

TEACHERS AND GYPSY TRAVELLERS

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SYNOPSIS

This paper discusses some of the findings from a project which set out to investigate how schools in Scotland perceive, and respond to, the culture and behaviour of Traveller children, in respect of behaviour, exclusion and difference. We discuss, in particular, how school staff described and made sense of the behaviour of Gypsy Traveller pupils. The findings raise issues about the relationship between difference and deviance and the extent to which schools are able to respond to cultural diversity, especially when this challenges notions of 'normality' in school attendance and behaviour. They confirm the view that disciplinary exclusion, while on one level a behavioural issue, is also inherently connected to the broader social exclusion of particular groups of pupils, in relation to class, disadvantage, ethnicity and gender (Booth 1996).

INTRODUCTION

This paper raises issues about how teachers define discipline and good order in schools. As Munn, Johnstone and Sharp (1998) point out, the level of indiscipline in schools is an emotive topic. Thus any aspect of a pupil's actions which might be seen to be threatening to good order may be viewed negatively by teachers. The present study looked at how certain behaviour by children from Gypsy Traveller families can become construed as disruptive to 'good' discipline. There are a number of ways in which this construction of Gypsy Traveller children's behaviour as problematic can be understood. Sometimes this can be seen as lack of cultural knowledge by teachers of Gypsy Travellers' lives, equally sometimes a lack of knowledge, or indeed a rejection, by the pupils of the norms and values of schools. Teachers themselves may often not reflect critically on the culture of schools; rather they may individualise problems, focussing on the single pupil. The position of Gypsy Travellers in Scotland as a marginalised group, many of whom feel under threat from the settled world, can be reflected in their experience of school. There is a parallel here with the experiences of some disabled groups who have argued that the response of the educational system to difference involves a privatising of controversial public issues (Troyna and Vincent 1996).

GYPSY TRAVELLER CHILDREN IN SCOTLAND

The Council of Europe identifies two main groups of Travellers, Gypsy Travellers and Occupational Travellers, the latter group including, for example, Show and barge people. (Others sometimes include a third group, 'new age' travellers.) Our project focused on Gypsy Travellers and Show Travellers; however the findings discussed below show a more complex situation for Gypsy Travellers in school, so this paper concentrates on that group.

It is difficult to know the number of Gypsy Travellers in Scotland. Estimates vary from three to five thousand nomadic Gypsy Travellers and possibly another twelve thousand housed (Gentleman 1992, Liegeois 1987). Traditional and understandable fear of authority probably means that any official figures underestimate the numbers who think of themselves as Gypsy Travellers and who share common cultural beliefs (Braid 1997, Reid 1997). There is disagreement among both Traveller communities

and academics over the legal recognition of Gypsy Travellers as an ethnic minority in terms of the race relations legislation. Although this is formally recognised through a Court of Appeal judgement in England, this is not always considered to be legally applicable in Scotland (Jordan 1996).

However, in sociological terms they clearly constitute an ethnic minority with shared cultural practices and norms. One Scottish Traveller writes that they are just as confused as others about their ethnic origins (Reid 1997). In Scotland the words Tinker, Tinkler and Gypsy have historically been used to describe them. The literature suggests that there were various groups of travellers in Scotland prior to the documented arrival in Europe of groups described as Egyptians or Gypsies (Fraser 1992). Scottish Gypsy Travellers do however now share features common to European Gypsy Traveller groups, often referred to as Rom or Roma. These include notions of descent, pollution taboos and a traditional wish to be self employed, rather than engage in wage labour, and a commitment to the idea of nomadism, even when not travelling. Their culture, like others, is permeable and constantly redefined and by travelling on the edges of settled society is also responsive to and affected by the mainstream culture. The historic language, Cant, of Scottish Gypsy Travellers reflects this complex history and includes many words common to other Traveller languages, particularly Irish Shelta, but also significant words from Romani, as well as from Scots and Gaelic. Travellers, like settled communities, also have identities that are to do with race, gender, class and nationality (Lloyd & Norris 1998).

While there is some diversity of opinion over the correct descriptive terminology the term Gypsy Traveller seems to be the most often currently used by organisations representing the community itself, such as by the Scottish Gypsy Traveller Association. By Gypsy Traveller we mean those who consider themselves to be part of this community, whether still nomadic or housed, and who share the common knowledge, speech, customs and manners historically associated with that culture. Our definition is, therefore, principally one of self ascription.

Research previously undertaken by the Scottish Traveller Education Project (STEP) and by Save the Children Fund (SCF) suggest a low level of school attendance by Gypsy Traveller children, especially at the secondary stage (Jordan 1996, SCF 1996). There is an official dispensation which allows for a reduction in the number of school attendances required from Traveller pupils, to allow for seasonal work travelling. Economic and legal changes in recent years do however make it increasingly difficult for Gypsy Travellers to maintain their nomadic life style.

THE RESEARCH - METHODS

The impetus for the project was provided by evidence, both anecdotal and from other research in England and Scotland, that some Traveller children were being excluded from school (OFSTED 1996). The research questions sought to explore whether our initial understanding, that Traveller pupils' behaviour was an issue in some schools, was substantiated by closer investigation. If some Traveller pupils' behaviour was an issue, how was it described and made sense of by teachers, pupils and parents? What responses were made to the behaviour and what strategies were used by schools?

