



TRAVELLER EDUCATION STRATEGY

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Interviewer: Oh ! So you get agreement from the people ? The way schools are now, do the teachers get agreement from the pupils ?

Traveller boy, 5th class: No, we need change

**Messages from the Children: Video
Educational Disadvantage Centre (2002)**

1) Traveller Preschools

- It is recognised that Traveller Preschools ‘provide valuable educational experiences for Traveller children’ and are ‘popular among parents’ (National Evaluation Report 2003).
 - Early intervention needs a) a carefully structured curriculum yet sufficiently flexible to adapt to individual needs, b) high levels of trained personnel and c) adequate physical conditions. It is suggested that the DES does not currently adequately monitor quality standards for any of these aspects in Traveller preschools. It is anomalous that the forty schools participating in the Early Start programmes have qualified teachers and childcare workers, in contrast to the situation for the fifty-two Traveller preschools. The opportunity for additional training for those currently working in preschools needs to be put in place.
1. A recognised teacher-training course and/or childcare course for teachers in the Traveller Preschools should be developed as part of the in-career development of serving preschool teachers. These courses should be modular and part-time. Prior learning should be taken into account when assessing each teacher’s individual training needs. Future teachers employed in the preschools should hold qualifications either at degree level in early childhood studies or as primary teacher or from FETAC approved childcare courses¹. Any training courses proposed or developed for teachers in the Traveller Preschools should be done with the full co-operation of and in consultation with the preschool teachers, and also be centred on the needs of Travellers currently working in the preschools.
 2. Each preschool should employ a classroom assistant for the class contact hours. Classroom assistants currently employed in the preschools should be offered training to meet the required standard, this training should be offered in a way that suits the workers concerned.

The Department of Education and Science fund 98% of the teachers’ pay and PRSI. They pay a modest annual equipment grant and they pay for transport, where necessary. These monies are paid by way of a grant to the Board of Management (BOM) of each preschool. The BOMs are comprised of various

¹ See also the Centre for Early Childhood Education submission to the Traveller Education Strategy regarding their development of an in-career development programme for the teachers in the Traveller pre-schools

voluntary members from the local communities. Many of the preschools have been in existence for up to 20 years and over.

3. The DES must take responsibility for paying the staff in the Traveller Preschools. The teachers should be paid 100% of their salary directly to them. This is a request made repeatedly by the pre-school teachers who experience delays in payment, non-payment of increases and more.
4. Preschool teachers should be entitled to comparable conditions of employment as primary teachers in relation to salary, pension, work practices, holiday entitlements, annual increments and allowances.
5. Equipment and other grants should be in line with those paid to the early Start Preschools.
6. The role of the Visiting Teacher for Travellers should include support for the teachers in the Traveller Preschools. They should work with the teachers to foster links between home and preschool, and preschool and primary school.
7. Accommodation in many of the preschools is unsuitable and inappropriate. The DES should take responsibility for accommodation as currently it can pose an insurmountable problem for many BOMs.
8. The composition of BOMs should be in line with those in Primary schools. Traveller culture should be reflected in the preschools in the curriculum and in the classroom environment.

2) Review and overhaul, as appropriate, of allocation and use of extra resources and supports

- Move to a situation where resource teachers for Travellers would be based *solely on need rather than on the fact per se of their ethnicity as Travellers*. Currently children are targeted just because they are Travellers, even where there are no stated special needs or even literacy/numeracy difficulties etc. If there are other problems then the resource teacher for Travellers could also become available but the presumption that Traveller children automatically need the resource teacher needs to be questioned. Issues regarding Traveller pupils' ethnicity need to be dealt with at a whole class level by the class teacher through in class support and celebration of diversity and inclusiveness as an integrated theme in the class lessons. It is hoped that the situation would occur that those Travellers with literacy or numeracy needs (but not stated special needs) would be given help by the Learning Support Teacher. The Learning Support teacher is better qualified than the Resource Teacher for Travellers to provide skilled help with literacy and numeracy issues.
- If Learning Support teachers are to play an increasing role in Traveller education in the coming years more incentives need to be put in place for secondary teachers to become Learning Support teachers. Currently there are

disincentives to recruiting high quality Learning Support teachers as they lose increments etc for their salary.

