

Traveller Education in Ireland Parental Involvement in Preschool Education

Anne Boyle

This paper presents a report of a focus group held with mothers of children currently attending a Traveller preschool. Parental involvement in the Traveller preschools is the central topic for this research. The overall aim of the research project is to develop an approach to parental involvement based on equality and dialogue and this focus group research represents an initial exploration of the field.

Introduction

Irish Travellers are an indigenous minority in Ireland, documented as being part of Irish society for centuries. They have a long shared history and value system which make them a distinct group. They have their own language, customs and traditions (Pavee Point Travellers Centre, www.paveepoint.ie). Travellers have been identified as one group at risk of failure in education. Their failure to benefit from education can be related to their unequal position in Irish society where they experience high levels of prejudice and discrimination and where their culture is not recognised and valued. Many approaches and interventions have been implemented to encourage enrolment and attendance by Travellers. Among these are the Traveller preschools referred to in this paper. These have been supported by government for the past twenty-five years as a compensatory educational measure.

This paper presents a report of a focus group held with mothers of children currently attending a Traveller preschool. The focus group was selected as a dialogic form which could elicit information on the feelings, beliefs, aspirations and fears of the group. Parental involvement in the Traveller preschools is the central topic for this research as an evaluation of the preschools had recommended that each preschool should develop a policy to encourage parental involvement in the preschool. The overall aim of the research project is to develop an approach to parental involvement based on equality and dialogue and this focus group research represents an initial exploration of the field. Information was sought concerning the amount and nature of involvement the mothers believed they had at present and the amount and type of involvement which they would like to have. In order to ascertain this, information was sought concerning parental knowledge of the preschool and their relationship with it. Because Travellers are an ethnic minority, views were sought on their perception of cultural representation and reflection.

Research Site

The Traveller preschool which is the subject of this research was established in 1981 and is one of 45 Traveller preschools throughout Ireland. It opens three hours each day for 183 days a year—the same days as schools in the primary school system in Ireland. The Department of Education and Science part funds the Traveller preschools. Staff in the preschool consists of a teacher who is a member of the majority community and a childcare worker who is a member of the Traveller community. It should be noted that not all Traveller preschools have a Traveller member of staff.

Parents have a right to be involved in their children's education and research indicates that when parents are involved, their children have better experiences of education. Though both mothers and fathers interact with the preschool, it was decided that this initial group should

comprise mothers only. It was felt that this would lead to less awkwardness and would help the group to gel better. Fathers will be targeted at a later stage in the research – either through focus groups or one-to-one interviews.

Research Themes

Four key themes were devised, along with associated prompts: (1) Parent knowledge of the preschool, (2) Perceptions of Traveller culture, (3) Perceptions of parental involvement in the preschools and (4) Participants' own experiences of education. The areas were selected as an organic way to ascertain how much involvement parents felt they had and how much they would like. To do this, it was necessary to ascertain information about the preschool, such as why they chose it, how much they knew about the programme followed in the preschool and the perceived benefits to the child of their attendance at the preschool. This was the first key question raised at the focus group. The second key question regarded Traveller culture and its representation in the preschool. This information is important as Traveller children should find their culture reflected in the preschool and the atmosphere in the preschool should be home-like. The third key question concerned how involved the parents perceived themselves to be with the preschool and how and what type of involvement they would like to have. Mothers' perception of the type and amount of involvement fathers might have in the preschool is explored also. The final key question concerns the mothers' own experience of schooling. The literature indicates that one's experiences, particularly negative experiences, will influence parental involvement in their children's education and the likelihood of parents engaging with the schools and advocating on behalf of their children. Travellers do not achieve equal success from their schooling as their settled peers. Thus, an account of the parents' experiences of their own schooling informs their relationship and involvement with their children's schools.

Sample

Eight mothers were invited to participate. It was decided not to mix the mothers and fathers at this stage. It was explained to the two fathers who regularly accompany children to and from the preschool that the group was being held and that they would be invited to contribute to the research at a later stage. They were agreeable to this and to confining the group to the mothers. The fathers will be included in later research, either through a focus group of fathers or through one to one interviews.

