



Submission  
to

Department of Education and Science

Intercultural Education Strategy December 2008



*'We are guilty of many errors and many faults, but our worst crime is abandoning the children, neglecting the foundation of life. Many of the things we need can wait. The child cannot. Right now is the time his bones are being formed, his blood is being made, and his senses are being developed. To him, we cannot answer tomorrow. His name is 'Today'. - Gabriela Mistral, 1948*

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## Intercultural Education Strategy

*'If you had settled people and Travellers together in books it might just mmm make them stop calling names, wouldn't they, make them stop calling names' (8 year old Traveller girl, 2007)*

### Introduction

The National Traveller Organisations; the National Traveller Women's Forum, Pavee Point and the Irish Traveller Movement welcome the opportunity to submit a Traveller perspective, reflections, ideas, principles and actions to the Department on the development of an Intercultural Education Strategy to support inclusion and celebrate diversity in the Education System.

The needs of Traveller children must not be determined in isolation from the reality of Traveller lives, from a recognition of Traveller culture and of an appreciation of what Travellers themselves want (Murray 1997). Traveller children, in the spirit of interculturalism, must be acknowledged, recognised and embraced by the education sector in order for Traveller children to be proud of their identity, have a sense of belonging and have the right to reach their full potential without hiding who they are.

**There is a special minority within a minority culture: children. In the dominant society, the children of a minority must endure along with their parents the problem of social and cultural discrimination, and they are even more exposed to the risk of cultural dissolution (Children of Minorities, UNICEF, 1993)**

### The Traveller Child

Traveller Children are a minority within a minority, suffering all the ill effect of inadequate accommodation, poor living conditions and discrimination experienced by their parents. Traveller children are restricted in their opportunities in Irish society and this has a detrimental effect on their own self-esteem and on their pride in Traveller culture.

Traveller society is young, over 50% of Traveller children are under the age of 15 years, and over 40% is under the age of 10 years. Many of these children live in inadequate living conditions. Participation rates in education have improved but are still inconsistent; illiteracy is prevalent in the community and very few Traveller children advance beyond primary school. Even before they enter school Traveller children are at a huge disadvantage compared with their peers in the settled community. Despite these adverse conditions, Traveller children do have the advantage of growing up in an environment where the extended family generally lives as a community and the restriction and restraints imposed in childhood on children are likely to be less than in

the settled community. Balancing this level of freedom however, Traveller children would also tend to work alongside adults at a much younger age than their settle counterparts.

## **Experience of the Traveller Child in Education**

Traveller child experience conditions and live a lifestyle which are unique to their own community, imagine what an unfamiliar world the Traveller child encounters when he /she first enters pre-school, primary school where rules and values conflict with the child's experience at home. In school, the authority figure usually speaks differently, behaves differently and most importantly does not have an understanding of Traveller culture. Traveller children may discover that certain ways of being (symbolised through appearance, clothes, possessions, activities, ways of expressing themselves, language etc.) are favoured over others, that certain family compositions are more 'normal' than others or that certain expectations of a 'polite attitude' are more appreciated than others. This may be the first time the Traveller child realises they are different and in some cases different in a negative way.

Children (as well as adults) are capable of complex code switching, continuously adapting their language, attitude and behaviour to various social setting and relationships. However, this becomes much more difficult when one important reference group (for example at the pre-school or school) overtly or covertly, consciously or unconsciously, conveys messages that another important reference group (for example in the home) is not accepted. Children can all too often feel they are confronted with a forced choice, that identity is a matter of 'either/ or' instead of a more inclusive 'and /and' that respects their multiple identities (Michel Vandebroek, 2008).

- *She (teacher) doesn't know I'm a Traveller (7 yrs)*
- *Miss .....hates Travellers (5 yrs)*
- *Doesn't talk about Travellers; no there are no pictures or books about Travellers (9 year)*
- Interviews with Traveller children in Pavee Point, 2007

## **Traveller Inclusion**

Traveller organisations have worked consistently and have led the way over the past 20 years for an inclusive intercultural framework for the education system. The Task Force Report (1995) and the Report for the Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy (RRTES, 2006), the '*éist*' (2004) early childhood project and the Diversity and Equality Guidelines for Practitioners (OMC, 2006) highlight and recommend the need

for an inclusive and intercultural focus in training and practice to support the improvement of the Traveller child and youth outcomes in the education system from pre-school to higher education.

