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E822 Masters Multi-disciplinary Dissertation: Education, Childhood and Youth

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Dissertation

Extended Research Proposal

“Rethinking inclusivity and traditional Western education for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children: an exploration of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller student and teacher perceptions of inclusivity in secondary schooling”

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Extended Research Proposal: Title

“Rethinking inclusivity and traditional Western education for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children: an exploration of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller student and teacher perceptions of inclusivity in compulsory schooling”

Chapter 1 – Introduction (1008 words)

Within the field of education, social justice and inclusive practice is a complex and contentious issue. This is in part due to the myriad views on what both social justice and inclusive practice entail among theorists, educators, parents, and policy makers, as well as tension between national education policy and the real and actual implementation of inclusive practice by teachers in a school setting. In reality, inclusive practice on the ground is often far from ideal (Hamilton, 2018) and can be referred to as ‘paper inclusion’ (Tyler, 2005). The very concept of ‘ideal’ needs to be questioned – whose ideal? Recognising the lack of clarity when defining inclusivity in education, Lauchlan and Greig (2015) state that it can be understood to mean pupils being included both socially and educationally in an environment that is hospitable and enables them to thrive and progress. They argue that inclusion cannot be separated from legislation and that while governments all over the world prescribe to universal basic education and the UN’s Sustainable Development Goal 4 which is to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (United Nations, 2021), a study of development towards a universal basic education demonstrates that a significant number of children that are not in school, or not learning, are from particular groups, specifically, the “marginalised, disadvantaged, excluded” (Shaeffer, 2019, p.182). How then, are these children ‘included’?

The Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities are one such marginalised group. They have long had the lowest attainment and lowest attendance rates in school of any marginalised group in the whole of the United Kingdom (Hamilton, 2018; McCaffery, 2009),

and this group will be the focus of the research proposal.

It is well established in the literature that for centuries, GRT communities have been perceived negatively by mainstream society across all of Europe (Rogers, 2021; Hamilton, 2018). My work as a teaching assistant in a primary school in London which had a large number of students from this marginalised group allowed me to observe attitudes towards the students. Having engaged with module material concerning social justice, inclusive practice, and the issues and obstacles GRT communities face in society and in education in particular, looking back on my time in that setting I found the attitudes of some of the practitioners towards the GRT students problematic and alarming. It led me to reflect on the ongoing debate regarding what inclusive education actually looks like in the classroom. My understanding of social justice and inclusivity has developed and changed over the course of the module, and I now have a deeper understanding and appreciation of the question put forth by Leijen et al. (2021): Is it “inclusion for some or inclusion for all?” It is evident to me now that this is the core of the issue regarding what can be considered inclusive practice in education. Children may be physically present in class, but are they truly included? This led me to feel that there is a need for an exploration of what inclusion is deemed to be and what it should in fact be, and further, how does one include all learners rather than accommodate the needs of only one particular subgroup? A number of scholars (McCaffery 2017, Rogers 2021) contend that what is needed is a complete overhaul of the system and a rethinking of Western education.

The aim of this dissertation, through an extended research proposal, is to explore inclusive practice within education as it pertains to the GRT community. The objective is to investigate and lend voice to GRT narratives on their experiences of education within mainstream secondary schooling and what they themselves assign value to, and to explore the notion of the validity of a western education for their community. The hope is to uncover strategies that could be implemented to create more meaningful and significant experiences with learning for the young people of the GRT community.

My interest in this issue and with this marginalised group specifically has arisen from my own views about discrimination faced by marginalised groups in the UK. Being from a marginalised group myself but having been afforded all the educational opportunities that non-marginalised groups enjoy and remembering no occurrences of discrimination against myself in my schooling, I am eager to understand the factors that allow for the neglect of another marginalised group. My current lens is one that views the driving factors as ignorant in nature rather than insidious and intentional, and I hope to gain clarity through the research. I believe this outlook poses opportunities to challenge any false belief I have about equity within the UK and the nature of GRT challenges within education, which are often in line with normative thinking perpetuated by dominant groups. Since the GRT are a marginalised group who are often silenced and 'othered' (Rogers, 2021), and who also practice 'othering' of members outside their group, I believe that taking a critical theory approach is an apt lens with which to critically examine the issues at hand. Critical theory calls for disrupting the status quo, lending voice to the disempowered and working towards transformative practice (Freire, 1970) – this theoretical framework will allow me to challenge my own beliefs as well consider problems within the education system which work to keep the GRT community shackled and largely forgotten, and work towards transformation that alleviates their experiences.

The literature review which follows attempts to explore and understand the socio-cultural, economic, historical and political factors that situate the GRT in their specific context, and allows for reflection on the reasons underlying the problem of GRT children's low attainment, attendance and lack of inclusion within school, and what can be done to address these issues. It will provide a conceptual framework with which to explore the issues and will inform the proposal of a research study.

The study hopes to answer the following research questions:

- What are GRT students' perceptions of inclusivity in education?
- What aspects of education do GRT children find valuable, or not valuable?

- What are teacher perceptions of inclusivity in education?

Chapter 2 Literature Review – The Topic (4105 words)

This study explores issues experienced by the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in the UK. It is important to note that in the UK the term Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) is a collective term used to refer to a range of diverse groups, primarily including British Romany Gypsies, European Roma, Irish Travellers, Scotties Gypsies/Travellers and Welsh Gypsies/Travellers (House of Commons, 2017). It also includes groups for whom being nomadic is an occupational choice (King's College Report). Inclusion in these groups relies not only on heritage and ethnicity, but also self-identification, and includes those who are settled and no longer live nomadically. It is noted that grouping this wide range of diverse groups of people who have different histories, cultures, and beliefs into one largely broad term can be problematic as it risks stereotyping individuals and can potentially reduce the complexity and intersectionality of these groups with an overemphasis on ethnicity (King's College Report). However, for consistency with the majority of research literature, this dissertation will use the term GRT, keeping in mind that the complexity and diversity of these groups should be recognised, and its use does not denote a belief that the GRT are a homogenous group of people.

The following chapters will explore and critically analyse existing literature on the barriers that the GRT face in education and examine theories which have been put forth as viable alternatives. Seminal literature will be referred to for the appropriate conceptual framework and methodological approach with which to explore the issues.