Interviews were conducted with a range of staff (31), mainly learning support, guidance and school managers, in twelve schools, urban and rural, where Travellers were known to have attended and with Show Traveller parents (10) and young people (6) and Gypsy Traveller parents (7) and young people (18) in different parts of Scotland. Traveller support workers, mainly teachers, were also interviewed (15).

Interviewers used a semi-structured interview schedule as a topic guide but our aim was primarily to create an interview climate where teachers, parents, children and young people felt able to talk freely without too much control from the researcher.

This approach is described by some researchers as a non-directive interview (Cohen & Manion 1994). This was particularly important for Traveller parents and young people, understandably suspicious, who needed to be reassured that we really were going to listen to what they had to say. Much of the content and direction of the interviews was determined principally by the respondent, the interviewer using the schedule to ask questions or raise issues if these had not come up. (The interview guides are given in the Appendix.) In this kind of research understanding develops throughout the project, during the process of identifying and checking emerging patterns and themes, with these necessarily informing future interviews. Other questions were, therefore, introduced as the research developed. For example, it was suggested by several respondents early in the research that the style used by Traveller pupils to address teachers might be considered inappropriate by some teachers. So in later interviews if this was not raised by the teacher the interviewer might ask about it. Care was taken however to avoid making suggestions or leading respondents. The majority of interviews were taped and transcribed; a small number of respondents preferred not to be recorded and in these cases detailed notes were taken.

Some deliberate validation was also built into the project through the process of interviewing of Traveller support staff. Their views were important - as a group they have a mixed 'outsider / insider' status working both on Traveller sites and with numbers of teachers and schools. They were thus able to offer a valuable comparative perspective. In the early stages of the project six Traveller support workers were interviewed together, using focus group techniques and recorded with tape and video. Three were subsequently reinterviewed towards the end of the project with the purpose of obtaining their views of the developing analysis.

We interviewed both housed and mobile Show and Gypsy Travellers, identified and contacted for us by 'gatekeepers', individuals with an existing relationships of trust with Traveller groups. The Travellers interviewed were not chosen as in any way representative of their communities; they had something to say and were willing to talk to us. We recognised that these groups are heterogeneous and so aimed to gather personal experiences from which we could form impressions and develop themes, rather than generalisations.

This study is both small scale and qualitatively based and is therefore open to the kind of criticism made of similar work on the processes that are involved in the reproduction of inequalities in educational experiences (Gillborn 1998, Foster et al 1996). We make no claim for scientific neutrality, indeed we are explicit that our interest stems from a concern for social justice. We have nonetheless maintained a focus on issues of validity through a process of critical reflexivity.

The criteria for plausibility and credibility cannot be divorced from the assumptions of the individual critic, whose views may reflect particular political, methodological, class-based, gendered and racialized assumptions. (Gillborn 1998, p41).

As Gillborn (1998) argues, research on race and ethnicity must like other research be open to critique. Our methods and our findings are open to dispute; their validity will be further explored in that very process of argument. We hope that we will at least have prompted such argument.

THE RESEARCH - FINDINGS

The research looked at the school experiences of both Occupational (Show) Travellers and Gypsy Travellers and the whole findings are described in a project report (Lloyd et al 1999). A key finding of the study was the difference in the views of school staff on the two groups of Travellers. Teachers in schools where Show Travellers had attended were almost all highly positive about having Show

Traveller pupils in school and did not to see their presence as disruptive, other than in relation to the disruptiveness to the routines of the class because of irregular attendance. Although teachers saw irregular attendance and absence from school as perhaps the major issue for both groups, the pupils themselves, Show and Gypsy Travellers, identified name-calling by other pupils as the strongest negative feature of their school experience.

This paper concentrates on the views of school and Traveller support staff concerning Gypsy Travellers in school. Here the findings, discussed below in more detail, are more complex, than for Show Travellers - they suggest that for some schools and some teachers the behaviour of Gypsy Traveller pupils was perceived to be problematic and that some pupils had been formally excluded. The paper also refers briefly where appropriate to the findings from interviews with parents and pupils.

WAS THE BEHAVIOUR OF GYPSY TRAVELLER CHILDREN AN ISSUE FOR SCHOOLS?

There were a wide variety of views and perceptions expressed by the staff interviewed. In some respects they reflect those likely to be argued about all children in school in that some children's behaviour is considered to be a problem by some teachers, in some schools and at some times. The notion of behavioural difficulties is inevitably subjective and contextually varied (Cullen et al 1996, Munn & Lloyd 1998).

You get children with behavioural problems who are Travellers and you get children with behavioural problems who aren't. (B:Traveller Support)

Most of the school and Traveller support staff did describe some incidents and circumstances where schools had defined the behaviour of some Gypsy Traveller children as problematic. A small number said that there had never been any particular issue with the behaviour of the Traveller children. Sometimes this was then contradicted by reference to circumstances where there had been problems. In some secondary schools not all staff were aware that the school had identified and responded to perceived problems. For example, the behaviour support teacher in a secondary school described the exclusion and referral to the Children's Hearing System of two Gypsy Traveller girls but two of her colleagues appeared not to be aware of this. In secondary schools there were sometimes quite different views expressed by staff in the same school, for example the four teaching colleagues quoted below.