The mothers were assured of confidentiality, and for that reason are identified by pseudonyms in this report. The mothers who participated are referred to as follows:

- Niamh: A mother of eight children, most of whom attended the preschool.
- Orla: A mother of one child who is currently attending the preschool.
- Una: A mother of four children, all of whom attended the preschool. She does not currently have a child in the preschool.
- Sinéad: A mother of seven children, all of whom attended the preschool.
- Deirdre: A mother of eight children, all of whom attended the preschool.
- Fiona: A mother of two children. Her second child is currently in the preschool. Her older child previously attended.
- Neasa: A mother of three children. Her second child is currently attending the preschool and her oldest child previously attended.

Findings

In presenting the findings, views of participants in relation to their own schooling are presented first, as these are likely to inform their views in relation to parental involvement in the preschools. This is followed by their comments on education generally which leads on to their views on the preschool. This is followed by their comments in relation to involvement with the preschool, and finally the issue of culture.

Own experience of school

Asked about their own schooling, Orla who had been withdrawn as a child from mainstream class to a special Traveller-only class said, “it wasn’t great for me” and Sinéad felt the same. Orla claimed that the Traveller children weren’t brought up to the same standard as the rest of the class and she said that she, herself, had left at age fourteen. Fiona recalled an upsetting experience that she had had as a primary school student when the teacher in the Traveller class hit her. She returned to refer to the incident on two further occasions during the course of the session and it was clear that this experience had hurt her deeply. Neasa spoke of her own experience of school and of being put at the back of the class with the other Traveller children. She said that if there was a maths test the Traveller children were told that they didn’t have to do it. Niamh stated her belief that children are sent to school to get an education; that they should have progressed according to their age and the class they were in. These mothers believed that they were treated differently because they were Travellers. They did not feel that the special Traveller class was a good thing and they mentioned that it was very embarrassing for the Traveller children to be withdrawn from the mainstream class, though they acknowledged that some Traveller children may have needed extra help. Neasa told a story about a teacher who made a sarcastic remark to her when she was in primary school. At the time she made a smart retort but now looking back, many years later, she feels hurt and belittled by the remark. The others supported her in agreeing that it was wrong of the teacher and that it was apparent that it would affect her.

The mothers felt that Traveller children were still not getting the same attention as the settled children and were not getting the same education and were leaving school without a proper education. Niamh, who did not go into detail about her own experience except an initial comment that it was fine, spoke of a recent experience that she had with her son’s school. She believed that she had not received the support from the principal that she should have. Her young son, who has a medical condition that requires regular hospital appointments necessitating absence from school, was crying outside the school and didn’t want to go in. The principal was standing at the door and the mother appealed to him to talk to the boy, to which she said he responded “that is your job”. This mother felt that there was a big difference between the boys’ school and the girls’ school in relation to the support they received. She said that if her daughter was going into school crying the teacher would come out and “catch her by the hand and bring her in and talk to her”. On the other hand, she said that her son was afraid to go back to school. The mothers were not happy that children at the local second level school could go around town without the school knowing. They believed too that if a child was missing from school the parents should be contacted and if a child was late then the school should check for a reason. Orla commented that it was a difficult job for a teacher with a large class.

The group said that they believed that Traveller children today are not getting treated fairly or equally and do not get the same education as the settled children. Niamh cited the

comparison between, for example, one of her daughters and a settled child leaving school. Taking that both went to school for the same period of time, she claimed “I guarantee you the settled person has more education than the Traveller.” She said that her son is not writing at the level appropriate for his age – indeed he is far below it – and yet she had had no contact from the school to explain why this is so. The child isn’t able to take down his homework properly because of his literacy skills and neither he nor his mother is able to decipher what homework he needs to do. She said that she has sent letters to the school concerning this problem. The child “doesn’t mind [that he cannot complete his homework] because his teacher doesn’t care”.