2.1 The 'Problem' of the GRT

The GRT have the poorest educational attainment and lowest attendance of all marginalised groups in the United Kingdom (Hamilton, 2018; McCaffery, 2009). In addition to having the lowest attainment and attendance rates, GRT students also have the highest exclusion rates (Mulcahy *et al.*, 2017) and report high levels of bullying and racial abuse. They are perceived and treated as 'other' as a consequence of symbolic (McCaffery, 2009) and epistemic violence

(Bunch, 2015), motivated by negative stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination and the absence of knowledge and awareness of their history and culture (Melendez-Luces and Couto-Cantero, 2021; Rogers, 2021). The hostility suffered by them is deeply entrenched in mainstream society and is often manifested in physical violence (McCaffery, 2009). The literature also demonstrates that within school settings, racism and bullying are an insidious and persistent issue which cultivates a hostile learning environment and is a major contributing factor in GRT children's low attainment and attendance (Bhopal, 2004; Bhopal 2011; Bhopal and Myers, 2016). Therefore, it is clear that the GRT experience discrimination in society and that this discrimination is a chief barrier in their access to an inclusive education.

Theorists point to socio-political, economic, and cultural factors as contributors to the low levels of attainment and participation within schooling amongst the GRT (McCaffery, 2009), therefore any attempt to tackle this issue must consider the background of the GRT, their values, their beliefs, and the discriminations they face within society. Li (2010) claims that experiences "cannot be understood in the absence of the situated sociocultural, historical, and institutional contexts in which it is constructed" (p.120), thus, it is imperative when researching a marginalised group of people that the societal relations of power that exist between the dominant and marginalised groups are considered and consequently analysed within their context. Understanding the sociocultural, historical, economic, and political factors that situate the GRT in a specific context enables reflection on the reasons for these barriers and why GRT students are perceived from a lens of 'deficit'.

2.2 Barriers to Education Amongst the GRT

The low attainment and lack of inclusion of the GRT are attributed to a host of factors. They can be categorised as GRT cultural values, societal and political discrimination, and negative experiences in school settings.

Culture and Values

Historically, the GRT are nomadic peoples, however even those that have settled generally identify, both culturally and ethnically, as Gypsy or Traveller (McCaffery, 2009). For their way

of life, self-employment, adaptability and flexibility are highly valued, although these have all been restrained due to the legal and political attempts to sedentarise them by placing constraints on their dwellings and movement (McCaffery, 2009). This lifestyle means that often, family practice within GRT communities include mobile occupations, obligations towards and demands of a scattered family, and an eagerness to introduce children into family businesses (Pollock and Barrow, 2021). These cultural practices are not conducive to the organised educational provision provided by the Western education system, which is designed for a settled community, and make it difficult for children to attend school while also fulfilling these practices (Cudworth, 2008; Myers, 2018). According to McCaffery (2009), this lower attendance has a significant impact on educational achievement.

Bhopal (2004) states that the GRT are deeply attached to their identity, their mobility and their right to self-determination, and have historically not placed much value on the type of educational provision provided by compulsory schooling; they find the type of education they receive at home and within their communities to be much more relevant and necessary. There is also a very real fear that assimilation brought about by compulsory school attendance will force their sedentarisation, which threatens to erase their identity (Levinson and Hooley, 2014). These reasons mean that often, their education at school is not taken seriously, and is a contributing factor in self-exclusion and poor attendance rates. It should be noted that while normative discourse considers this low attainment and low levels of literacy as deficit, research amongst the GRT demonstrates that generally, the GRT communities themselves do not share this view (McCaffery, 2009).

Societal and Political Discrimination

The literature quite comprehensively establishes that the GRT have always suffered from discrimination and racism within mainstream society across all of Europe (Rogers, 2021; Hamilton, 2018; McCaffery, 2009). Legal restrictions are placed on their caravan dwellings and stopping places and they suffer high-profile evictions (McCaffery, 2009). They experience hostility from the dominant groups in society, which is often played out as racist abuse, discrimination and actual violence (Hamilton, 2018, McCaffery, 2009). Further, this hostility and prejudice is not implicit but explicit, as it seems to be the last form of acceptable racism (The Traveller Movement, 2017). This "symbolic and actual violence" against them

(McCaffery, 2009, p.644) is a primary factor in the lack of fair and equitable policies for their communities.

The term 'symbolic violence' emerged in the literature as a prominent factor in the negative and insidious discrimination that the GRT experience. This term 'symbolic violence', coined by Bourdieu (1979), describes a type of domination and non-physical violence which dispossesses subordinates of their "agency and voice", and is exhibited in an imbalance of power between dominant and subordinate groups (Lusasi and Mwaseba, 2020, p. 4). It is described by Bunch (2015) as those who possess the social power exploiting this power to "establish and impose norms through misrecognition – the disguising of the economic and political interests driving these practices (p. 11). Citing Burawoy (2019) and Rowlands (2015), Cortes (2021), differentiates it from hegemony which is based on consent, whereas symbolic violence is built on "misrecognition and asymmetric access to fields where social perception is constructed" (p. 1). It is a "veiled" (Cortes, 2021, p. 1) form of domination, which "prevents domination from being recognised as such, and therefore, as misrecognised domination, is socially recognised" (Krais, 1993, p 172).

Stemming from symbolic violence is epistemic violence, which according to Bunch (2015) is the practice of 'othering' and refers to the marginalisation of members of society that are distinct from the members of the dominant group, or the "in-group" (p.3). Bunch (2015), citing Maoz et al. (2008), states that in asymmetrical conflict where one group has more symbolic power than the other, the more powerful group will utilise this power through epistemic violence, which she claims can lead to physical violence and conflict. This is the case with the GRT, especially GRT students, who are victims of racism, bullying and physical abuse. Bunch (2015) identifies three forms of epistemic violence: discriminatory, testimonial and distributive, all of which the GRT suffer from equally. The discriminatory form of epistemic violence 'others' the out-group, the testimonial form diminishes their credibility and silences them (which can be evidenced in McCaffery's (2009) research on the GRT, where despite their knowledge, they were not equal participants in town meetings with local politicians) and the distributive form withholds resources such as an education from the out-group. These are all applicable to the GRT. The GRT children that are in school and those that do not attend are

equally denied an education when the education system is so inhospitable to their needs. These forms of epistemic violence can all lead to physical violence and conflict. The GRT experience all three forms of this epistemic violence, and viewing their experiences from the lens of this epistemic violence lends insight into the specific ways in which the GRT are discriminated against within society, as well as by teachers and student peers.

GRT Experiences Within School Settings

Racism and discrimination against the GRT are keenly felt by them not only in wider society but also within schools when they do actually attend. Despite the introduction of anti-bullying policies aimed at the GRT, the literature consistently emphasises the issue of racism and discrimination that GRT children face when they are in school (Bhopal, 2004; Bhopal and Myers, 2016; Pollock and Barrow, 2021).

