The Educational Experiences of Gypsy Travellers: the Impact of Cultural Dissonance

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ABSTRACT

There is a steadily growing literature on Gypsy travellers' experiences of education. Given the low levels of literacy and attendance in formal education amongst Gypsy traveller children and, further, the centrality of education to UK society, this is a welcomed growth. Data from a variety of theoretical and ethnographic studies on the attainment levels of Gypsy travellers, their educational experiences and the quality of education that they receive indicates that Gypsy traveller experiences of formal education are fraught with varying degrees of conflict both with regard to authority figures within the school (i.e. teachers and teaching assistants) and with their non-Gypsy traveller peers. Drawing upon this literature, the present study found evidence of such conflict present in an English middle school. Specifically, conflicts were found to have their causes in a curriculum which Gypsy travellers found both irrelevant and inaccessible, in the presence of academic-minded teachers who inadvertently provoked volatile behaviour amongst Gypsy travellers and in peer-to-peer relations. Examination of the impact of the middle school structure found that teachers fitting a developmental model of teaching helped to mediate or indeed negate potential conflict for some Gypsy traveller students.

KEYWORDS: Cultural Dissonance, Education, Gypsy travellers, Middle School, Pedagogy, Qualitative Research.

INTRODUCTION

The popular view of the educational system in England and Wales is that it is a system based upon value consensus, whereby all involved have agreed upon the values to be adhered to and to be imbedded within the institution. For Gypsy travellers such a consensus does not exist. The cultural dissonance that occurs between Gypsy travellers and the dominant culture in England and Wales has been well documented, within both the educational system and society at large. Like other ethnic minorities and deprived social groups, Gypsy travellers, although present within school walls, are marginalised by school and educational practices which are designed to cater primarily for the white middle-class (male) residing in a more settled home environment. Indeed, Liegeois (1998: 225-26) warns that: 'if we place children in a "scholastic competition" where conditions clearly favour some more than others, yet we perpetuate the myth of meritocracy, we can only expect confrontation. And confrontation gives rise to "conflict (latent or violently explicit)" within the school.'

Against this backdrop, and grounding itself primarily in the theoretical framework provided by Liegeois (1998), this study sought to discover if there was any evidence of conflict, ('latent or violently explicit') in the educational experiences of Gypsy travellers in an English middle school. Further, given that the school in question was a middle

school, what models of teacher can be found and in what ways do they impact on the presence or absence of conflict?

CULTURAL DISSONANCE IN PEDAGOGY, PEER RELATIONS AND MIDDLE SCHOOLS

Given the centrality of education in society, and the promises by central government to provide equal educational opportunities and experiences to all social groups (DCFS, 2008), it is understandably the focus of much research. It is further understandable that ethnic minorities and various under-privileged groups have been the focus of much of that research (Banks and McGee Banks, 1989). Gypsy travellers have proved to be one such focus of attention.

Liegeois's (1998) warning of potential conflict between Gypsy travellers and schools is based upon Europe-wide research which illustrates that educational systems do not operate upon principles of equality of opportunity; the practices and structure of schools does in fact generate inequalities by alienating and marginalising ethnic minorities such as Gypsy travellers. The practice of 'sending children to school is a cultural option' (Liegeois 1998: 175), and one that without the coercion of state legislation Gypsy travellers may be unlikely to take. In his view, cultural dissonance occurs as a consequence of forcing Gypsy traveller children to attend schools and to operate within an institutional climate whereby norms and values are often opposed to those of their own culture. Members of the dominant society do not have to contend with such difficulties as the values embedded in schools are 'reflections and extensions' (Liegeois 1998: 177) of the values that are taught and shared within their homes.

That such cultural dissonance exists means that Gypsy travellers are unlikely to master the codes necessary for scholastic success, negating full participation in school life as learning school codes is a 'prerequisite to learning itself' (Banks and McGee Banks 1989: 178). Conflict, then, is the consequence of requiring Gypsy travellers to attend formal schooling and yet not providing a stimulating and exciting environment that meets their educational needs.