We've never had any situation where the Travelling people have been different from anybody else (A:Depute HT, Secondary)

There are conflicts, I hate to say there is a 'them and us', they have a way of life where they do certainly appear to care for each other but equally well, they see the rest of the community as being the great unwashed where the problems are. (B:PT Guidance, Secondary)

They voice their opinion in not too pleasant a manner sometimes ... I could take it because I knew him, but certainly in front of a mainstream class it wasn't acceptable ... He didn't see a lot of point to the curriculum ... it was difficult to us too because if he was withdrawn from these classes it meant he was sitting down there and it was time that was special for others too. If he was there, he demanded attention. With the staffing level it was difficult to make sure the others were getting the attention as well. That was a problem. (C: Special Education Teacher, Secondary)

He had real run ins with authority which was major, quite a major disruption, fighting and swearing and such things. On the other hand he was quite pleasant to adults. He did have a problem with integration... there was little parental backup, the parents didn't see the value of school or higher education... If we're talking difficulties, the biggest difficulty is attendance, they just don't attend... no matter how nice they are, how well they integrate, the attendance thing is always the thing that hits most, even more so than just discipline. (D: Guidance Teacher, Secondary)

There were no teachers who argued that the behaviour of all Gypsy Traveller pupils was a problem for the school. Several made a point of beginning with a positive statement, even when they subsequently mentioned difficulties with individual children.

For the most part their behaviour is good, if not better than many of their peer group... Within the school there is no doubt that we have come up against behavioural problems with the kids... we have also had difficulties with those Travellers who have been settled, even though they have been settled for quite some time. One of the major issues is truancy. (F:PT Learning Support, Secondary)

The kind of difficulties that were described are discussed under the following headings, derived from the analysis of interview data. These are discussed in more detail in the next section.

- Perceived lack of cooperation in class, eg not following instructions
- Difficulties related to late coming and to absence
- Problems to do with missed curriculum and specific learning difficulties
- Problems with friendships/peer group relationships
- Difficulties related to name-calling/bullying of Traveller pupils and fighting
- Style of addressing adults and sense of justice
- Difficulties associated with transition to secondary school
- Difficulties deriving from travelling life and being on a site
- Difficulties associated with local poverty and delinquent subcultures

HOW DID TEACHERS MAKE SENSE OF TRAVELLER BEHAVIOUR?

Again, there was a considerable range of views and understandings of Gypsy Travellers' actions in school. The interviews often contained quite contradictory observations, for example several teachers stated that they felt that the difficulties presented by a particular pupil were not related to cultural background but then went on to give examples that suggested that the teacher was indeed viewing the behaviour as significantly influenced by their background. Sometimes teachers were emphatic in their view that the cultural background of the pupil was not a factor in the teacher's perceptions, implying that perhaps to recognise difference was in itself inappropriate.

I've never, never thought of him as any of the Travelling people, he was difficult because he could flare up very easily. My impression was that was part of his background and he had a sort of defence mechanism... maybe the language is the one thing we've noticed more... he's not scared to say what he wanted. I wouldn't say that was typical of Travelling people but he

maybe, that might have been that they accepted it more on the site. We've never had a any situation where the Travelling people have been different from anybody else (A:Depute HT, Secondary)

In some instances the teacher's own implicit prejudice or stereotyping was apparent. For example, a teacher in charge of a secondary special class, where several Gypsy Traveller young people had been placed, talked 'positively' about two pupils, contrasting this with looking like a 'tinker'.

They were very acceptable, they were nicely dressed, they turned up nice, they didn't make themselves different in any way... they were actually very clean and tidy... they didn't make themselves out to be Tinker girls... their hair was nice and what not... (C:Special Education Teacher, Secondary)

Perhaps paradoxically, the teachers who acknowledged that schools could face problems with the behaviour of Traveller pupils were those with the most knowledge and empathy with cultural difference, as in the case of Traveller support teachers. They were the most likely to say there is an issue which they see in the schools they visit. They were clearer in their positive acknowledgement of difference and their perception of how this difference might become constructed as difficulty by schools.

Several support teachers and other staff made the point that all children can choose to be difficult in school and also that sometimes Traveller children face difficulties in their lives which are not peculiar to Traveller communities. Thus, though some Traveller children were seen to have required extra support in school because of family bereavement, alcohol or other drug use or physical or sexual abuse, in this respect they would be no different from children from the settled community.

Perceived lack of cooperation in class, eg not following instructions:

Some difficulties may be the consequence of lack of knowledge. Schools' ability to operate is contingent on pupils knowing how to behave and knowing when they break the rules. Often the Traveller pupils might have missed the beginning of the first class in primary school, may not have been to nursery school and, therefore, have missed the everyday learning about how you act in class.

