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**Improving Educational Engagement in the  
Travelling Community: Effective Pedagogies to  
Ensure the Achievement of Learning Outcomes**

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# Improving Educational Engagement in the Travelling Community: Effective Pedagogies to Ensure the Achievement of Learning Outcomes

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## Abstract

This research project explored ways in which educational engagement rates could be improved for students from the Travelling community. Using a qualitative approach, data was collected using five semi-structured interviews. Teachers who participated were asked about the problems causing low engagement rates for Traveller students in their schools and what pedagogies were effective in tackling this issue from their perspective. The data collected indicated a number of pedagogies that could be used specifically to improve the educational engagement of students from the Travelling community however it also highlighted the room for further improvement and development in the area.

## Acknowledgements

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## **List of Acronyms and Abbreviations**

- BFL: Behaviour for Learning  
 CPD: Continuing Professional Development  
 CSO: Central Statistics Office  
 DEIS: Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools

DES: Department of Education and Skills

ERSI: The Economic and Social Research Institute

NCCA: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

NEPS: National Educational Psychological Service

SEN: Special Educational Needs

SFTC: Students from the Travelling Community

SNA: Special Needs Assistant

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Origin of the Dissertation

To create an inclusive learning environment based on equality of opportunity for all students, schools must support educational engagement and the achievement of learning outcomes for members of minority groups. Recent studies have shown that learning outcomes have not been achieved across the board for students from the Travelling community (SFTC) in post-primary settings. As of the 2011 census, 91 per cent of Travellers leave school at the age of 16 or younger with 23 per cent leaving before the age of 13 (ESRI, 2017). The idea for this project is based on figures like these and experiences with students from the Travelling community in post-primary settings. From working closely with experienced teachers in a DEIS setting it became clear that to the heart of successful educational engagement is effective methodologies and strategies used by the school staff. This project will set out to research and outline these pedagogies by hearing the opinions of experienced teachers who have worked with Traveller students for a number of years.

## 1.2 Background to the Project

In a 2006 Government report titled *Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy* it states the five year aim that '*all Traveller pupils should remain in school and complete the junior cycle*' (DES,2006,p.61). When comparing this objective to today's figures about Traveller student attendance and engagement it is clear that the planned outcomes have not been met. The most recent Government study that tackled issues faced by Traveller students in Irish schools came in 2021. This report suggested steps that schools and individual teachers can take in an attempt to support educational engagement for SFTC (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2021). Policy makers have aimed to improve attendance and overall engagement for students from the Travelling community(Houses of the Oireachtas, 2021). This project will look at the opinions of teachers in the context of these policies in an attempt to support educational engagement and the achievement of learning outcomes for students from the Travelling community.

### **1.3 Rationale**

The DEIS plan drawn up by the Department of Education and Skills in 2017 detailed a plan to improve equality of opportunity for all students in the post-primary setting (DES, 2017). The plan details how inclusion and educational engagement could be improved for Traveller students. The Travelling community were to be supported through financial supports, educational welfare services, literacy and numeracy strategies to name a few (DES, 2017). By the inclusion of such objectives in the DEIS plan the department are putting groups like the Travelling community to the forefront of their planning. They have highlighted that the challenges around engagement and inclusion facing minority groups are of utmost importance to the contemporary Irish classroom. This research project aims to examine ways in which effective pedagogies can be used in order to increase educational engagement in the Travelling community. The objective of the project is to search for teachers' opinions about effective pedagogies which ensure learning outcomes are met for students from the Travelling community. This project also aims to examine specific areas of the English and Geography curriculum that may be used effectively to improve educational engagement for members of the Travelling community.

### **1.4 Dissertation Layout**

The dissertation will be structured into six chapters. Chapter one introduces the project highlighting the origins, rationale and aims of the dissertation. Chapter two will examine and critically analyse relevant literature written about the area of Traveller students in post-primary settings. Important policy documents will be examined and analysed also. The research questions emerge in this chapter through the study of the relevant literacy. Chapter three of the project will outline the research process as well as justifying the methodologies and methods selected for the project. The participants will be detailed anonymously and the methods for data analysis will be defined in chapter four. The findings and results of the project will be detailed in chapter five of the dissertation. The final chapter of the project will offer a summary of the findings as well as presenting the studies strengths and limitations and suggestions for areas of further study.

## **1.5 Conclusion**

Conducting research on the support of educational engagement for SFTC will have its challenges. These challenges will provide opportunities for development and learning. Gaining the opinions of teachers in DEIS schools will provide valuable perspectives that can be used to highlight effective pedagogies that can be utilised. This project will enable teachers to share their experiences from interacting with Traveller students and provide opinions on how to support the achievement of learning outcomes for this minority group.

# **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

## **2.1 Introduction**

This literature review will present research detailing the problems facing students from the Travelling community and other minority groups in post-primary settings. This review will focus on literature discussing how these problems hinder educational engagement and impact school completion for Traveller students. Statistics from relevant reports and writers will provide a context for the issues raised and present evidence to the severity of the issue. The literature analysed in this section will highlight the challenges and barriers facing students from the Travelling community as well as providing first-hand experiences from both students and parents. The second part of the review will analyse recent improvements made in the world of Traveller educational engagement as well as possible strategies that can be used to support the attainment of learning outcomes written from the practitioner's standpoint. Section two will also highlight how recent literature has suggested possible improvements that can be made in the area of Traveller engagement with post-primary education. The information gathered in this literature review will assist our understanding of the problems facing students from the Travelling community in post-primary settings and present possible supports and improvements to the issues raised.

## **2.2 Problems Facing Students from the Travelling Community in Post-Primary Settings**

### *2.2.1 Current Engagement Rates.*

The educational underachievement of SFTC and other minority groups has been analysed by practitioners and writers for decades. In 2004 Kalwant Bhopal wrote that Traveller '*underachievement in schools has given serious cause for concern based on the quality and relevance of the education they receive*' (2004, p. 49). Recent statistics surrounding

educational engagement have highlighted the current level of achievement and attendance and present some stark findings. In 2020 the Department of Children and Youth Affairs released the Young Travellers in Ireland report providing some of the most recent evidence of educational attainment for students from the Travelling community in post-primary settings. The report states that in 2018/2019, 2084 Junior Cycle students received Traveller supports in comparison to only 704 Leaving Cert students. (2020, p.30). This highlights the loss of engagement and attainment between junior and senior cycles. The 2016 census showed that just 13.3 per cent of Traveller females were educated to leaving cycle or above compared with 69.1 per cent of the general population. (CSO, 2016). These statistics show how relevant this issue is in contemporary post-primary settings in Ireland. Recent literature has shown a light on this issue and highlighted the exact problems and barriers that have led to these statistics.

