focus groups and individual interviews with parents revealed little knowledge of management among the parents. The Traveller preschool in Cnocard was the only preschool with a developed system for involving parents in decision-making.

6.7.1 Parents on management committees

There were parent representatives on the management committees of ten out of twenty-one preschools (Questionnaire Q52). In two preschools parent representatives were elected by the other parents, and they were chosen by the management or teacher in the remaining eight (Questionnaire Q55). See Figure 6.2.



Figure 6.2 Traveller parents on preschool management committee

Of the ten preschools with parent representation on their management committees, the number of parent representatives varied. In four preschools, there was one parent representative, in a further four there were two representatives and in the remaining two there were more than two parent representatives (Questionnaire Q53). In eight preschools mothers were more likely than fathers to be representatives, while mothers and fathers were equally likely to be representatives in the remaining two.

Table 6.10 Parent attendance at management committee meetings (n=10)

Q56 How would you rate the attendance of parents at management committee meetings	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor	Not given
Number of preschools	2	4	-	3	1

Table 6.11 Parent attendance filtered by number of parents on committee (n=10)

Attendance of parents on committees with	One parent	Two parents	>Two parents
	3 Poor 1 Good	2 Good 1 Very Good	1 Very Good

Note: Number of parents not specified in two cases

Attendance of parent representatives at management committee meetings was rated as Very Good or Good in six preschools and Poor in a further three (Questionnaire

Q56). Attendance by parent representatives was better where there was more than one parent representative on the management committee.

Table 6.12 Parent contribution to management committee meetings (n=10)

Q57 Do parents contribute to discussion at management meetings?	Regularly	Occasionally	Rarely	Never	Not given
	3	5	-	1	1

Table 6.13 Parent contribution filtered by number of parents on committee (n=10)

Contribution of parents on committees with	One parent	Two parents	>Two parents	Number not given
Rated Regular to Never	Regular 1 Occasional 1 Never 1 Not given 1	Occasional 4	Regular 1	Regular 1

Parent representatives were judged to be Regular contributors in three preschools, Occasional contributors in five preschools and in one preschool the parent representative was reported as never having contributed at the management committee meetings (Questionnaire Q57). The four preschools with one parent representative reported that these parents contributed to the discussion at management committee meetings in a range from Regular to Never. The preschools with more than one representative reported parent contributions either as Occasional or Regular. In the two preschools where the parent representatives were elected by the parents themselves, their attendance at management committee meetings was Good and Very Good, respectively, and they regularly contributed to discussion.

6.7.2 Cnocard: An example of good practice

There was one significant example of good practice in relation to Traveller parent representation in decision-making, and this was the Cnocard preschool. The Traveller parents in Cnocard were represented on the management committee of their preschool by representatives that they elected, and they also participated in a parents committee for the preschool. The parents committee had contributed to the preschool curriculum in relation to the representation of Traveller culture. The parents fund-raised for the preschool. They were the only parents interviewed who

had good knowledge of, and were involved in, management or representative bodies for their preschool.

The Cnocard preschool was part of the Cnocard Traveller Organisation, which included a crèche and an adult training centre. Lily (manager, Cnocard) described how the preschool had come under the auspices of the Cnocard Traveller Organisation:

We didn't used to be in overall charge of [the preschool]. It used to be run by a management committee and that was kind of falling away and rather than lose the preschool for the Traveller people and the Traveller children we then took it on board. The management committee of [the Cnocard Traveller Organisation] undertook to oversee that and employed a manager to oversee all the childcare.

Lily spoke of how important the preschool was for the local Traveller community and the sense of belonging that they had concerning it:

It's part of their culture. They don't want to lose that. That has been a Traveller preschool since the day it opened so there is a kind of ...belonging as part of that.

She described the circumstances in the preschool when she took up her post as childcare manager:

When I first came here there was very little parental involvement and I think the first year when you work you have to get to know people before you can actually come in and make changes ... you have to meet people, get to know them, build up relationships with them, sort out how they feel they could be part of it. So we've actually a small minority of parents who are very good, always attend everything and support everything that's going on. We actually have a parents committee now as well which is fantastic and a good support too. We are hoping to build on that.

Lily was committed to creating space for involvement of the parents in the preschool and thus promoting a greater knowledge of preschool education. She felt that parents had a right to involvement and through this they could contribute to and influence the work of the preschool. She believed that greater involvement of the parents in all aspects of the preschool would provide benefits: “My whole vision around it, as well, is to get parents to understand the importance of preschool education.”

There were two representative layers in Cnocard, a parents committee for the Traveller preschool and a management committee for the overall organisation, and there were Traveller parent representatives from the preschool on each. These representatives on the management committee, elected through the parents committee, afforded parents an input into decision-making for the preschool. Síle (parent, Cnocard) described the management committee for the organisation:

The overall organisation which Cáit is chairperson, which runs the whole organisation and the preschool ... but there are parents who come in as well from the parents committee.

While Síle was not a member of the management committee, her belief was that it was “very well run” and that she was well represented by parents from the preschool: “Cáit is on it, she’s a parent, Catherine is a staff rep, but she’s a parent in the preschool too.”

The parents committee in Cnocard discussed the preschool activities and curriculum, fundraised for the preschool, and also elected parent representatives to the management committee. The parents committee was chaired by Síle and it met “once every six weeks” according to Cáit (parent, Cnocard).

The parents committee was open to all the parents of children attending the preschool. The teacher did not attend the meetings, but Lily (manager, Cnocard) did attend and she mediated two-way communications between the parents and the teacher. Cáit explained this mediation: “Lily, she listens to us, she listens to what [the teacher] thinks.” According to Síle:

Lily would come ... to the parents committee and, like, there’s a list she brings back of what [the children] are exactly doing at the

moment and a note goes out to all the parents of what's happening at the moment, of ... the Traveller culture theme and, you know, what they do ... We had the parents' meeting away back a couple of weeks ago and it did come out of it that Cant should be used more in the Traveller preschool so we will put our heads together hopefully and we will make charts with the different meanings of [Cant] words and, you know, put it up for the children and keep talking in the preschool to keep it up. It seems to be dying. So, we'll keep it up in the preschool, hopefully.

Síle described how the Traveller parents had discussed the Cant language at the parents committee meeting and came to a decision that they should take action to try to preserve the language. This required the cooperation of the teacher and Lily (manager, Cnocard), acting as a go-between, facilitated this. Thus the parents in Cnocard, through involvement in the parents committee, were able to contribute to the representation of Traveller culture in the preschool by organising and producing teaching materials concerning the Cant language. Lily felt that this type of contribution by parents to the preschool curriculum was a natural progression from understanding the importance of preschool and becoming involved on the parents committee.

Síle, who was chairperson of the parents committee, felt that the parents were fortunate to have this preschool, linking it to the issue of Traveller identity:

[This preschool] is great on the Traveller identity. It's a place I went to and a lot of Travellers went to and it's really important to Travellers that it's there, 'cause it has to be theirs as well.

Síle explained why the parents committee organised a fundraising day for the preschool: "It's our preschool ... we have got to fund to run it ... We'll have a big fundraising day ... to raise money for [the preschool]."

While the parents committee was open to all of the parents of the preschool children, not all were actively involved. According to Síle, "A lot of parents don't participate; it's always the same parents." However, she pointed out that parents who did not attend committee meetings were kept informed of its activities. She said: "a note

goes out to all the parents of what is happening at the moment.” She also pointed out that those parents who were less involved supported events organised by the committee:

They do go to the [organised fundraising day], but to organise to go [to the meetings] it could be, like, due to younger children at home, and to go somewhere, just particular circumstances.

Gender was also a factor in relation to participation in the parents committee. John (parent, Cnocard) said that he attended the parents committee “an odd time, it’s mostly mothers.” He said that this was the same for the other fathers, explaining:

I think Traveller men think it’s up to the women to be involved about the children. That’s what I think, and I think probably they’d be ashamed to come, but probably would come if a few more went.

John’s comments corresponded to the questionnaire survey of teachers which showed that mothers were more involved than fathers in the management committees of the preschools.

Lily (manager, Cnocard) described the parents committee as a “work in progress” and was hopeful of drawing in more parents over time. However, parents who were not involved with the parents committee did support the preschool in other ways such as attending the fundraising event.

Not all parents were active on the parents committee and those who were involved were mainly mothers. This is not unusual, as Reay (2005) found little evidence of fathers being involved in monitoring or supporting their children’s educational performance, while Lareau (2000, 2011) found that in both working-class and middle-class families mothers were more likely than fathers to be involved with their children’s education, especially in the lower grades. However, John (parent, Cnocard) did suggest that fathers would attend “if a few more went” so an explicit outreach to fathers may be needed. Whalley (2007) found that, while mothers believed that that their partners would not want to be involved, the fathers actually responded positively to an explicit invitation.

6.7.3 Parents' knowledge of management structures

Apart from Cnocard, discussed above, parents in the study generally had little or no knowledge of management structures in their preschools.

According to Carmel (manager, Avonard), there was a Traveller parent on the preschool management committee, although this parent was not a member of the focus group held in Avonard. The parent representative had been chosen by the management committee.

The parents in the Avonard focus group had little knowledge of the management committee or of the parent representative on it:

Shane: "If there is, it ain't one of us"

Josie: "I don't know anything about it".

Tara: "I didn't even know there was a management".

Kitty: "I think this one is [run] by the government"

Parents in other preschools also demonstrated a lack of knowledge of the management of their preschools. For example, neither Lucy (parent, Lisnashee) nor Maeve (parent, Liosbeag) had knowledge of the management committees of their preschools. Deirdre (parent and childcare worker, Liosbeag) said that to her knowledge, a Traveller parent had been on the management committee in the past, but that there was none at the time of the interview.

The Seanbaile parents had no knowledge of the management committee of their preschool and they were not involved in it, with Lisa (parent, Seanbaile) saying: "I never heard of it in the preschool". However, they expressed themselves in favour of a forum, such as a parents committee, where they could have an input:

Annie: "Which I think is another important thing, there should be a committee ... if there were a few meeting the parents could go and give their views".