Orla believes that setting the compulsory school leaving age of 16 was a good thing, as in the past once Traveller children had completed the First Holy Communion (age 8) and Confirmation (age 12) they were kept out of school. The compulsory older age gives them a better chance to get more education, she claimed. Neasa talked about her little boy who was bullied by other children in the presence of the teacher who took no action. When Neasa spoke to the teacher after class she didn’t get a satisfactory response. The teacher appeared to blame the child saying that he didn’t mix well or talk much. Neither was she satisfied with the subsequent action taken by the teacher.

The mothers mentioned experiences with the school which they felt were bad or hurtful. Niamh mentioned a standoff between the school principal and her son. Her son had been bullied, his jacket torn and his lunch money taken off him. When the parents went to the school, they did not feel that the situation was addressed properly. Subsequently, the principal paid for the jacket but imposed a condition on the son, who was 15, that he must use a school bag. All the mothers present reacted with laughter, as a Traveller boy of this age is considered to be a man and it would be embarrassing for him to carry a school bag. The school didn’t back down, no compromise was reached and the boy never went back to school. Neasa told of her sisters’ recent experience in the same school when they overheard a teacher speaking to a colleague in an empty classroom with the door open and unaware that she was being overheard. She referred to Travellers using a derogatory expression. Niamh, who has two daughters who are out of school, said she didn’t send them to this school which is mixed, but wanted to send them to an all girls school in town which, she claimed, is very strict. These two girls were not in school and Niamh didn’t expand on this.

Many of these mothers’ experiences of the education system illustrate and construct a cultural chasm between school and Traveller. In addition to numerous examples of overt prejudice, those working within the educational system often make little accommodation for the differing cultural norms of the Traveller community. For the mothers in this study, their experiences of, and attitude to, the school system came from both their own experiences as students, and their more recent interaction as parents. Despite often negative personal experiences, the parents are generally strongly invested in their children’s educations, but can find the school an unwelcoming or unaccommodating environment.

Preschool

Responding to the question of why they sent their children to the preschool, the mothers felt that it gave them the opportunity to learn something before they went to primary school, that the preschool provided a start for them which made it easier to settle into primary school. All but Orla have had children in the preschool previously; some mothers have had a large number of children attend. The group added that attendance at this preschool benefited the children because when they moved on to primary, they knew more and had learned more. Niamh said that the

teacher in junior infants couldn't believe all her little girl knew when she started there. The mothers said that they were not under pressure to send the children. Parents chose the preschool because they believed that their child would acquire skills that would benefit them when they transferred to the local primary school. Niamh also said that her child expressed a desire to go and some mothers said it gave them a few hours away from the child. Orla, a mother of an only child, commented that she would not have a preference between a Traveller and non Traveller preschool. The other mothers stressed the desire for continuity for their children as the older siblings had previously attended this preschool. They said that choosing the Traveller preschool was not about keeping the children away from settled children but that they were used to and felt comfortable with the teacher and the preschool.

The mothers spoke of talking to their children about what they did in preschool and they related examples of what the children had told them about their day. Fiona commented "he loves it". The mothers listed out what they believed the children engaged in during the time in preschool. They mentioned "playing games, drawing, colouring in, and counting." Niamh said that her little girl "does this teapot thing" and pretends to be the teacher. Another said that the children were "singing and dancing and naming the children". The mothers talked of the benefits of attending the preschool which included having more advantages when they go to school and being less shy and not crying and of finding it easier to settle in. They felt that they learned a lot in the preschool, including how to socialise with other children. Deirdre cited the example of her son who had attended the local crèche prior to enrolment in the preschool. He did not settle there and the staff had difficulty in dealing with him. She said that since coming to the preschool she had no bother with him. Sinead commented that "it makes the world of difference [to be] in with their own when they are all Travellers".