An Intercultural Education Strategy by its very nature should include *all*, both minority and majority communities. Given the focus by the Minister for Integration on new immigrant communities, there is a risk if the strategy does not explicitly highlight the inclusions of *all* and specifically the Traveller child and youth, that they will be excluded in the minds of trainers and educators as they focus only on inclusion of the new communities in Irish society. As Traveller culture is currently not celebrated in education

*Teacher never talks about Travellers and how they live (10 year old, 2007) Pavee Point*

the strategy is a mechanism to support a shift in understanding and focus for educators to ensure Traveller children are holistically embraced. Traveller organisations hope that the Education Intercultural Strategy will support this shift.

## **Current Intercultural Educational Initiatives**

There are a variety of organisations looking at the inclusion of diversity and equality issues in the education system from Early Years to Higher Education and in the Youth Work sector. Traveller organisations have been involved and/or led some of these initiatives and in some we have no involvement in. All these initiatives are working to achieve similar outcomes early childhood and primary include:

- The Development and Intercultural Education (DICE) Project
- Amnesty International 'Lift Off' Project
- 'éist' early education Project, Pavee Point
- Equality and Diversity in Early Childhood Care and Education Network EDENN and
- Other individual initiatives at community level.

There are also the intercultural guidelines for early years, primary, post-primary and the youth work sector which include a Traveller focus but have not been adequately implemented.

The DICE project supports trainers in the main primary education colleges, their general focus is on Development Education as they are funded by the Dept of Foreign Affairs and they do not have a brief to include Travellers in their intercultural element, the topics for curriculum is at the discretion of individual trainers. The Amnesty 'Lift Off' Project is a human rights education project and includes a minor Traveller Focus and is

also funded by Irish Aid. The 'éist' Project addresses all aspects of diversity through a celebrating of difference and anti-discriminatory lens and is funded by the Bernard van Leer Foundation.

Many other frameworks exist which highlight the need for diversity, equality, intercultural focus however there are many interpretations of what constitutes interculturalism (see Appendix 1) diversity and equality and we would recommend that these concepts are very clearly defined to ensure a holistic and not a tokenistic approach to recognition and inclusion for children and youth. Many services are focusing the 'exotic' and 'touristic' elements of new immigrant cultures while ignoring the area of identity, sense of belonging, prejudice and discrimination. Some of the cultural days are contributing to stereotyping and many efforts, while well meaning, are providing inaccurate information to children about various countries, lifestyles etc. In some cases children's backgrounds are being ignored altogether. All of the above projects operate independently with very little collaboration. It is imperative that we begin to work together to pool our expertise and our vision for inclusion and support the implementation of the Intercultural Education Strategy

Research findings show us that children everywhere learn and absorb prejudice from prevailing attitudes in society. We now know that very young children begin to notice and even develop negative attitudes to difference (Connolly, Paul, Smith, Alan & Kelly, Berni. (2002); van Ausdale, D & Feagin, J.R. (2000). Majority children also need to feel good about who they are without feeling superior to others. Hence this work cannot be a package of materials, bulletin board themes and activities, it needs to be embedded and present in the daily curriculum and should not only be focused on the children who are targets or potential targets for prejudice. We also need to focus on the adults implementing the curriculum and an intercultural strategy. Training for adults is an essential element of this work hence training of both lecturers, students and current school staff has to be a key element of the strategy if the implementation of an intercultural educational strategy is to be successful. Intercultural training and practice must begin in the early years.