Pollock and Barrow (2021), citing Bhopal (2011) and Foster and Norton (2012) make the important point that there appears to be a diminished social stigma to racist and derogatory attitudes against the GRT, in comparison to other ethnic groups. This resonates with the phenomenon of racism against the GRT being the last acceptable form of racism. Due to the hostile environment, the negative stereotypes and cultural assumptions about the GRT held by schools, and GRT children's negative experiences in school stemming from these experiences, GRT children often self-exclude (Pollock and Barrow, 2021), and these are all major factors in their low attainment and low attendance (Bhopal, 2004; Bhopal 2011; D'Arcy, 2017).

I found Bhopal's (2004, 2011) work to be very valuable in understanding the issues surrounding the issue of the GRT's negative experiences in school and their low attainment. Her work may seem dated, but it is ground-breaking in fact, as it investigates both parent and teacher perceptions and attitudes. Bhopal's objective was to give voice to the GRT, a marginalised group in society, which aligns with critical theory and its aim of giving voice to marginalised groups and consequently empowering them and enabling positive change and transformation (McKernan, 2013; McArdle and Mansfield, 2007).

Bhopal (2004) found that despite GRT parents' own very negative experiences attending school in the past and the negative experiences of the communities' children attending school, they were mostly encouraging and very supportive of their children pursuing an education. This was the case even though it clashed with their need to preserve their unique culture, as they fear that assimilation through school attendance would erase their identity and force their sedentarisation (Levinson and Hooley, 2013). Referring to Ogbu's (1987) work on 'folk theories of success' provides a lens with which to explore this shift in perspective and attitude in the GRT parents. Ogbu presents the idea that minority groups construct narratives regarding success in education, employment and in access to wealth (Carrington and Luke, 1997). Applying this to GRT parents, their 'folk theories of success' narrative has changed over time. Due to changed and diminishing opportunities for employment in their traditional occupations (mainly due to legal constraints on their movement and stopping places), some of them have come to consider literacy and an education in mainstream schools as valuable for their children as it will make them appear 'respectable', despite negative experiences of their own in schooling and a hostile environment (Bhopal, 2004; McCaffery, 2009). Bourdieu's theories on "economy of practice", cited in Carrington and Luke (1997) suggest that the entirety of human practice is driven, whether consciously or subconsciously, by the "maximisation of social advantage" (p. 100) which is what is presented here with the shifting perceptions of GRT parents. Despite their own negative experiences and knowing they would be sending their children to a hostile environment, their perception is that education would allow for increasing their children's social advantage. This can also be demonstrated in McCaffery's (2009) study on the literacy and communicative skills that the GRT sought and employed for resisting and fighting policy at government level.

There is a discrepancy however between parents' positive attitude towards mainstream education, and the perceptions held by schools on the attitudes of GRT communities towards school, which is generally perceived as being "at the very least antipathetic if not actually hostile" (Bhopal, 2004, p. 48). Derrington (2007) asserts that GRT children's behaviour in school is routinely misunderstood or perceived as rude and confrontational. Bhopal's (2011) research demonstrates some of the worryingly negative attitudes and stereotypes conveyed by some teachers. For example, one primary teacher explicitly stated, "I find them hostile, so I don't like them and I don't like teaching them" (Bhopal, 2011, p. 472). The GRT students

were generally seen as disruptive, apathetic and challenging, and Bhopal found the teachers' "prejudice and stereotyping...apparent" (p. 479). This was certainly the case in my own practice. This must be addressed, as the stereotypes held by practitioners and schools are what will determine how these institutions engage with GRT students (Bhopal, 2004).

Good relationships developed within school have been shown to be crucial in influencing how well students settle and progress (Hamilton, 2018), and in the case of the GRT, the literature suggests that having stable, respectful relationships with teachers and feeling understood by them made it more probable that GRT students have better attainment and attendance (Bhopal, 2011). It cannot be overstated how important good relationships between teachers and students is - Derrington (2007) claims that much of the time, the reasons for a GRT student's withdrawal from secondary school is a result of a breakdown in relations with their teachers. Thus, developing empathic relationships with students and being responsive and sensitive to their social and emotional needs strengthens their sense of belonging (Goroshit and Hen, 2016), and are "key" to developing and enriching GRT children's inclusion (Pollock and Barrow, 2021, p. 28) and improving their attainment, attendance, and retention (Hamilton, 2018).

Another important theme to emerge through the literature and related to teacher attitudes is the importance of fostering positive and trusting relationships between the schools and the parents of GRT students (Bhopal, 2004). The Traveller Education Service was established in the late 1970s to offer support to GRT families in accessing and navigating the education system. Many researchers note the positive impact the TES had on GRT experiences (Bhopal, 2004; Rogers, 2021) with parent accounts demonstrating that they felt more welcome when they felt that the teachers and the school were showing an interest in their culture and a concern for their wellbeing, which was often facilitated by the TES. Research has shown that feeling valued and understood inculcates confidence in both the parents and children who are anxious about attending a hostile environment, and this confidence can only come about when negative stereotypes amongst society in general and teachers in particular are dismantled (Bhopal, 2004; Rogers, 2021). The TES has since been scrapped, and in the absence of these facilitators, the onus is on policy makers and teachers to create meaningful

relationships for GRT students and parents. This is easier said than done, however, as Pollock and Barrow (2021) found that there seems to be more readiness on the part of teachers to support GRT pupils academically than willingness to cultivate emotional and pastoral relationships with them. This may be because it is easier to provide learning intervention with specific pathways and strategic goals, than pastoral care which is more personally demanding (Pollock and Barrow (2021)).

To be able to provide a truly inclusive education, the school must adapt to the student rather than the student adapt to the school. With the GRT, this can only happen if stereotypes are dismantled and educators cease perceiving them from a lens of deficit. The burden is on policy makers here, as, “the way societies and policymakers perceive social problems, shape the solutions they are able to envision” (Lauritzen and Nodeland, 2018 p. 164). If there was greater awareness of GRT culture and experience, better training for teachers, and policy more in tune with GRT needs, then teacher perceptions could potentially be shifted, and inclusive practice adapted to the needs of GRT students rather than expecting GRT students to adapt to a way of life they are not familiar with and in which they do not feel welcome.

Chapter 2.3 *Recommendations in the literature*

As far back as 1991, it has been claimed that the education of GRT children has been a failure for everyone involved (Lee and Warren, 1991), and according to more recent literature, this is the case today. Despite the increased number of government initiatives spanning over more than a decade, findings from the Race Disparity Audit (Cabinet Office, 2018) confirm that there has not been any significant change (Pollock and Barrow, 2021). The system seems to be failing and needs to be problematised.