- There is a need to remedy potential diffusion of responsibility for Traveller children's learning between the class teacher and resource teacher through implementation of a whole school team approach (see also Weafer 2001 on the tendency of the class teacher and school to abdicate responsibility to the Resource Teacher for Travellers)

3) Pre-service and In-service

- Interculturalism is a key theme in the Adult Education White Paper (2000) but unfortunately is largely omitted from the Primary Preservice Teacher Education Report (2002). The Immigrant Council Report (2003) refers to the need for review and reform of the education system and curriculum to reflect the increasing diversity in Irish society. Similarly, echoing the Report of the Special Education Review Committee (1993), the White Paper on Education (1995), the Task Force on the Travelling Community (1995), the First Progress Report (2000) highlights the need for a 'Clear focus and strategy for inter-cultural education' as a 'priority concern'.
- A compulsory module on interculturalism with specific focus on Traveller culture and opportunity for meeting with members of the travelling community is needed for every student teacher at pre-service level. This module may alternatively be integrated within existing programmes² e.g., sociology, history, teaching skills. This approach goes beyond information on Traveller culture in the abstract to actual contact for student teachers with the travelling community, preferably with the opportunity to engage with Travellers onsite. In this regard, there is a need for more linkage between courses on interculturalism and placement in schools/communities. Students also need to be given an understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of equality, diversity and difference. The planning and delivery of such a programme would involve Traveller men, women and children, as well as representatives from other ethnic minority groups. This programme could be developed as a best practice model for pre-service and in-service education for teachers and ethnic minorities at an EU level.
- There is a need for more cross college liaison/convergence in terms of the third level colleges of education, given the different states of affairs in each college regarding intercultural education and incorporation of a focus on Travellers
- A user friendly brochure and/or educational tool explaining and illustrating Traveller culture with a view to teachers' planning lessons which will engage with the life experience of Traveller children needs to be developed and made available to schools and student teachers. This could be the first of a series

² Or through a restructuring of the B.Ed programme around certain prioritised areas and themes, one of which needs to be intercultural education

seeking to illustrate cultures of minority groups in Ireland and would be a key aspect of an education system giving expression to interculturalism. Research indicates the pivotal importance of engaging children with culturally relevant materials. This can only be done if student teachers and teachers have knowledge of these cultures (see also Weafer 2001 on the need for materials to be made available). Specific workbooks for teachers on interculturalism also need to be made available for use in the classroom.

- This series of brochures and/or educational tools could also be developed in conjunction with the Department of Health and Children given the First Progress Report (2000) recommendation of a module on cultural awareness in the training courses of all health professionals
- Clearly visible expressions of Traveller culture and other cultures within the institutional buildings of the Colleges of Education as part of a coherent college policy of interculturalism
- Greater emphasis on the importance of formative assessment over summative assessment as a strategy for teachers in order to facilitate movement of pupils out of the 'low attainment' trap (see Black & Wiliam 1998 for a review). Increased emphasis on the need to operationalise multiple intelligence approaches within the classroom setting (see also Flynn 1998; 2000).
- A minimum two day intensive programme on anger management strategies including a focus on self-development of the student teacher. Development of these skills would be of benefit to teachers when coping with a wide range of pupils with emotional and behavioural problems.
- The National Forum Report, Ending Disadvantage (2003) recommends the establishment of mobile in-service education teams to provide in-service training around the country. A module on interculturalism including a focus on Travellers could be provided by such a team with the cooperation of local Traveller groups.