## **Conclusion**

NTWF, ITM and Pavee Point welcome this opportunity to make a submission to DES which has allowed us to outline Travellers perspectives and recommendations to ensure that Traveller's culture and identity is validated and supported in the forthcoming Intercultural Education Strategy. We would also welcome the opportunity and offer our support to review the draft strategy document. Our organisations were encouraged by Minister Lenihan's commitments given at DES consultation with the community & voluntary sector on the 8<sup>th</sup> of December that Travellers are to be included in the Intercultural Education Strategy and indeed in any policy/strategy relating to Interculturalism and Integration. We remain concerned however that the Traveller

community will be reflected only as part of the majority Irish population and not as a community with their own distinct culture and identity. Travellers must be recognised, supported in their identity and have a real sense of belonging in the education system and in intercultural initiatives. The development and introduction of the forthcoming Intercultural Education Strategy offers the opportunity to ensure Traveller children and youth feel included and as a consequence take the steps to reach their full potential within the our education system.

## **Traveller Organisations Input on Principles for an Intercultural Education Strategy.**

### **Principles**

1. **Children and youth** must remain at the core of the Intercultural Education Strategy.
2. **Respect for Diversity** (should include The Traveller Community, the Jewish Community, the Muslim Community, religious diversity, black and ethnic minorities, in-ward migration, Refugees (incl. Asylum Seekers) and recent immigrants to Ireland). (NAPAR)
3. **The recognition of racism and discrimination in relation to culture, ethnicity and religion.** (NAPAR)
4. The **mainstreaming** of education provision through inclusive practices by and all involved in the education of **ethnic and cultural minorities and majority population**, at national and local levels.
5. **Equality of access, participation and outcomes in a fully inclusive education system that respects cultural and ethnic diversity of all students.**
6. All students and those in the **wider education community**, incl. parents to have a **knowledge of the English and Irish languages.**
7. **Rights and Responsibilities should be the same for all participants in the wider education community** incl. teachers, principles, parents, students.
8. **High aspirations and high expectations should be the same for all students.**
9. Any **intercultural education strategy should be developed, implemented and monitored in partnership with the key stake-holders**, including; parents, young people, the community and voluntary sector, the informal and formal education practices etc.

10. The development of a **shared vision** around Intercultural Education as well as a clear vision on what this strategy is trying to achieve.

### **Traveller Organisations Proposed Actions**

- **Travellers need to be included in all work relating to interculturalism & integration.**
- **There needs to be Leadership from DES that will ensure** that all communities both majority and minority have a voice and play a part in the development, implementation & evaluation of the strategy.
- **Equality of access, participation and outcomes** in education and the delivery of education should be enhanced to Travellers and other minority ethnic, cultural and religious groups.
- Travellers need to be **included as part** of the work of the **Office of Integration & Minister of Integration.**
- The Educational **curriculum** should reflect diversity, including existing diversity in Ireland, such as the Traveller Community, Roma, the Muslim and Jewish Communities.
- Clear **targets, timeframes and methods** of evaluation for this strategy need to be outlined.
- The employment of members of the Traveller community and other minority, cultural and religious groups to promote a diverse workforce.
- **Targeted Research:** Ensure that systems for collecting data are put in place, with cultural & **ethnic identifiers** in terms of outcomes.

- Travellers and other minority ethnic, cultural and religious groups should be targeted by design **at all levels and sectors** involved in Education.
- The **Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy** should be clearly visible in the Intercultural Strategy for Education.
- Develop **greater links between** the existing intercultural initiatives, the Community and Training Colleges, Voluntary Sector and the Youth Work Sector with relation to implementing this strategy
- **Data needs to be collected** by DES on Travellers and children from New Communities should be made available at a local level to inform work on the ground

### **Awareness raising and recognition of the importance of diversity through**

- **Appropriate resourcing** for implementation of the strategy **and in particular for training.**
- Development of appropriate and comprehensive **in-house training** that is mandatory (pre-service & post service). Ensure that there are enough trainers to deliver this training on the ground. That training is not just once off inputs.
- **Supporting Children’s Identity and sense of belonging** — this action concerns self-identity and a sense of belonging, to build self-esteem and pride in all children.
- **Supporting Children to be comfortable with difference** — this action promotes comfort and empathy with difference amongst children, accepting and supporting the many ways to be.
- **Fostering Children’s Critical Thinking**— this action involves enabling children to recognise what is fair and not fair in their daily lives. Building a sense of fairness and justice and an ability to question.
- **Supporting Children to stand up for themselves and others** this action is about learning to stand up for yourself and others and building the skills needed to counteract unfairness
- **Teacher Training linked to new codes of professional conduct** for teachers.