Tom: “There should be meetings held every so often ... to talk about ... preschool.”

Grace: “A settled person wouldn’t really know the values as much as the Travellers.”

These parents talked of the benefit of getting together in order to discuss the preschool so that they could make a contribution and have their voices heard.

There were no parent representatives on the Cuanmara management committee and Sally (parent, Cuanmara) did not see any need for this or for a parents committee as she was satisfied with the way the preschool was run; “We know we haven’t to worry ... because we know everything is perfect for our kids here.” However, Sally also said that parents had come to occasional meetings called by Nuala (teacher, Cuanmara) in response to particular difficulties. Nuala explained:

I call meetings with the parents the odd time, get together as a group ... I’ve had one or two meetings here where we talked about the fact that we don’t have a [childcare] assistant ... we have to look for one and it would be at a meeting like that where we’d say it.

Following on from one such meeting, Sally explained how she had lobbied on behalf of the preschool:

I wrote to [politicians], like, they are trying to take our bus away and our children here needs [funding for] another helper in permanent, and they have given us bad respect on that.

Sally had also been involved in organising a petition and in mobilising support of other parents for these issues. She had advocated on behalf of the preschool. Thus parents rallied to support the teacher and preschool when issues of concern were made known to them.

6.7.4 Factors that inhibit involvement of parents in management

Although there were no parent representatives on most of the management committees, the teachers and managers were supportive of such representation and

they described efforts that they had made to remedy this. According to Michelle (manager, Carraigmore):

At the information evenings that we hold for parents I have asked parents would they like to be involved, what ways would they like to be involved, but I didn't get any [response] ... They are great at valuing what the kids bring home, stuff like that, but they are not keen to be involved in the committee. Some people shy away from committees.

Triona (teacher, Lisnashee) believed that parents should be on the management committee but she had encountered obstacles in her efforts to get the parents' approval for her nominees:

We tried ... and the parents wouldn't approve of the one we picked so we had to let it go ... when [the parents] realised that this girl was always there ... they didn't want it and then we picked another man and we were told that he was [involved in anti-social activity].

Similarly, Nuala (teacher, Cuanmara) said that the absence of parent representatives from her preschool was not intentional and that it was something that she had made efforts to redress; "Well, we tried for the last two or three years to get the parents to go on it and they wouldn't go on it". She outlined some obstacles:

I think picking a parent that is acceptable to everybody ... we have problems with different families sort of getting on and there would be jealousy which parent is on ... I think getting a parent to do it in the first place and then to get one that everybody is happy with, has voted in or whatever.

Both Triona and Nuala had made efforts to include Traveller parents on the management committees of their preschools, and had sought the parents' support for this. Disagreements and feuds among the Traveller families can lead to objections to particular nominees and can also frustrate efforts to create an environment in which parent elections can take place.

John (parent, Cnocard) cited the lack of educational achievement of Traveller adults and the discrimination that Travellers experience in society, with a resulting lack of confidence, as reasons why Traveller parents might be reluctant to volunteer for committees:

I think they are not really involved with the school because the parents have a lack of education themselves and they have low confidence level. Society in general don't want the Traveller community ... so it's very hard to get involved in parents' committees and stuff like that.

Sara (parent, Castletown) commented on the need to counteract the lack of education:

You'd want a good education for that ... If the words were broken down and we understood them in our own way, I would prefer if there were some parents with kids in this school would go on it.

Hannah (parent, Seanbaile), referring to the primary school board of management, spoke of her lack of confidence:

I'd never put myself forward in a million years. I wouldn't like to be in it, to tell you the truth. I'd be no good in it. No, I wouldn't like to be in it. They'd be coming up with this thing and that thing. You mightn't have an answer.

Tara (parent, Avonard) offered a different reason as to why she would not want to be a parent representative on the preschool management committee:

I find my time taken up ... I only have four but between washing and cleaning I nearly always have appointments with doctors and that. The time just goes.

Thus, parents were reluctant to involve themselves in management because of lack of education, lack of confidence and lack of time because of family commitments.

Reluctance by parents was not the only reason for lack of parent representatives on the management committees of the preschools. Where the Traveller preschool was a unit within a larger organisation which managed a number of projects, the layers of management can work counter to the aim of involving parents. For example, Carraigmore Traveller Organisation comprised seventeen projects, including the preschool, under one management committee. A committee with representation from each of these projects would be unwieldy and there were no preschool parent representatives on the committee. Although she perceived some value in having parent representatives, Michelle (manager, Carraigmore) did not think it a necessity, as she believed that the staff could represent the parents:

Do I see a value in having Traveller parent representatives? I do, but do you know what, I also feel that we have such a respect and regard for Traveller families that, you know, we really are their voice because we have a lot of involvement in the area through the different projects here as well.

Although she spoke of respect and regard for the Traveller families, the mediated voice that she suggested would not be authentic and parents need to be able to express their views themselves. As both a non-Traveller and a staff member, it would be difficult for Michelle to adequately represent the views of parents.

6.7.5 Involving parents as partners

A true partnership with parents is not possible if parents cannot contribute to decision-making (Epstein 2011). Decision-making can be exercised through parent committees and parent membership of management committees, but it can also be seen in activities such as lobbying on behalf of the preschool, as in the case of Sally (parent, Cuanmara) above. Sally did not see any need for her involvement in the management of the preschool, but she was prepared to mobilise on behalf of the preschool when she perceived it to be threatened.

Although teacher questionnaires showed that there were parent representatives on management committees in over half of the preschools, interview and focus group findings suggest that the involvement of Traveller parents in decision-making within the preschools was limited. Only Cnocard involved parents in all aspects of the

preschool, and it was only in Cnocard that parents seemed to know anything about the management.

Generally, teachers and managers throughout the study expressed support for involving parents further in management and parents were also in favour of this, although some expressed reservations. Some managers and teachers spoke of the difficulties that they had experienced in securing parent representation on the management committees of their preschools. Parents who were reluctant cited lack of confidence, especially in relation to their education and literacy skills and also lack of time to commit to membership of such committees. This latter is a genuine concern as family commitments and childminding can pose challenges for parents, particularly mothers. However, it may also to some extent be used to mask lack of confidence or concerns about ability among parents.

Parent representatives on Traveller preschool management committees were more likely to be mothers than fathers. This is not surprising since mothers are more involved generally than fathers in their children's schooling (Hallgarten 2000, Reay 2003, Reay 2005, Vincent and Martin 2005). Whalley (2007) states that fathers were involved in Pen Green. Fathers were part of this study and while their numbers were small, it is not clear that it was due to lack of interest.

The *Traveller Preschool National Evaluation Report* (Department of Education and Science 2003) had found no evidence of parents being consulted about curriculum content. The preschool in Cnocard had made progress in this area and this progress was facilitated by the existence of the parents committee. This preschool was a model of good practice and showed what is possible with commitment and vision. While not all parents were actively involved in the parents committee, those who were involved were enthusiastic and knowledgeable about their preschool; they felt it was theirs and they took responsibility for it.

6.8 Conclusion

It is widely acknowledged that bridging the gap between school and family can play an important role in addressing educational disadvantage (see Chapter 2). Parental involvement covers a range of practices. It has been shown that Traveller preschools

sought to involve parents in various ways, and that parents were, to a significant extent, willing to engage. The practices used by the preschools were not necessarily fully developed, nor were they necessarily fully integrated into the day-to-day operations of the preschools. Practices depend to a large extent on the skills and commitment of individual teachers, on the resources available, and the value that parents place on them. However, the practices documented here do demonstrate that both staff and parents saw value in parental involvement in Traveller preschools. Teachers strove to create a warm and welcoming space where parents could be involved, and parents responded to the opportunities provided. They dropped into the preschools for various reasons and this gave them a good understanding of the value of preschool; they also advocated for their children and supported their learning in the home. The range and type of involvement in Traveller preschools showed that parents responded when preschools were welcoming and open.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a conclusion to the thesis. An overview of the findings in relation to the three aims of the research is outlined. Also, implications for policy, practice and future research are considered.

I embarked on this study in order to explore the type and degree of involvement that Traveller parents have in their children's preschool education within Traveller preschools. It is the only major study conducted on this matter. To carry out the study, I positioned the issue of parental involvement within the context of the Traveller parents' own educational experiences. As these experiences were shaped, to a large extent, by government policy towards, and societal views on, the Traveller community and Traveller culture, it was necessary to explore my three aims. My position was that findings in relation to them could be brought together to tell a coherent and compelling story about this aspect of Traveller education.

7.1.1 Research approach

I adopted a qualitative approach to the research, based on three explicit research aims: to generate an understanding of the historical and policy context within which Traveller preschools evolved; to generate an understanding of Traveller parents' perspective on schooling; and to generate an understanding of parental involvement practices in Traveller preschools. The research paradigm was interpretivism, drawing on social constructivism and critical theory. Adopting the latter provided a lens for a consideration of power structures in society and reflected my concern for social justice; one motivation of mine was to advance equality and social justice for Travellers. A further aspect to the research was the need for a reflexive stance, as I was a member of the settled population carrying out research on Travellers, a minority group of which I am not a member. This necessitated that I acknowledge

my own position in the research and try to ensure that the parents' voices come through in the thesis.

I used a variety of methods. Question one was investigated through critical engagement with relevant policy documents. I analysed three milestone documents dealing with Travellers generally: the *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy* (Government of Ireland 1963) (hereafter referred to as *Commission Report*) the *Report of the Travelling People Review Body* (Government of Ireland 1983) (hereafter referred to as *Review Body Report*) and the *Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community* (Government of Ireland 1995) (hereafter referred to as *Task Force Report*). This was supplemented with analysis of related documents dealing with Traveller education and with Traveller preschools. The final policy document considered was *Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy* (Department of Education and Science 2006a) (hereafter referred to as the TES).