Mothers believed that it was very important that their children got attention from the staff. They felt that the small group facilitated this and they contrasted this with the local primary school where they said the teacher can't go around and sit with every child. Niamh commented "my [child] feels so homely here. She loves going to school". She said that the fact that the teacher/staff sat down with the child and gave them their attention is what she always liked about the preschool. Niamh referred to what Orla had said about it not making a difference to her whether it was an all Traveller preschool or otherwise. Niamh said that it does make a difference to her because all the children get attention, not just particular children. She added that when talking to women with children in the preschool they would say what their child and the other children did. They felt that "They [the children] are treated the one way here".

The mothers discussed the Traveller only nature of the preschools and they felt that the children were more comfortable when they were with somebody they know. Sinéad commented that she'd "rather them in with somebody of their own". On the other hand, they agreed that their children get on well with local settled children. Deirdre commented that she wouldn't mind a mix of Traveller and settled children but that there would "have to be a few Travellers there". They commented that this particular preschool was always a Traveller preschool, that it is a good preschool with only Travellers, but that they wouldn't mind if it was mixed, "for one reason the children are mixed in Junior Infants". They saw the opportunity for breaking the barriers between Traveller and settled and allowing the opportunity for people to see each other as individuals – and of settled people being able to see Travellers as ordinary people. In the event of a mixed Traveller and settled preschool, Orla felt that there should be equal numbers of both, Fiona felt that there should be more places for Travellers as they tend to enrol their children late

and tend to miss out on places. Niamh commented that if there were greater proportion of settled children then they would be treated better than the Traveller children.

The mothers demonstrate mixed attitudes to the notion of integration and to the Traveller-only nature of the preschool, being generally positive regarding its history as a Traveller-only space, but also remaining open to integration in the future. It is interesting to consider these attitudes in the context of mothers' own experiences in school, particularly their strong opposition to the Traveller-only classes, within the primary school, in which many of them were placed. The desire, if integration of the pre-school were to occur, that a critical mass of Traveller students should be present reflects in part a concern for the maintenance and support of Traveller culture that became evident as the mothers moved to consider their involvement with the pre-school, as parents.

Involvement with the preschool

Asked about their involvement with the preschool, Orla responded, "from my point of view, I don't think we are involved very much with it." She suggested that there should be monthly meetings between the parents and the teacher along the lines of parent-teacher meetings in primary school – so that parents might get feedback about the child.

The group felt that the preschool was welcoming and they felt that they could ask questions and were confident that they would get the information that they desired. They said that when they asked questions they get a straight answer and that they could talk to the teacher easily. They contrasted this situation with the teachers in the primary school, saying, "they don't seem to understand as much" and they mentioned a different "vibe" in the preschool. The group said that they find the pictures, craft, rhymes etc. that the children take home from the preschool interesting. Deirdre spoke animatedly about a picture of the family that her little boy had taken home. The suggestion that the parents might like to meet as a group to discuss the preschool was not seen as something that would succeed. They felt that they would just chat generally rather than confine themselves to the topic and that they would need the teacher to keep the group focused.

When asked whether they would like to participate in the management committee for the preschool, Niamh said that being a member of the management committee would require a person to have a good education, and Orla said that she didn't realise that parents could be on the committee. She said, "if the words were broken down and we understand them in our own way I would prefer if there were some parents with kids in this school would go on it". She went on to talk about the contribution parents could make in lobbying for facilities etc. Many of the parents said that they would be willing to come into the classroom but wondered about how their child might react when the mother or father turned up. They all agreed that they would like to help with the annual preschool outing. The group discussed the organisation of the preschool and felt that the three-hour day was too short. While the 9.30 start was fine, they felt that the day could be lengthened by an hour or an hour-and-a-half, but not any longer because of the young age of the children. Considering these issues, some parents felt that if they were on the committee that they "would have power". There were obstacles to involvement, both in coming into the classroom and in taking a place on the management committee, according to the mothers and they mentioned issues like time constraints and lack of baby sitting facilities. Fiona stated in relation to babysitting, "that's the catch for most Travelling people, for the women in particular." The mothers felt that there would be benefits for the child if they had more involvement, saying

that the child would be excited about the parent coming in and Orla felt that the child would be continuously asking the parent when they would be coming in again.