Shaeffer (2019) states that international promulgation of a universal basic education has not succeeded in its aims for positive outcomes and for providing quality education, especially to children from disadvantaged groups, which is true of the GRT. Much of the literature recommends that policy makers and practitioners adapt teaching methods and the curriculum, and call for a concerted effort for greater familiarity with and understanding of GRT culture (Kyuchukov, 2000). This brings me back to the question posited by Leijen et al.

(2021): Is it “inclusion for some or inclusion for all?” This leads to the question on inclusivity as a concept and is something which must be problematised if a critical theory approach is to be taken.

Inclusive education was born out of the social model of disability and has developed over time into what is viewed as a positive ideology of benefit to all. However, confusion over its actual meaning due to the various and sometimes conflicting assumptions about the objective of education, schooling and society (Norwich, 2013) means that what is perceived to be beneficial to all in fact overlooks many. The educational system in the UK is focused on and driven by performance (Cudworth, 2008) and the benchmark for accomplishment against which ethnic minority children are measured is middle-class white children (Banks, 2016). Hamilton (2018), citing Banks (2016), notes that the features and language arising from the culture of performativity, like “school engagement, attainment, outcomes, aspirations” (p.8) perpetuate the stigmatisation of various learners (including GRT students) as opposed to addressing the problems that arise from inequality within the education system and society as a whole.

The review led me to Rogers’ (2021) work on inclusive practice in education. According to her, the current policy in the UK is underpinned by a neoliberal approach through which dominant powers in society aim to condition the public into maintaining and upholding the status quo. Rogers (2021) states that even though inclusive education is deeply embedded in legislation, on the ground it is far from being implemented. Citing Borkett (2019), Rogers argues that physically being in the same environment does not equal inclusivity, and that inclusivity is about “belonging, empowerment and participation” (p.8). I take this a step further and suggest that this inclusivity on Rogers’ terms could and should include a sense of belonging within the school while being able to maintain one’s own feelings of belonging to their culture and community. Rogers’ approach is a critical theory one and supports Freire’s (1970) critical pedagogy approach which calls for an education that empowers learners and allows them to challenge and transform the status quo.

Some researchers, like McCaffery (2017), question the validity of the current western education system as a system that can be applied to all of society. McCaffery calls for a complete overhaul of the education system and a paradigmatic shift in education in the West,

as she claims that it functions as a means of assimilation as opposed to a vehicle of agency. This assertion can be applied to the GRT experience, as the Western education system could be considered a threat to their culture and identity (Levinson and Hooley, 2014).

It is worth considering that the needs of the GRT are not the same as the needs of others, as they have a unique cultural identity and values, which while may not be the normative values, are valuable nonetheless. This can be demonstrated in Carrington and Luke's (2001) work where they argue for a complete reframing of literacy based on Bourdieu's social model (1984, 1986, 1991). Using Ogbu's (1987) theory on 'folk theories of success', they argue that what communities assign value to can change over time.

This supports Levinson (2007) who contends that there needs to be a transformation in the culture amongst education policy makers and within schools themselves with regards to literacy. Citing Gallego and Hollingsworth (2000), Levinson purports that a reframing of literacy would contest the domination of the concept of traditional school-based literacy and allow for alternative concepts on literacy to develop. The importance of considering other types of literacy or learning as valuable can be demonstrated in McCaffery's (2009) work on the GRT activists who taught themselves communicative literacy so as to be able to engage and participate with the local authorities on a matter that was of great concern to them.

In terms of government-issued recommendations and policy that attempts to improve outcomes for GRT children, there are examples of what is deemed 'good' practice. These address the issues and advise on practical ways in which the needs of GRT children can be met in education. For example, some local authorities have produced 'good practice' guides on how to implement inclusive practice for GRT learners specifically (Norfolk County Council, 2021). These are local-based initiatives for local-based communities and are merely guidance. They are valuable resources but remain guidance only and it is up to the schools who are interested to seek out this information. The Norfolk County Council has provided the most comprehensive Local Education Authority guide online dealing with GRT issues in education. Government website pages also only provide a handful of links and a number of reports on addressing GRT needs in education (Department for Education, 2010) which are now outdated. It appears that GRT education advisory groups, and the Traveller Movement in

particular, are the most valuable resource for how schools can implement inclusive practice for the GRT. The Traveller Movement produced a guide (2019) which appears to be the holy grail, with many guides directing users to their publication. The guide is very detailed and explicit and can be utilised as a valuable resource for schools, and a potentially successful way to implement inclusive practice and actual inclusivity for GRT children. The limitations are that schools are not required to implement or even seek out these recommendations.

Citing Wilding (2008), Hamilton (2018) claims that the cultural dissonance the GRT experience is a result of demanding GRT children to function in an educational system that was created to “cater primarily for white middle-class pupils from a settled community” (p.6). Hamilton argues that in order to offer GRT children an inclusive education, critical thinking needs to be utilised to explore what does in fact serve the needs and interests of GRT learners “as seen from their *own* needs and perspectives rather than what is based on the plural values of mainstream society” (p.6). This helped formulate the research question of what the GRT themselves assign value to in education.

It should be noted that while I find these calls for overhauls of the educational system compelling, as all assumptions and dominant structures should be questioned, it remains that these arguments are highly ambitious and if not oversimplified, lacking pragmatism. In terms of the GRT, they make up only 0.25% of the school population in the UK (UK Government, 2023) and it is unreasonable to overhaul a system to accommodate such a small number of the population. There is validity in their arguments however, that the system does not seem to be working. Much of what the GRT endure in discrimination within school, like racism and bullying, have overlaps with what any minority suffers. An exploration of what changes within the system can be made to become more inclusive overall, for all disadvantaged learners, has the potential to be beneficial in general, and not just for the GRT community.

Chapter 3 – Conceptual Framework (2761 words)

The previous chapter explored the existing literature relating to the GRT’s low attainment and negative experiences in schooling. This chapter will focus on the conceptual framework and the broader theories that underpin the research proposed. Ontologically, I associate with the

view that there are manifold subjective realities, all of which are socially constructed by individuals, and between them (Farrow and Mathers, 2020). The desire to understand the *perceptions* of GRT students and teachers on the same topic demonstrates a belief that their realities are subjective, which relates then to the epistemological view that knowledge is subjective and formulated at the individual level (Farrow and Mathers). These views then align with an interpretivist research paradigm, which supports the proposed research objectives of understanding and giving value to the participants' own interpretations of their own reality based on their lived experiences. The chapter will now explore the theories which can provide a framework for the research and the methodology which arises out of the interpretivist position.