The boys had no real knowledge of how to behave in a large group... sorry, how we expected them to behave, which is maybe a different thing... they would sit and talk, shout out, refuse to do any work, walk around the place – which in a class of thirty is something that is very difficult to accommodate... I feel that in the case of the Traveller boys they were just behaving normally to them. They weren't setting out to disrupt. (G: PT Guidance)

The structure of classroom norms may be implicit and difficult for the Traveller child to access. It may represent a difficult transition to insiderness for children used to spending much of their time outside.

I think the thing at the P (primary) 1 level with the behaviour is that it is such a culture shock for the child, you know... (E: Traveller Support)

Just a whole new ball game to be even within a building with corridors and so many rooms. (C: Traveller Support)

And rules – 'you sit down' (in teacher instruction voice). (F: Traveller Support)

Research into teachers' views of discipline in schools generally suggests that the biggest issue is low level disruptiveness, talking, hindering other children and not cooperating (Munn *et al* 1998). It was suggested that Gypsy Traveller children may

get into trouble for the same kinds of reasons as other children, for example, not having a pencil or not doing their homework, but that for some Traveller children these may happen more often because of the circumstances of travelling and life on site.

Difficulties related to late coming and to absence:

Erratic patterns of attendance created difficulties. Problems of attendance were sometimes, but not always associated with actually travelling. Several teachers mentioned problems of attendance by housed Travellers.

One of the difficulties when they did come back was that if they had been off for a great deal of time, like other kids, they had fallen behind and therefore the disaffection if you like, started at that period when they came back and it was in all subjects. (F:PT Learning Support Secondary)

Unpredictable patterns of attendance were recognised by all the Traveller support teachers as disruptive to class and subject teachers. Sometimes it may be that this exacerbates a problem a teacher was already having with a class.

It's a case where fourteen Travellers arrived at a school within a week, most of them settled very well but there's five gone into the P1 class and one boy, by anybody's standards anywhere has behavioural problems. You get children with behavioural problems that are Travellers and you get children with behavioural problems that aren't. But it has had a catalytic effect on the class who were difficult any way. There is one child who has come in who the other children perceive as being beyond control. And it's not just that he is a problem in that class, but he has awakened, or reawakened, the possibility for that type of behaviour, the other children had settled quite well. So in terms of that class, yes the child is being perceived as huge problem. They're trying to deal with it positively but there is a huge problem. (D: Traveller Support)

Well you can appreciate you've got bad days and you've got a class like P's class which is disruptive and then you've got them settled to work and then the door opens and P comes in (J:Learning Support T Secondary).

Problems to do with missed curriculum and specific learning difficulties:

Frustration was expressed by several teachers recognising that the difficulties presented by irregular attendance and their wish to see children making identifiable progress.

If they move between areas, move between schools, they might find that in some school they have done a section of work, when they get to another school they are only starting it so they repeat it all but they've missed the bit that they did before. (B:PT Guidance Secondary)

Several teachers suggested that sometimes difficulties in schools might be related to a high level of dyslexia amongst Gypsy Traveller boys. This is a problematic assertion as it is difficult to separate the notion of a specific learning difficulty from the overall issues associated with a historically non-literate culture, inconsistent school attendance and missed learning.

Problems with friendships/peer group relationships:

Varying patterns of attendance were also seen to lead to difficulties with friendship and peer group relationships.

The poor attendance means that they never establish real friendships because it happens so often. They're always on the outskirts in the class if they're not attending regularly. They're always on the fringe because they haven't built up relationships over the years and if they find they can't build relationships with children it's very difficult for them to mix in. (H: Traveller Support)

Some teachers felt that it was difficult for Gypsy Traveller pupils to establish friendships outwith their own community. Sometimes children would spend break times checking on the well-being of siblings or of other Traveller children.

Difficulties related to name-calling/bullying of Traveller pupils and fighting:

Some teachers felt that there would always be name-calling.

I would say that you are bound to get a bit of name-calling and that sort of thing, I think that's inevitable... I'm sure there's a bit of name calling but they never complain about it... they tend to tough it out. (D: Guidance T, Secondary)

Others thought that it was not an issue in their school although the evidence from the interviews with children, families and Traveller support teachers suggests that it is virtually universal and that many pupils do not feel supported by schools in facing it.

(Q. What about relationships with other children?) Poor. Two reasons: firstly they kept themselves to themselves, they don't naturally mix, this is girls and boys: secondly because of the background they come from, they do at times come up smelling or dirty, they get called 'tinkie' or 'blacko', in this part of the country it's 'tinkie' and 'blacko'. To this they would rarely react violently, they would come and complain and would use this as an excuse for not coming to school for the next three weeks. (G: PT Guidance, secondary)

I think he gets on well, but he is a wee bit smelly at times, a wee bit scruffy, he has an English accent, so he is different and he will be picked upon from time to time. Not because he's a Traveller but because he's different. (A: Depute HT Secondary)

There's a lot of prejudice in the area about Traveller children. They use a horrible word, I can hardly bring my self to say the word, but they say 'scoot' as a derogatory word for a travelling pupil. They would use it for any one they saw who was dirty or scruffy. That is one of the problems, I have to say, that many travelling children are not very clean which other children don't like at all... it really is a form of racial prejudice and it has to be tackled as seriously as that. (N:Traveller Support)

A number of teachers said that a small number of travelling pupils may be seen as not clean or as smelly. Some had tried to minimise the difficulties they felt this created for the children by offering spare clothes or access to showers but felt that the children were often resistant to this. Several emphasised that this was not only an issue for Gypsy Travellers but also for some children from the settled community. Equally one Traveller support teacher argued that some housed Travellers, because of their own high standards, are offended by their neighbours.