On the topic of fathers' involvement, Orla said that they were the "fathers' daughters and sons as much as the mothers", but Fiona felt that "whatever chance you have with mothers, you have no chance with fathers" and that most fathers don't have time as most are working. Fiona said that the fathers would be shy. Orla said that the best thing about the monthly parent-teacher meetings, suggested earlier in the session, would be that if both parents came in and got feedback that it would be attractive to a lot of parents. She envisaged these meetings as the teacher telling the parents how the child was getting on, whether or not they were improving, and what the child's behaviour was like. She said parents would be more comfortable when they got this feedback.

The mothers are very cognizant of the impact that their limited formal education has on their ability to participate in structures such as the school management committee, but are focused on processes and accommodations that could facilitate them in overcoming such barriers, identifying the need for a shared approach by parents and other committee members in addressing issues around language. Practical barriers, such as the need for childcare or babysitting, highlight in part the gendered nature of these barriers. This is further underlined by the discussion over involvement by fathers, with the mothers, while generally supporting involvement by fathers in the school, identifying a number of cultural and social factors that would require concerted effort to develop and sustain such involvement. Gendered parenting roles are, of course, not unique to Travellers, but some of the issues raised do draw on the specific nature of Traveller culture.

Traveller culture

The group discussed the representation of Traveller culture in the preschool. Una stated "It is a Traveller preschool. They are Travellers". The discussion turned to the difficulties associated with the current temporary preschool premises. They felt that there could be more pictures of Travellers and that it would be nice for the children to be told about Travelling. The mothers then raised the issue of the Travellers' language, cant. It was generally agreed that the mothers would like Cant to be used, promoted and taught in the preschool. The mothers' own command of cant varied – the younger ones had less knowledge of it. Sinéad said that her small children could use and understand some few basic words in Cant – for example man and woman. Orla suggested that the preschool staff should become involved in teaching Cant to the children while Sinéad felt that if Cant was used at home the children might pick it up. Orla said that if Cant wasn't taught in the school it might die out.

The mothers spoke of the fact that many parents and grandparents had been reared in caravans. They felt that this could be reflected in some way in the preschool. They mentioned that this history could be transmitted by the Traveller childcare worker who could also inform the teacher. They felt that for Traveller preschools where there were no Traveller staff members then the preschool could "bring in a Traveller" and "bring in parents" as this had been done in a primary school in another part of the city. Orla said, "I'd do it. I'd have no problem talking to the children here". Some mothers felt that while the four and five year olds were old enough to understand what they were suggesting, that the three year olds were too young. Deirdre disagreed, saying that from nine months "Traveller children ...start to take in things, they listen to what their parents say, they learn from the home". Returning to the topic of who best could talk about the Travelling way of life and Traveller culture to the children a local Traveller

woman who writes poetry and stories was suggested. A number of older Traveller women were also suggested, saying, “The old people know more”. They also felt that it was important to get a Traveller who could talk to the children. The group was unanimous in their agreement that it was a good thing to have Travellers working in the preschool, Sinead commenting that there was always a Traveller and settled person working in the preschool and that it was a good balance. Orla commented that “even in other preschools where there’s Traveller and settled children together there should be a Traveller person working there. Not for the Traveller children themselves, but for either.”

The mothers discussed the representation of Traveller culture in primary school and they had mixed views. Fiona said that the children get embarrassed if there is talk about horses. It should be noted here that horses are extremely important within Traveller culture, related to their nomadism. Una retorted that there was nothing to be ashamed about if the teacher mentioned horses. Orla said that she was not going to send her child to the local school, where all the local Traveller children go, as she claimed that there were too many Travellers going there. None of the other mothers expressed this view and they have children attending this school.

Discussion

Four themes were selected: own experience of school, knowledge and experience of preschool, involvement with preschool and opinions in relation to Traveller culture. These four themes were selected in order to elicit insights and discussion concerning how these Traveller mothers perceive particular aspects of education and to ascertain their views on how they are involved and what they would regard as a desirable level and type of involvement in the Traveller preschool which their children attend. While there are four distinct themes, these combine to provide an integrated understanding of the Traveller parents’ experience and views concerning education. The parents’ positive relationship with, and perception of, the preschool contrasted with that of the primary school, yet the parents state that they do not feel involved with the preschool and that they would like to be. Recognition and representation of Traveller culture was important to all the mothers present. The confidence that they had in their identity was apparent.