This interpretivist stance, the themes that emerged through the literature review, and my reading of different theorists in Unit 7 of EE815 (The Open University, 2023), led me to choose to utilise both critical theory, with a focus on Freire's Critical Pedagogy, and Sen's Capabilities Approach, as the conceptual framework with which to explore the issue of the GRT's low attainment and negative experiences in education. This chapter discusses how these theories can be applied as a conceptual framework that can be used to interrogate the research questions and the underpinning philosophy of the proposed research. My positionality as a researcher with relation to the research and the connection between these theories and the chosen methodology will also be examined.

Critical theory is a wide, interdisciplinary field that is differentiated from 'traditional theory' in that rather than merely attempt to understand society, it actively seeks to both understand society and transform it (McKernan, 2013). Stemming from Marx's *kritik*, critical theory entails challenging political, economic, and social policies (McKernan) and to upend normative theory and the dominant discourse. It seeks to identify the factors within existing structures, which, in a bid to maintain the status quo that serves the interests of dominant groups, creates and perpetuates inequality.

The crucial element for critical theorists is attempting to transform these structures; to "play a role in *changing the world*" (McKernan, 2013, p.246). The GRT are a marginalised group that has always suffered discrimination in wider society, and for this study's focus, in

education. They are victims of symbolic violence, which consolidates its power by othering and maintaining their status as the 'out-group' (Bunch, 2015) as it disempowers them from voice, agency and full participation in wider society. McLaren (2007) states that critical theorists propagate theories which are dialectical in nature and which enable them to identify negative dimensions implicit in the hidden structures that serve to oppress and marginalise groups in society, as well as to perceive that those very same arenas (such as within an educational institution) have the potential to be transformative in themselves; essentially, to be 'sites of both domination and liberation' (p.4). Critical theory, with its focus on social justice and how it can be achieved through action, can be perceived as a relevant and useful framework by which to explore the GRT and inclusivity in education.

Specifically, Sen's capability approach and Freire's critical pedagogy, while not encompassed within the same theoretical framework, are apt lenses with which to explore this topic. The education system seems to have failed the GRT (Lee and Warren, 1991) and I find the call for a rethinking of the Western education system and whether it is suitable for the GRT compelling. The GRT community have distinctive cultures, histories, languages and principles, and have resisted assimilation for centuries as they want to preserve their identity (Levinson and Hooley, 2014). Their 'folk theories of success' have developed over time, and their intrinsic adaptability (McCaffery, 2009) as a people has meant that they are willing to pursue literacy and numeracy in order to be able to survive in society and to gain greater agency. However, within the community itself, there are differences in opinion and aspirations, and it is worthwhile to attempt to uncover these.

A number of theorists (McCaffery 2017, Rogers 2021) contend that what is required and necessary is a complete overhaul of the system and a rethinking of Western education. This makes the assumption that Western education is the currency of value, and that this assumption needs to be challenged as it may not be of value to the GRT community. However, this questioning – or problematising, must be questioned and problematised itself: perhaps the GRT, or some at least, do believe this type of education is valuable to them? This idea can be explored through Sen's capabilities approach, which is grounded in liberal political philosophy (Robeyns, 2005). Fundamentally, Sen's capabilities are what Walker and

Unterhuter (2007) define as “opportunities or freedoms to achieve what an individual reflectively considers valuable” (p.2), and that when reflecting on equality and education, the focus should not be on equality of distribution of resources but on capabilities – what people are able to be and to do. Essentially, it is about the freedom of people to be able to choose the things they value. Walker and Unterhuter claim that the capability approach provides a method by which to measure real education and to identify “discrimination, marginalisation and exclusion” (p.5), all things which the GRT community has faced.

The literature review suggests that the approach has been “underused in education” (Kremakova, 2013, p. 411) but that there are examples that point to its potential for gaining insight into inequalities in education. This approach acknowledges that different people use different resources in different ways, and that the possession of a certain resource does not imply that that resource will be utilised in an effective way, if at all (Kremakova, 2013). This is demonstrated in McCaffery’s (2009) work on how the GRT resisted acquiring literacy skills but used communicative literacy when they considered it necessary. Kremakova (2013) also states that different functionings hold different value in different circumstances by different people, a concept which the capability approach recognises. It is thus a useful framework with which to explore the research questions regarding what the GRT assign value to in education. Walker (2010), citing Sen (1992), argues that educational advancement is not limited to access to equal resources but an extension into *capability* and the freedom to choose the lives that hold value. Approaching the research with this lens allows a deeper exploration of ‘inclusive’ education and how it might hold value for the GRT, from their own desires, interests and aspirations.

What is apparent from the literature review is that generally, the GRT community ascribes value to things that are in contrast to what the Western education system and wider society attach value and significance to. If policy insists on inclusivity in education and providing an “education” to the GRT community, then a complete re-conception of what is a valuable education is for different people needs to be considered. Consultation with the GRT community is imperative if policy makers and educators are to gain a greater understanding

of what is considered valuable to the GRT in terms of education, and to then make adequate accommodations for that.

Undoubtedly, there are complexities to such an approach, but research that explores the GRT experience, aspirations, and values in education, and one that takes into consideration GRT voice and narrative, will be able to enhance knowledge on the “problem” of the GRT and their low attainment and attendance, and on the strategies formulated to address these. It is impractical to suggest that any such overhaul can take place overnight, but greater depth of understanding and more open-minded consideration of what is valuable and to whom can potentially enable policy makers and practitioners to develop and implement policies that do allow for an education that is valuable to the GRT.

Walker (2010) points out that the capabilities approach focuses on the opportunities which allow for achieved functionings but does not adequately consider the importance of the achieved functionings themselves. She argues that for education, it is important to investigate the achieved functionings and not merely capabilities, and that is necessary to “add in other relevant theories” (p. 905). In research conducted on university students, Walker (2010) combines Sen’s capability approach with Freire’s critical pedagogy, bridging the gap between them. For the proposed research, I believe that employing both theories as a framework allows for a more comprehensive and relevant exploration of the research questions.

Critical pedagogy is a useful approach with which to frame the research study. Its main advocate is Freire (1970) and emerged and developed as a critique of the prevailing educational system. It exposes how the system reinforces the structures which oppress and maintain inequality through what Freire refers to as the ‘banking’ concept of education which only serves to rob students of their critical consciousness, forces them to accept passivity and serves the purposes of the oppressors. As an alternative, Freire offers libertarian education, where the teachers become partners to the students and authentic thinking is practiced. He describes it as a problem-posing education which helps teacher and student both to educate each other and to critique society and the structures within it which perpetuate oppression. Such an education can facilitate for people to become empowered and to resist collectively

to eradicate these inequalities (Tarlau, 2014). Burbules and Beck (1999) claim that it has a focus on transformation, and that it tries to accomplish this through “pedagogical relations” whose objective is teaching others to “think critically” (p.51), culminating in the person who has been taught how to be critical and seek justice, seeking emancipation. GRT children in schools can benefit from such an approach. Pedagogical practice which instils critical thinking and empowers the GRT to seek to transform the practices which subjugate them can transform practice and lead to greater inclusivity within education.