They're housed in probably the worst areas of (City) and what generally happens is that they go into schools but because of the housing situation are forced out of housing and then their education... because the Travellers couldn't cope with the lack of cleanliness or the social behaviour of their neighbours. (P:Traveller Support)

For most teachers in schools the bullying and name-calling was not seen as part of an overall racism, although one or two did see this broader view which also tended to be expressed more often by Traveller support teachers.

Certainly the anti bullying policy and strategies (are) in place within the school. It's not seen as a racial problem just as a general bullying thing. (N: Traveller Support)

A number of teachers suggested that use bullying and name-calling were sometimes used as an 'excuse' to not attend school.

Most schools mentioned fighting in the playground as an issue, often as a response to name-calling but also sometimes between Gypsy Traveller children.

...it's playground and it usually focuses on the boys because there is a tendency for them to be fiercely competitive. They're fiercely competitive among themselves and it leads to rough play. If they have a fall out, a quick aggressive battering is a very quick quite satisfactory solution to them. (HT Primary)

It (ie exclusion) was for fighting. One boy was swearing at the teacher but mainly it's been fighting outside school. (N:Traveller Support)

The issue of racist name-calling and bullying is addressed in more detail in a forthcoming paper (Lloyd *et al* forthcoming). It may be that teachers in some schools have not reflected on their duties under the law to provide education free from discrimination and harassment or that they do not perceive this to be an issue with respect of Gypsy Traveller pupils. Traveller support staff were more likely to perceive the bullying and harassment as racist than teachers in schools.

Style of addressing adults and sense of justice:

These were commonly identified as an issue for schools. Children often addressed school staff as if they were equal adults, sometimes making personal comments which the teachers found difficult. One Traveller support teacher argued that Gypsy Traveller children have not learned the 'social dishonesty' expected in the settled world.

...if you are talking to a Traveller child, he or she will speak to you as an adult. Now in school that can appear to be cheeky because children tend on the whole not to speak to teachers like that. (A: Traveller Support)

In one school the head described a situation where some boys, when they lost their tempers:

...would argue with you as an adult, as if you were some peer that you could bawl and shout at. (T: HT Primary)

She was able to recognise the reason for this and was understanding:

Once they snapped out of their uncontrollable rage they became very courteous again. (T: HT Primary)

She and several other teachers said that the open, more equal style of talking to adults enabled very interesting social interaction with some Gypsy Traveller children, when other children used to the informal rules of (non) communication with teachers might be reticent.

However these children will start and chatter and ask how you're getting on and it's lovely because they're so courteous. You get all sorts of information and you get a real ethos of community warmth and involvement. (T: HT Primary)

I think one of the difficulties is the difference in Travellers' perceptions of fairness, It's difficult because by the time a Traveller boy is twelve he is thinking of himself as a man and speaking on equal terms with adults and this is not acceptable (to teachers). It's just so difficult to match the registers. (L: Traveller Support)

Several teachers like the one above commented on the sense of fairness expressed by Gypsy Traveller children and suggested that this sometimes got them into trouble at school.

The boy that was with us lasted till about the end of 3rd year then he just couldn't cope any more. It was very frustrating for us because he was quite a bright boy and what we could offer him in his support class did not give him the breadth and balance, it did not give him what he needed. Now for him to conform in a mainstream situation was very difficult for him, he was bright, he was cheeky, he had to be disciplined. He had a real sense of justice if he thought something was wrong. He had his own values if he thought somebody was being unfairly treated. His language, if he did get annoyed he found that very difficult to control and of course in certain situations it doesn't always work. (C: Special Education Teacher)

Difficulties associated with transition to secondary school:

Lack of knowledge of school and class room routines is also mentioned in relation to the transition from primary to secondary school when Gypsy Traveller pupils may arrive late and miss the introduction and induction phase. Attendance becomes much more sporadic and tails off completely for many Gypsy Traveller pupils (SCF 1996). Peer group relationships and bullying may also become more problematic.

It's like going from P7 to secondary, October is too late to try and fit into S1. (F: Traveller Support)

Once the boys reached the age of 12,13 they didn't want to come to school they were disruptive, they couldn't be put in a class with other children, they just completely disrupted the place and we found that a tremendous problem. (G: PT Guidance secondary)

Another issue identified at the secondary school level was refusal to participate in particular subjects, for example PE. Several teachers argued that some secondary subjects were seen as irrelevant for Gypsy Traveller pupils. As for other pupils it may also be the case that sometimes a particular subject may be liked because of the teacher who teaches it:

He liked science because he got on well with the science teacher and the science teacher really talked to him and they really got on well. (C: Special Education Teacher)

Discipline at secondary level becomes more complex as subject teachers vary in their approach:

Some secondary teachers are very free and easy about things like chewing gum and what the noise level is... and that's accepted that within a secondary school there are variations. (J: Traveller Support)

Difficulties deriving from travelling life and being on a site:

Traveller support staff felt that school colleagues had little understanding of the impact of life on a site, rather than in a house or of the culture and customs of travellers living in a trailer.