4) Access to Third-level/Progression from post-primary

- The First Progress Report (2000) notes that there has been 'insufficient' action to positively encourage Traveller participation at third level. This view is evidenced by the lack of discussion of access issues for Travellers or other disadvantaged groups in the Primary Preservice Teacher Education Report (2002). However the National Forum Report, Ending Disadvantage (2003) does highlight the need for Direct entry programmes to the Colleges of Education for disadvantaged groups, including those from minority backgrounds
- A long-term strategy to facilitate access to third level for Travellers, with particular strategic priority to be given to the areas of teaching, law, social policy, social work, youth work, childcare, sociology, psychology. Every third level institution in Ireland would have an access policy where there would be reserved places for Travellers outside the Leaving Certificate points

requirement (though with a minimum requirement) analogous to schemes already operating with regard to mature students and disadvantaged students in many universities and colleges. St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, has for example, recently established a system of reserved places for students from designated disadvantaged schools in Dublin.

- With regard to the Irish requirement for entry to the Colleges of Education, it is suggested that it is more important that levels of Irish be sufficient upon graduating than upon entering the third level institution (see National Forum Report, Ending Disadvantage 2003)
- It is essential that there be a long-term strategy to facilitate access of Travellers to positions of responsibility throughout the educational system. There needs to be specific staff dedicated to implementing a strategy of access of Travellers to teaching and youth work positions in particular, e.g., teaching on Youthreach, VTOS, Senior Traveller Training Centres, literacy courses, pre-school, primary teachers, classroom assistants, resource teachers for Travellers etc

5) School enrolment policies and Traveller-proofing system for DES and school policies and practice generally

- Combat Poverty (2003) refer to the need for 'a commitment to address discrimination and racism. In particular, it means addressing issues for Travellers across the policy spectrum' including in education.
- A clear checklist needs to be communicated to all schools nationwide to clarify the performance management indicators of an inclusive school and classroom environment as part of their duty of care to pupils, including Traveller pupils (see also e.g., the National Forum on Ending Disadvantage 2003 and First Progress Report 2000 regarding equality proofing)
- This would include clear communication to schools of best practice and an ethical rights based approach (see also Immigrant Council of Ireland 2003 for a similar approach generally regarding immigrants):
 - a) Examples of best practice would include:
 - displaying images of Traveller culture in the entrance to the building of the school (see also Traveller Guidelines 2002)
 - inclusion of Traveller children with their own age cohort in the same class, even if their academic performance is not at the level of their age cohort (see also Traveller Guidelines 2002)
 - a focus on the child's strengths when communicating with Traveller parents and providing opportunity for visits to the school in non-threatening situations e.g., school concert
 - anonymous school surveys on bullying given the finding from international and Irish research that teachers consistently underestimate levels of bullying in their class and in the school (Tattum 1997; Downes 2002)

- close schoolyard supervision to ensure that Traveller children are not being bullied during this time, recognising also that relational aggression, including verbal taunts is also to be classified as bullying
- clear communication from the school to parents that the school operates an ethos of inclusiveness and of the expectation that all children be included in formal and informal school contacts
- it is to be recognised by schools that one form of bullying is that of ‘exclusion bullying’ (Tattum 1997)
- Incorporation of intercultural strategies with a focus on Travellers in school plans, based on the whole school approach (see also National Children’s Strategy 2000)
- Public display in the school building of written integration and admission policies, also making them available to all parents (see also National Forum Report, Ending Disadvantage 2003 policy recommendation)
- See also 2002 guidelines on school mission statement, school policies on school management and organisation, school curriculum and assessment and First Progress Report (2000) on the lack of school planning at second level regarding Traveller education policies
- class materials where the teacher has a knowledge of and engages with Traveller culture to facilitate constructivist learning based on their life experiences
- the importance of classroom based group work to break down barriers given that psychological research on prejudice emphasises that contact between different groups is not enough to minimise prejudice but that cooperation on shared goals for agreed tasks is a key factor in overcoming prejudice (see e.g., Brown 1996 for a review)

b) Examples of unacceptable and discriminatory practice regarding Traveller children include:

- Non-inclusive school enrolment practices and policies (see also 1994 Guidelines on enrolment and National Forum Report, Ending Disadvantage 2003 on discriminatory enrolment practices excluding Travellers)
- a segregated roll call between Travellers and other children
- putting Traveller children to the back of the classroom
- isolation of Traveller children in the line in school

This communication to schools needs to involve specific examples of best practice and also unacceptable practice

- It is recognised that despite the recommendation that Traveller children be in classes with their same age group (see Guidelines 2002), this does not always occur in practice. International research also fully supports the importance of same age group class inclusion (e.g., Fowell & Lawton 1992; Mc-Gill-

Frantzen & Allington 1993; Hauser 1999; Jimerson et al 1997; Jimerson 1999; Ferguson, Jimerson & Dalton 2001).