Aims two and three were investigated by conducting case studies. To this end, the focus in pursuing the second question was on the Traveller parents' perspectives on their own schooling and that of their children. Interviews and focus groups with the Traveller parents elicited the data used to address this aim, together with some data from teacher and manager research. In some cases the focus groups helped parents to tease out and develop views with their fellow parents which differed from their first unreflective responses. This was especially the case in relation to questions about representation and recognition of Traveller culture. The interview method allowed deeper probing of issues that were not easily disclosed in a focus group, such as the degree of hurt that parents felt in relation to their own schooling.

The focus in pursuing the third aim was on parental involvement in Traveller preschools. The same methods were used as with question two, although the research with teachers and managers contributed more to addressing it. There was no uniformity in policy or practice regarding parental involvement across the preschools, so it was necessary to get some indication of the range of practices that had been used. This was achieved through using a teacher questionnaire. The questionnaire also indicated teacher views on involving parents. These views were teased out more fully in teacher and manager interviews.

7.1.2 Equality and social justice

I undertook this study because I believe in equality and social justice. Through my work I had seen the inequality that Travellers have experienced in various aspects of their lives, and how their choices were constrained by public policy and public opinion. Travellers' access to accommodation was often blocked and frustrated by local residents (Helleiner 2000). There were cases where settled parents withdrew their children en masse from schools rather than allow them to be educated with Traveller children (Irish Independent 2001). It was not until the end of the twentieth century that Travellers had the protection of the law against discrimination in employment and services (Employment Equality Act 1998 and Equal Status Act 2000). While welcome, these laws did not end the discrimination and prejudice that Travellers experience.

I taught in a Traveller preschool for twenty-five years and I got to know and respect the Travellers whom I met on a regular basis. I noted how they responded to the education of their children in the preschool and how encouraging and supportive they were of them. I saw how the children thrived in the preschool, yet as they progressed through primary school they almost invariably fell behind their settled peers. I believed that if I examined parental involvement in Traveller preschools it would give me an insight into Travellers' approach to education, taking into account their educational experiences and standards of education. I felt that it would add to an understanding of issues related to Travellers and education, especially early years education, and that it could contribute to policy and practice in this area.

7.2 Summary of findings

7.2.1 Aim 1: To analyse policy documents

Chapter 4 addressed the first aim of the research, namely, to generate understanding of the historical and policy context in which Traveller preschools developed. Four themes require consideration in relation to this document analysis: first, the evolution from policies of absorption and assimilation towards policies based on equality and cultural recognition; second, the rationale provided for the development of Traveller preschools; third, the publication of the Traveller Education Strategy

and subsequent developments; finally, the call by Traveller organisations for recognition of the Traveller community as an ethnic group.

7.2.1.1 From assimilation to cultural recognition

Travellers were brought into the education system following the *Commission Report* (Government of Ireland 1963) and subsequent *Committee Report: Educational Facilities for the Children of Itinerants* (Department of Education 1970). No recognition was given in these documents to Traveller culture and there was no respect shown for Traveller nomadism. In fact, Travellers were regarded as “deviant, destitute, dropouts” (Lodge and Lynch 2004, p.93) in need of rehabilitation and absorption into settled society. This misrecognition of Traveller identity caused real harm.

Travellers were brought into an education system which did not understand them. Although the aim was assimilation, the system devised for Travellers was marked by separation and exclusion. Over the years they experienced separate schools, separate classes and withdrawal from regular classes. Within regular classes, many Traveller children were left untaught at the back of the class (Dwyer 1974). The negative stereotype of Travellers as being dirty was reinforced by the practice of showering Traveller children in the schools.

A more positive view of Travellers began to emerge with the *Review Body Report* (Government of Ireland 1983). Unlike the Commission on Itinerancy, membership of the Review Body included a number of Travellers and representatives of Traveller organisations. The policy of assimilation was replaced by one of integration, with explicit recognition of Travellers as a distinct group “with their own distinct lifestyle, traditionally of a nomadic nature” (Government of Ireland 1983, p.6). The *Review Body Report* (Government of Ireland 1983) recognised that when Travellers settled in houses they did not thereby abandon their cultural identity. It was also supportive of nomadism, although it held that only Travellers living in houses could aspire to an education. It supported separate education for Travellers on an interim basis, as it held that most did not come from “reasonably normal home conditions” (Government of Ireland 1983, p.65). A growing number of Traveller children were attending mainstream classes in primary schools, although they were still isolated

within their classrooms with Dwyer (1988) acknowledging that the culture of the classroom reflected that of the settled population.

By 1992 the majority of Traveller children were enrolled in primary schools but only a few transferred to second level (Government of Ireland 1992). In 1994 the Department of Education issued guidelines for the education of Traveller children (Department of Education 1994b) which promoted cultural diversity and recognised Traveller culture as a distinct culture.

The late 1980s and early 1990s saw the emergence of social partnership, starting with the *Programme for National Recovery* (Government of Ireland 1987). This concept of social partnership influenced the approach of the Task Force. The *Task Force Report* (Government of Ireland 1995) signalled a shift from a welfare approach to a rights-based approach and called for Travellers to be involved in decisions that affected them.

As with the Review Body, there were a number of Travellers and representatives of Traveller organisations on the Task Force, but it had fewer representatives from the voluntary sector. The *Task Force Report* (Government of Ireland 1995) seemed to imply that Travellers were a distinct ethnic group, although it did not explicitly call for them to be recognised as such. It was stronger than the Review Body in its recommendations that the distinct culture of Travellers should be recognised. It recommended an inter-cultural approach in schools, with different cultures presented in an accurate and positive manner, and it urged a review of textbooks to ensure that they were not ethnocentric or racist. It also called for improved communication between schools and Traveller parents and for greater involvement of Traveller parents in their children's schools, reflecting the overall spirit of partnership that informed this document.

7.2.1.2 Traveller preschools

In the late 1960s the value of preschooling was being promoted internationally, especially with the establishment of the Headstart programme (US Department of Health and Human Services 1985) in the United States, and the Irish Department of Education was supporting a model preschool in Rutland Street in Dublin (Holland 1979). This was the background against which the Department of Education (1970)

suggested that preschools could help to socialise young Traveller children, so that they would fit in better in primary school. This relatively modest aim led to funding being made available for voluntary organisations to support Traveller preschools around the country. The *Review Body Report* (Government of Ireland 1983) was supportive of Traveller preschools and called for their expansion, and for the involvement of Traveller parents in the preschools. In the five years following publication of this report, the number of Traveller preschools had grown from 30 to 45 (Dwyer 1988).

The *Task Force Report* (Government of Ireland 1995) was also supportive of Traveller preschools. It noted, however, that the Department of Education had never issued guidelines for practice or curriculum within the preschools. It called for an evaluation of Traveller preschools. This was carried out in 2002, with the report issuing in 2003 (Department of Education and Science 2003).

The evaluation noted the *ad hoc* nature of the management committees of the preschools and it recommended that guidelines be drawn up concerning their composition and duties. It also urged that parents of children attending the preschools be elected to management committees. It called on Traveller preschools to develop parental involvement policies, in consultation with parents, and sensitive to Traveller culture.

Recommendations of the evaluation were never implemented and were overtaken by the Traveller Education Strategy (Department of Education and Science 2006a) which sought an end to all Traveller-specific provision.

7.2.1.3 Traveller Education Strategy

When the TES was published, there was almost full participation of Traveller children in primary schools. However, the TES drew attention to the continued low achievement and completion rates for Traveller children. In the years up to the TES there had been immigration into Ireland, which created a diverse population. Travellers were no longer on their own as a minority group in Irish society. The TES sought an end to interventions targeted at Travellers, on a phased basis, and instead sought that interventions be based solely on identified need. It also sought an intercultural approach to education.

Implementation of the TES began during a period of severe restrictions on government funding. Traveller specific provision was ended, including the visiting teacher service, the resource teachers for Travellers and Traveller preschools. Spending on targeted educational interventions for Travellers fell by 86% (Pavee Point 2013a). However, it is not clear that these have been replaced with equivalent provision on the basis of identified need. There is a danger that the lack of Traveller-specific provision may facilitate a return to assimilationism of the form noted by McVeigh (2007a); a move that may be aided by the fact that the government has not accepted the claims of Travellers to be acknowledged as an ethnic group.

7.2.1.4 Traveller ethnicity

Parents in the study were concerned that their culture and identity be recognised. Some, such as Sile (parent, Cnocard), viewed recognition of Travellers as an ethnic group as essential, saying, “I think when the Government recognise that Travellers are an ethnic group and have their own culture, society will start changing”. While Travellers are now recognised as having a distinct culture, they are not accorded ethnic group status in Ireland. It is a key demand of the Irish Traveller Movement and Pavee Point that Travellers be accorded this status. This demand has come to the fore in recent years, although Traveller ethnicity has been an issue since the 1960s. The *Commission Report* (Government of Ireland 1963) explicitly denied that Travellers constituted a separate ethnic group. The *Review Body Report* (Government of Ireland 1983) adopted a definition of Traveller which Crowley (1999) argued would suggest an ethnic status for the Traveller community, although the Review Body did not make that claim. The Equality Authority (2006) examined the issue from an academic and public policy perspective and concluded that there was a clear case for acknowledging Traveller ethnicity, holding it to be, both, legally necessary and socially beneficial. It held that this was central to the achievement of equal status for the Traveller community. McVeigh (2007b) claimed that there were no longer any organisations working with Travellers that disputed Traveller ethnicity. The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (2011, p.2) expressed its concern at the State’s “persistent refusal to recognise Travellers as an ethnic group”.

In November 2013 the Irish Human Rights Commission and the Equality Authority made formal presentations to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality calling on the State to recognise Travellers as an ethnic group (IHRC 2013). They argued that such recognition would ensure that Travellers would be covered by international human rights protections. Later that month the Labour Party, a member of the Government coalition, adopted a motion at its National Conference calling on Government to recognise Travellers as an ethnic group (ITM 2013). Recognition as an ethnic group could afford stronger protection for Travellers against discrimination, as suggested by McVeigh (2007a).