One of the things I feel about issues around behaviour is, for example, within a school, teachers don't understand the perspective of Traveller life and how the child's behaviour can change totally when they start getting ready to leave. There are other examples like a funeral or something major going on at the site, just like children in houses where they have something going on with their family but Travellers have more incidents like that and it comes through more in their behaviour. (A: Traveller Support)

Difficulties associated with local neighbourhood poverty and delinquent subcultures:

Several teachers mentioned that both housed and nomadic Gypsy Traveller families often live or stay temporarily in areas of multiple deprivation. Changing patterns of employment may make it difficult for Gypsy Travellers to obtain work and some were seen by schools to be living in circumstances of great economic disadvantage. A few teachers, especially where there were locally housed Gypsy Traveller families, talked about the problems for the school and for the families where Gypsy Traveller young people had become involved in the local delinquent subculture, for example, in one case with drug dealing. Some Gypsy Traveller parents also referred to this and, for some, their fears of their children getting into this kind of trouble were an argument against participation in secondary education.

Gender issues:

Most of the teachers' views differentiated between boys and girls. As has been found elsewhere, boys were more likely to be in trouble in school, to be seen as aggressive and more confrontational (Crozier & Anstiss 1995, Lloyd 1992). Girls were more likely to be seen as accommodating to the school norms.

It's hard to say but our experience would be the girls integrated better. I can think of several girls, P's sister for example, who came into school and had friends and went through school and she was - you'd never know she was a Travelling person, you never associated her with P. she fitted in perfectly well, had friends, came to school. (D: Guidance T Sec male)

When girls were difficult they were regarded as particularly problematic, especially when they were involved in violence.

EXCLUSION

Although formal disciplinary exclusion did happen to Gypsy Traveller pupils, it seemed often more likely that conflict with teachers led to non-attendance. Where pupils were excluded there were issues around the formal procedures, for example, where the procedure was to write formally to parents inviting them to attend a meeting before their child would be readmitted it was often the case that this meeting never happened. Some Gypsy Traveller parents may not be able to read such communications. Often, however, the pupil may be removed from the roll by their parents after a problem before reaching the stage of exclusion.

Some teachers suggested that Traveller pupils may have consciously or unconsciously behaved in a disruptive way leading to exclusion from school as a strategy to avoid attending school.

...he was finally excluded for urinating in a bowl up at home economics and making it very obvious that he done this and so on and so forth. Whether he was deliberately trying to get himself excluded, or he was making a statement, I'm not a hundred per cent certain, but he was not a pleasant lad to have within the building. (N:AHT Secondary)

One support teacher saw the continual exclusion of a boy from school in the context of what was being done by neighbours to his family.

One of the wee boys I'm working with just now is in a situation where the family have been forced from the housing scheme they were in because of discrimination. His behaviour has always been a problem and he's been excluded. (P: Traveller Support)

Another saw the exclusion having a negative impact on a pupil.

In one particular case, I think this boy changed remarkably after he was excluded. I think he saw it as unjust. He's in secondary school and he became very withdrawn and quite hostile. He's been in a lot of confrontations with teachers since then although he hasn't actually been excluded... He's now stopped attending and we feel it stemmed from the exclusion and his perception of a strong sense of injustice... I think that he felt he was in the right to fight back. (N: Traveller Support)

Although most of the excluded pupils mentioned were boys there was evidence of the exclusion of a few girls. Where there was exclusion it tended to be for reasons similar to those found in other research on exclusion, ie violence between pupils or general disruptiveness (Cullen et al 1996, Lloyd 1999).

LACK OF CONFIDENCE BY TEACHERS

Several teachers and Traveller support teachers suggested that sometimes a lack of confidence on the part of colleagues may lead to difficulties in class.

I think a lot of it just depends on how secure the teacher feels. And if they feel that they're in a class where they're on the borderline of being in control of that class, then anything like that is going to increase the level of insecurity and they're going to feel threatened, so they're going to see it as a behavioural issue. Whereas the teacher who feels perfectly confident in their relationship with the other children in the class, isn't going to feel threatened by that and it isn't an issue. (D: Traveller Support)

Teachers and schools may be afraid of the impact on the class or the school of the presence of Gypsy Traveller pupils:

...there was a family who were known in the area, who had been made homeless and were living outside the area but because they had just lost their dad; there were nine children, it was two who were secondary age and the dad had been killed in a terrible road accident, just months before, and had been made homeless at the same time and they were living in temporary homeless accommodation and the mother thought for stability's sake the best thing to do was to get back to the school... the school said no way are we letting these two in. It would undermine the entire school and the school formally believed this. (H: Traveller Support)

The school eventually agreed a compromise arrangement of part-time attendance:

...they got a part-time learning support teacher just for them and they were not allowed to do anything without that teacher being with them, they weren't allowed to go the toilet, they were kept in and couldn't have lunch with the other kids. (H: Traveller Support)

Even when teachers are positive and supportive they may sometimes feel insecure about how to approach Traveller children. One Traveller support teacher described

her first meeting with a group of Gypsy Traveller pupils and feeling that her college teacher training had not prepared her for this.