Several examples of conflict arising from cultural dissonance can be found throughout the literature on Gypsy travellers in English and Welsh schools. Tyler (2005) highlights forthright verbal responses of some Gypsy travellers to teacher questions and demands as a possible area of contention in school as it does not fit with the expected norms of school behaviour, and is likely to be viewed as bad behaviour rather than a reflection of Gypsy traveller cultural norms. Similarly in Derrington's (2004) work on Gypsy travellers going through the transition from primary to secondary school, primary school teachers were concerned that the 'hostile' teaching methods of some secondary school teachers would cause Gypsy travellers to respond in a volatile way (Derrington, 2004: 55).

This concern appears to be well founded, for Derrington (2004) asserts that the greatest cause of unhappiness at school amongst the Gypsy traveller children in his study was their 'inability to access the curriculum' (Derrington, 2004: 45). Indeed the curriculum, it seems, can be found to be both inaccessible and irrelevant to Gypsy travellers. The problem over the ability to access the curriculum is two-fold. Firstly, as Hawes and Perez (1995) indicate, many Gypsy traveller children undergo primary socialisation in an illiterate environment, situated in an oral-based culture creating great difficulty for Gypsy

travellers as the curriculum revolves around the need to be literate. The second issue concerns the irrelevant material of the curriculum which often bears no relevance to everyday experiences of Gypsy travellers. O'Hanlon and Holmes (2004: 93) assert that 'pupils learn best and are highly motivated when their school curriculum reflects their cultures, experiences and perspectives'. Unfortunately Gypsy travellers have to contend with a serious discrepancy between the Gypsy in-family education and formal education. The former does not promote 'abstraction from everyday life contexts', but rather encourages learning within the context of lived experiences, whilst the latter often concentrates on abstract learning (O'Hanlon and Holmes, 2004). Levinson's work is illustrative of the difficulty that Gypsy travellers may have with accepting education through abstraction from real-life contexts. Several of his participants 'were forthright in their belief in the superiority of learning acquired in the home environment', as opposed to formal education, the home environment being seen as providing a 'real' education and the necessary skills for a successful life within the Gypsy traveller culture; for example, the ability to tarmac, perform tree surgery or sell fortunes (Levinson, 2007: 23). The overall structure of the classroom, then, does not 'facilitate Traveller involvement' (Reynolds, McCartan and Knipe, 2003: 409). The boredom and resentment that this can create might lead to conflict within the classroom.

Peer relations are an additional area of school life identified as having high potential to be a source of conflict in Gypsy traveller experiences of education. Liegeois (1998) and Derrington (2004) both state that it is common to find Gypsy traveller students adopting 'passing' as an 'institutional response' (Derrington, 2004: 94) to a hostile or potentially hostile school environment. 'Passing' comprises disguising one's true cultural identity in line with the assumption that life will be less hostile if such information remains hidden. Some Gypsy travellers 'pass' for their whole school lives, others opt to disclose slowly their real cultural identity to close non-Gypsy friends after a period of time. The young Gypsy traveller women interviewed by Sheehan (2000) claimed that if they could go back to school they would have 'passed' as Gadjes (a term used by Gypsy travellers to identify members of the dominant culture) as this would have prevented their isolation from their class peers, making school life a more positive experience. Based upon evidence such as this, it appears reasonable to suggest that the presence of 'passing' amongst Gypsy travellers within schools is a strong indicator of conflict, subtle or explicit as such an act as 'passing' would be unnecessary in the absence of hostility, real or perceived.