The discussion on the parents’ own experiences of education did not provide as much data as anticipated. Those who spoke referred to hurtful or negative primary school experiences, but not all parents joined in. One of the reasons that individuals may feel reticent about sharing such personal information is that the focus group setting does not provide the feeling of security that a personal interview does, notwithstanding the guarantee of confidentiality. Many of the hurtful experiences have left people feeling vulnerable and sometimes ashamed, and they would not feel safe sharing them with their adult peers. Though they shared less than might have been anticipated in relation to their own experiences, this was partly counteracted by the information they volunteered about school experiences of their children in settings other than the preschool.

Traveller children do not achieve the same school success as their settled peers, as seen from the Task Force Report (*Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community*, 1995) and as stated by the parents in this focus group. It is interesting that this experience of school failure is shared by minority ethnic groups in other countries. For example, in relation to Maori people in New Zealand, Else reports: “Maori students as a group spend less time in the education system and do less well in it, than non-Maori students as a group” (Else, 1997, 1). Hilliard raises concern at the disproportionate placement of people of colour in certain categories of special

education in the US (Hilliard, in Delpit & Dowdy, 2002, 90). This is the experience also of Romany children in Central and Eastern Europe, as described by Rona and Lee (Rona & Lee, 2001).

Despite their own painful experiences and the lack of success generally experienced by Traveller children within the education system, the parents were hopeful for their children's education, though they believed that they were not being treated fairly and equally with settled children. The parents referred to a number of negative incidents which involved their children and which, the parents believed, were not adequately resolved by the school. Parents felt that they could not break through the barrier with the school. Examples include the mother whose little boy was bullied in the presence of the teacher and the other mother whose son dropped out of second level school as a result of an incident which was not resolved.

The preschool has built up trust and familiarity among the parents. The staff are familiar, and the parents describe a warm and welcoming atmosphere in the preschool, which is one of the desirable qualities as a prerequisite for parental involvement described by Espinosa (Espinosa, 1995). Parents believe that in the preschool their children are helped both socially and academically for entry to primary school. These parents talk to their children about their school day and like to see them bring home materials, yet they do not feel involved in the preschool. They were not aware of the various possibilities for involvement in the preschool and they wanted to be involved.

They commented on the barriers to involvement for example the possibility of not being able to understand the overly formal language of the management committee, but felt that once these were broken down they would be in a position to contribute as long as they could understand the language. This concern about overly formal language is seen in Hanafin and Lynch's study (Hanafin & Lynch, 2002) where they cite Samantha's experience of isolation and of not belonging at her first meeting on a parent representatives council. She never went back after that initial meeting. The management committee of a Traveller preschool would not be as large or necessarily as formal as these primary school representative committees. Because they are smaller and less formal, it may be easier to take account of cultural difference amongst members, ensuring that all can take part equally.

The mothers' perception of fathers' involvement indicated that they believed that fathers would attend the parent-teacher meetings but that they would be too busy for the type of involvement that the mothers might engage in; it was also mentioned that they might be too shy. It must be pointed out that fathers have had a good relationship with the preschool over the years and it is often the fathers who drop off and collect the children. When they collect the children they will often take time to admire a piece of work the child has done during the day.

The representation of Travellers in the classroom has changed over the years. Formerly, they were ignored or portrayed in a negative manner. Winnie McDonagh (McDonagh, 2004, 95) tells her story of the shame she felt at the negative depiction of Travellers in a story in her Irish language text book entitled *Campa Tincéirí*. It must be noted that the mothers in this focus group had very strong ideas of how their children's ethnic identity could be supported in school and they placed themselves central to this support.