For Freire (1997) the agency of individuals has the power to challenge and reverse the conditions of social exclusion that marginalised people face, referring to humans as beings of transformation rather than of adaptation (Ramis, 2018). Freire’s (1970) critical pedagogy affords the role of critical agents to disempowered individuals and, according to him, enables people to radically transform the structures of oppression which the more dominant have imposed on them (Ramis, 2018). Dialogue is central to Freire’s (1970) ideas and his critical pedagogy and ideas for a libertarian and problem-posing education is based on dialogical action.

Through dialogical action, the learner is no longer the passive recipient of information and becomes instead an active agent and participant of critical inquiry, together with the teacher (Ramis, 2018), and together, they jointly construct new meaning and interpretation of truth. The conditions for this type of dialogical practice are that the dialogical action must be absent of any form of violence, and free of dogmatism and authoritarianism (Ramis, 2018). In this process, all the actors (the teacher and the students) are set on equal footing, invalidating the authority of any of the actors over the other, as in traditional Western pedagogical practice. The teacher’s role is to facilitate this process, and to enable the student to understand structures and processes that affect them.

Supporting this idea, Duboc and Ferraz (2018) claim that critical literacy can enable learners to live in harmony with difference in society because of critical literacy’s constantly “dis/relocating” of “‘us’ and ‘them’” (p.236). This can be applied to the GRT and the peers in their classrooms, whereby both groups can learn to see beyond the othering of ‘us’ and ‘them’. An example of this can be demonstrated in a primary class in a school in Canada, as featured by the University of British Columbia (2018). Wanting to teach their students about

residential schools, the teachers use a critical literacy approach and encourage the young students to firstly share their own real-life, lived stories of themselves and their families, before going on to explore text and other media about the experiences of those who were affected by residential schools. The aim here was to allow the students to see themselves in a “mirror”, and a distinction is made between two ways of seeing when reading - either it is a “mirror” in which one sees one’s self represented in some way, or one is looking through a “window” into another person’s lived experience.

This is a clear example of what Duboc and Ferraz (2018) describe as “reading the other, but also reading ourselves,” something which they claim should be the focus of language education. This example demonstrates the idea that education is wider than just the “banking” system of information reception that Freire warned against (1970). The content and subject are to be explored rather than ‘taught’, with the students at the heart and centre of the learning. In this project, the teachers, through encouraging the sharing of the students’ experiences, and through facilitating the students’ creation of work in the way that they felt most confident in, learned as much as the students did, very much in the spirit of Freire’s aims for teacher-student exchange and learning. There is no one truth to be known here, only each learner’s individual lived-experience, through which their peers and their teachers can learn new truths. GRT students could greatly benefit from such practice, where their experiences, culture and heritage are given as much value as everyone else’s.

Implementation of critical pedagogy in schools with GRT students, and indeed in all schools, has the potential to profoundly transform the way in which GRT children learn, and on their experience within class. It is evident that dialogue between teacher and student and the dialogical relationship that grows from that is crucial to knowledge. Ramis (2018) refers to it as not merely a method or strategy but as a relationship which can foster the student’s motivation and drive for learning. Ramis suggests that it goes beyond the classroom, and that interactions of power between the school and parents should be replaced by dialogical interactions instead. This has the potential to improve discrepancies in attitudes and foster relationships built on mutual respect.

It is important to consider that while critical theory will push for a re-evaluation of what is valuable, and the argument is that propagating the social values of the normative, dominant group robs the 'outsider' group of equality, the question does arise – are the values pushed for by the GRT community more desirable? The driving force of critical theory is that the dominant group imposes its values and systems - but so too then does the argument extend to the values and systems of the GRT. It is worth considering that, since the argument is made that one of the reasons why the GRT resist education is because of Bourdieu's (1979) theory of cultural capital and habitus, and that since they are discriminated against and schools and society expect them to resist, and have low expectations of them, that they behave in this way because their behaviour is shaped by their habitus. If society did not have such low expectations, would results differ? If one reason they "don't like school" is because they are mistreated, are their values purely their values, or were they formed and conditioned to become this way? Furthermore, within GRT communities themselves there exist hierarchies and symbolic violence. The girls growing up claiming they do not want to go into education because they believe the woman's role is to be a mother, is a form of symbolic violence – their culture and traditions, pushed by the dominant group (the men), eventually leads to an internalisation of this expectation of themselves and a self-oppression. Thus, when GRT children say they do not want to attend school – when it may be that they are conditioned to believe they do not want to attend school – what then? Respecting of their values, or compulsory schooling? Critical theory is liberating and transformational, but its flaw is that while it argues against imposing the values of the dominant group on the marginalised groups – it itself imposes its values on the marginalised group.

This serves to demonstrate why critical theory's insistence on seeking out and amplifying voice, especially of the disenfranchised, is so important. The antidote is within its own methodologies. The voice is what is important here, and hearing what the GRT themselves have to say is paramount in understanding the issues they face and thinking about how to redress these with their guidance.

Chapter 4 - The Research Proposal (712 words)

The research title of my proposal, “Rethinking inclusivity and traditional Western education for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children: an exploration of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller student and teacher perceptions of inclusivity in secondary schooling,” reflects the purpose of this dissertation to explore and gain insight into how GRT students and teachers perceive inclusive practice within their schools. The proposal has stemmed from wanting to understand how GRT students and teachers interpret their realities, and has been influenced by my personal experiences as a teaching assistant, my own upbringing as a minority, and by academic reading, dialogue, and an iterative reflection on my ideas about the world. The hope is that the research may contribute to a greater understanding of how the educational experience of GRT students can be improved in a way that is congruent with their hopes and aspirations, allowing them to thrive and flourish.

National education policy and targets aim for greater attainment, attendance and outcomes for the GRT community, and the literature review has emphasised that there are a substantial number of complex and intersectional factors at play which contribute to this. Critically analysing the existing literature through the literature review, the synthesis has demonstrated that the literature is mainly restricted to the ways in which outcomes can be improved. I believe it has uncovered a need to for an understanding of what the GRT students themselves believe to be valuable to them regarding education.