Following Liegeois's argument that schools need to find a way in which to mediate the confrontations that occur between Gypsy travellers and schools, an analysis of the middle-school structure becomes of interest. Middle schools form part of a three-tier educational system that is in limited use in twenty-two English counties, and they typically cater for the 9-13 age range. Their origins lie in the 1960s and 1970s, built on the ideology that it was beneficial to continue providing for older students what was thought to be the positive attributes of primary schooling, namely the freedom of creativity and self expression in learning. It was believed that such features would be crucial in the early years of identity formation in early adolescence (Hargreaves, 1986). Hargreaves's (1986) typology of middle-school teachers provides some indication of the models of teacher that are likely to be found within a middle-school structure and whose presence, if found, are likely to have consequences for the educational experiences of Gypsy travellers. Hargreaves's (1986) model of the 'academic-elementary' teacher and of the 'developmental' teacher stand out as most significant in the study of conflict between school and Gypsy traveller student. These types are placed in opposition to one another, with the 'academic-elementary' teachers focusing on subject-specialism,

as is characteristic of secondary schooling, placing additional importance upon teaching children to be part of the economic system and preferring firm discipline and rigid classroom structures. They favoured 'setting' (the placing of children in classes according to ability as opposed to the use of a mixed-ability classroom environment) as a way of teaching, categorising and testing children, and often held the view that children were of a fixed intellectual capability (Hargreaves, 1986). Conversely, the 'developmental' teachers paid greater attention to the individual child and how education could contribute to his or her development as a person, rather than creating a finished item ready for economic productivity. These teachers encouraged children to be active within a collaborative learning environment. Discipline, rather than being based along traditional, formal lines, was constructed as part of interpersonal relationships between child and teacher, and unlike their academic minded counterparts they were not 'proud' of their disciplinary achievements. The presence of either type of teacher has the potential to have varying consequences for the Gypsy travellers within the middle-school schooling system.

CONTEXT AND METHOD

The research was structured around the assumption that if conflict, in either subtle or explicit manifestations, between Gypsy travellers and the school was present then it would be found within the social interactions between various combinations of pupils and teachers. To this end and in an attempt to provide a thick description revealing the complexities of, and meanings attached to, such experiences, this study can be identified as qualitative and firmly located within the interpretivist paradigm. Through the adoption of the role of 'observer as participant' and the use of semi-structured interviews, the study sought to place the experiences and the voices of the Gypsy travellers at the centre of the research. The nature of the research, given time and financial constraints, is small-scale and therefore any findings are best viewed as indicative rather than definitive, but nonetheless important.

In terms of access, it was good fortune that initiated my entry into St Edward's School [1], with a valuable connection being established via one of my university seminar tutors whose partner worked for the Traveller Education Support Services, a government agency responsible for working alongside schools and families to ensure a school environment that recognises the needs of Gypsy traveller students. It was this agency that put me in contact with St Edward's. A subsequent meeting with the Head teacher, Mrs Black, was arranged and I explained the intentions of the research in greater detail, and offered assurances that my research would not be a critical assessment of individual teachers and that full anonymity and confidentiality would be provided to the school and to all participants.

Gaining access both in terms of 'getting in' and 'getting on' (Walford, 2001) was achieved swiftly and relatively easily. Mrs Black granted full access to the school for a period of up to two weeks, during which time I spent approximately five or six hours a day with a combination of both staff and students, on and off the school site. A timetable was prepared for me that identified where the Gypsy traveller students would be throughout the school day. It was with the Gypsy travellers themselves that 'getting on' was most crucial.

A vital seal of approval was needed from Sam, a 13-year-old in his final year at St Edward's, who was asked to show me around. Sam was touted as a somewhat reformed character, having been a very difficult student on the borderline of expulsion for much of his school life, before deciding, in his own words 'to grow up I s'pose'. Sam was a strongly built boy, loud, and well known throughout the entire school by staff and students; he commanded reasonable respect from the other Gypsy travellers, especially males. During the tour I attempted to establish an informal rapport with him, talking about football, rugby, maths and Elvis (his interests) so as to relax him to my presence and distance myself from authority figures within the school system. This initial tour and contact with Sam proved to be of remarkable value throughout the study as it appeared that acceptance of my presence from Sam carried much weight with the other Gypsy traveller children. This was demonstrated in the willingness of the entire sample (consisting of seven males and two females across all three year groups) to talk with me, both around school and within an interview situation, and by their knowledge of my research before I had even approached them.