- There is a need for procedures to maximise accountability, to ensure standardisation and consistent implementation of good practice across schools nationwide regarding Travellers. Significant prejudice against Travellers exists in Irish society (MacGreil 1996; Lynch 1999; Murray 2002; Combat Poverty 2003). The teaching profession as a whole, as part of Irish society, cannot be presumed to be free of prejudice in this regard. It is recommended that the following position be established. Either
 - a) a National Ombudsperson for Travellers generally or
 - b) a National Ombudsperson for ethnic minorities with specific focus on the education system.

This person would:

- give priority to a clearly articulated rights-based perspective
- have a proactive supervisory role to ensure that discriminatory and unacceptable practice is not occurring in schools regarding Traveller children
- be external to the schools and external to the DES
- liaise closely with organisations representing Travellers to facilitate communication from Traveller parents of concern regarding unacceptable practice
- have legal expertise in order to refer cases to the Equality Authority where necessary

6) Post-primary transfer and retention

- a) A coherent national plan to develop extracurricular activities engaging and targeting Travellers to help provide them with opportunities for responsibility and an identity focusing on their strengths with diverse opportunity for achievement. Participation in extracurricular activities is well recognised internationally as a protective factor against early school leaving (see Downes 2003 for a review)
- b) 5th/6th class and first/second year post-primary need to be targeted regarding extracurricular activities with a focus on how to develop continuity within these activities from primary to post-primary
- c) Promotion of secondary school to Traveller parents and their children. One aspect of this would include intensive programmes of visitation by Traveller parents and children of the child's future secondary school, needs to become standard practice from approximately age 9 onwards
- d) A whole school team approach needs further development at second level, with also a dedicated teacher in the school to provide ongoing support
- e) Curriculum reform at second level to move from a subject-centred syllabus to one designed around the declared needs of the learner
- f) More emphasis in schools on animals and plants with control and responsibility given to pupils to take care of them (see also Glasser 1986; Downes 2002). This could be one motivating factor for school attendance for those at risk, whether Travellers or others.

- g) Child-centred research needs to be undertaken which examines the voices of Traveller children across primary and secondary schools to document their experience and the obstacles they experience (see also O'Brien 2003 on cultural barriers and education)
- h) Financial incentives and supports for Traveller children at secondary school level are needed. It is suggested that at second level supports for Travellers with learning difficulties are chronically lacking
- h) The whole area of the martial arts e.g, judo, aikido, tae kwan do, karate, needs to be explored for Traveller youth of both genders, as well as other areas such as yoga. Research on these avenues for self-development needs to be undertaken.

7) The need for an integrated education/health/accomodation strategy

- Provision of adequate halting sites is an education issue as well as a health issue. There is an overwhelming recognition of the centrality of the family environment in the education of children³. Therefore it must be recognised that the well-being of the Traveller child's education cannot be separated from the quality of their family living conditions and accommodation needs (see also Weafer 2001). The necessity to deliver on Traveller Accomodation Plans must be recognised as having major implications for Traveller education. Physical needs cannot be divorced from cognitive, emotional and social needs (see also White Paper on Adult Education regarding a hierarchy of needs and education with regard to homelessness, and the criticism (Barnardos 2003) of the implementation of the commitment to eliminate child poverty made in the National Children's Strategy 2000-2010)
- An integrated health and education strategy is needed, including, for example, availability of parental education once pregnancy is known. Such parental education would need to be available in early childhood education centres onsite (see also the National Forum Report, Ending Disadvantage 2003 on the lack of inter-departmental leadership in the promotion of integrated service provision for young people).
- There is a clear need for more structured collaboration across all agencies involved with Travellers, as well as for more continuity of integration across the different levels of schooling from preschool to primary to secondary and third level
- The relationship between education and promotion of mental health is recognised through the introduction of Social, Personal and Health Education to the school curriculum. Development of self-esteem and assertiveness programmes for pupils generally, would also be of real benefit to Traveller children. Such programmes would also include anger management and would ideally be based both in school and onsite