- Ensuring that the Teacher Council adopt as part of the revised standards for teaching education **that teachers need to demonstrate an ability to teach across a range of cultural and ethnic groups**. That they are able to adopt an inclusive approach in their teaching.
- **Directives & circulars** on the implementation of strategy
- Ensuring the implementation is part of **whole school evaluations**.
- **The development of resources** appropriate to each level (Early Years, Primary, Post Primary, Youth Work, Higher Education) which is broader than just a development education /theme based focus. Resources that support a comprehensive focus on anti-discriminatory practice and support sectors/groups to develop their analysis around Equality, Racism & Discrimination & a shared vision of Interculturalism.
- Training trainers to **deliver training** the **NCCA Intercultural Guidelines** for Primary & Post Primary Level. The training should be **mandatory** for personnel working within Primary & Secondary schools.

## Appendix 1: Terminology

### **Interculturalism:**

The National Action Plan Against Racism describes interculturalism as “the acceptance not only of the principles of equality of rights, values and abilities but also the development of policies to promote interaction, collaboration and exchange with people of different cultures, ethnicity or religion living in the same territory.” The NCCRI agree stating that “Developing a more inclusive and intercultural society is about inclusion by design, not as an add-on or afterthought. It is essentially about creating the conditions for interaction, equality of opportunity, understanding and respect.” (NCCRI)

Interculturalism is an approach that should embrace difference as something positive that can enrich a society. It also recognises racism as a barrier that needs to be tackled in order to create a more inclusive, intercultural society. The concept of interculturalism has replaced earlier concepts of assimilation and multiculturalism. (NPAR)

### **Integration:**

Integration is a multi-faceted, intercultural process that requires the state, majority and minority ethnic and cultural communities to work together towards accepting diversity, without glossing over challenges and barriers such as extremism or racism. (NCCRI)

### **Culture**

Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour, acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiment in artefacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional, i.e. historically derived and selected ideas and especially attached values. The recognition of Travellers’ culture has an importance for Travellers and their status in Irish society. Identity and belonging is vital to everyone as is equal to physical wants and needs. (Task Force Report, 1995)

### **Ethnicity:**

Ethnicity refers to social groups with a shared history, sense of identity, geography and cultural roots which may occur despite racial difference or place of birth. Shared characteristics such as culture, language, religion, and traditions, contribute to a person or group’s identity. Ethnicity has been described as residing in:

- the belief by members of a social group that they are culturally distinctive and different to outsiders;
- their willingness to find symbolic markers of that difference (food habits, religion, forms of dress, language) and to emphasise their significance; and
- their willingness to organise relationships with outsiders so that a kind of ‘group boundary’ is preserved and reproduced. (NCCRI)

Travellers are identified both by themselves and by the majority population as a separate group with their own identity which is key to attributing the ethnic status of

Travellers. The denial of Travellers ethnic status has consequences for Travellers in human rights, equality of opportunity, integration and discrimination.

**Minority Ethnic/ Majority Group(s):**

Sometimes also described as 'Black and minority ethnic group(s)', minority ethnic refers to a group whose ethnicity is distinct from that of the majority of the population. The term 'ethnic minority' is sometimes used, but the term 'minority ethnic' draws attention to the fact that there are majorities and minorities- all with their own ethnicity. White Irish people are the majority ethnic group in this country. However, this term in Ireland does not refer to the Traveller Community. As such the term "ethnic and cultural minority" can be used to be inclusive of this group.

**Racism:**

The UNESCO and UN declarations on racism are the most widely acknowledged definitions of racism and give a clear statement that racism is without scientific foundation and is contrary to internationally accepted human rights. Racism is a specific form of discrimination and exclusion faced by minority ethnic or cultural groups. It is based on the false belief that some 'races' are inherently superior to others because of different skin colour, nationality, ethnic or cultural background. (NCCRI)

The United Nations International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination defines racial discrimination as "Any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on 'race', colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on a equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life".

The UNESCO Declaration states that 'Any theory involving the claim that racial or ethnic groups are inherently superior or inferior, thus implying that some would be entitled to dominate or eliminate others who would be inferior; or which places a value judgement on racial differentiation, has no scientific foundation and is contrary to the moral and ethical principles of humanity.