St Edward's school is a middle school teaching pupils from the ages of 10-13 years (school years 6-9), and has approximately 300 students in total; the main hall in which assembly and lunches were eaten provided a clear focal point for school activity. The teaching staff consists of both full-time teachers as well as teaching assistants, some with several years' experience. The school has had a long-running involvement with the well-established Gypsy traveller population of the town and at present has around 16 Gypsy traveller students, of which only five were female. However, the exact number was unknown by staff as they had to rely on Gypsy traveller parents identifying their children as Gypsy travellers on official paperwork, something that some opted not to do, or could not do due to illiteracy. The head teacher explained that despite the present relationship between the school and the Gypsy traveller community being positive, this had not always been the case and indeed when she first took up her post as head teacher she had to remove teachers who viewed Gypsy travellers as 'sub-human' (16-03-07) and had to struggle to transform what was an overtly hostile environment between the Gypsy travellers and the school.

Throughout the study I attended the classes on the timetable that the school had devised for me, and I divided my lunch times between the staff room and the main hall, common areas or playground. When the opportunity arose, as it occasionally did, I broke with the timetable and observed other interactions going on throughout the school. Taking the advice of Boyle (1999) I adopted the 'less-teacher' role, in which I attempted to distinguish myself as much as possible from the teachers; this was done in the hope that the Gypsy travellers would find it easier to relax in my presence and later disclose things to me that they might not disclose to a teacher.

Interviews with the Gypsy travellers were a significant feature of the research. The interviewees were chosen in part by myself asking to speak with particular students, partly by the teacher providing appropriate permission and importantly by the Gypsy travellers granting consent. Unfortunately, time constraints meant that I did not seek parental consent to speak to the Gypsy traveller students, however the school reassured me that from their perspective my methods were ethical and the eagerness on the part of the Gypsy travellers themselves to speak to me, and their satisfaction with the outcome of our interviews, together testifies to the sound ethical manner in which the interviews were conducted. A feminist methodological model was adopted for the interviews, with information flowing in both directions between myself and the participants in a non-hierarchical environment. Six interviews took place in total; on two

occasions group interviews were undertaken but one such interview was found to be detrimental to gaining information from the participants as some students significantly dominated others. Where it helped to relax the interviewees I played games such as hangman, again disassociating myself from teachers and establishing rapport.

Taking detailed notes throughout lessons was uncomplicated as the students and teachers were familiar with being observed by various outside agents and it did not appear to affect the validity of the environment. During interviews much of the data was memorised and written up immediately afterwards so as not to intimidate the interviewee. Field notes were written in full after each visit and typed up for analysis where I cross-referenced themes found within the data between various lessons, days and other observed events. Such themes were looked for during subsequent observations to see whether an identifiable theme was emerging across the whole study, and whether or not that theme bore any links to the sociological literature on the area.

THE THREE I'S: IRRELEVANCE, INACCESSIBILITY AND (CULTURAL) IGNORANCE

In line with the findings of Liegeois (1998), Derrington (2004) and Tyler (2005), the taught curriculum at St Edward's appeared at times to be irrelevant and inaccessible for the Gypsy traveller children. In the areas in which it was found to be irrelevant, conflict – of both a subtle and violent nature – was identified. In classes such as Science and French, where many of the Gypsy travellers observed dismissed the lessons as irrelevant, the students could be found demonstrating body language that showed a lack of interest, typically turning their torso or head towards a friend and attempting to make non-verbal contact with them. Occasionally this would develop into verbal communication that was less than subtle. Perhaps not surprisingly, such behaviour generated frequent verbal warnings from staff and, in some cases, this lead to the physical removal of the Gypsy traveller student to another part of the room, and on one occasion from the class altogether. An alternative, less disruptive, strategy was that of the Gypsy traveller student slouched over his or her desk, head in arms, silently not paying attention to the lesson.

As mentioned, this sight was most frequent in Science and French lessons, both of which were identified in interviews as subjects which GT children disliked:

> Gary: 'I hate French. It's boring. I want to go to college (to be a mechanic) and I'm already fluent in Chinese! Shaun's lucky he don't have to do French.'