7.2.2 Aim 2: To explore parents' perspectives on schooling

Chapter 5 presented finding related to the second aim of the research, namely, to generate understanding of Traveller parents' perspectives on schooling, including their own experiences of school and their expectations and aspirations for their children. Three issues of particular significance to consider in relation to findings on this aim have been identified. These are as follows: the centrality for parents of Traveller identity and culture, the hurt and disappointment they feel when they recall their own schooling and the positive value that they place on education for their children.

7.2.2.1 Identity and culture are central

The pride of Travellers in their culture and identity came through strongly in this research. Traveller culture is expressed through family relationships, nomadism, the Cant language and traditional trades. Family is of paramount importance as a source of emotional and financial support, particularly in times of difficulty. Nomadism is also important, even though most parents in the study lived in houses and did not travel as extensively as their own parents had. They still regard themselves as a nomadic people and they curtail their travel both to support their children in education and because of difficulties in continuing this way of life. They also value the Cant language as something distinctive to Travellers and they are concerned that it will be lost, leading some to suggest that it be taught in schools and preschools.

Cultures change over time, and at any one time they are not experienced in a homogeneous way by all members, as is clear from the varied views expressed. Any

attempt to include or represent Traveller culture cannot be done in a prescriptive or rigid manner. This brings one to conclude that ongoing dialogue with Traveller parents must be a core aspect of Traveller cultural recognition.

7.2.2.2 Parents' own experience of school

The parents attended school in the 1980s and 1990s when education policy for Travellers was based on the *Commission Report* (Government of Ireland 1963) and *Review Body Report* (Government of Ireland 1983). For decades following the Commission, school was not a welcoming place for Traveller children. The Traveller community had no say in the type or nature of schooling that was put in place for them. For some, school meant separate classes, within the mainstream school, but isolated from settled children. Others, who were in mainstream classes, found themselves sitting at the back of the class, colouring, with no expectations of them or few demands made of them. School was cut short for most, while some only attended to prepare for sacraments of First Holy Communion and Confirmation. Within the schools, there was no regard for Traveller culture. Indeed Travellers were regarded as poor dropouts from settled society in need of rehabilitation. In the words of Bernie (parent, Owenree), "schools were ... never designed for Travellers, ever."

The parents in the study learned little at school and most left with poor or no literacy. Their own parents had made great efforts to send them to school, yet they emerged with little to show except the experiences of isolation, hurt and rejection. They never saw their lives or culture positively reflected and the only acknowledgement of their difference was in the negative stereotyping and name-calling by the settled children. These experiences of rejection and discrimination led to some Travellers internalising negative stereotypes and made it difficult for them to feel confident enough to express their culture freely later in life. Benhabib (2002) writes of how this can occur when one's identity is denigrated in the public sphere. Almost all of the parents looked back on their schooling with a sense of disappointment and loss.

7.2.2.3 Positive views on schooling for their own children

Given the bleakness and hurt caused by their own schooling, one might think that the parents would not have faith in the school system for their children. This is not so. They regard schooling and educational achievement as capital. They recognise that

members of the settled population possess this capital, which ensures that they hold key positions in society; they hold the power. Travellers have never seen themselves represented in these positions. The parents view educational achievement as important for their children and they want them, as in the words of Brigid (parent, Avonard), “to go all the way,” to successfully complete their second level education. They want equality for their children with their settled classmates. They are not seeking a different or less academic education for their children, in contrast to findings in relation to comparable cultural groups elsewhere (Bhopal 2004, Hamilton *et al.* 2007, Myers *et al.* 2010). They want them to complete Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate examinations. Many hope that their children will go on to train as professionals. Although Grace (parent, Seanbaile) said that “the way of life is lost altogether the day they start going to college”, others are supportive of third level for their children, and some already have children enrolled at this level.

One obstacle that parents identified in relation to education is low teacher expectations of their children. They feel that many teachers believe that Travellers will not stay in school and that they do not need educational achievement in the same way as settled children. Thus, Travellers are trapped by a self-fulfilling prophecy. For those whose children have succeeded at second level and moved on to third level education, the parents ascribe much of this success to teachers who had high expectations for their children and who encouraged them. The parents believe that they themselves had missed out on opportunities due to lack of education and they want educational success for their children.

The parents return again and again to the issue of Traveller culture and identity. It is because of being Travellers that school failed them, they hold. They were neglected and treated badly in school, reflecting their position in the wider society where Travellers were subject to prejudice and discrimination. While they express an intense pride in being Travellers, for some this pride must be expressed in private. They fear that recognition and representation of Traveller culture in schools would cause hurt and embarrassment for their children. They would prefer if it were not mentioned or referenced. For others, however, the acknowledgement of Traveller culture is a necessary aspect of equal education. John (parent, Cnocard) argued that

including Traveller culture in the schools would improve outcomes for Traveller children.

The Traveller parents want educational achievement for their children, but they do not want their culture eroded and they do not want their children to become like settled people. Traveller culture should be included in schools in a positive manner which allows Travellers to achieve and succeed as Travellers. On this, O'Hanlon and Holmes (2004) noted that Travellers who succeeded in the UK did so by denying their identity. This indicates that a space must be created where one can openly be a Traveller and yet be educated and successful in society.

7.2.3 Aim 3: To investigate parental involvement in Traveller preschools

Chapter 6 presented findings related to the third research aim, namely, to generate an understanding of parental involvement practices within Traveller preschools.

Overall, a wide range of involvement practices are used in Traveller preschools. Teachers endeavour to ensure that the preschools are warm and welcoming. Parents visit for various reasons, encourage and support their children's learning, and demonstrate knowledge of preschool activities and an understanding of their value. Some involvement practices are relatively widespread, while others, such as being involved with management, are less common.

7.2.3.1 Reaching out to parents

Many teachers claim to have an open door policy. This was confirmed by the ease with which parents dropped into the preschools. Parents visit for various reasons, calling in when they are bringing or collecting their children, asking about their children and telling teachers about difficulties or illnesses. These visits allow for informal chats regarding a child's progress and provide a basis for a two-way exchange of information and ideas. Limitations of the open door policy are illustrated by the case of Maeve (parent, Liosbeag) who needed more than the casual notion of an open door. Without a definite invitation, she felt unable to drop into her son's preschool as she believed that the teacher was too busy to be disturbed. This shows the importance of explicit outreach to parents, beyond the simple notion of the open door, a point upheld by O'Kane (2007).

Indeed, explicit invitations are extended to parents in many instances, to attend parties and plays, or to participate in parent-teacher meetings. Formal parent-teacher meetings are held in a third of the preschools and this is appreciated by parents. Teachers also communicate with parents in writing, through notes home and periodic newsletters containing information about preschool activities. They try to extend the work of the preschool by sending home words of songs and rhymes. Some teachers mentioned the limitations of written communications where parents had poor literacy, emphasising the need to also use verbal communication.

Apart from parents visiting the preschools, in most preschools the teachers also visit the family homes. This indicates a commitment on behalf of the teachers who are not resourced to do this. It may contribute to the goodwill that parents feel for the preschool. It also benefits the teachers in allowing them to see the home lives of the children and to develop a better appreciation of Traveller culture.

7.2.3.2 Parent knowledge of preschool

Parents feel welcome and included in the preschools and they are generally confident about approaching the teacher concerning issues that they want to raise. In some cases, parents developed relationships with the teachers over many years. They had sent their older children to the preschool, and some had even attended the same preschool themselves when they were younger. Because of this, they regard the preschools as welcoming enclaves due to their all-Traveller nature.

Parents sing and recite the songs and rhymes at home with their children. They ask them about their day. In this way, and through their visits, parents gain good knowledge about preschool activities. They believe that preschool provides a valuable start for their children in education, “the first stepping stone to school” as John (parent, Cnocard) put it, and they want to support this. Some teachers ask parents to work on particular tasks at home with their children, such as colour recognition or motor skills. Some parents borrow books and jigsaw puzzles from the preschool to work with their children at home. Parents praise the work that their children bring home and their efforts with songs and rhymes, understanding the need to be positive and supportive of their children’s learning. In many preschools, folders of the children’s work are sent home periodically. These folders are treasured by

parents and several speak of keeping them for years. Parents also respond well to the cards that the children make to celebrate occasions during the year.

7.2.3.3 Traveller culture

Although parents are divided over the inclusion of Traveller culture in primary and second level schools, it is different in the preschools. They want their children to see their lives reflected here. Some are cautious, concerned that a concentration on Traveller culture might take away from education, but most are enthusiastic about Traveller culture inclusion in the preschools. They place themselves central to this inclusion, volunteering to help or suggesting other Travellers who would be able to contribute. It is also suggested that Traveller childcare assistants could contribute to this representation. This emphasis on Travellers managing the representation of Traveller culture indicates a level of comfort and confidence. Teachers too have made efforts at Traveller cultural inclusion. Many have discussed this with parents and individual preschools have procured books, jigsaws, posters and toys depicting aspects of Traveller life. Teachers want the children to feel comfortable in preschool and the all-Traveller nature of the preschools allows for this cultural affirmation. Some teachers have taken steps to introduce the Cant language into the preschool and parents were contributing to this in one case.

7.2.3.4 Decision-making

The preschool management committee is where decisions are made, which is why parents need to be included on it. This would give them a say in the type of programme offered and in ensuring that their culture was included and reflected accurately and positively.

Although the questionnaire survey indicated that half of the preschools have Traveller parent representatives on the management committees, most representatives were selected by the committees themselves, rather than elected by parents. Also, their contributions are relatively muted. Parents in the focus groups and individual interviews have little knowledge of management. There was a parent representative on the management committee for the Avonard preschool, yet members of the focus group in Avonard had no knowledge of the management committee and did not know that a fellow parent was on it.

It is not easy for preschools to ensure parent representation. Parents, teachers and managers are all supportive of the inclusion of Traveller parent representatives on the management, but they point out various obstacles to achieving this. Both Nuala (teacher, Cuanmara) and Triona (teacher, Lisnashee) had tried to recruit parents to the management but had not been able to get agreement from parents on a nominee. Parents were reluctant to be nominated, citing lack of time and also not having anybody to care for the children when they would be at meetings.