### *2.2.2 Problems Identified by Students and Teachers.*

Chris Derrington has published many pieces of work in the area of Traveller education and attainment in the English secondary school system. He echoes the fact that low attainment and engagement has been an issue for members of the Travelling community as far back as the 1970s. Derrington states that *'a study of Traveller students' secondary school experiences in 1975 linked low attainment with discriminatory practice, negative attitudes and inflexible approaches in the secondary schools concerned'* (2005, p.55). Derrington analysed interview data from students and teachers about the transition from primary to secondary education and produced a list of problems and barriers being facing by students from the Travelling community. Hostile exchanges and direct communication with teachers led to inappropriate verbal exchanges and behavioural issues with students from the Travelling community (2005, p. 57). The results presented that some teachers did not possess effective behavioural management for these instances while at times students found it difficult to accept authority due to being treated more like adults when at home (2005, p.57). Learning difficulties were also highlighted as a common issue among Traveller students at secondary level (Derrington, 2005, p. 58). When these learning difficulties went unrecognised early on in their education, SFTC presented difficult behaviour more often, hindering their educational engagement. One of the most frequent barriers to educational engagement in the Travelling community is attendance. Derrington concluded that *'poor attendance was associated with disaffection or social and emotional difficulties; in some cases, this was related to bullying'* (2005, p.59)

### 2.2.3 Exclusion of Heritage and Culture from Post-Primary Curriculum.

Boyle et al. released a report in 2018 concerning the views of Irish Traveller parents, specifically on their own schooling and the educational experiences of their children. This report provided first-hand views of Traveller parents in terms of the problems and barriers facing their children in the contemporary post-primary classroom. The recognition of Traveller identity and culture in schools was highlighted as an important aspect of improving the school experience for Traveller students (Boyle et al., 2018, p. 1395). It was noted in the report that the secondary school curriculum is not attainable for the Travelling community due to cultural differences. Traveller parents feel that excluding aspects of Traveller history, identity and culture from the curriculum was having a negative effect on engagement and attainment for their children (Boyle et al., 2018, p.1396). One parent spoke about their own schooling experience and stated that

*‘Traveller children entered schools where the teachers, pupils and the school environment represented the settled population, and where there was no recognition of Traveller culture, and they felt unchallenged, friendless, marginalised, and unwanted’* (Boyle et al., 2018, p.1399).

The work from Boyle et al. here mirrors the views of parents of students from the Travelling community in our post-primary schools. The overriding view from this report is that the exclusion of Traveller history and culture in the secondary school curriculum is a problem adding to low educational attainment.

Burns, Colum and O’Neill compiled an informative chapter in the book *Diversifying the Teaching Profession: Dimensions, Dilemmas and Directions for the Future*, providing some of the most recent viewpoints surrounding the education of Traveller students. The chapter entitled ‘No One Sees a Traveller at the Top of the Class’: Experiences of Irish Travellers on Programmes Supporting Teacher Diversity, explored the journey for Traveller students through post-primary education as far as post-graduate studies. From the outset of the chapter Burns et al. state that *‘denial of cultural differences and of multigenerational discrimination can impact Travellers’ motivation to stay in education and is linked to extremely limited progression into the labour force’* (2022, p. 177). Once again, these writers have highlighted how the exclusion of Traveller culture and heritage from the post-primary curriculum is having a directly negative affect on educational engagement for Traveller students. These writers also hold the viewpoint that years of discrimination passed down through generations

has had a negative effect on attendance and overall engagement and attainment for Travellers in post-primary settings. Burns et al. have noted that Travellers may even choose to *'conceal their Traveller identity due to fear of discrimination and exclusion'* (2022, p. 177). Having to deal with discrimination on a daily basis in schools does not allow for a safe learning environment and therefore has a direct link to poor attainment rates of learning outcomes for Travellers and other minority groups (Burns et al., 2022).

Poor educational engagement is an issue that has been studied and analysed by practitioners for decades. It has become evident that recent publications exploring the subject have highlighted the same issues facing the Travelling community from decades previously. Problems like poor recognition of heritage and culture, attendance and discrimination are still issues facing students from the Travelling community in the contemporary post-primary setting in Ireland. Welcomingly recent Governments have planned for improvements in the area of Traveller student educational engagement.

## **2.3 Recent Improvements and Suggested Future Developments**

### *2.3.1 Government Suggestions to Support Educational Engagement: Curriculum*

An expansive governmental report was compiled in 2019 by the NCCA in response to Traveller culture and history in the post-primary Curriculum. The report set out to audit Traveller culture and history in the school curriculum, to consider its place in the curriculum and future opportunities to teach Traveller culture and heritage. This report has outlined possible areas in which teachers can incorporate the study of Traveller culture and heritage for every subject for both junior and senior cycle. In the case of junior cycle English, the report states that teachers may use the classroom-based assessment as a way for students to explore their own Traveller culture and present it to their peers (NCCA, 2019). It also states that flexibility of choice for determining texts to be studied *'provides huge scope for exploring aspects of Traveller history and culture'* (NCCA, 2019, p. 71). In terms of the senior cycle however the report states that *'the scope for addressing content related to specific aspects of history and culture is largely dependent upon the professional capacity, interest and disposition of the teacher'* (NCCA, 2019, p.108). When looking at English specifically the report suggests that it is up to the practitioner to facilitate a student's exploration of their own culture rather than it being laid out in the curriculum specifically (NCCA, 2019). For both senior and junior cycle Geography, the report states that Traveller culture can be referenced through the lenses of nomadism, economic activities and in the

classroom-based assessments (NCCA, 2019). Once again there is no specific reference to the Travelling community in either of these curriculums and the direction given to teachers on how to include it is vague.

The department of Justice and Equality compiled a strategy in 2017 entitled the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017 – 2021. The department presented a list of targets and possible solutions to the Traveller inclusion and engagement problem in Irish schools. Some of the strategies included:

- The development of resources and supports specifically for Traveller students.
- Improved access and participation in an attempt to achieve learning outcomes.
- SOLAS and ETB to consider the Travelling community in their planning and training provisions.
- Promoting a positive culture of respect and protection for the cultural identity of Traveller.

(DOJE, 2017).

The Government also released an action plan titled: Action Plan for Increasing Traveller Participation in Higher Education 2019-2021. In this strategy the department included a section highlighting the supports for Traveller participation in post-primary schools. This plan identified resources like the DEIS Plan, National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), TUSLA and SEN (Special Educational Needs) allocations (DES,2019). The document also cited how *'NEPS who work with both primary and post-primary schools are concerned with learning, behaviour, social and emotional development'* (DES, 2019, p.12). To combat this full time NEPS psychologists have grown from 173 to 194.

Similar to the NCCA report in 2019, no specific curriculum changes or teaching practices were suggested in these strategies. The suggested strategies for promoting Traveller identity and culture were targeted at planning and training boards rather than teaching practitioner or curriculum writers.

### *2.3.2 Building Relationships to Promote Engagement.*

Boyle et al. have cited the opinions of Traveller parents, who have children in current post-primary settings, discussing their views on how engagement and the overall learning environment can be improved for their children. They feel that the relationship between Travellers and settled children '*would be enhanced if Traveller culture were included in the schools*' (2018, p.1396). Parents from the Travelling community feel that the inclusion of Traveller culture and heritage would break down the barriers between the communities in schools and lead to a better learning environment and greater educational engagement from their children. These feelings again mirror the work complied by practitioners in this field calling for the inclusion of Traveller culture, heritage, and history to be included in the curriculum for all students. The inclusion of this for all students from all backgrounds will positively influence problems like discrimination (Boyle et al., 2018) and attendance and therefor aid in the achievement of learning outcomes for all students.

Building healthy relationships with trusted adults in an educational setting has also been cited as way to promote a more effective and positive learning environment for Traveller students. Chris Derrington stated that having a trusted adult was particularly important for vulnerable Traveller students (2005). This linked the relationship they have at home with their parents and workers in a school setting and showed to have a positive influence on aspects like confidence and mental health (Derrington, 2005). McDaid and Rothen state that '*the caring relationships teachers establish with their students are core to high-quality education for minority ethnic students*' (2022, p.192). The literature shows that by fostering a healthy relationship with students a teacher can directly affect how a student from a minority group engages with the curriculum and can improve their overall learning experience (McDaid and Rothen, 2022). The strategies and supports highlighted by government bodies as ways to improve engagement within the Travelling community can only be successful if teachers and other educational practitioners can foster a caring a healthy relationship with Traveller students.

