

Book review

O’Hanlon, C. & Holmes, P. (2004). *The education of Gypsy and Traveller children: Towards inclusion and educational achievement*. Stoke on Trent, UK and Sterling USA: Trentham Books. (ISBN 1 85856 269 4)

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Trentham Books in the United Kingdom is well-known as a publisher of books about access, equity and social justice in education, including for minority ethnic learners. Within that field it is particularly renowned for its growing specialisation in the education of Travellers, both Gypsy and occupational. These groups, especially the former, have been identified as the most socially and educationally disadvantaged communities in Britain, owing to centuries of suspicion, discrimination and even oppression on account of both their ethnicity and their mobility. Through its publications in this area of scholarship, Trentham Books is contributing significantly to the circulation of counternarratives to the prevailing discourse that positions Travellers as other to the generally accepted norm of schooling posited on fixed residence. These counternarratives present accounts of educational innovation and good practice that value and build on Travellers’ mobility and their culturally constructed lifeworlds – and in doing so they contain valuable lessons for educators of mobile and non-mobile learners alike.

Just so with *The Education of Gypsy and Traveller Children*. The authors are well-placed to explore the issues and aspirations constituting the book’s subtitle’s focus on “towards inclusion and educational achievement”. Christine O’Hanlon is an experienced teacher educator who works with current and prospective teachers to deploy techniques to enhance the participation of marginalised students. Since 1986 Pat Holmes has led the West Midlands Consortium Education Service for Travelling Children, one of the largest and most complex in the country, and she is a founder member of the British National Association of Teachers of Travellers. Their combined experience and perspectives give considerable credibility and strength to their exploration of the problems and possibilities encountered by educators seeking to promote the learning outcomes of Gypsy and Traveller children.

The book consists of six chapters. Chapter 1 provides a succinct overview of the different Traveller communities, highlighting the diversity within and among those communities. The second chapter takes us into the lifeworlds of the Travellers, including naming practices and family learning, and contains a “good practice checklist” for each of primary and secondary schooling. Chapter 3 moves to the effective educational strategies that have been developed over decades, particularly the innovative work of the Traveller Education Support Services and the school-

based distance learning packs developed by the students' winter base schools to take with them when they are travelling in the summer months. The fourth chapter switches to the macro level legislation and policies that influence the education of Gypsies and Travellers; that influence extends from local authorities to the national government to the United Nations Organisation, and includes issues such as accommodation and health in addition to educational provision.

Chapter 5 overviews the action research design underpinning the portrayal in the sixth and final chapter of several fascinating and vivid case stories of Traveller education. Based on interviews and survey questionnaires with children, parents, teachers and headteachers, these case stories engage with eight themes: whether schools reflect Traveller culture; Traveller education as equality education; whether Traveller language is used in schools; Traveller children's early years education; the development of literacy; inclusion in schooling; efforts to enhance Traveller children's school attendance; and teachers' inclusion strategies. These stories are compelling and often poignant; they also exemplify goodwill and positive intentions by both Travellers and educators, sometimes complicated and even compromised by broader forces associated with the uncomfortably close proximity between inclusion and assimilation. The book concludes with three useful appendices: an annotated bibliography of Gypsy and Traveller education policies; addresses of three support organisations (alas one of these, the European Federation for the Education of the Children of Occupational Travellers, has ceased to function); and culturally appropriate resources produced by several Traveller Education Support Services.

The education of Gypsy and Traveller children combines the best of experience and research, encapsulated in the authors' backgrounds. There is a great deal of practical value for current and new teachers who might have Travellers in their classes, distilled from the lessons learned over decades in which the prevailing economic, political and social climate has varied but the educational needs of this community have remained and their aspirations have both endured and evolved to take account of new technologies and changing understandings of the character of education. There is also a lot of theoretically informed and methodologically sound evidence that can be used for multiple purposes by the several groups likely to find this book relevant and useful, including pre-service teachers, policy-makers and researchers. Certainly the authors have been successful in fulfilling their stated purpose for the book: "... to draw out the lifestyles and experiences of Traveller communities to highlight their presence in our schools and classrooms or their absence from educational processes and to outline the subsequent implications for meeting their educational needs" (p. ix).