The exception is Cnocard, where there is an active parents committee and where parent representatives on the management committee are elected by the parents themselves. The Cnocard preschool is an example of good practice, resulting in a group of confident, involved parents. Not all of the Cnocard parents are involved with the parents committee, but the core group is committed and efforts are being made to draw in others.

The situation in Cnocard evolved with careful planning and introduced the parents to the notion of ownership of the preschool. First, the conditions were in place to ensure parents' confidence regarding parental involvement. Then the parents committee was established and they elected parent representatives to management. Cnocard preschool created a space for parents to meet, to raise issues, to have those issues represented to management, and for parents to receive feedback.

7.3 Limitations and transfer of findings

This thesis presented a study of Traveller preschools which had been in existence for up to 40 years, and which ceased to operate in the summer of 2011. The study is a snapshot in time of a service that no longer exists and which was a Traveller-only service. Having considered its findings, questions now arise as to the extent to which they might be transferable or generalisable, in order to inform practice in different settings and services.

Transferability refers to the “extent to which findings from one study can be transferred to other situations” (Merriam 2009, p.223). Merriam cautions qualitative researchers not to think of this issue in the same way that quantitative researchers might. Qualitative research involves engaging in in-depth research into the

particular. The advantage of this is that we can learn lessons for life from the particular which can help us in understanding other situations.

Further limitations arise from qualitative research. The study reported here involved engagement with a relatively small group of parents in discussion about their own educational experiences, their perspectives on education and their involvement in Traveller preschools. The majority were mothers, with fewer fathers being involved. This cohort cannot be regarded as representing all Travellers everywhere. Nonetheless, there was a high degree of corroboration from one group to another in relation to some issues, which gives confidence that these views were shared by many. There were also remarkable similarities in the stories that parents told about their own education. They all expressed pride in their Traveller identity. The view was widely shared that teachers do not have high expectations for Traveller children. Parents were also unanimous in looking for a good standard of education for their children, and outcomes comparable with those of their settled peers.

7.3.1 Significance of the study

Despite the limitations, the research has been valuable for the insights it provides into how Traveller parents view education in general and preschool education in particular. It highlights the strong desire of parents for school success for their children, contrary to the assumptions of some. The parents are aware of the relatively low achievement of their children compared to their settled peers and they want this to change. Also, they are advocates for their children on this. Despite the parents' own poor experiences and lack of success at school, the findings show a high level of involvement in their children's preschooling and an openness to further involvement. One simple lesson that should transfer to any early years services policy related to the enrolment of Traveller children is the need for an inclusive intercultural approach which respects Travellers and has positive regard for their culture.

This study stands out in that it is the only major study undertaken on Traveller preschools. The methods used, namely, interview and focus group, allowed the Traveller voice to emerge. I have stayed faithful to what parents said and I believe they tell a powerful story. It is a story of a proud people whose lives have been

constrained by the State and the wider society. They have been subjected to a policy of assimilation and have been viewed as failed settled people in need of rehabilitation. They went to school, emerging scarred and undereducated. They survived, reassessed their position and opted for schooling for their children, seeing and appreciating the opportunities which education provides for settled people in respect of status and security, and they wanted this. As Collins (2012, p.6), himself a Traveller, put it in another forum, “I am both surprised and delighted to say that as a community we have survived, which demonstrates a huge depth of resilience and adaptability”.

Much has been written concerning Travellers and education. While the school experiences of Traveller parents in this study correspond broadly with what is written elsewhere, the value they place on education for their own children is distinctive. This calls to mind Hamilton *et al.*'s (2007, p.7) reference to a “pernicious view that Travellers do not want to be educated”. Much research has shown the error of this view (e.g. Bhopal 2004), but such research has also suggested that many Traveller parents would prefer a more practical or vocational education for their children. In contrast, the parents in this study wanted equality for their children and they wanted them to complete all the state examinations at second level, with some talking about third level. They also spoke of wanting their children “to do something they’d get from their schooling” as Edel (parent, Avonard) put it.

7.4 Implications of the research

A number of implications can be drawn from this study for policy and practice in relation to education for Traveller children, in particular early education, and it also provides pointers to areas requiring further research.

7.4.1 Implications for policy development

One of the most positive aspects of policy development over the years was the move towards including the Traveller voice, of ensuring that Travellers themselves contribute to policies that affect them and it is vital that this trend should continue. It is a right in a democracy, but it should also contribute to the effectiveness of policy. Policies that are informed by Travellers themselves have a better chance of meeting

their needs and thus have a better chance of success. Also, people are more committed to policies that they themselves help to develop.

The adoption of an intercultural inclusive approach in schools is to be welcomed. However, the continued resistance of government to recognising Travellers as an ethnic group may hamper their inclusion. I recall the remarks of Sile (parent, Cnocard) about an intercultural day at her children's school where different cultures were celebrated, yet, she said, "where were the Traveller children sitting? In with the settled!" Government needs to give serious consideration to the claims of the Traveller community to be recognised as an ethnic group.

It is also important to ensure that inclusion is not just aspirational. Parents in this study told stories of their experiences as outsiders in their classrooms when they were children. Early years services should be helped to understand that they need to make space for cultures other than the majority culture, and that this is not about just a few token resources representing other cultures. Representation and inclusion needs to be ingrained into the classroom; children need to feel that their identity and culture is validated in the day-to-day operation of the service.

This study showed that parents were not represented on management committees in most Traveller preschools and parents also demonstrated little knowledge of management structures. Mainstream early years services should be required to include elected parents on management committees. Management should be accessible to parents and all parents should be facilitated to contribute to decision-making, such as through the establishment of parents committees.

The history of separate educational provision has not been a happy one for Travellers, and the ending of such provision is to be welcomed. Nonetheless, the Traveller community faces distinct challenges in relation to education because of its history and there is a danger that ethnic-blind provision will fail to accurately identify and deal with these challenges. There is a need for continued and ongoing monitoring of participation rates and outcomes for Travellers from the education system and there may be need for targeted interventions aimed at tackling the particular problems that Travellers experience.

7.4.2 Implications for practice

In considering implications of this research for practice, I have focused on three separate areas. First, I consider implications for educators and early years practitioners. Second, I consider implications for management and administration. Third, I consider implications for preservice and inservice training.

7.4.2.1 Implications for practitioners

Travellers are an indigenous minority group in Irish society. Staff need to be respectful of Travellers and Traveller culture and this needs to be apparent to parents. Traveller children need to see their reality reflected in classrooms, but any representation of Traveller culture should be based on dialogue with parents, as this is the only way it can be authentic. Issues of recognition and representation are seen in a different light when considering integrated services rather than Traveller-only preschools which were the focus of this study. Inclusion of Traveller culture should be part of an overall inclusiveness. There should be positive expectations for all children. It is vital that curriculum materials – books, posters and so on – do not stereotype Travellers, nor exoticise them. Practitioners need to ensure that their services do not reflect popular prejudices. They need to recognise that anti-Traveller name-calling is hurtful, and all bullying and name-calling needs to be tackled.

Services should involve parents to the maximum extent possible. Epstein's (2011) six-step framework for parental involvement shows a range of areas for parents to become involved and this study showed the willingness of parents to involve themselves when given the opportunity. It is important to develop involvement practices that are meaningful and of benefit to Traveller parents. Services should be warm and welcoming, but it is not enough just to say that there is an open-door policy, as this may be experienced differently by different parents. Parents need to be invited explicitly and regularly to engage with the service. It is equally necessary to be sensitive to the challenges to involvement that parents face. The demands placed on them should not be onerous or excessively time-consuming. There is also a need for awareness of the varying literacy abilities of Traveller parents.

7.4.2.2 Implications for management and administration

Many of the implications for practitioners carry equal force in relation to the management and administration. It is management which must resource and support the efforts of practitioners to ensure that the service is respectful and inclusive of Travellers and that it seeks to involve Traveller parents. Policies for inclusion need to be put in place to ensure that inclusion is not just a token concept and is incorporated into the everyday operation of the service. Parental involvement policies need to embrace all parents, and need to recognise that some Traveller parents may be reticent and may need encouragement to become involved.

In relation to involving parents in decision-making, the election of parents to management committees is an important step. Management committees should be as informal as possible and use plain English, to ensure that parent representatives can contribute. In an integrated service it may be unlikely that parent representatives would be drawn from a minority group, such as the Traveller community. In order to ensure contributions from as wide a range of parents as possible, the development of parents committees should be pursued. While this can be challenging for a service, the example in Cnocard shows that it can be a success.

Where Traveller parents are involved in decision-making, they must be allowed to advocate for their needs. Space must be created to allow them to put forward their views and concerns in a way that does not cause them to feel that they are being partial (Phillips 2005).

Management should also consider how they might involve Travellers as staff. Traveller preschools provided opportunities for individual Travellers, whose level of education would not have been high, to participate as childcare assistants. These opportunities are lost in an integrated setting unless positive action is taken to train members of the Traveller community for these positions. This would create a more inclusive environment for all children and would help bridge the gap for Traveller children between their homes and the services.

7.4.2.3 Implications for preservice and inservice training

Preservice and inservice training for early years practitioners should support inclusive and intercultural practice. Staff training should address ways in which Traveller children, and others, can be included across the curriculum, and where each child sees his or her life reflected. Efforts should be made to avoid tokenistic attempts at inclusion where Traveller culture, or another minority culture, is seen as exotic and not integrated through the service. Travellers should have an input into any Traveller cultural training that early years practitioners receive. Staff also need training to help to avoid stereotyping and to avoid perpetuating a self-fulfilling prophecy of low expectations.

A further point needs to be made concerning the implications of this thesis, for both policy makers and practitioners. Whilst the focus here is on the experience of Travellers, many aspects of these experiences are likely to be mirrored by other marginalised groups, such as asylum seekers and Roma people. Accordingly, the findings may help to inform developments in relation to these other groups.