Although this is an issue that has been written about for generations, Traveller educational engagement has become an important department issue in recent years. The reports and strategies that have been released by the NCCA, Department of Education and Department of Justice and Equality show the importance placed on Traveller student education by the latest governments. The strategies suggested however do not mirror the suggestions cited in recent

literature like inclusion of Traveller culture and heritage in the curriculum and the improvement of relationships between minority group students and school staff.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

Increased evidence in both peer reviewed literature and government strategies in recent years highlights the importance of supporting educational engagement for students from the Travelling community in post-primary Ireland. The ESRI report on A Social Portrait of Travellers suggest that even though improvements in educational levels for the general population have improved in recent times, *'Travellers have been left farther behind'* (Kenny et al., 2017, p.34) in terms of their capacity to take advantage of opportunities associated with education levels. Recent literature has presented many issues facing Traveller students in the contemporary classroom. The problems facing Traveller students are having a direct influence on attendance rates, school completion and the overall achievement of learning outcomes. Upon reviewing the relevant literature, it has become clear that the exclusion of Traveller culture and heritage has been cited as an influential issue. The work published by government bodies in recent years have provided guidelines for teachers to include aspects of Traveller culture into their lessons. These guidelines are not specific, and the levels of inclusion are left up to interpretation. Peer reviewed work from authors like Derrington and Boyle et al. would suggest that aspects like Traveller culture and identity must be specifically included in the curriculum. This opinion is echoed by the parents of Traveller students who believe that relationships between settled and Traveller students will improve by including this in the curriculum for all students (Boyle et al., 2018). A gap can be noted in the reviewed work in the area of teacher opinion about this matter. The above research has led to the posing of the following questions which can be directed towards post-primary teachers:

1. What problems facing members of the Travelling community in post-primary settings are directly influencing educational engagement?
2. How can Traveller Heritage and Culture be included into post-primary life?
3. What can be changed or included in the Geography and English curriculums to support the achievement of learning outcomes for students from the Travelling community?
4. What are effective pedagogies that can support the educational engagement for members of the travelling community?

Although recent supports and improvements have been suggested in the area of Traveller post-primary education, the engagement numbers have not drastically improved, and it is still an important issue in the contemporary post-primary setting.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter will present the methodologies used for the research project along with the justification for choosing this research model. The research questions that have emerged for this project have been developed through personal experiences in the classroom, during extracurricular school activities and through the analysis of relevant literature. This chapter will also address the ethical considerations for the study and detail the ethical guidelines that were adhered to as set out by Hibernia College and the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011). A qualitative approach was chosen for this study after careful analysis of both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The aim of this method was to gather information from experienced teachers in a post-primary setting who work closely with SFTC. The chapter will justify the selection of a qualitative approach for the research project. This section will also present the tools and techniques used in the qualitative study while also outlining the methods used to collect the information and data relating to the study.

### **3.2 Aims and Objectives**

The aim of this research project was to examine ways in which effective pedagogies can be used to increase educational engagement in the Travelling community. Research was conducted through an extensive literature review to analyse the history of Traveller students in post-primary education and to highlight possible problems facing the minority group that cause low rates of engagement. The main objective of the project was to gather the opinions of experienced teachers who have worked closely with students from the Travelling community. The project set out to gather teacher viewpoints about effective pedagogies which ensure learning outcomes are met for Traveller students. The project also aimed to examine specific areas of the English and Geography curriculum that may be used effectively to improve educational engagement for members of the Travelling community. These aims and objectives directed the decision to use a qualitative approach for the research project.

### **3.3 Research Paradigm**

An interpretivism paradigm of inquiry was selected for this study as it best suited the qualitative approach chosen. This approach allowed for an in-depth analysis of teacher experiences with Traveller students in a post-primary setting. Interpretivism considers differences like cultures and circumstances as well as times leading to development of different social realities (Husam and Pius, 2020). An interpretivism paradigm also aims to include richness in the insights gathered rather than provide a generalised narrative (Husam and Pius, 2020). The interpretive paradigm enabled the researcher to consider different factors based on participants experiences and beliefs. This allowed for a detailed analysis of the views and opinions of post-primary teachers in the area of educational engagement for Traveller students.

### **3.4 Research Design**

Careful consideration was used when deciding between a qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approach. Smith and Osborn (2008) have stated that a qualitative approach interprets the personal and social experiences and opinions of human beings. This approach assists the researcher in producing findings that are based on the lived experiences of the participants in the study. Quantitative research can be described as the gathering of numerical data that can be organised and grouped for the purpose of analysis (McLeod, 2019). This approach allows for the use of graphs and tables to present data minimising bias.

After careful consideration of both methods, a qualitative approach was decided upon for the purpose of this research project. The qualitative data offered an insight into Traveller student educational engagement through the viewpoint of teachers who have worked closely with the minority group. Although a quantitative and a mixed approach to research has its benefits like accuracy and the minimisation of bias, a qualitative research design was felt to provide a broader view to the topic of educational engagement for Travellers while still allowing the detailed analysis of more specific issues like the possible utilisation of particular parts of the English and Geography curriculum. Quantitative and mixed approaches were deemed inappropriate for this study as they would have diluted or lessened the amount of teacher experience and opinion that was needed to answer the relevant research questions. This study focused on the participant's views, beliefs, and experiences rather than an analysis of statistics and numbers. Using this research design, the researcher was able to gather opinions expressed by teachers of Traveller students which aided in answering the relevant research

questions and provided a detailed overview of supports that could influence the achievement of learning outcomes for Traveller students.

### **3.5 Data Collection**

Data was collected for the research project through five semi-structured interviews. Merriam and Tisdell stated that the main purpose of an interview is to '*obtain a special kind of information*' (2016, p.108) and that it is the best collection form when a researcher wants to find out what is in and on someone's mind. Interviews are cited as being the most important source of data in qualitative research (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016) and allow the researcher to elicit an honest and open response about a particular topic. A semi-structured interview can be defined as an interview where the questions are '*more flexibly worded*' and the interview '*is a mix of more and less structured questions*' (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016, p. 110). Using this interview type will allow for specific responses to questions in a more flexible manner to highly structured interviews. This structure also allows the researcher to request the participant to elaborate on an answer and also enables the researcher to follow a new line of inquiry based on an answer given to a previous question.

An interview schedule was prepared for five semi-structured interviews. These were conducted with post-primary teachers in DEIS schools who work closely and directly with SFTC. Participants received a Research Project Information Sheet and a Consent Form before the interview commenced. The research information sheet provided the participants with information about the format and purpose of the interview in terms of the research project. The Consent form provided were signed and dated before the interviews began. Information sheets were also provided to school principals along with a letter requesting permission to conduct the interviews with members of their staff. Interview schedules were sent to the participants and to the school's principal prior to conducting the interviews. Interview questions focused on the following topics:

1. Working with Traveller students.
2. Supports and Resources.
3. Effective Pedagogies- Classroom Specific.
4. Possible Improvements.

The questions posed under these topics were made personal to the participant's area of expertise to elicit their best knowledge of the area. The interviews lasted approximately thirty

minutes. Interviews were recorded with the consent of the participant. Each interview was then transcribed for the purpose of analysis.