...they were put in a little room on their own and told that a teacher was going to come and be working with them... I tried saying to them 'What would you like to do?' and I was trying to be really positive about it and all I got was 'No way am I going to talk to you, we don't need another teacher, we've had enough of people like you coming in, we liked our last teacher, what are you doing here?' It was so negative from them... in fact after a few months it was good but I did feel threatened. I felt like any minute one of them was going to throw a chair at me. (J: Traveller Support)

DISCUSSION

The OFSTED report in England (1996) argues that sometimes the behaviour of Gypsy Travellers can be misjudged and this is supported by our evidence. From our interviews with teachers there was also sometimes a high level of understanding and tolerance shown by some teachers towards certain types of behaviour that may be considered as part of Gypsy Traveller culture. Although the behaviour of Gypsy Traveller pupils may be perceived as a problem, often this is understood as the 'fall out' from repeated and sustained absences. The reasons for many such absences may be from self exclusion or exclusion as the result of racist name-calling, or because of regular absences due to travelling. It was clear that some teachers did see some Gypsy Traveller children having behaviour difficulties but many also emphasised that other children from the Gypsy Traveller community showed good behaviour and furthermore that most of the school's behaviour problems were created by other kids from the settled community.

The findings did, therefore, confirm our initial understanding that the school behaviour of some Gypsy Traveller pupils was seen as problematic by school staff. Some of the teachers who were interviewed made sense of it by contextualising it within an understanding of the culture of Gypsy Travellers. Other teachers either did not have much knowledge of Gypsy Travellers' lives or, like the rest of the community, had partial, stereotyped or even prejudiced views. Equally a lack of knowledge, or indeed a rejection, by Gypsy Traveller pupils of the norms and values of schools was seen by staff as underpinning their actions. Staff in schools rarely reflected critically on the culture or organisation of their schools, tending as we argued earlier, to see problems in individual terms. Traveller support staff were more aware of the interaction between the child and their culture and the norms and values of schooling.

There was a great deal of evidence from our interviews of individual teachers and schools taking action to facilitate the education of their Traveller pupils. There were several different strategies and responses discussed that accepted some of the practicalities of nomadism and worked with these, rather than against them with variable success. Other responses may have exacerbated the social and peer group problems that may be associated with nomadism, for example when Gypsy Traveller pupils were segregated in school from other pupils.

In most schools there was a lack of awareness of the extent of name calling or a reluctance to see it as an issue and, therefore, little attention was paid to addressing it a school problem (Troyna & Hatcher 1992). From interviews with Gypsy Traveller parents and children it seems that much of what the school sees as indiscipline in the form of violence may be in response to name-calling - several pupils talked of the importance of fighting back when there was name calling in the playground. Some schools are failing to make the connection between discrimination in the wider community and what happens in schools. When some teachers perceive an

inappropriate or excessive concern with their rights by Gypsy Traveller pupils they may not understand that their lives may be characterised by a struggle to achieve what are seen as basic rights and that a strong response to injustice reflects a life where injustice is experienced as routine.

Kenny (1997) argues that 'Travellers do not claim to be completely different, they simply refuse to be measured by the norms of the sedentary' (p.25). Traveller support staff who were interviewed had made an effort to make sense of this to the teachers in the primary and secondary schools and attempted to mediate between the Gypsy Traveller families and the schools. For many teachers there appears to be some confusion/tension between their understandings of some behaviour as possibly culturally defined and their desire not to discriminate against their Traveller pupils. This often results in statements which deny difference and stress the particularity of the situation, which itself may lead to failure of the school to respond to the particular situation of some Traveller children, where an understanding of their cultural background and experiences could lead to a more empathetic response by the school. Sometimes an assertion that 'they are no different' or 'they are never treated differently from anyone else' may suggest a lack of recognition of the issue of difference. The recent Lawrence Inquiry has also re-emphasised the importance of the notion of institutional racism, which, as defined by the CRE, '...operates through the normal workings of the system rather than the conscious intent of the prejudiced individual' (Commission for Racial Equality 1985 p 2).

The literature on disciplinary exclusion relates this to wider ideas of social exclusion and to the processes by which certain groups of pupils may be devalued, particularly in a climate of emphasis on formal academic achievement (Booth 1995). Other research has identified the complex ways in which race and gender stereotyping leads to the exclusion of other disadvantaged social groups, for example working class black boys in England (CRE 1997). Blyth and Milner and others have investigated the ways in which miscommunication can lead to confrontation in school (Blyth & Milner 1996). They argue that discipline is negotiated between teachers and pupils and that this negotiation is more complex for children from minority groups. Gypsy Traveller pupils thus have to negotiate different social contexts, the mainstream (settled) process in schools, in which they constitute a minority and are subject to racism, and then within the minority context they have to negotiate Traveller cultural agendas (Blyth & Milner 1997).