7.4.3 Implications for further research

This thesis presents a study of parental involvement in Traveller preschools. It highlights the value that Traveller parents place on education for their children. It provides an insight into the levels and types of involvement that can occur for Traveller parents when the environment is respectful and positive towards them. Traveller children are now accommodated in integrated mainstream early years services. Findings from this study could act as a backdrop for future studies of the involvement of Traveller parents within integrated early years services. The following are some questions that merit further investigation:

- What are the experiences of Traveller parents in mainstream early years services?
- What is the nature and extent of parental involvement in these services? In particular, to what extent are Traveller parents involved?
- What are the views of early years practitioners on the involvement of both Traveller and non-Traveller parents?

- Traveller preschools were experienced by parents as warm and welcoming, providing a first step for parental involvement. Is the experience for Traveller parents similar in relation to integrated mainstream services? Are Traveller parents facilitated to contribute to decision-making in mainstream services? Are specific mechanisms required to ensure inclusion of the Traveller voice in mainstream services?
- Traveller parents reported that they experienced the Traveller preschools as protected enclaves. This merits further research, particularly within the context of debates on integrated and segregated education provision.
- Most of the parents who contributed to this study were mothers. It would be valuable to explore in more depth the views of Traveller fathers concerning their role in relation to their children's education. What value do they perceive in education for their children? To what extent and in what ways are they involved in their education?
- Travellers and Traveller organisations campaign for recognition for Travellers as an ethnic group. In relation to education, research is required to investigate the impact of Travellers being accepted as an ethnic group. Would it have an impact on practices? In what ways would they be different?
- The NCCA (2009) seeks respect for cultural diversity in preschool education. Are early years education settings respectful of diverse cultures, including Traveller culture? Is the teaching culturally responsive? Is intercultural education a reality? Are Traveller concerns accommodated?
- While educational outcomes for Traveller children are still low compared with their settled peers, this study showed that some Travellers have had educational success at second and third level. Further research focused on those who have had successful outcomes could help to identify factors which facilitate success.
- Research into training, both preservice and inservice, for early years practitioners could help to identify strengths and gaps. To what extent are early years practitioners prepared to engage and involve parents? To what

extent are they prepared in relation to cultural diversity and intercultural provision? How well do practitioners understand and appreciate Traveller culture?

- This study focused on the views of parents, teachers and managers. One voice missing from this study was that of Traveller children themselves. There is scope for direct research with Traveller children, including preschool children, to better understand their experiences.

7.5 Conclusion

In this study I set out to explore parental involvement in Traveller preschools by focusing on three aims: the policy context in which they developed, the views and experiences of Traveller parents in relation to education, and the involvement practices in Traveller preschools.

Policy documents showed an evolution in policy over the years. While early documents regarded Travellers as failed settled people who needed to be rehabilitated and absorbed into settled society, later documents recognised the validity of Traveller culture and acknowledged the necessity for inclusive intercultural education.

While Traveller culture is now recognised as valid, the parents in the case study component of the study attended school at a time when this was not so, and they left school with little education and with feelings of hurt, rejection and loss. Despite this, they value education and they want their children to complete their schooling. They know that Traveller children are not achieving school success equal to that of their settled peers, and they want equality in education for their children. In this they are adapting to a changing world, as Travellers have always done, now perceiving that education is essential in current society.

Traveller parents were involved in, and supportive of, Traveller preschools. They regarded them as the first step in education. Traveller parents represented the preschools as protected enclaves where they felt welcome and accepted. Parents reported that the culture and environment of the preschools facilitated their

involvement. Parental involvement occurred at an individual and familial level. Parents saw their role as that of encouraging their children and helping them to gain all that they could from this level of education. They responded positively to opportunities for involvement. They approached the teachers, visited the preschools, helped on preschool tours and worked with their children at home to support their learning. While involvement at the level of management and decision-making was not common, where it did occur the findings show that it was successful.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Summary of field research

Population	Research method	Sample	Aim
Traveller parents	Focus groups	One preliminary group of Traveller parents (pilot phase of research).	Initial group: own education, views on culture, preschool, involvement. This helped set the agenda for subsequent study.
	Interviews	Five groups from different geographical areas. Accessed through teacher colleagues and local Traveller organisations. Criterion: parents of children in Traveller preschools. Individual interviews with six parents, to provide expanded information not possible in a focus group.	Experience of schooling, views on identity and culture, expectations for their children and involvement in their preschool education Corroborate findings from focus groups; additional detail not got from focus groups
Teachers in Traveller preschools	Initial individual interviews	Three teachers.	Teacher perspective on parental involvement and Traveller identity and culture in the preschools. Data from these interviews informed the development of the self-administered questionnaire
	Questionnaire census/survey	All teachers in Traveller preschools.	Describe current parental involvement practices and Traveller culture within the preschools
	Individual interviews	Three teachers who had offered contact details in returned questionnaire	Follow on interviews to explore more fully examples of parental involvement practices and views on cultural representation
Other:	Individual interviews	Three managers of Traveller preschools	Supplement information from teachers; see how managers would support parental involvement and cultural representation in Traveller preschools.
		National Education Officer for Travellers.	Insight into background on Traveller education and Traveller preschools

Appendix B: Location and participant synonyms

Research Activity	Location	Participant
Parent focus group (initial/pilot)	Castletown [City]	Gillian, Orla, Neasa, Paula, Maisie, Sara
Parent focus group	Seanbaile [3,000 Small town. Population less than 5,000]	Annie, Tom, Grace, Lisa, Hannah, Frank
Parent focus group	Owenree [City]	Emma, Maura, Bernie
Parent focus group	Avonard [8000 Medium town. Population more than 5,000 and less than 10,000]	Shane, Kitty, Josie, Chrissie, Edel, Tara, Eva
Parent focus group	Gleneeshal [4,000 Small town]	Aine, Kathy, Sandra, Marion, Agnes, Teresa
Parent focus group/group interview*	Liosbeag [20,000 Large town. Population greater than 10,000]	Deirdre, Maeve
Parent interview	Cnocard [20,000 Large town]	John, Síle, Cáit
Parent interview	Cuanmara [4,000 Small town]	Sally
Parent interview	Lisnashee [City]	Lucy
Parent interview	Owenree [City]	Sara
Teacher interview (initial)	Ballygall [4,000 Small town]	Niamh
Teacher interview (initial)	Glenmore [6,000 Medium town]	Esther
Teacher interview (initial)	Ballyknock [8,000 Medium town]	Fiona
Teacher interview	Cuanmara [4,000 small town]	Nuala
Teacher interview	Lisnashee [City]	Triona
Teacher interview	Newtown [5,000 Small town]	Chloe
Manager interview	Cnocard [20,000 Large town]	Lily
Manager interview	Carraigmore [14,000 Large town]	Michelle
Manager interview	Avonard [8,000 Medium town]	Carmel

* Due to tragic circumstances, only two participants were available. The interview in Liosbeag proceeded as a group interview with the two parents.

Appendix C: Letter parents focus groups

<Address>

<Date>

Dear Parent

I am studying for a Ph.D. degree at St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra. As part of this degree I need to carry out research on the Traveller Preschools. The main area that I will be looking at is parents' relationships and involvement with the Traveller Preschools.

Your views are very important to my study and I have asked you here this evening to get your opinions about a number of questions to do with education and the preschool. Some questions will be about your dealings with the preschool and others will be about your own schooling.

You will be talking with a group of other parents. You do not have to answer any questions that you don't want to and you are under no pressure to say anything that you might not feel comfortable with.

I will be using a tape recorder to make sure I don't miss anything anybody says. I will also be taking notes and afterwards I will be writing a report about this session. I will not use any of your names in that report. If someone says something that I feel should be written out exactly as they say it, I will use a made up name for them.

I want to thank you sincerely for your help with my study.

Yours faithfully

Anne Boyle

Appendix D: Description of preschool

The following is a brief description of the Traveller preschools read out at the beginning of the focus group:

There are 52 Traveller preschools in the country. They are partly funded by the Department of Education. The Department did a study of the preschools a few years ago and from their study they felt that parents should be more involved with the preschools. They should have more say in what happens in the preschools and Traveller culture should be seen and respected in the preschools. There are a number of ways in which parents can be involved in the preschools – coming into the classroom to see what is going on, talking to the teacher about the child, talking to the child at home about what they do in the preschool, a parent can be elected on to the preschool committee, parents could have a greater say in what happens in the preschool.

My study is trying to find a way that parents and teachers can work together as partners and feel comfortable with each other. I have seen from other studies that children do much better in school when their parents know what is going on in school and are more involved with the school.

I'm going to ask you to talk about a few questions amongst yourselves, as I would be very interested to hear your ideas.