The aim of the interviews was to gather specific and detailed opinions and viewpoints about the topic of Traveller educational engagement from post-primary teachers. Under the proposed headings for the interview questions, the researcher aimed to collect the opinions of post-primary teachers about the main problems they thought faced members of the Travelling community in Irish secondary schools. The questions also aimed to gather information on the current supports and resources available to teachers as well as what they thought were effective pedagogies for improving the engagement of students from the Travelling community. Finally, the questions focused on how current post-primary teachers thought best to improve the current engagement rates for Traveller students. The interviews were taken place with practitioners who had previously worked with the researcher. This worked well with the semi-structured aspect of the interviews and resulted in natural and organic conversations. This approach allowed for questions to be asked that only became relevant during the interview and also facilitated the participants to go into great detail about a topic they may have felt strongly about. The interviews were recorded using a recording device and transcribed after the interviews for analysis allowing for the examination of what was communicated and emphasised during the interviews. The interviews encouraged the participants to develop their ideas and opinions in a non-rigid structure that may have come about using a questionnaire in a quantitative research method justifying the choice to use a qualitative method.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

The information gathered was analysed thematically with an in-depth investigation of the interview questions. The process of thematic analysis is an effective method where the researcher categorises an abundance of cross references involving the data collected and the projects evolving themes (Hayes,1997). The content from each interview was listened to and transcribed to aid with the analysis. This allowed the researcher to gain a broader understanding of the teacher's opinions on Traveller student engagement with the current post-primary curriculums. The emerging themes from the interviews were identified and categorised. The categorisation of the emerging themes aided in addressing the research questions attached to the project. The themes were the coded to help with analysing process.

### **3.7 Piloting**

For the purpose of this research project the interview questions were piloted on two teachers of English and Geography in a different DEIS school. This helped to ensure no methodical surprises occurred which increased the reliability and validity of the research (Gudmundsdottir & Brock-Utne, 2010). The piloting process resulted in some wording in the questions being changed in the interviews to ensure the best possible outcome from the qualitative approach.

### **3.8 Ethical Considerations**

Before this project began, the research had to be granted ethical approval by the Hibernia College Ethics Committee. By applying the principles of the Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA, 2018) it can be ensured that the project adheres to all relevant ethical standards. Data from the research was used in line with the Data Protection Act 1998. Written consent forms and information letters were provided for school principals prior to contacting participants. All consent forms were returned and signed prior to starting each interview. All the voluntary participants were informed of the purpose and nature of the research and were reassured about the confidentiality concerning the information gathered. Interview participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time. The interview participants were emailed the questions two days before the interviews took place. The participants were guaranteed that all the information would be stored securely in coded files and hard copies in a locked filing cabinet. The names of the interviewees were not used during the interview recording or in the transcript. All personal identifiers were removed and replaced by pseudonyms.

In line with Hibernia College Dublin, all data will be held for three years after the submission of the research project. It is also guaranteed that the information gathered will only be utilised for the function of this project and will never be shared with a third party.

### **3.9 Limitations**

One of the limitations noticed during this research project was the lack of triangulation to the study. The only method used for data collection was through five semi-structured interviews. This limited the amount of data sources available and therefore meant that the findings were not statistically proven. This limits the interpretation of the study to the wider audience in terms of its degree of certainty (Ochieng, 2009). There is also a potential of bias due to the

structure of the data collection. The variety in sources again influences this due to the nature of the qualitative research design. The personal qualities of participants and researchers along with the availability and reliability of various sources have been cited as potential reasons for bias (Norris, 1997). This limitation was tackled using the before mentioned piloting method. During two mock interviews the researcher was able to practice the skill of asking questions without showing bias or responding to the answers (Bryman, 2004).

### **3.10 Conclusion**

After careful considerations of both the effectiveness and the limitations of each research approach, it was decided that a qualitative method would best suit the small scale of the project. Quantitative approaches were deemed unsuitable as they would not elicit the personal opinions of teachers in the detail desired. Ethical considerations in relation to data collection were detailed and an analysis of the limitations of the research design took place. The procedure concerning the interviews was detailed with careful consideration placed on the ethical considerations for the project and the limitations experienced using only a qualitative research approach were discussed. The results of the data collection and analysis are presented in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

### **4.1 Introduction**

Qualitative data from five semi-structured interviews will be presented in this chapter. The themes that emerged from the interviews will be presented through the analysis of the data. As it is not possible to present all of the data that was collected throughout the five interviews, this chapter will prioritise the findings that are most relevant to the research questions and the emerging themes. This chapter will present the experiences and opinions of post-primary teachers that have worked with students from the Travelling community. The five participants that took part in the interviews were as follows:

1. English Teacher in a DEIS school.
2. Geography Teacher in a DEIS school.
3. Behaviour for Learning (BFL) teacher.
4. JCSP, LCA co-ordinator and Geography Teacher in a DEIS school.
5. JCT co-ordinator and English Teacher in a DEIS school.

Finally, connections will be made between the findings of the interviews and the research questions already presented. Interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

#### 4.2 Interview Findings and Emerging Themes

Three prominent themes emerged upon analysing the five semi-structured interviews that were carried out. *Inclusion of Traveller of Culture and Heritage in the curriculum, Building Relationships, and Supports and Resources* were the most frequent themes that were highlighted by the interview participants. The Inclusion of Traveller Culture and Heritage into the current curriculums was by far the most prominent theme upon analysing the transcripts. Each theme will be broken down and presented, portraying the opinions, and lived experiences of the post-primary teachers that participated in the interviews.

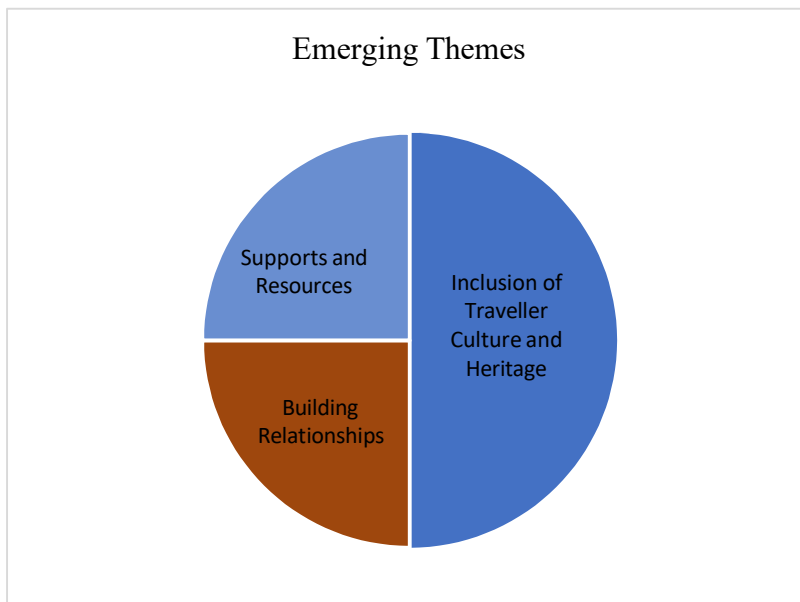


Figure 1: Depiction of Theme Popularity from interviews.

##### 4.2.1 Inclusion of Traveller Culture and Heritage

Throughout the interviews the inclusion of Traveller Culture and Heritage was cited as an influential aspect when trying to improve educational engagement for students from the Travelling community. A lack of this in the curriculum for English and Geography was also noted by the interviewees as a possible reason for poor educational engagement and school completion rates for SFTC in comparison to students from settled backgrounds. When asked their opinion on the main problem facing SFTC, one participant cited a lack of connection to

the current syllabus as the biggest issues negatively influencing educational engagement.