Indeed it was in French that the largest single disruption was observed with two Gypsy travellers being sent outside the classroom. Throughout the disruption and conflict with the substitute teacher the two Gypsy traveller students constantly insisted that they did not understand what was required of them. With these protests falling on deaf ears the disruption escalated, with pens being thrown randomly around the room and the teacher being unable to help anybody due to escalating noise levels.

O'Hanlon and Holmes's (2004) assertion that 'pupils learn best when they are motivated by a relevant curriculum' certainly appeared accurate throughout the observations, and as the incident in the French lesson illustrates, where this was not the case, conflict

occurred. The increase in the likelihood of conflict generated by irrelevancy within the curriculum at St Edward's was further highlighted by observations of the same Gypsy travellers behaving almost impeccably in lessons that they deemed relevant to their experiences. Design technology proved a favourite amongst all of the students, and one D.T. teacher remarked how 'different', and well-behaved they were in her class compared to others, leading her to claim that they were 'angels really'. Maths, art and P.E. joined D.T. as firm favourites with the Gypsy travellers and the oft-stated reasons for such preferences were the relevance to what Gypsy traveller students viewed as everyday life skills and also the methods of teaching; it was in such lessons that more imaginative and accessible methods of teaching were employed. These imaginative methods involved using visual methods, for example, electronic white board games and group maths games to encourage basic arithmetic. These methods were preferred by all of the Gypsy traveller students without exception. Certainly the Gypsy travellers cannot be said to have been 'angels' in the favoured lessons, but there was a noticeable improvement in behaviour due to the relevancy of the lesson material and the accessibility of a pedagogical method that was able to stimulate and captivate Gypsy traveller interest in the subject matter.

Problems such as these may not be confined to St Edward's School with the National Curriculum having to be implemented in all schools, but individual schools can work towards reinventing how lessons are taught so as to include a variety of stimulating pedagogies that will find relevance with all pupils and so incorporate them more fully in the learning process. This is perhaps especially so in the case of a middle school free of the burden of having to prepare for Key Stage 3 SATs, which adds pressure to perform for league tables rather than for the best interests of the pupil. However not all teachers recognised their methods as problematic, with most, as in Liegeois's (1998) work, viewing the Gypsy traveller as culturally deficient in some way. As one teacher commented in relation to the perceived academic potential of a bottom-set class containing three Gypsy-traveller students, 'you can't polish a turd'. Such opinions will serve to perpetuate conflict, 'subtle or violently explicit'.

PLAYING AT BEING 'NORMAL', KEEPING OUT OF TROUBLE: 'PASSING'

'Passing' was a common feature of Gypsy traveller life at St Edward's, albeit in varying degrees. No single student was found to pass entirely, with most Gypsy traveller students suspecting that the teachers knew of their cultural identity. The Gypsy travellers tended to adopt 'passing' as a strategy to avoid conflict. Gemma, one of the only two girls interviewed, believed that it was easier to disguise who you were than face various, often very subtle, forms of harassment each day. Indeed she perceived attacks on her culture as coming from several angles;

> Gemma: 'Even the teachers do it, they laugh at the way we speak; Mr Edwards (English teacher) kept saying 'daart' yesterday, coz that's how Acer (a Gypsy traveller) says it. I didn't like that.'

This instance was reported and not observed so the intentions of the teacher cannot be confirmed, but this does suggest that, in the best-case scenario that the teacher was attempting to have some light-hearted fun, it was still perceived as a specific attack upon Gypsy travellers and, as such, Gemma believed that school was more enjoyable if her cultural identity was hidden. The Gypsy travellers interviewed believed that teachers were more strict with Gypsy travellers, scolding them for things that non Gypsy

travellers could get away with doing, and a common complaint was the way in which staff reproached Gypsy travellers, with all of the students feeling that the teachers were too hostile in their tone of voice and the students especially disliked how they were prevented from speaking whilst being scolded. Complaints like these can be explained in terms of cultural dissonance given that previous research has suggested that older Gypsy traveller children and adolescents are treated like adults within their own cultures and afforded some respect for their opinions. To then have this denied to them at school creates a source of conflict (Tyler, 2005). Therefore the conclusion of Gypsy traveller students was that it was for their own good to 'pass' as Gadjes in school.