Appendix E: Focus group – Rationale for questions

Question	Optional prompts and probes	Rationale
Question 1: What do you hope your children get from their schooling?	<p>Is it important for them to go to school?</p> <p>How long do you expect them to stay in school?</p> <p>What would you like them to do (What do you think they will do) when they leave school?</p> <p>If they didn't have to go to school, would you still send them?</p> <p>Is their Traveller identity and culture respected in the preschool/school?</p> <p>How does this make them feel?</p> <p>Is school different for Traveller parents and their children than it is for non-Traveller parents and children?</p> <p>Is it different for your children than when you were at school?</p> <p>What are the differences?</p> <p>Someone said that some Traveller parents don't want their children to be known as Traveller what do you think about this?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial focus group showed strong parent interest and commitment to schooling. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents in initial focus group felt that children learned a lot in preschool. Issues of Traveller identity, culture and racism in schools also arose in initial focus group. Inspectors report (Dept. Education and Science, 2005d) identified parental perceptions of low expectations of teachers for Traveller children. Issues of cultural recognition and respect are important (Fraser and Honneth, 2003) National Evaluation Report (Dept. Education and Science, 2003), Traveller Education Strategy (Department of Education and Science, 2006) and DES Guidelines for Primary School (2002a) all promote respect for Traveller culture. Bourdieu (1990) – Cultural capital, Freire (1973)
Question 2: How would you describe your relationship with your child's teacher / preschool?	<p>Do you have children in preschool?</p> <p>Do you ever visit your child's preschool?</p> <p>What are your reasons for visiting?</p> <p>Are you made to feel welcome?</p> <p>Are you made to feel like you belong?</p> <p>Would you like to have more dealings with your child's preschool?</p> <p>What ways do you think you could be involved?</p> <p>Would you like to know more about what your children are doing at preschool?</p> <p>What do you know about the management of the preschool?</p> <p>Did you ever attend a meeting about management of the preschool?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial focus group identified relationship with teacher and welcoming atmosphere of preschool as important. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial focus group comfortable with preschool and staff. Desire to be involved with preschool. Noted that many schools not accommodating. Teachers in pilot interviews expressed willingness to engage with parents. National Evaluation Report (DES, 2003) promotes parent involvement. Literature (Crozier, 2001, Hanafin and Lynch, 2002, Olivos, 2006) notes difficulties experienced by ethnic minority and working class parents in relation to parental involvement. Important to identify and categorise current practices and experience (Epstein, etc.).
Question 3: Describe what your children bring home from preschool	<p>Do you talk to your children about what they do in the preschool?</p> <p>Does the teacher ever ask you to work with your children at home?</p> <p>What can you teach the children at home that they wouldn't learn at preschool/school?</p> <p>Where do the children do homework? Do you help them?</p> <p>Do you speak Cant to your children at home?</p> <p>Would you like Cant to be part of the preschool/school?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial focus group findings indicated that parents were interested in what their children did in school and believed that their preschool education was of benefit to them. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Noted a cultural chasm between home and school. Raised the issue of Cant being included within the preschools Important to identify and categorise current practices and experience (Epstein Type 4: Learning at home).

Appendix F: Interview consent letter

<Address>

Dear _____

As you know, I am studying for a Ph.D. degree at St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra. The focus of my research is Traveller parents' relationships and involvement in the preschool education of their children.

As part of my research, I am looking for the views of staff and management in preschools. I will be asking you about Traveller parents involvement in your preschool and other more general questions about the preschool. I will also ask questions concerning Traveller cultural representation in the preschool.

I will be using a tape recorder and taking notes during the interview so that I can represent your views as accurately as possible. I will not reveal the source for any information I receive from you and no preschool or respondent will be identifiable in any report of this research. If I need to quote anything that you say I will use a pseudonym.

I want to thank you sincerely for your help with my study.

Yours faithfully

Anne Boyle

Please sign here to indicate that you understand the above letter and that you agree to be interviewed:

Name: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix G: Letter of Transmittal with Questionnaire

<Address>

<Date>

Dear Colleague

I have been teaching in a Traveller Preschool for the past 20 years. I am also studying for a PhD with St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra. The topic for my study is Parental Involvement in the Traveller Preschools. One of the methods I am using for my research is a questionnaire which I am sending to all the teachers in the Traveller Preschools. In it I am asking the teachers for their views regarding the involvement that Traveller parents have in the preschools.

If there is any further information that you feel would be valuable to my research, I should be most grateful if you would put it down on the blank sheet at the end of the questionnaire. The questionnaire should take approximately twenty-five minutes to complete. Kindly return it to me in the stamped addressed envelope provided.

The information which you give me will be extremely valuable for my study. I would like to assure you that all of this information will be treated in confidence and if you chose to include your contact details neither you nor your preschool will be identified in the final report.

I would like to thank you in advance for your assistance with my study.

Yours faithfully

Anne Boyle

Appendix H: Teacher Questionnaire

Parental Involvement Questionnaire for Teachers in Traveller Preschools

Please take your time to complete this questionnaire. The information you provide will contribute to my research project on parental involvement in Traveller Preschools. Please return the completed questionnaire by _____, or as soon as possible, to: Anne Boyle <Address>

Any information you provide will be treated in a confidential manner and you will not be identified in any report of this research.

Please answer all questions by ticking ☒ the appropriate box, or write your responses in the lines provided.

The following questions are about your preschool. Please tick the boxes or fill in the answers as appropriate

1. Where is your preschool located? ☐ On primary school campus
☐ Community setting
☐ Other (specify): _____

-
2. What is the average distance from the children's homes to the preschool? ☐ Less than a mile
☐ 1-3 miles
☐ More than 3 miles
-

3. How do the children come to preschool? ☐ Parent/family bring them
☐ Transport provided
☐ Other (specify): _____

-
4. Who normally enrolls the children? (Tick one box only) ☐ Parents
☐ Visiting Teacher
☐ Public Health Nurse
☐ Other (specify): _____

-
5. How many Traveller children are enrolled in your preschool? _____
-

6. How many non-Traveller children are enrolled in your preschool? _____
-

7. Is there a Traveller employed in the preschool? ☐ Yes
-

	<input type="checkbox"/> No
8. If the answer to question 7 is "Yes", then in what capacity is this person employed?	<input type="checkbox"/> Teacher <input type="checkbox"/> Childcare worker <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify): _____ _____

The following questions concern contact between the parents and your preschool. The questions cover a wide range of possible parent-preschool contacts, some of which will not be practiced in your preschool. Kindly complete all the questions as accurately as possible by ticking or filling in your responses.

9. Does the preschool have a written policy on parental involvement?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
10. When may parents visit the preschool? (You may tick more than one box)	<input type="checkbox"/> Whenever they wish <input type="checkbox"/> At times specified by the teacher <input type="checkbox"/> To deliver and collect children <input type="checkbox"/> When there is a problem <input type="checkbox"/> Never
11. What proportion of the children have visited the preschool prior to enrolment?	<input type="checkbox"/> All <input type="checkbox"/> Most <input type="checkbox"/> Few <input type="checkbox"/> None
12. Do you have contact information (for example, telephone numbers) for all the parents?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
13. Are there children attending the preschool whose parents have not visited the preschool since the children started?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
14. If the answer to question 13 is "Yes", then how many children?	_____
15. Do you engage in informal discussion with parents about their child's progress?	<input type="checkbox"/> Often <input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely <input type="checkbox"/> Never

16.	How often are formal parent teacher meetings held?	<input type="checkbox"/> At least once a term
		<input type="checkbox"/> Once a year
		<input type="checkbox"/> Less than once a year
		<input type="checkbox"/> No formal meetings held

17.	If applicable, at what time of day are parent/teacher meetings held?	<input type="checkbox"/> During preschool hours
		<input type="checkbox"/> Outside preschool hours

18.	Have individual parents ever asked for a meeting with you?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
		<input type="checkbox"/> No

19.	Do mothers call into the preschool for informal visits?	<input type="checkbox"/> Often
		<input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally
		<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely
		<input type="checkbox"/> Never

20.	Do fathers call into the preschool for informal visits?	<input type="checkbox"/> Often
		<input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally
		<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely
		<input type="checkbox"/> Never

21.	Do you send home items (for example, crafts) which the children have completed?	<input type="checkbox"/> Often
		<input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally
		<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely
		<input type="checkbox"/> Never

22.	With reference to question 21, if you send home items, do you receive feedback from the parents on these?	<input type="checkbox"/> Often
		<input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally
		<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely
		<input type="checkbox"/> Never

23. Do parents ask to borrow items, e.g. ☐ Yes
books or jigsaws, from the preschool to ☐ No
use with their child at home?

24. Do you encourage parents to expand on ☐ Yes
the activities that the children engage in ☐ No
in the preschool at home (for example,
practicing rhymes and songs or talking to
them about preschool activities).

25. If the answer to question 24 is Yes, please _____
give details: _____

26. Do parents ever help to repair, renovate ☐ Yes
or build classroom equipment? ☐ No

27. Do the parents ever make materials for ☐ Yes
use in the preschool? ☐ No

28. Do parents volunteer in the classroom by ☐ Yes
working with their own child? ☐ No

29. If the answer is Yes, please give an _____
example of the type of activity engaged _____
in. _____

30. Do parents volunteer in the classroom by ☐ Yes
working with a group of children? ☐ No

31. If the answer is Yes, please give an _____
example of the type of activity engaged _____
in. _____

32. Do parents ever come to the preschool to ☐ Yes
attend a party? ☐ No

33. Do parents ever come to the preschool to ☐ Yes
attend a play? ☐ No

34. Do parents make suggestions concerning ☐ Yes
the programme followed in the ☐ No

preschool?

35. If the answer to question 34 is Yes, please _____
give an example _____

-

36. Do parents help with fundraising for the preschool? ☐ Yes
☐ No
-

37. Are parents involved in the planning of the school outing/tour? ☐ Yes
☐ No
-

38. Do parents help out on the day of the outing/tour? ☐ Yes
☐ No
-

39. Do you send notes home with the children (for example, concerning holidays, school work) ☐ Yes
☐ No
-

40. Does the preschool produce a newsletter or booklet for parents? ☐ Yes
☐ No
-

41. If the answer to question 40 is Yes, please _____
outline briefly the topics covered in the _____
-

newsletter/booklet:

-
42. Do you ever visit the parents in their homes? ☐ Yes
☐ No

-
43. If the answer to question 42 is Yes, please briefly outline the circumstances in which this might occur:

-
44. Do parents usually explain the reasons for a child's absence from the preschool? ☐ Yes
☐ No

-
45. Do parents ever discuss personal or family matters with you? ☐ Yes
☐ No

-
46. Does the preschool have the following services available to it? (Please tick all that apply)
- ☐ Visiting Teacher for Travellers
☐ Home/School/Community Liaison Service

-
47. Has the preschool been involved in ☐ Yes
-

providing education or training courses

☐ No

for parents?

48. If the answer to question 47 is Yes, please

give details on what has been provided.

49. Does the preschool have contact with the

☐ Yes

wider Traveller community?

☐ No

50. If the answer to question 49 is Yes, what

is the nature of this contact?

51. Does the management committee discuss

☐ Yes

at its meetings ways in which parents

☐ No

might become involved in the preschool?