They stated that:

*.... the biggest issue I see is that they can't connect with the syllabus they are being asked to study..... we are told to "hook" students by using examples and case studies of things that interest them, but I just don't think there are enough points of interest in the (English) curriculum for Travellers.*

A geography teacher also noted that there was a noticeable 'cut-off point for engagement' of sixteen years of age for members of the Travelling community. Similarly, this participant noted that things outside of post-primary settings interested students from the travelling community more than the current curriculums and activities they were interacting with in post-primary schools. The interviewee described losing an academically gifted student at sixteen years of age:

*(He) stopped coming in the day after his sixteenth birthday because he legally wasn't obliged (to) anymore.... but that student would have been one of my top students in the class and that was halfway through fifth year.*

This teacher also highlighted areas of the geography curriculum in which Traveller Culture and History could be included in an attempt to combat the engagement issues he had spoken about. This participant highlighted the OS map and sketch map sections of the junior cycle curriculum as areas in which culture and history could be included. They stated:

*(They) have a great knowledge of old areas in the county, maybe stories have travelled down from their families about different places, but those places weren't actually highlighted on maps.... (They) realise that culture is being spoken about but not necessarily their culture is being shown.*

Another area of the geography curriculum that was highlighted as an area that could include Traveller culture and history was during the classroom-based assessment. The participant detailed how a change to the geography CBA title could help with educational engagement with SFTC. The interviewee noted that a 'culturally based CBA' could provide these students with an opportunity to present their culture to their classmates and aid with their overall engagement with classroom-based assessments in geography at junior cycle level. This also led to the area of Migration in junior and senior cycle Geography where the participant spoke

of how the migration of the Travelling community in Ireland and internationally could be included in the current curriculum:

*.... Migration is a huge part of what Traveller life would have been like. It is not shown in the syllabus, but it is a huge opportunity to engage them.*

They went on to state that:

*The Textbooks that schools use doesn't really work towards something that can cater for (the Travelling community) .... If we take migration for example international migration is talked about, west to east migration in Ireland is talked about but historically travellers have migrated around Ireland. We don't discuss the migration of the (Travelling community) at all.*

When the participants were asked whether they agree with the Departments recommendation of using CBAs to include Traveller Culture and Heritage into the junior cycle curriculum one English teacher agreed and stated that:

*The CBAs are a great opportunity to possibly include the idea of Traveller Culture into the curriculum.... I had a student (from the Travelling community) last year actually who engaged brilliantly with the CBA, much better than (they) had been engaging in the class in general.*

Due to the nature of their position in the DEIS school the Behaviour for Learning Teacher noted that teachers are now expected to be made aware of the cultural backgrounds of new groups of students enrolling in their school. This can be seen for example with the enrolment of students from the Ukraine in the last year. They highlighted how the curriculum is being tailored by the use of specific supports and resources in order to maximise engagement for this group of students in particular. The BFL teacher stated that:

*.... If we started to do the same for the Travelling community, we would get a lot more of (them) engaged for a longer time.*

Each interviewee that participated in the interviews cited a lack of inclusion of Traveller Culture and History in the current post-primary curriculums as a big issue influencing the poor levels of engagement. Each participant felt that including this into the syllabus would foster a better connection between student and content which may positively improve the rates of engagement.

#### 4.2.2 Building Relationships

The importance of relationships between students from the Travelling community and post-primary teachers and special needs assistants emerged as a regular theme upon analysing the interviews. This theme became particularly relevant when the participants were asked about their opinions on possible strategies to improve rates of engagement for students from the Travelling community. The participants were asked; *have you noticed any pedagogy that is particularly effective in helping engagement for Traveller students in your classroom?* The Behaviour for Learning teacher who participated replied by stating:

*.... Relationship is really, really important to them (Travelling community), I have seen that that is the thing that will make them engage.*

This view was also shared by an English teacher who also cited that building a positive relationship with students from the Travelling community was an effective strategy when trying to achieve learning outcomes for members of the minority group. This participant noticed a *'marked improvement'* in SFTC after a positive relationship had been fostered and when the teacher felt that the particular students *'liked and respected'* them.

The importance of the relationships with special needs assistants was also highlighted as an influential aspect to improving educational engagement when posed the question about effective practices. One participant stated that a good relationship between an SNA and a student from the Travelling community *'can be very very positive'* in terms of that student's engagement and overall school life.

During the interviews one participant also spoke about how the possibility of having negative communications and weak relationships with students from the Travelling community may hinder their overall educational engagement. This point was presented by the participant when they cited the importance of a teacher understanding a student cultural background and interests stating:

*If (a teacher) is dismissive of (their) interests, you will get very little engagement from Traveller students.*

A JCSP and LCA co-ordinator also spoke about fairness in the relationship between a teacher and a student from the travelling community stating that *'the level of fairness they feel (they)*

*are getting*' plays an important role in their level of engagement. This specific idea of perceived fairness on the part of students from the Travelling community was mentioned by two of the five interviewees. Both participants who mentioned this work closely with students from the Travelling community outside of the mainstream classroom in an BFL role and as a JCSP and LCA co-ordinator.

Each participant that was interviewed cited the importance of relationships between post-primary practitioners and students from the Travelling community. The interviewees differed has two of the three spoke about the negative influence a poor relationship can have while the remaining three interviewees spoke of the positive impact a strong relationship may have on educational engagement for students from the Travelling community.

#### *4.2.3 Supports and Resources*

Different types of support networks for students from the Travelling community emerged throughout the interviews as ways in which learning outcomes could be achieved and overall engagement rates improved. This theme however was in contrast to the previous two as each participant cited different support networks that they found useful in their teaching experiences. A BFL teacher was asked their opinion on whether overall behaviour would improve with a change to the current curriculums in an effort to make it more engaging for Traveller students. They responded by saying:

*It would yes. They would feel more valued in the class overall. They would feel valued amongst their peers.*

This participant then went on to make the point that if students from the Travelling community thought that they were *'receiving the supports that other (minority groups) are receiving'* in schools, behavioural issues would improve, along with the possible changes to the curriculum.

An English teacher would worked closely in an SEN setting with Traveller students spoke of the supports they received while working with the minority group. When asked of supports they have used specific to their subject area they replied:

*I used a resource booklet that was provided by the school, it was specific English resources that were made for students from the Travelling community.... I remember a crossword based on hunting and fishing.*

The participant then highlighted the impact of the resource saying that the students engaged much better with the resources that were ‘*made specifically for them*’. When speaking about improving current resources in schools, one participant cited the importance of CPD in the area of the inclusivity of different cultures. They were of the opinion that:

*Schools are so diverse now. We need to continue to develop and learn ways to make sure all ethnicities, all cultures, all backgrounds are included. The same can be said for (students from the Travelling community). We need to make sure we are professionally developed enough that we have the resources and the supports to make sure that students from the Travelling community are included and engaged.*

This participant was mirrored by the views of another English teacher who cited an example of the ‘*Yellow Flag Programme*’ as a possible whole school approach to becoming more inclusive for all cultures and ethnicities.

The five interviewees highlighted different supports they have used in the past and presented differing opinions on how supports and resources may be implemented in the future. Each participant however was in agreement the support networks and available resources are an important part of trying to improve educational engagement for members of the Travelling community. Each interview was concluded with a question put to the participants about what they feel was the most important action that can take place to help support the educational engagement of SFTC? A geography teacher highlighted that the most important action they could engage with in their classroom was:

*Making the student aware that they are supported.... We can help them do what they want to do, not what they historically may have had to do.*

This teacher is of the opinion that support from teachers for students from the Travelling community is an influential aspect that can help improve educational engagement for these students.