A number of the Gypsy travellers reported feeling victimised by some members of staff, and in fact the head teacher was singled out as the least trustworthy of all the teachers. It was widely believed that Mrs Black always took the side of Gadjes, and would continue to do so:

> She thinks we cause all the trouble and when our parents come in she acts all nice but when they go again she moans at us. I don't moan and sort it (referring to her own problems) out.

It is clear how the above stance (a pupil wanting to take their problems into their own hands) can lead to future conflict as it is a direct contravention of school rules for a student to take such action, especially if the action is likely to end in verbal or physical aggression. In this way the Gypsy traveller decision to adopt 'passing' as a coping strategy to institutional discrimination (Derrington, 2004) can ironically lead to an increase in hostility as it occasionally went hand-in-hand with the decision to solve one's own problems. This reinforced Gypsy traveller perceptions that they were always being 'blamed' for the trouble at school simply because they were Gypsy travellers.

Reports of overt racism and harassment demonstrated by non Gypsy traveller pupils were made, although no such incidents were observed. The reports came primarily from the two female students in the study; nevertheless this did not prevent some of the boys from passing as Gadjes, although such behaviour caused great disgust for one male Gypsy traveller:

> I'm proud of being a Traveller. Shane tells people he lives in a house and that makes me mad.

The extent to which many of the Gypsy travellers 'passed' was in fact quite successful, with several teachers being unaware of who was and was not a Gypsy traveller. It can be said with some confidence that the option to 'pass' as something one is not is evidence of the existence of underlying, subtle conflicts throughout the school system that result from coercing one social group to participate within an institution that operates both formally and informally to alien norms and values. The fact that with the exception of three males, all of the Gypsy traveller students stated that they would opt to 'pass' when they moved to secondary school, highlights how serious such subtle conflicts can be, and reflects the concerns of the primary school teachers in Derrington's (2004) study that beyond primary education teachers' methods of operating and disciplining would serve to provoke aggression in, and alienate Gypsy traveller students.

AGITATORS AND MEDIATORS: THE ROLE OF MIDDLE-SCHOOL TEACHERS IN GENERATING CONFLICT

Hargreaves's typology of middle-school teachers could be readily identified and documented. Even though teachers could be recognised as broadly operating to an academic-elementary or developmental model (Hargreaves, 1986), it became apparent through my observations that an element of fluidity existed whereby some teachers were able to adopt both approaches depending on the specific context in which they find themselves. Often the context upon which such fluidity depended was the overall ability of the class being taught, as one teacher explained:

> It's more enjoyable getting a top-set class, you can relax a bit more and you can encourage opinions. You can see who's developing a real interest and encourage that. With the lower sets I find I'm just hammering fact after fact trying to get through to them but that's all they understand.

Not all teachers adapted their educational style, with many of the developmental teachers believing that their approach to education worked regardless of class ability;

> I generally approach my lessons the same way whether I have top set or bottom set. Even if I'm a substitute teacher for another lesson I try to get a little bit extra out of the students, and I think they enjoy it. It's not all about grades.