Conclusion

As noted earlier, this paper is based on a focus group that is part of a larger project on parental involvement in the special preschools. This research, while providing much useful

information in itself will also, therefore, inform the later research in this project. Some of the questions/prompts used here worked well and others were too closed or weren't explained clearly enough, so that they elicited "yes" and "no" answers. This happened especially at the beginning of the discussion on culture and perhaps too much reliance was put on the group coming up with ideas themselves without strategic prompting. The assistance in the group of the child care worker, who is herself a Traveller, was very beneficial as she decoded some of the language and concepts. The difficulty with the language was something remarked upon by the women themselves in relation to committee meetings, and they suggested that the language used would need to be simplified.

It may be desirable to proof future questionnaires with a member of the Traveller community, such as the childcare worker, where these are intended for use with Traveller respondents, to ensure that they are presented in such a way that their meaning is clear.

The mothers at this session were all familiar to the researcher, and this made it possible, for example, to notice that one mother in particular was very quiet and to make an effort to draw her out. This reticence might not be so apparent where all participants are strangers. One mother talked a lot, contributing very interesting, relevant and useful information. However, she may have dominated a little too much, given the time constraints, so that the views of some others may have been squeezed out. Also, because some of the mothers came late it caused a break in the flow of discussion as the informed consent letter was read out each time somebody arrived. It would be a good idea to ask the mothers themselves what time would suit and pin it down to a time which suits everyone. The following are some final observations about the session:

- The mothers needed a smoking break in the middle of the session.
- Some didn't talk about past school experiences – questionnaires may be needed to bring out that information in further research.
- It would also be interesting to check whether mothers had been in a special Traveller class and to compare experiences of those who were with those who were not withdrawn for the special Traveller class.

Overall, the focus group was a success. It elicited useful information and also provided some ideas on how subsequent research should be approached.

AUTHOR

Anne Boyle is a teacher at a Preschool for Traveller children in Ireland. She is currently pursuing a PhD at St. Patrick's College, Dublin, focused on parental involvement in the Traveller preschools in Ireland. anne@funferal.org

References

- Barnett, J. M. (2005). *Focus Groups Tips for Beginners: TCALL Occasional Research Paper No. 1*. Retrieved 20 October, 2005
- Cohen, L., Manna, L., & Morrison, K. (2003). *Research Methods in Education* (5th Edition ed.): Routledge-Falmer.
- Delpit, L., & Dowdy, J. K. (2002). *The Skin that we Speak: Thoughts on Language and Culture in the Classroom*. New York: The New Press.
- Else, A. (1997). "Summary of Maori Participation & Performance in Education" based on an original report Maori Participation & Performance in Education: A Literature Review and

- Research Programme prepared by Simon Chappel, Richard Jefferies and Rita Walker for the New Zealand Ministry of Education.
- Espinosa, L. (1995). Hispanic Parent Involvement in Early Childhood Programs. *ERIC Digest*, ED382412.
- Gibbs, A. (1997). Focus Groups. *Social Research Update*(19).
- Hanafin, J., & Lynch, A. (2002). Peripheral Voices: parental involvement, social class, and educational disadvantage. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 23(1), 35-49.
- Hilliard, A. G. I. (2002). Language, Culture and the Assessment of African American Children. In L. Delpit & J. K. Dowdy (Eds.), *The Skin that we Speak: Thoughts on Language and Culture in the Classroom*. New York: The New Press.
- McDonagh, Winnie (2004) "Travellers and education: a personal perspective" in Deegan et al., *Primary Voices: Equality, Diversity and Childhood in Irish Primary Schools*, Institute of Public Administration
- O'Hanlon, C., & Holmes, P. (2004). *The Education of Gypsy and Traveller Children*: Trentham Books.
- Punch, K. F. (2005). *Introduction to Social Research: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches* (Second Edition ed.). London: Sage.
- Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community*. (Task Force Report)(1995). Dublin: Government of Ireland.
- Rona, S., & Lee, L. E. (2001). *School Success for Roma Children: Step by Step Special Schools Initiative Interim Report*. New York: Open Society Institute.