### **4.3 Conclusion**

After analysing the five interviews it is apparent that teachers of Traveller students feel that their level of engagement can be improved upon. It was clear from the interviews that

changes to the current curriculums by including aspects of Traveller culture in an attempt to improve educational engagement was a view shared across the board. The findings from the interviews are noticeably similar to views presented in the literature review in chapter two. This similarities and differences will be analysed in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter will present the outcomes of the findings from chapter four which were based on the qualitative data collected through five semi-structured interviews. These findings will be analysed alongside the literature review of chapter two and connections made between the two. Upon analysing the data collected three prominent themes emerged that related to the original research questions:

1. Inclusion of Traveller Culture and Heritage in the curriculum.
2. Building Relationships.
3. Supports and Resources.

This chapter will make connections between this particular study and research that has been carried out in the area of post-primary education for Traveller students. Recommendations and considerations will be drawn out from the findings and from the review of relevant literature. The analysis presented will portray how future practice could be impacted in an attempt to support the educational engagement of post-primary students from the Travelling community.

### **5.2 Qualitative Analysis: Inclusion of Traveller Culture and Heritage in the Curriculum.**

Each teacher that participated in the interviews cited the inclusion of Traveller culture and heritage into post-primary teaching and learning as a paramount way to support the improvement of educational engagement for the minority group. This also emerged as a prominent theme from both governmental strategy and literature from experienced writers in the area of diversity and inclusion in schools. Each interview participant provided examples of successful engagements in their class when effective pedagogy was used to recognise identity, culture, and history. This section will highlight classroom-based examples of successful implementation of the theme from relevant literature and from the data collected

through the five interviews. It will also compare and contrast the views of teachers to the data collected from the literature review about the possible ways and areas in the current curriculums where Traveller culture and heritage can be included.

### *5.2.1 Lack of Traveller Culture and Heritage in the current Curriculums.*

Boyle et al. cited that a lack of recognition for Traveller identity and culture is making the current curriculums unattainable for students from the Travelling community (2018). This report contained interviews from the parents of Traveller students, one of whom felt that there was no recognition of Traveller culture which in turn made the community feel unwanted and marginalised leading to low engagement rates and poor attendance (Boyle et al., 2018). This view was mirrored by all of the interview participants who at some stage during the interview cited how the current curriculum was not suitable for Traveller students attempting to achieve their learning outcomes. Recent literature from Burns et.al describes a denial of cultural differences in schools is impacting '*Travellers' motivation to stay in school*' and achieve learning outcomes (2022, p. 177). This point was also made by a BFL teacher who spoke of how a recognition of culture rather than excluding it would make the student feel valued and improve their overall school experience. Inclusivity and diversity are now pillars to the contemporary post-primary environment. These findings suggest that a recognition and celebration of all cultures rather than a *one size fits all* approach to curriculums can help improve current rates of engagement for students from the Travelling community.

### *5.2.2 Successful Examples of Inclusion of Traveller Culture and Heritage.*

The Geography and English teachers interviewed provided examples of occasions when they have seen improved rates of engagement for Traveller students when their culture and heritage was included into learning tasks. At junior cycle level in the geography syllabus, Migration, OS Maps and CBAs were highlighted as areas where learning outcomes had been achieved for this learner group specifically. The NCCA similarly suggested that Traveller identity and culture could be included through aspects like nomadism, economic activities and in the CBAs (NCCA, 2019). The government report however left the specific implementation of identity, culture, and history up to the practitioner as the geography syllabus itself did not change. One interview participant criticised the geography curriculum for not directly including links to traveller culture citing how engagement would improve

with changes to sections like the CBAs and migration. An English teacher also cited an example of improved engagement during a second year CBA task. In this instance the teacher spoke of how a particular student from the Travelling community engaged considerably better with Classroom Based Assessment task of creating a presentation on an interest of theirs in comparison to general learning tasks. Similar to the geography syllabus, the NCCA report highlighted the CBA as possible area to include aspects of history and culture but again stressed how it was *'largely dependent upon the professional capacity, interest and disposition of the teacher'* (NCCA, 2019, p.108). Upon analysing the interview data, it became clear that the participants felt that a more direct and detailed inclusion of Traveller culture, history and identity into the curriculums would improve the current engagement rates. Although governmental strategies in recent times have outlines areas in which Traveller identity and culture could be included, further guidelines on how to implement this coupled with the direct curricular inclusion would support the achievement of learning outcomes for Traveller students. The analysis of the theme of Traveller culture and heritage and its inclusion or exclusion from current curriculums aids in the examination of each research question that emerged in chapter two of the study. The exclusion of the above has been cited by practitioners as a problem adding to poor engagement. It is also highlighted as a possible solution to the problem with effective inclusion using the English and geography curriculums as an example.

### **5.3 Qualitative Analysis: Building Relationships**

The building of positive relationships between students from the Travelling community and teachers was highlighted during the interviews as an effective pedagogy to improve overall educational engagement. The relevant literature and qualitative data analysis provide contemporary examples of strong relationships in post-primary settings improving the achievement of learning outcomes for Traveller students.

The interview participants were asked specifically if they had noticed any pedagogy which was particularly effective in improving engagement for Traveller students (Question 12 of Interview Questions – Appendix A). Two of the five participants noted that they could clearly see an improvement in engagement when relationships were built for the student from both teachers and SNAs. Chris Derrington wrote at length about the positive outcomes healthy student-teacher relationships would have for SFTC. He linked the building of relationships to modelling behaviour that is often seen at home in Traveller households (Derrington, 2005).

Derrington was also part of a report entitled *Improving the Outcomes for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils: final report*, in which they spoke of creating ‘soft outcomes’ (Derrington et.al, 2010, p. 74) in an attempt to improve engagement. Part of this process was improving enjoyment for Traveller students in post-primary schools through the building of healthy relationships (Derrington et.al, 2010). The report states that fostering healthy relationships with travellers and their families also developed school staffs’ ‘*understanding and context of their students’ backgrounds*’ (Derrington et.al, 2010, p.72). This finding is mirrored by an experienced JCSP and LCA co-ordinator who was interviewed. This teacher had years of experience working closely with Traveller students and spoke of the importance of not being ‘*dismissive of (their) interests*’ and how having a knowledge of their backgrounds can really improve a student’s engagement and performance in school. This point can be linked back to the first theme of including Traveller culture and heritage into school life. By doing so both student and teacher can have a better understanding of the context and interests of the minority group, therefor improving peer and student-teacher relationships which in turn will aid in the improvement of educational engagement.

#### **5.4 Qualitative Analysis: Supports and Resources for Students for Traveller Students**

During the five interviews that were facilitated, each participant highlighted specific supports and resources that they had used in their practice in an attempt to improve educational engagement for SFTC in post-primary settings. Examples of such were also found in the relevant literature that was analysed. Governmental literature and action plans also referenced supports that may be used to improve the educational engagement of Traveller students. This section will link the experiences of teachers in using these resources and supports while also critiquing the usefulness of the resources which have been written about and provided.

Poor behaviour has been marked as a major problem facing students from the Travelling community (Derrington, 2005). The BFL teacher that was interviewed highlighted how in their opinion an improvement to the support networks received by Traveller students would result in an improvement in overall behaviour for the group. This participant also noted the contemporary issue of different ethnic groups receiving resources and supports in schools and cited how SFTC do not always feel like they receive the same amount of support. The Department however have developed plans and strategies to add to the support received for Traveller students in post-primary education. As examined in chapter two, actions like an increase in NEPS psychologists and the promotion of planning and training for the Travelling

community were brought forward. Some of the interview participants however highlighted a more classroom-based approach that was needed in terms of improving supports and extra resources for Traveller students. An English teacher who had worked closely with members of the Travelling community in an SEN setting provided an example of a resource booklet that was provided to them by the school that was tailored specifically for Travellers. This teacher stated that the engagement levels of their students rose significantly when they worked from the specific resources. This participant felt that if more classroom resources like these were made available across all subjects the engagement rates for members of the Travelling community would greatly improve. The same interviewee however was in agreement with some of the strategic plans made by the Department. The SEN teacher highlighted the importance of CPD in an attempt to increase engagement rates for students from diverse backgrounds and to *'make sure that students from the Travelling community are included and engaged'* (Chapter 2, p.\_).