52. Are there Traveller parent

☐ Yes

representatives on the management

☐ No

committee?

If the answer to this question is No, please go to question 58. Otherwise, please continue

53. How many Traveller parents are on the management committee?	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 or more
---	--

54. Are mothers or fathers more likely to be on the management committee?	<input type="checkbox"/> Mother more likely <input type="checkbox"/> Father more likely <input type="checkbox"/> Mothers and fathers equally likely
---	---

55. How are parent representatives on the management committee chosen?	<input type="checkbox"/> Elected by parents of children attending the preschool <input type="checkbox"/> Chosen by management committee or teacher <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify): _____ _____
--	---

56. How would you rate the attendance of parent representatives at management committee meetings?	<input type="checkbox"/> Very good <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Poor
---	---

57. Do parent representatives contribute to the discussion at management committee meetings?	<input type="checkbox"/> Regularly <input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely <input type="checkbox"/> Never
--	--

58. Please specify any way that parents are involved in your preschool which have not been covered in previous questions.	_____ _____ _____ _____
---	----------------------------------

59. Does parental involvement provide any
benefits for families?

Please explain your answer.

60. Does parental involvement present any
challenges or difficulties for families?

Please explain your answer.

61. Does parental involvement provide any
benefits for the preschool?

Please explain your answer.

62. Does parental involvement present any challenges or difficulties for the preschool?

Please explain your answer.

The next four questions concern Traveller culture.

63. Give some examples of ways in which you represent Traveller culture in the preschool:

64. Have you discussed the representation of Traveller culture in the preschool with the parents?

☐ Yes

☐ No

65. Do the children or parents use any Cant

☐ Often

☐ Occasionally

words?	<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely <input type="checkbox"/> Never
<hr/>	
66. Do you think you could incorporate Cant as part of the preschool programme?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<hr/>	
67. Would you like to add any further comments concerning parental involvement for Traveller parents?	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

Thank you for taking time to complete this questionnaire.
Please place the completed questionnaire in the prepaid envelope provided and return by
_____ or as soon as possible to:
Anne Boyle, <address>.

I would be grateful if you would insert your name and telephone number below as I may wish to contact you again, if you are agreeable. This is purely optional, and I assure you that any information you provide will be treated confidentially.

Name (optional): _____

Tel (optional): _____

Appendix I: Questionnaire survey – Rationale for questions

Question	Topics	Rationale
1 to 6	These questions relate to 4. Location of preschool 5. Who enrolls the children 6. Non-Traveller children in preschool	4. Location can either facilitate or inhibit involvement. It will affect the amount and type of involvement. 5. Enrolment may be directly by parents or mediated by others (e.g. VTT). 6. Traditionally these preschools were Traveller only. A move to integration was evident in some preschools and was supported by the Traveller Education Strategy (Department of Education and Science, 2006).
7 to 8	Are there Travellers on the staff?	4. Traveller parents may feel more comfortable if there is a Traveller on staff 5. May have a positive effect on parental involvement 6. Traveller Education Strategy promotes recruitment of Travellers to ECE positions (2006, p.40)
9	Written policy on parental involvement	2. A written policy can ensure that parental involvement is promoted (Epstein Type 2). Recommended by Department of Education and Science national evaluation of preschools (Department of Education and Science, 2003)
10 to 20	Looks for extent of formal and informal contact with the preschool, before enrolment and during the preschool year	5. Build up a picture of the type of contact practices between preschool and parents. 6. Informal contact can imply a welcoming atmosphere (Espinosa, 1995) and willingness on behalf of parents. 7. Parent-teacher meetings provide a formal avenue for involvement (Epstein Type 2). 8. Consider involvement of mothers and fathers (Reay, 2003, notes that mothers tend to be more involved than fathers).
21 to 25	These questions are about take home materials and extending the work of the preschool in the home, whether initiated by parent or preschool.	3. This type of contact builds bridges between home and school, child has a common experience when parents build on schoolwork (Epstein Type 4). 4. Parents take active role in child's learning. Wood and Caulier-Grice (2006), "providing learning activities in the home is more important than becoming involved at the child's school" (2006, p.81).
26 to 36	These questions are about parents' involvement within the preschool.	4. This type of involvement can be a form of partnership (Epstein Type 3). 5. Parents have a sense of belonging if they are contributing to the operation of the preschool. 6. Children experience their parents and staff working closely together (Whalley, 2007).
37 to 43	These questions deal with communication between the preschool and the home,	3. This type of contact is especially important for parents whose children come to preschool by bus and who don't have daily contact (Epstein

	through notes, newsletter and visits	4. Type 2). Espinosa, 1995, "Personal touch". Answers to 42 and 43 can indicate level of trust of the teacher by the parent.
44	This question ask about support personnel available to the preschool	2. Services, such as HSCL or VTT, could support links between preschool and home and allow further relationships to develop
45 to 46	Courses for parents	3. This is often seen as an aspect of parental involvement (Epstein Type 1) 4. Included in Early Start Project (Educational Research Centre, 1998)
47 to 48	The level of contact with wider Traveller community.	3. Shows level of embeddedness of preschool in Traveller community (Epstein Type 6). 4. This enhances acceptance and support of the preschool by the community (Whalley, 2007).
49 to 55	These questions relate to the management committee: Are there Traveller parent representatives? How many? Mothers or fathers? How chosen? Level of activity?	3. Management committee is the decision-making body for preschool. Parents input to decisions and feeling of ownership (Epstein Type 5). 4. Mothers and fathers and if selected rather than elected, which may dilute some of the benefits.
56 to 60	These questions concern teacher views on parental involvement.	2. Success of parental involvement initiative depends on teacher commitment. These questions give idea of teacher views.
61 to 64	These questions concern the representation of Traveller culture in the preschool and opportunities for using the Cant language.	2. It is important that preschools for Travellers reflect Traveller culture (O'Hanlon and Holmes, 2004)

Appendix J: Letter of appreciation to survey participants

<Address>

<Date>

Dear Colleague

If you have returned the questionnaire which I sent to you, I want to thank you sincerely. Your generosity in giving your time to completing the questionnaire has greatly contributed to my research and I will represent your views and comments as honestly and diligently as I can.

If you have forgotten to return the questionnaire, or if you have mislaid it and feel that it is too late because the specified return date has passed, please be assured that I still want to include your views and experiences in my study. I should greatly appreciate it if you would return the completed questionnaire at this stage. If you have mislaid it, please contact me and I will forward another copy to you.

Your views are extremely important to me.

Yours faithfully

Anne Boyle

Appendix K: Main features of Traveller policy 1963 – 2006

Date	Reports	Philosophy	Trends	Connections to previous
1963	<i>Report of the Commission on Itinerancy</i>	Absorption/assimilation of Traveller children in order that they may fit in and benefit from education – in the context of state modernisation	State enforcement of enrolment and school attendance. No recognition of Traveller ethnicity or validity of Traveller culture	Parental rights generally overruled in order to get Traveller children into school.
1970	<i>Report on Educational Facilities for the Children of Itinerants</i>	Assimilation – Traveller culture seen as impoverished	Recognition of the need for cooperation of parents & there is limited involvement of parents	Implementation of the Report of the Commission
1983	<i>Report of the Travelling People Review Body</i>	Integration. Compensatory education. In relation to preschool, role of parents recognised & their participation encouraged.	Change in terminology – Travellers not referred to as “itinerants”, & Travellers represented on Review Body	Travellers seen as needing to change in order to allow them to fit into society and participate in education
1995	<i>Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community</i>	Recognition of Traveller culture. Promote partnership between Traveller parents & schools. Move away from assimilation & integration & compensatory approach. In the context of national social partnership	Greater role recommended for Travellers in decision-making & direct engagement with schools.	Parents urged to get involved in any way they can in schools. “Creative ways of bringing Travellers into the planning & administration of education should be explored”
2003	<i>Preschools for Travellers: National Evaluation Report</i>	Recommend that each preschool develop & implement policy to encourage parental involvement, involving a range of mechanisms sensitive to Traveller culture	Any development of guidelines for the preschools should seek to preserve & enhance existing voluntary initiatives & community ownership of the preschools	Recommend Traveller parents, elected by parents of children attending the preschool, should be members of the management committee.
2006	<i>Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy</i>	Inclusive education. Recognition for diversity	Travellers to be educated in mainstream settings, with staff trained in diversity. End separate provision. Close or phase out Traveller only settings	Parents should be encouraged and supported to participate in representative structures

Appendix L: Summary description of three Irish projects

Three Irish projects

Rutland Street Project (Holland, 1979)	Early Start Preschool Programme (Lewis and Archer, 2002)	Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Scheme (Ryan, 1999)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Preschool project (one school) in an area of disadvantage in Dublin</i> • <i>Mothers' club and advice centre (to increase contact between home and school).</i> • <i>Home visits before enrolment</i> • <i>Open door policy stressed – parents in classroom</i> • <i>Parent teacher meetings – to “explain” goals of preschool to the parents.</i> • <i>Community involvement in development and working of project</i> • <i>Play activities in the centre</i> • <i>School outings</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Preschools in a number of primary schools in selected areas of disadvantage. Curriculum adapted from Rutland Street.</i> • <i>Visit families at home</i> • <i>Parents' room in school.</i> • <i>Courses on personal development for parents</i> • <i>Initial meetings of school and families to outline programme</i> • <i>Parents support children's learning in classroom.</i> • <i>Parents attend open days and outings with class</i> • <i>Book and toy library</i> • <i>Parents committee</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Scheme in primary and second level schools in areas of disadvantage</i> • <i>Aim to increase involvement of parents in children's learning.</i> • <i>Local committees</i> • <i>Parent courses and activities</i> • <i>Coordinate home visits</i> • <i>Meetings with parents</i> • <i>Establish community links – contact agencies or individuals in the community.</i> • <i>Assist parents in developing skills to help their children</i> • <i>Parents help in classroom activities</i> • <i>In some schemes parents managed structures and programmes for crèche</i> • <i>Some parents organise classes/activities – swimming, art and craft</i>