The issues explored in this research proposal are aptly framed by the critical theory paradigm, as critical theory calls for a questioning and disruption of accepted norms as the ‘right’ way, especially when these norms perpetuate the inequalities of those in disadvantaged positions. Sen’s capabilities approach has also underpinned the research in providing a framework for the question of value and affording individuals the capabilities to have the freedom to articulate and choose and access that which is valuable to them. Thus, links have been made with an interpretive paradigm, from which emerged the decision to employ narrative interview methodology, which is a powerful tool in gaining crucial insight into people’s experiences (Costely, Elliott and Gibbs, 2010).

This research topic has been developing since Stage 2 Module EE815. Initially, I was focused on giving voice to the experiences of GRT students at school and exploring the barriers that resulted in such low outcomes, with a look to improving them. However, the iterative thinking process that developed with extended independent reading for the literature review for EE815 TMA2 led me to change direction, with three researchers influencing me in particular. Bhopal (2004, 2011) and Rogers (2021) played a role in formulating the angle I wished to pursue. Bhopal revealed the discrepancies between positive GRT attitudes to schooling and teachers' negative perceptions of GRT attitudes. Since a key factor in student success at school has been positive relationships with their teachers and peers, and having observed similar attitudes amongst staff in my own practice, this struck a chord and my focus became exploring the attitudes of teachers towards GRT students. I was heavily influenced by Rogers' (2021) questioning of the validity of a Western education for the GRT, and this tied back to my even earlier interest in Levinson and Hooley's theories which helped me develop my thinking on questioning what is valuable. Throughout all three stages I have been interested in Sen's Capabilities Approach, and I found that it could be used as a theoretical framework with which to view the question of value, and who assigns it. Feedback from my tutor pointed out that it would be difficult to convincingly place the two theories together, so I conducted more reading to look for links which could make them apt for the study. Through the course of E822, as I questioned my positionality and read more widely, I decided to explore GRT perceptions of inclusive education to gain insight into what they believed to be valuable, and to explore teacher perceptions with a view to discovering what they find challenging, rather than looking to blame them.

To that end, the final version of the RQs are:

- What are GRT students' perceptions of inclusivity in education?
- What aspects of education do GRT children find valuable, or not valuable?
- What are teacher perceptions of inclusivity in education?

Chapter 5 – Research Design, Methods and Analysis (1838 words)

This chapter sets out an overview of the proposed research design and how it has emerged from the critical analysis of the topic literature and conceptual framework presented in Chapter 3. It will describe and explain the proposed research methods, the characteristics of research participants, the criteria for determining quality of the research, ethical considerations, and the proposed methods of analysis.

The research design is based on the interpretivist paradigm, which recognizes multiple subjective realities and interpretations of those realities and strives to capture accounts of individual lived experiences. The research draws on the critical theory paradigm for its research design and employs the narrative interview methodology to collect co-constructed qualitative data from GRT students and their teachers. The proposed setting is a secondary school that has a high number of registered GRT students enrolled. The research aims to give voice to the experiences of the GRT students, how they perceive inclusive education, and what they value in education. It also seeks to understand what the perceptions of their teachers are with regards to inclusive education.

5.1 The Research Paradigm and Approach

Critical theory is motivated by both epistemological knowledge as well as transformation, and generally favours a methodological approach that focuses more on qualitative research than quantitative, with the methodology itself aimed at gaining knowledge or creating change, and in some cases, both (Costly, Elliott and Gibbs, 2010). This lends itself to certain methods for research. Narrative interviewing has been a significant methodological tool and is a valid method for the proposed research because of its links to critical theory. The narrative approach is a means of understanding people's experiences and allows participants to make sense of their own experiences by co-constructing stories with the researcher (Garvis, 2015). Its power lies in its ability to aid researchers in understanding and gaining vital insight into

people's experiences, as well as helping to explain behaviour and how people come to have shared belief systems (Costely, Elliott and Gibbs, 2010).

Given that the GRT are a marginalised group who have traditionally been voiceless due to their lack of social and cultural capital, this renders narrative interviewing especially relevant and valuable in this case. It would provide insight for the researcher, as well as give GRT students access to voice - it affords the GRT students a "sense of self" and helps in their empowerment (Warin and Muldoon, 2009; McArdle and Mansfield, 2007). It allows for their counter-narratives to be heard (Milner, 2008), and these storied accounts allow researchers to reflect on the connections between personal experiences and the contexts in which they occur, which can achieve a greater understanding of how the social has an impact on the individual (Soler, 2012). It is valuable in that it contributes to the body of work on "marginal experience narratives" (Gray, 2009, p. 651).

Narrative interviews are highly valuable when it comes to qualitative research, and especially when the problem itself concerns disrupting norms that silence a certain groups' voices. In our case, narrative interviews would allow us to gain insight as well as give the GRT access to voice. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted, as they would allow for more specific questions to be asked (Costley, Elliott and Gibbs, 2010). These interviews would be recorded and transcribed for data analysis, and handwritten notes would be taken during discussions with participants after the end of the interview.

This methodology will also enable the use of voice as a tool. Although complex in that the definition of 'voice' can vary, it is an important tool which is often utilised within critical theory research. McArdle and Mansfield (2007) demonstrate the fluidity and significance of this term. In their collaborative article, they use their own distinct voices to demonstrate how each person's world view affords them the lens through which they will understand voice, and also how they will employ it as a tool in their research and in their practice in how they go about bringing about change and transformation. Using voice as a tool thus will be a valuable aspect of the research for both the students and the teachers, as the research seeks to understand the perspectives of both groups on the same issue, of inclusive education. If given the opportunity within a school setting, marginalised students have the capacity to

articulate and express their own barriers and identify the support they are in need of, and this method will give GRT students a voice and allow them to be active agents in co-transforming practices. It will also allow for teachers to give voice to their own interpretations of how they perceive inclusive education, and what they themselves assign value to. The findings have the potential to generate beneficial findings that can impact and improve practice for teachers, GRT students as well as other marginalised students, in addition to adding GRT narratives to the body of existing literature.

This research also aims to capture the perceptions of the teachers of GRT students to better understand the challenges they face. Teachers are often characterised as part of the problem and painted as being unwilling to fully engage with GRT students (Bhopal, 2004). The literature review has demonstrated that teachers face their own challenges, whether they stem from ignorance about GRT culture, a lack of training and resources, or from pressures to perform and achieve statistics with the GRT students within a system that was not designed for their needs. This research hopes to make meaningful change, even if small, and since the relationship between teacher and student is so important, and a willingness on the part of the teacher so vital, it is imperative that the challenges that teachers face are understood. It is hoped this will be a bridge in understanding between the two, and an insight into how teachers can be better supported and resourced to be able to carry out meaningful pedagogical and pastoral functions with the GRT community.