The government have made visible efforts to improve supports and resources for students from the Travelling community as seen in the plans and strategies in chapter two. A more classroom-based approach to supports and resources may help to further improve engagement rates and aid teachers to facilitate the achievement of learning outcomes.

## **5.5 Research questions**

### *5.5.1 What Problems Facing Members of the Travelling Community in Post-Primary Settings are Directly Influencing Educational Engagement?*

The exclusion of Traveller culture and heritage has been cited as the main problem impacting poor educational engagement for SFTC throughout the project. A denial of culture and identity is leading to SFTC feeling marginalised and uninterested and is negatively impacting their ability to achieve learning outcomes. Practitioners like BFL teachers have suggested that excluding aspects of their culture is leading to poor attendance and behavioural issues. Teachers have also cited a need for specific examples of Traveller culture and heritage in the curriculum rather than its inclusion being solely left up to the practitioner. Problems like attendance, poor behaviour and overall poor educational engagement rates can be linked back to an exclusion and denial of Traveller culture and heritage in post-primary curriculums.

### *5.5.2 How can Traveller Heritage and Culture be included into post-primary life?*

*What can be changed or included in the Geography and English curriculums to support the achievement of learning outcomes for students from the Travelling community?*

The NCCA has provided a description of how to include Traveller heritage and culture into the syllabi of each post-primary subject. The participants of this project, along with the literature analysed however cited that more specific inclusion is needed. Geography teachers highlighted aspects like migration, OS maps and CBAs as ways to include Traveller culture specifically and in detail. English teachers also noted examples of times when STFC engaged well with CBAs and resources that were made specifically for them. After analysing the above findings it can be suggested that specific examples of culture and heritage in the syllabus as well as detailed direction to teachers on possible ways to include it into the curriculums would aid SFTC to achieve learning outcomes.

*5.5.3 What are Effective Pedagogies that can Support the Educational Engagement for Members of the Travelling Community?*

Mortimore defines pedagogy as '*any conscious activity by one person designed to enhance learning in another*' (1999, p.3). Using this definition, it can be said that incorporating aspects of a Traveller students' culture and history into a lesson is an effective pedagogy to use when trying to improve educational engagements. The building of strong relationships between student and teacher has also been highlight by the participants as a useful tool to help a Traveller student achieve their learning outcomes. After analysing the emerging themes, it has also come to light that that using specific resources that have been designed for SFTC has helped these students achieve their learning outcomes. Building resources, supports and curriculum content that acknowledges and includes Traveller culture and heritage is the most effective pedagogy to use when trying to improve educational engagement for the community.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

The problems facing SFTC have been highlighted in both the literature review and in the five semi-structured interviews that provided the data for this qualitative study. The teachers interviewed identified the exclusion of Traveller culture and heritage from the current curriculums as the main problem facing this student group and this opinion was mirrored in the literature studied. The relevant literature and interviews analysed unanimously portray that including aspects of Traveller culture, identity and heritage into the current syllabuses will drastically improve educational engagement rates. Teachers also identified the

importance of strong relationships with Traveller students as a way to improve their engagement and overall school experience. It was also emphasised that further development and improvements to resources and supports specifically for Traveller students would effectively improve the achievement of learning outcomes.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This research project examined the current problems facing students from the Travelling community in post-primary education and presented possible classroom-based improvements that could be made in order to improve educational rates for the minority group. Literature in relation to the contemporary issues facing the student group as well as governmental strategies were explored in chapter two during a literature review. The study collected qualitative data using five semi-structured interviews in which five experienced teachers who had have worked closely with members of the Travelling community participated. The data was analysed to portray the opinions of experienced practitioners about the issues causing low educational engagement rates for Traveller students. Possible solutions and improvements to the problems emerged and were presented through the literature review and through the opinions expressed by current post-primary teachers. The data was presented and analysed thematically with three main themes emerging.

### **6.2 Summary of Findings and Main Themes**

The findings from this study confirmed the problems facing members of the Travelling community in post-primary Ireland. It also portrayed how experienced teachers felt it best to deal with these issues effectively. Four research questions emerged after an extensive literature review, all based on the problems causing poor educational engagement and ways in which these rates can be improved using particular pedagogies. The three themes that emerged during the analysis of the data collected via the interviews were:

4. Inclusion of Traveller Culture and Heritage in the curriculum.
5. Building Relationships.
6. Supports and Resources.

The inclusion of Traveller culture and heritage into the current curriculums was seen as the most important step to improving the achievement of learning outcomes for Traveller students (Boyle et al., 2018). This possible improvement was cited in the relevant literature and by teachers alike. Teachers noted that strong student-teacher relationships would also aid with the achievement of learning outcomes and provide students from the Travelling community with a better overall school experience. It was also found that the improvement of supports and resources at a classroom level may also positively impact student engagement. Teachers felt that effective pedagogies could become more useful if there was greater curricular, resource and support development.

### **6.3 Limitations**

Using a qualitative approach, the researcher was able to gain a deep insight into the views of teachers who had worked closely with students from the Travelling community. Using only a qualitative data analysis however did mean the project was met with some limitations including its degree of certainty due to a lack of statistical data (Ochieng, 2009). The project was impacted by the sample size and timeframe provided for the purpose of the study. A larger sample of participants, coupled with the inclusion of online surveys (mixed methods approach) would have provided the researcher a broader account of opinions about the topics as well as allowing for a comparative analysis of opinions from teachers in different school environments and settings.

### **6.4 Recommendations**

The teachers who took part in this project feel that educational engagement rates can be improved for pupils in the Travelling community. The findings of the project have highlighted possible ways in which this improvement can be achieved. Considering this the following recommendations can be made:

1. Inclusion of Traveller culture and heritage into post-primary curriculums: Including specific examples of Traveller identity, culture and heritage into both junior and senior cycle curriculums will make Traveller students feel included and valued and therefore improve their rates of engagement.
2. Strengthening student-teacher relations and modelling: Creating a strong relationship with a student from the Travelling community will improve that pupils' chances of achieving the learning outcomes set out by said teacher. Modelling behaviour will

also aid in the behavioural issues and the overall educational engagement of the student.

3. Traveller specific resources: Using resources specifically made for Traveller students can be used as an effective pedagogy when trying to improve engagement. Providing teachers with resources for each syllabus will aid with the achievement of learning outcomes across the board.

## **6.5 Conclusion**

Recent Governmental reports like the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017 – 2021 and the Action Plan for Increasing Traveller Participation in Higher Education 2019-2021 (DES, 2021) prove that the Department are serious about tackling the issues facing Traveller students in the contemporary post-primary classroom. This study may also encourage discussion about the subject among its participants and readers. This study set out to examine effective pedagogies that can be used to improve the current rates of engagement for Traveller students. Effective pedagogies have been highlighted at a classroom level and discussed through a qualitative analysis. Further developments of curriculums, supports and resources must continue to improve if all Traveller students are to '*remain in school and complete the junior cycle*' (DES,2006, p.61) as targeted by the Department.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Interview Schedule

*The interviews will be broken up into four sections: 1) Working with Traveller students 2) Supports and Resources 3) Effective Pedagogies-Classroom specific 4) Possible improvements*

### Research Questions:

- What problems facing members of the Travelling community in post-primary settings are directly influencing educational engagement?
- How can Traveller Heritage and Culture be included into post-primary life?
- What can be changed or included in the Geography and English curriculums to support the achievement of learning outcomes for students from the Travelling community?
- What are effective pedagogies that can support the educational engagement for members of the travelling community?