We are not arguing that disruptiveness, aggressiveness or violence by Traveller pupils should be ignored in school, any more than they would be by other pupils. We are arguing that it is important to understand and make sense of these actions and, again as for any pupil, to look at the school institutional context and in particular at the climate and culture of the school. One aspect of this involves a consideration of whether the level of cooperation required from pupils involves an inappropriately high level of deference to adults. We recognise that the notion of effective authority is fundamental to order in a school, however several teachers identified a problem for Traveller children (and probably for other pupils) when some teachers were excessively concerned with visible deference. Several teachers made the point that the same teachers may have difficulties with Travellers as will have difficulties with other children.

Some teachers find it incredibly difficult because they like to have a trench in front of them! Some folk like a line but some folk like a trench. (Learning support teacher, secondary)

Although the number of Gypsy Traveller pupils in Scottish schools is not large, a discussion of teachers' views does raise some important issues about the ability of schools to respond to children who challenge the 'normality' of school attendance and

behaviour. (Other children also do this, for example others with intermittent attendance such as children with chronic illness and truants). Gypsy Traveller pupils may challenge the fundamental and often unspoken bottom line of schooling which is that you come every day and do as you are told. There have always been groups of children who challenge these rules and schools vary considerably in their ability to include them. As Slee (1996) argues, the search for equity is itself a challenge to the structure and culture of schooling. By seeing these issues in individual terms, by not recognising difference, schools may continue merely to focus on behaviour, rather than explore the institutional response of the education system to a marginalised community.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We are grateful for the helpful advice of an anonymous referee.

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APPENDIX

Schedules used in interviews.

These schedules were used flexibly as a topic guide.

SCHOOL STAFF

Explain what the research is about. Confidential, no one outside the research team will have access to the data, and no schools or individuals will be named in the report.

- How many Travellers attend the school?
Number in your class?
Breakdown of number of girls/boys
How often do they attend?
What time of year?
- How do you find having Travellers in your class?
- Are there any particular issues which arise when Travellers are in class?
Are there any particular difficulties?
Any difficulties experienced with classroom behaviour?
Difficulties associated with learning difficulties?
Could you tell us about peer group relationships?
- Are there any Traveller pupils who you would describe as having behavioural difficulties?
Could you tell us about that? (make point about confidentiality, ie. we don't want to know a pupil's name)
What do you feel are the main difficulties?
Are there any key differences between Traveller pupils who display difficult behaviour and those who do not?
Differences between Traveller pupils and other pupils in this respect?
- Why do you think there are/were these problems?
Intermittent nature of attendance?
Because of differences in culture?
Curriculum does not meet Traveller pupils' needs?
Traveller pupils' difficult behaviour is different from that of their non-Traveller peers?
Tell us about parent-school communication
- Has anything been done to address difficult behaviour by these pupils?
What are the strategies used in class to address such behaviour?

Same as for other pupils?
 Other in-school support?
 Out of school support?
 Have any Traveller pupils been excluded? How many?
 If so, for what reasons?
 What was the outcome?
 Do you feel any strategies employed have been effective?

- Thinking about the curriculum, do you think it addresses the educational needs of this group of pupils?
 What are the particular difficulties for this group of children in accessing the curriculum?
 If they cannot read or write, what do you do about that?
 Do you feel the curriculum is relevant for this group?
 Do the learning styles of Traveller children match those of non-Traveller children?
- Thinking about the classroom behaviour of both male and female Traveller pupils, do you feel there are any differences in the behaviour of girls and boys?
 Do they reflect those in the non-Traveller population?
 If not, what are the differences?
- What about bullying /name-calling - is this an issue for Traveller pupils?
 How do you respond to it?
- Where do you get your support from?

TRAVELLER CHILDREN / YOUNG PEOPLE

Introduction - the research we're doing is about how young Travellers feel about school and how they get on at school. None of what you say will go back to the school, it's entirely confidential.

- How many schools did you attend (which ones)?
- Do your school friends/teachers know you are a Traveller?
 Do you like people to know?
- Did you go to school all the time or were you travelling during school time at some points?
 How was it going into school, when the other pupils had been there all the time?
- Did you like going to school?
 What did you like about it?
 What subjects did you like?
- Was there anything you didn't like about school?
 What kind of things?
- What were the teachers like?
 What did you like/dislike about them?

- Did you get on with the other pupils who were in your class?
- Was there ever any name-calling?
If so, what happened?
What did you do?
What did the teachers do?
- Did you ever get into any trouble? If so, how did you feel about that?
What did the teachers do?
How did you react?
- What age did you leave school?
Did you ever think about staying on?
- Looking ahead, what kind of school would you like for your children?
- Is there anything else about your experience of school that we haven't covered in the questions that you would like to tell us?

Thank you for answering our questions.

SCHEDULE FOR TRAVELLER SUPPORT GROUP /INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

- What are the general issues about Travellers in school?
- How do Traveller pupils find school?
- How do teachers react to their Traveller pupils?
- Is the behaviour of Traveller pupils an issue for schools?
- In what way is this an issue?
- What support is there for Travellers and their teachers?
- How knowledgeable are teachers of Travellers and their culture?
- What kind of contact is there between schools and Traveller parents?