It is worth noting that this is a 'generative' study (Bunnis and Kelly, 2010), and an important element of narrative inquiry is ambiguity with what the data collected will be. The starting points of the research may be planned, but there is an openness to where the participants will lead the researcher (Clandinin 2018; Dauite, 2014). So, while the existing literature mainly points to negative experiences on the GRT students' part, and hostility from the teachers, there should be no pre-determined expectation that the accounts will be negative in nature. On the contrary, there have been accounts of GRT students who thrive in the school environment and teachers who are fully committed to providing an inclusive education to GRT students. Positive experiences and 'good practice' accounts also have the potential to be beneficial as they can serve as models which other practice settings can be guided by.

5.2 Proposed Research Participants

To ensure an adequate sample level for the research, once expressions of interest from GRT students have been received, one child per year group will be randomly selected, which would result in twelve in total. Morgan et al. (2023) suggests that between six and twelve interviews is adequate for data saturation point, and aiming for twelve is to allow for the potential for the sample size to decrease over the course of the study, for example, in the case of any of the participants deciding to withdraw from the study.

Teachers within the school will also be invited to participate. I initially planned for only teachers of the identified GRT students to be invited, however other teachers may have taught GRT children in the past, and their perceptions on inclusive education are valuable whether they have or have not taught GRT students.

Although parent perceptions are not the focus of the proposed research, parents of the identified GRT children will be invited to be participants. Their perceptions of education, of inclusive education, and what they assign value to will provide rich understandings of the backdrop which the GRT students are operating from, will help to contextualise the students' own interpretations. The literature demonstrates that generally, GRT parents are often opposed to or at least apprehensive about keeping their children in school for a number of reasons, like worries about cultural erasure, about mixing genders, sex, drug and alcohol misuse, and a hostile and discriminatory schooling environment (Bhopal, 2004; Fensham-Smith, 2014). Often, it is because they consider literacy to be an education and see no value in mainstream schooling beyond primary school (Fensham-Smith, 2014). The literature has also shown, however, that the GRT's 'folk stories of success' are changing (Levinson and Hooley 2007), and that many parents now are eager for their children to get an education (Bhopal, 2004, 2011). The literature has demonstrated that the opinions and support or lack thereof of the parents played a significant role in the students' experience at school – they were more likely to flourish within mainstream education when they had supportive mothers and suffered alienation within their families and the community when their parents were not

supportive. Thus, collecting parent accounts will enrich the research overall and help to contextualise it.

5.3 Ethical Considerations

The research will observe the ethical guidance for research in education stipulated by the British Educational Research Association (2008). As the research intends to work with children, special ethical consideration must be given to this throughout.

To gain access to potential participants within a school setting, the researcher must first gain consent from the school gatekeeper and consult with them on an appropriate method of gaining consent from the potential participants, that adheres to school procedures and safeguarding policies.

For qualitative research, it is crucial that potential participants have agency and are in a position in which they can make their own decisions about whether to consent to participate (Miller and Bell, 2012), and this includes the children, teachers as well as the parents. As per BERA (2008) guidelines, all participants will be made aware that participation is voluntary and that they can decline participation or withdraw consent at any point during the research project and it will be made explicitly clear that there are no consequences if they wish to do so.

Once permission is received, the researcher will ensure that all stakeholders involved understand what the research is for, what the process is, how the data will be collected and used and who will see the data (Maguire et al., 2018).

The confidentiality and autonomy of all participants will be respected, and data protection guidance will be adhered to with regards to how the files will be stored and held digitally with password protection by the researcher. Pseudonyms will be applied throughout. A secondary school with a substantial number of enrolled GRT students is proposed as the setting. The researcher will meet with the headteacher and explain the purpose of the research and gain

gatekeeper permission. The GRT students will be identified by the headteacher as per their school ethnicity categorization, and once identified, they and their parents will receive information about the study and be invited to participated.

Postscript Narrative Critical Reflection (645 words)

This topic developed as an interest of mine since the previous module EE815; whereby the module content on the GRT piqued my interest and it has evolved since. Initially, I was very much influenced by Bhopal's uncovering of the discrepancies between GRT perceptions of education and their teachers' perception of the GRT's attitudes to education. I found their attitudes similar to ones I had heard in my own setting and have admitted to recognising in myself my own subconscious prejudice towards them with regards to my belief that they did not want to be in school. Having read the literature, I was appalled with the teachers as well as worrying that I may have also held subconscious bias that sees them through a lens of deficit. In formulating possible research questions for assignments in EE814, during a call with my tutor, he asked if the point of my research was to catch out teachers. In effect, I was indeed *expecting* that any research conducted would demonstrate negative attitudes from the teachers towards the GRT. This was a pivotal point in my learning journey, especially as a researcher. I realised I had a bias; I was expecting certain results and I was designing my potential research around what I expected them to say. Although all researchers are subjective, upon reflection I found that the approach I was taking was not in the spirit of critical theory research paradigms; I believed it to be so because I wanted to point out an injustice and disrupt, question, and transform, but what needed disruption was my own thinking! This module required extensive reading for the extended literature review, and I found that while this factor, of teachers' misunderstanding and oftentimes mistreatment of students was reported across much of the literature, there were examples, anecdotal and in Traveller newsletters and websites, and very in few studies, where there was evidence of good practice, and this was always down to an attitude of willingness to commit to the full inclusion of the GRT in the school community. I came to understand that not all teachers are like the ones mentioned in Bhopal's work and in my own practice, and that even when teachers do have damaging attitudes, it is because they face their own challenges in addressing the issue

of inclusive education for GRT students. While this research proposal's main aim is to capture the voices of the GRT and to gain insight into their perceptions of inclusive education, it is equally as important to also explore the attitudes of teachers in an open, tolerant, curious way. The point of the research is to affect transformation, however small, and since relationships with teachers play such a crucial role in any student's sense of wellbeing, familiarity and sense of belonging at school, then the challenges that teachers themselves face, or even just their lack of awareness, need to be addressed first as they will be the ones to reflect, plan, initiate, maintain, encourage, promote, connect, fight the system, argue with superiors, ignore targets, be flexible, creative and nurturing. This is a lot to ask of already underserved, overstretched, under-resourced teachers and they needed to be supported in this role.

I had to reflect on my own biases towards teachers in this instance, and ensure I was not romanticising or playing the role of saviour with the GRT, which in essence perpetuates viewing the community through a lens of deficit. They do not need to be saved, they need to be given the freedom to choose what it is they wish to pursue and in what way. For this reason, the research question was changed slightly and the RQ and the ensuing narrative interview broad questions and follow up ones give a platform to the teachers but in the spirit of truly wanting to know of their own experiences and perceptions of inclusivity.

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