³ At a constitutional and statutory level [The Education Act 1998], as well as in Irish and international research

- For younger Traveller children there is need for much greater investment in onsite play and art therapy to allow for non-verbal emotional expression, to prevent the damaging consequences of long-term pent up sadness and anger. Such play and art therapy would also ideally be available in the school setting for those young children who may need it.
- It is hoped that Traveller teenagers could begin to play an active role in developing and delivering self-esteem programmes for their Traveller peers. Such programmes could also include peer mentoring regarding anti-bullying strategies and for young mothers and fathers could also involve peer parenting skills programmes

8) Second-chance/Adult education initiatives for Travellers

- a) The influence of ‘macho’ male culture on decisions not to participate in literacy education has been recognised in Irish culture generally (see Owens 2001; Corridan 2002) and is also a barrier to participation of Traveller males in education. It is recommended that detailed qualitative research take place to establish the range of perceptions of Traveller male adults regarding education – both their arguments in favour and against participation in education. By engaging with their perceptions from their perspective, a cost-benefit framework for Traveller males in education could serve as a basis for discussion and persuasion of future Traveller males to participate in education – and to further develop an approach to their education centred on their expressed needs. This could then serve as the basis for a coordinated national strategy to reach Traveller men
- b) The need for a central role for parental involvement in children’s education is well recognised in Ireland and internationally (e.g. Burke 1992; Kellaghan et al 1995; White Paper 1995). Thus education of Traveller parents is a key dimension to the education of Traveller children. A coherent strategy which does not split adult education from primary education needs to be developed.
- c) Funding through the Back to Education Initiative for additional dedicated workers with a specific focus on reaching Travellers
- d) Adult education programmes run in Traveller workshops, for example, to be involved in creche childcare and as classroom assistants, need to be part of an overall access strategy for Travellers to work in the education system at various levels so that they can provide role models and reform to the system to accommodate Traveller culture
- e) A focused national family literacy strategy (involving paired reading etc) for Travellers recognising that an intergenerational approach to education is essential (see also Morgan & Kett (2003) on the importance of family literacy strategies)
- f) Traveller parent to parent programme, to transfer skills between Travellers mediated by Travellers themselves
- g) A research project needs to be undertaken to document Traveller folk

memory of their past experience of the school system – qualitative research in similar vein to O’Brien’s (1987) interviews with other disadvantaged groups experiencing alienation from the school system. The contents of such research could serve as the basis for discussion in Traveller Adult Education groups

- h) Implementation of the White Paper (2000) recommendation for Traveller men and women to be targeted within specific VTOS programmes adapted to their needs

9) Nomadism and education

- There is a clear need for Ireland to develop and actively participate in an EU wide focus on the Roma minority and Travellers to collaborate on best practice for their involvement at different levels of the education system
- There is a need to make all special schools for Travellers designated disadvantaged in order to provide them with the much needed additional resources

10) Data collection

- Clarification of issues of and procedures for confidentiality within a school regarding information on the family background of Traveller children, including clarification of parental consent regarding such issues

11) Role of NEPS and NEWB in relation to Traveller children

- There is a need for in depth training of Education Welfare Officers and Educational Psychologists regarding the needs of Travellers. Such training would include the development and application of culturally appropriate assessment tests for Travellers by NEPS
- Current levels of state resourcing of Education Welfare Officers are inadequate to facilitate Traveller attendance at school
- A clear national strategy and partnership between Education Welfare officers, Visiting Teachers for Travellers and Home-School Liaison Teachers with regard to encouraging Traveller school attendance and clarifying their respective roles

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