These internationally accepted definitions clearly indicate that racism is more than a set of attitudes or prejudice. Racism is a specific form of discrimination associated with skin colour and ethnicity. There is also a conscious or unconscious ideological basis to racism that involves superiority and a set of beliefs and processes to justify oppression against people of perceived different 'race' or ethnic origin. (NAPAR)

**Equality:**

Equality is not about treating people the same, because different groups of people have different needs; different groups, including minority ethnic groups experience discrimination in different areas of life and in different ways. Treating everyone the same can have the effect of being an indirect form of discrimination when it is clear that some groups have much greater needs than others. Equality is about securing equality of opportunity, equality of participation and equality of outcome.

The Equal Status legislation (2000) prohibits discrimination on the grounds of:

- Gender
- Marital Status
- Family Status
- Sexual Orientation
- Religious belief
- Age
- Disability
- Race
- Membership of the Traveller Community

## Appendix 2: Core Values and Guiding Principles

In addition to the recommended principals & values outlined in our submission, we are including the values & guiding principles that are being considered by the Northern Ireland Task Force on Traveller Education which may be useful in the development of the Principles for the Intercultural Education Strategy.

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| <b>Core values and Guiding Principles being considered by N.I. Taskforce on Traveller Education</b> |
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The development of a strategy that will affect real change for Travellers in education will involve discussion from a wide-range of partners over a range of issues that impact on Traveller participation and attainment in education.

In order to successfully develop a strategy to improve the educational outcomes for Travellers in Northern Ireland it will be important to have an agreed set of core principles to return to should debate over specific issues cloud over the potential for developing a strategy to deliver change for Travellers in education.

### **Core values and guiding principles:**

- The Task Force should look, where possible, to objectively assess the current provision of education services for Travellers in NI; and in order best to understand this provision, where possible, historical analysis of the provision of Traveller education should be listed in order to accurately account of how and what has been the rationale for supporting Travellers in education in the past to learn from past practice
- The strategy should identify ways forward and based on best national and international practice, especially in relation to education provision for nomadic people
- The task force should recognise education as life-long learning and recognise the role of Traveller as primary educators with supports identified
- Where the education of Traveller children is being assessed, the UN Rights of Child should be at core of all decisions
- The strategy will promote Traveller inclusion in manner that respects and actively promotes Traveller culture and identity within schools
- For real inclusion, changes will be needed to mainstream education services to ensure they can deal positively with diversity; this will recognise the need for supports to be identified and resources put in place in order to deliver real change in education for Travellers
- Based on this, all education for Travellers be integrated, in a phased manner, in an *enhanced* mainstream that will provide real inclusive education

- Any changes have to be carefully planned and will require the capacity of mainstream services to be built-up to deal positively with diversity
- All education services to be provided free of racism and discrimination; the impact of a Traveller education strategy will strengthen mainstream education for all students, parents and teachers, regardless of ethnic identity
- Equality to mean more than equality of access, but also of participation and outcome
- An Intercultural approach
- Active Participation of Travellers in education system to be encouraged
- Extra measures should avoid creating isolation or dependence; where measures are being introduced these should always be based on clear principles of inclusion of Travellers in education
- Training of teachers vital in order to deliver truly intercultural, inclusive education; this needs to include pre-service and in-service training
- Consultation with Travellers on matters relating to their own education is considered important aspect of education process; the report needs to develop a strategy to include measures to consult with Travellers over the life-time of the development of the strategy

**Inclusion**, a key core principle, also needs to be clearly defined and agreed as being:

- Integration of Travellers in mainstream provision at all levels in a fully inclusive model of education
- Provision of resources based on identified need rather than ethnicity
- Sharing of physical resources by Travellers and Settled learners
- Inclusion of Traveller culture into curriculum and into day-to-day life in education system
- Promotion of respect of difference
- Promote ways to respond to Nomadism
- All levels of training of education providers to be informed by equality, diversity & inclusion
- Affirmation and support in education for Travellers with disabilities and also for their parents
- Inclusion will have serious implications for all involved in education