There was an increase in in-class confrontations, even of a mild nature, in lessons taken by academic-elementary teachers. Conflicts along these lines were usually frustrated attempts to get Gypsy traveller students to do work in a particular fashion, which tended to be the style that the teacher saw as most appropriate, with there being little room for the Gypsy traveller to offer an alternative method of working. The greater freedom allowed within the structure of developmental teachers' lessons negated minor conflict like this and as such likely prevented larger-scale conflict that was on one occasion witnessed in the classroom of an academic-elementary teacher. After a series of warnings for minor disruption and not setting his work out correctly during an English lesson, Alex was told to sit by himself by Mr Hill. Clearly aggrieved by such a demand, Alex slung his chair under the table aggressively, further angering Mr Hill, whose response was to shout at Alex, informing him his stamp was to be taken from him (part of a school reward system; the removal of a stamp has adverse effects for student at a later date). This led to Alex storming to the other side of the room where he threw himself down and refused to participate any further in the lesson. Afterwards Mr Hill offered this:

> They are almost impossible to deal with after you have to tell them off. Sometimes you are forced to shout at them but when you do the shutters go up and any chance of co-operation after that is gone. It doesn't happen often, but when it does…

As already indicated, this was not the case in lessons taken by developmental teachers, and even where Gypsy travellers, or indeed any other students, were being mischievous they were reminded that their behaviour had a negative impact on the rest of the class and was unpleasant for the teacher. It was not uncommon to hear such teachers make comments along the lines of 'oh come on, you're usually so well behaved for me' or 'we've had fun today, don't spoil it' (22-03-07). One technology teacher frequently referred to the Gypsy traveller boys in her class as her 'angels' or 'stars'. Constructing discipline as part of interpersonal relationships (Hargreaves, 1986)

in this manner clearly had a positive impact on the classroom environment for all concerned and avoided such conflict as was recorded in the English lesson.

Perhaps one of the largest sources of conflict arising from cultural dissonance at St Edward's was the frequent combination of both an academic-elementary teacher and inaccessible pedagogical methods. When asked what they would change about St Edward's, without fail all Gypsy traveller students identified at least one academic-elementary teacher and at least one lesson that was identified as using inaccessible methods as the thing they would most like to change.

CONCLUSION

This paper has presented the findings of a piece of qualitative research which set out to give voice to a group of Gypsy traveller pupils at one middle school in the English Midlands. From the results it is evident that conflict of various forms, but most often that of a subtle nature, was an everyday feature of Gypsy traveller educational experiences at St Edward's School.

As previously recognised by a number of studies on Gypsy travellers, an education cultural dissonance can be found at the origin of the several sources of conflict within the walls of St Edward's, from the problems concerning the curriculum and pedagogy, the sometimes difficult peer-to-peer relations and the presence of particular styles of teacher in the form of the academic-elementary model. Occasionally a mediating force could be identified, and when this was the case, far less conflict, subtle or explicit, was found. In St Edward's the greatest mediator of conflict was perhaps the presence of those teachers who could be identified as developmental teachers. Such teachers tended to have positive working relationships with Gypsy traveller children and discipline was constructed through interpersonal relationships; this maintained poor behaviour at a low level. Importantly, these teachers approached their lessons in imaginative ways using a variety of resources that engaged the Gypsy travellers and brought the vital elements of accessibility and – crucially – relevancy to the educational experiences of Gypsy travellers. In these instances Gypsy travellers could be seen as being fully integrated into their classes and enjoying their experiences just as O'Hanlon and Holmes (2004) suggested would be the case. Obviously it is not only Gypsy traveller students whose classroom disruptions have roots in an inaccessible and irrelevant curriculum and pedagogy, but not all students find themselves in this position as a result of cultural dissonance (Liegeois, 1998).

The research raises a number of issues with regards to the education of Gypsy traveller children, not least those concerning teaching style and cultural identity. 'Passing' was the most common feature of school life amongst Gypsy travellers and a feature that certainly betrays actual or perceived hostilities and conflict. Gypsy travellers will only feel ready to be open about their identity when schools such as St Edward's become truly multicultural, not just in rhetoric but in actual celebrations of difference (Liegeois, 1998). This cannot occur until the ignorance that prevents suitable 'student-centred pedagogies' being generated (Liegeois, 1998) is tackled and similarly with the ignorance that is the oft-cited font of racism and harassment. All of these problems have their roots in cultural dissonance which is itself the creation of either an ignorance of or a refusal to meet the needs of those outside of the dominant culture.

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NOTES

[1] All names, including that of the school, have been changed to preserve anonymity.

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