### Working with Traveller students

1. How long have you been working with students from the Travelling community and in what capacity are you working with them at the moment?
2. Have you worked with students from the Travelling community in any extracurricular activities?
3. Have you noticed any changes in the rates of engagement with students from the Travelling community since you started working with them?
4. How do Traveller students engage with everyday learning tasks in comparison to a settled student?

### Supports and Resources

5. Have you utilised any supports or resources specific to your subject area for students from the Travelling community?
6. What supports does your school provide specifically for members of the Travelling community?
7. Have you used many resources or supports for students from the Travelling community outside of what is provide by your school and the Department of Education?
8. Do you feel that the current English/Geography curriculum supports and encourages educational engagement for members of the Travelling community?

### Effective Pedagogies- Classroom Specific.

9. Can you identify any sections of the English/Geography curriculum that students from the Travelling community engage with in particular?
10. Are there any areas of the curriculum that you have been able to adapt to support engagement for Traveller students?
11. The Department have identified the CBAs as a possible avenue to celebrate Traveller culture and heritage. Do you agree with this and have you seen any examples of this being the case?
12. Have you noticed any pedagogy that is particularly effective in helping engagement for Traveller students in your classroom?

### **Possible Improvements**

13. What are some of the main issues/problems you can see facing Traveller students in post-primary schools?
14. Do you think these issues/problems facing students from the Travelling community are having a direct effect on their ability to achieve the learning outcomes set for them?
15. In 2019 the NCCA released a strategy report detailing possible ways Traveller culture and heritage can be included into the curriculum for both junior and senior cycle. Have you noticed any improvements to engagement levels in your classroom since then?
16. Do you think the specific inclusion of Traveller culture and history would help to improve the rate of educational engagement in your classes?
17. Where exactly in the current English/Geography curriculum could Traveller culture and heritage be included do you think?
18. Have you noticed any specific extracurricular activities or tasks outside of the classroom that students from the Travelling community engage with particularly well with?
19. Can the inclusion of more specific extracurricular activities tailored for Traveller students help with the overall educational engagement of students from the Travelling community?
20. Can you see an improvement in engagement levels, attendance and overall school completion for members of the Travelling community in the near future?
21. What do you feel is the most important action that can take place in the classroom to help support the educational engagement of students from the Travelling community?

## Appendix B – Information Sheet

### RESEARCH INFORMATION SHEET

<b>RESEARCHER</b>	William Carley
<b>ORGANISATION</b>	Hibernia College Dublin
<b>SUPERVISOR</b>	Conor Harrison
<b>TITLE</b>	Improving Educational Engagement in the Travelling Community: Effective Pedagogies to ensure the achievement of learning outcomes.

#### Outline of Research Study:

According to the 2011 census, 91 per cent of Travellers leave school at the age of 16 or younger with 23 per cent leaving before the age of 13 (ERSI, 2017). This statistic is in comparison to non-Travellers with only 25 per cent leaving before the age of 16 and only 1 per cent before the age of 13 (ERSI, 2017). This research project will examine the reasons why the levels of early school leaving are so high in the Travelling community. It will also investigate ways in which educational engagement can be supported in an attempt to achieve learning outcomes for students from the travelling community and other minority groups. This study will examine areas of the Geography and English Post-Primary curriculum that can be used effectively in combination with specific pedagogies to support educational engagement. This research will highlight what teachers deem effective pedagogies, methodologies and activities for supporting and improving the levels of educational engagement for Travellers in a Post-Primary setting. The differences in school completion numbers suggests that Travellers are benefiting much less from general educational improvements and remain disadvantaged in educational terms. This project will examine ways in which we as teachers can support the changing of these numbers for the better and how the overall achievement of learning outcomes can be improved for members of the Travelling community.

#### Objectives of the Project:

The Objectives of this research are to:

- examine ways in which effective pedagogies can be used in order to increase educational engagement in the travelling community.
- search for teachers' opinions about effective pedagogies which ensure learning outcomes are met for students from the travelling community.
- examine specific areas of the English and Geography curriculum that may be used effectively in order to improve educational engagement for members of the travelling community.

#### What I need you to do:

Your participation in this research project is greatly appreciated. This research project has received ethical approval from Hibernia College Dublin. If you agree to participate, you will participate in a short semi-structured interview with the researcher. Any information you provide about your own identity or that of the school will be anonymous and confidential. Quotes from the interview may be used and may also be published in the research however your name and the name of the school will not be published. The interview will be audio

recorded and transcribed, and a copy of the transcript will be made available to you on request. This research will be used in a publication of a thesis for Hibernia College Dublin. It may also be used in conference proceedings or used in academic articles. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

**What is the purpose of this research?**

The purpose of the research is to complete small-scale study which forms part of the final year of the Professional Masters of Education (Primary) with Hibernia College Dublin.

## Appendix C – Consent Form

### CONSENT FORM

<b>RESEARCHER'S NAME:</b>	William Carley
<b>ORGANISATION:</b>	Hibernia College Dublin
<b>TITLE OF STUDY:</b>	Improving Educational Engagement in the Travelling Community: Effective Pedagogies to ensure the achievement of learning outcomes.

#### Consent (to be completed by the participant)

Have you been fully informed/read the information sheet about this study? Yes/No

Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study? Yes/No

Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions? Yes/No

Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without giving a reason for withdrawing and without your withdrawal having an adverse effect for you? Yes/No

Do you agree to take part in this study, the results of which are likely to be published or presented at a conference? Yes/No

Have you been informed that a copy of this consent form will be kept by the researcher? Yes/No

Are you satisfied that any information you give to the researcher will be kept confidential? Your name and the name of the school will not appear in the research report. Yes/No

**Participant's name (printed):**

**(signature) :**

**Date:**

**Researcher's signature**

**Date**

## Appendix D – Principal’s Letter

### PRINCIPAL’S LETTER

Dear ,

As part of my Professional Masters in Post-Primary Education with Hibernia College, I am exploring how educational engagement can be supported and improved for students in the Travelling community. The title of my project is ‘Improving Educational Engagement in the Travelling Community: Effective Pedagogies to ensure the achievement of learning outcomes’.

Classroom teachers are key stakeholders in identifying ways in which educational engagement and the achievement of learning outcomes can be supported for Travellers and students from different minority groups. This letter aims to provide you with an introduction to the research project and to seek consent from you for the project to move forward in order to inform my future professional practice as a teacher.

With your permission, I would like to interview a member of your staff. The practitioner will be asked to partake in semi-structured interviews to gain an insight into the aims of the project. Please find enclosed for your perusal, a copy of the information and consent forms. Only those respondents who return a signed copy of the consent form will take part in the study. Any data gathering will strictly be underpinned by the school's ethical code of conduct. No students will be interviewed.

Information gathered will be held in the strictest of confidence and pseudonyms will be used to ensure anonymity. The school's name will not appear on any research findings. Interviews will be recorded, and the data will be securely held under Hibernia College Research Ethics guidelines. Participation in the study is voluntary and participants can withdraw from the research at any time. The results from this research study will be reported in my research project and may be disseminated through professional publication.

I would appreciate your cooperation in providing access to the staff at the school over the coming weeks.

If you have any queries or require further information on the research study, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Researcher: William Carley

Mobile:

Email:

This research study has received Ethics approval from Hibernia College Dublin. If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent you may contact:  
School of Education, Hibernia College Dublin.

Tel

William Carley.

Researcher's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: