

***Elective Home Education and Traveller families in contemporary times: Educational Spaces and Equality.***

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## **Acknowledgement**

I am very grateful to all those who agreed to participate in my research project. I am especially grateful to all my Traveller families as hearing their voices will provide better insights and understandings about education and inequality. I would also like to thank Ken Marks, Chris Winter, my family and friends for their support and faith in my work.

## **Abstract**

Traveller communities form a distinctive and ever-growing group of home-educators in England. This thesis examines the reasons why Traveller families take up Elective Home Education (EHE). Although there is a substantial research literature about the difficulties Travellers experience in school, there is limited research on Traveller families' experiences of EHE.

The aim of my research was to explore the reasons why Traveller children are home-educated and to illuminate issues of educational inequality that lie therein. I wish to inform current understandings of the education system, as experienced by a marginalised community and to work towards making this system more socially just. This study considers equality issues in education for Traveller children within two educational spaces, mainstream school and EHE, by documenting the rarely-heard accounts of a sample of Traveller families. I interviewed 11 different Traveller families and the main professionals responsible for EHE in one particular Local Authority in England.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) provided an appropriate theoretical framework for this study. CRT focuses on concepts of racism and inequality as well as providing methodological approaches such as storytelling and counter-stories to give voice to Traveller families. I found that although many Traveller families were satisfied with home-education as preferable to mainstream school, they were all compelled to take it up, rather than adopting it as a positive and desirable choice.

Racism, bullying and discrimination in school were commonly cited reasons for the uptake of EHE. EHE was chosen by my Traveller families as a safe educational space. My study reveals how current education systems do not facilitate the opportunities which many Traveller families desire for their children's success. Wide-spread racism still denies many Traveller children equitable educational opportunities. This study's findings will, it is hoped, inform new understandings of racism and education to address these inequalities.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

In England the term *Elective Home Education* (EHE) is the official government term for home-education. Home-education describes the situation in which parents or carers elect to provide an education for their children at home rather than sending them to school (DCSF, 2007). Positions and views concerning home-education vary substantially. Within research there are those who are critical, those who argue for better regulations and those who advocate home-education; positions which will be elaborated on in the following chapter. Nevertheless, at this point I want to confirm that I do not advocate or disagree with home-education, nor will this be the purpose of my research. The aim of this research is to explore the reasons Traveller children are being home-educated and to illuminate issues of educational inequality.

My knowledge of Travellers' use of EHE stems from my previous role as a practitioner working with Traveller communities. I worked for a Local Authority (LA) within a team of professionals who campaign for race equality and diversity in education. The team works with schools, parents and communities to improve educational access and inclusion for Black and Minority Ethnic groups, which includes Travellers and learners of English as an additional language. I have observed firsthand the inequalities Traveller children and their families experience in education and wider society. My curiosity regarding this particular research project began with my awareness of the difficulties Traveller children experience in school and the high numbers of Traveller families who opt for EHE at the secondary school phase. My understanding and interest in EHE increased with the government review of EHE in England, which began in 2009 (Badman, 2009).

This thesis presents a critical inquiry into the reasons Traveller families take up Elective Home Education and considers potential equality issues arising for Traveller children within two educational spaces: mainstream school and EHE. I start with the situation of Traveller children experiencing long-term underachievement in mainstream school in England (Tyler, 2005). For many Traveller children mainstream school signifies a space of inequalities. I consider EHE as an alternative educational space to mainstream school. I investigate Travellers' EHE experiences and the complexities and consequences that arise from current EHE policy and practices. In 2004 O'Hanlon and Holmes pointed out that the majority of research on Travellers' experiences of education had concerned itself with Travellers' relationship to school, but only consulted with schools and official bodies to do so. Since this time several studies have

sought to capture Traveller parent and pupil viewpoints on schooling (Derrington and Kendal, 2004; Wilkin *et al*, 2010). In contrast, this thesis concentrates on Travellers' perspectives and experiences of EHE, which remain marginalised and unheard. This is an approach which Critical Race Theory (CRT) supports and is discussed further in later chapters. In this study CRT provides a theoretical framework and a critical lens to identify the struggles and conflicts that exist within these two educational spaces (Gillborn, 2005).

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an initial introduction to my research project and the structure is as follows: I begin by explaining the nature of home-education and the use and definitions of the terms *Racism* and *Travellers* within this thesis. As it is not possible to understand any phenomenon without reference to the context in which it is embedded (Guba and Lincoln, 1985), I provide some contextual background of the two educational spaces which are the focus of my research: mainstream education and EHE. I then explain the process and outcomes of the Review of Elective Home Education in England, which was conducted by Graham Badman for the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) in 2009. This is followed by my research aims, questions and justification of this study. I explain the research design, including my positionality as a researcher. This is followed by the significance of the study. This chapter concludes with the structure of the thesis to follow.

### **Elective Home Education**

In the present day the majority of parents in England send their children to mainstream school. Nevertheless, parents can also choose to educate their children at home. Home-education is not a new phenomenon and throughout recorded history parents have taught their own children (Petrie, 2001). Home-education was considered the natural educational format for many children up to as recently as the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Taylor and Petrie, 2000). Blok (2004) confirms that even after the evolution of school-based education, home-education remained a serious alternative to institutional, compulsory schooling.

Yet today it is home-education which is often depicted as the modern and radically Western alternative to school (Neuman and Aviram, 2003). Monk (2004) suggests this is because education is underpinned by a discourse of socialisation within which school attendance is perceived as necessary for healthy child development. Hence, home-educators are often looked upon as different, deviant and strange. Indeed LA officers

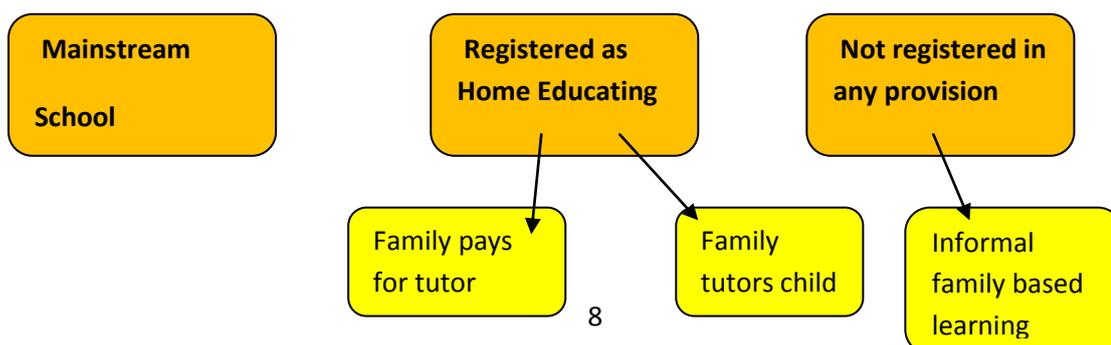
and teachers are often astonished that parents feel that they can provide their children with an education of the same standard as that delivered through school (Webb, 2010).

In a time when mainstream education and the achievement of children within school is regularly scrutinised and monitored, it seems surprising that the area of EHE has not, until recently, attracted academic, government or public attention (Monk, 2004). There are no national statistics pertaining to the exact number of EHE children in England, as current EHE guidance does not require parents or carers who are home-educating their children to make themselves known to their LA. Consequently, home-education is a young field of research and research into home-education in the UK is in short supply.

Lack of research and accurate data in England make it difficult to establish a comprehensive understanding of the circumstances and content of home-education and the number of children involved. Nevertheless, it is apparent that the number of home-educated children is growing; recent research suggested the total number to be in excess of 80,000 (Badman, 2009). Ivatts' (2006) research, across 23 LAs in England, identified a total of 2989 children registered for EHE. Approximately a third of these children were from Traveller communities (1023). Available figures suggest that a considerable number of parents, including Traveller parents, are home-educating.

At this point it is important to clarify the complex reality of education. Although this thesis focuses upon two legal educational spaces for Traveller children: school and EHE, there are additional educational alternatives such as Pupil Referral Units and Private Education, which are not covered. It is also important to stress that there are significant numbers of Traveller children who are not registered in any provision. Ofsted (1999; 2003) estimated that 12,000 Traveller pupils of secondary age were not registered in any school. The diagram below provides a visual representation of the various educational options open to and used by Traveller families in Saltfield.

**Figure 1. Educational options open to and used by Traveller families in Saltfield.**



Most educational research on EHE derives from the US where there are large numbers of home-educators, yet the EHE situation in the US is markedly different from the UK. A common motivator for US home-educating parents has been religion as many Christian families believe that it is the role of the family to educate their children (Van Galen, 1991; Webb, 2010). Nonetheless, I want to urge caution about any generalisations concerning EHE early on, as research (Arora, 2002, 2006; Rothermel, 2003; DCSF, 2007, Winstanley, 2009) has shown that the reasons parents choose to home-educate are diverse and their motivations change over time. Thus home-educators, like other families, are not one homogenous group in any country or region across the world. Yet the lack of research on EHE in the UK context has meant that few have had their voices heard on the subject.

### **Travellers, Racism & a note on Terminology**

*Traveller* is a commonly accepted term that covers a range of identifiable ethnic groups, the largest being Gypsies, Roma and Irish Travellers. The term *Traveller* is also sometimes extended to include *Occupational Travellers*, the most significant being the Fairground or Showman community<sup>1</sup>, and also more recently New Age Travellers.

Travellers from the Gypsy/Roma and Irish groupings have been living in Britain since the fifteenth century and have maintained a strong sense of cultural identity. Exact numbers are unknown<sup>2</sup>, but in 2006 it was estimated that there were approximately 300,000 such Travellers in Britain (CRE, 2006). The much smaller Showmen population has been estimated by Clark (2006) as between 21,000 and 25,000. Clark notes the strong sense of the Fairground as a community with its own culture and heritage. The nomadic traditions of the community date back to pre-Norman times (Showmen's Guild, 1987) but the modern community has key roots in the Victorian era, with the advent of steam powered rides and other Fairground innovations leading up to the formation of an organized national structure which has further cemented the distinctiveness of the community:

The formation of the United Kingdom Van Dwellers Association in 1889 was the most decisive and important event in the history of travelling showpeople as a community.....In 1917 the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, as it became known, was recognised as the trade association of the travelling funfair business and acquired the right to stand as representatives for the business at both local and national levels, a position it still occupies to this day (National Fairground Archive, 2012).

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<sup>1</sup> This community will be referred to as 'Showmen' in this thesis.

<sup>2</sup> Travellers from minority ethnic groupings were not included in the national census until 2011.

Romany Gypsies, Travellers of Irish Heritage and Showmen families are distinctive communities but they both attract a pattern of hostility and prejudice which seems to have developed as a direct reaction to their nomadic tradition (Kiddle, 1999; Danaher, 1995, 2001). This is an historical phenomenon. Discrimination against Travellers remains a pressing issue for all Traveller communities in England today. Discrimination can be positive, however here I am referring to the negative form of discrimination. Society has attached a detrimental label to Traveller people and their communities based upon their *difference* (Thompson, 2011). Discrimination continues to have a marked effect on the acceptance and inclusion of Traveller children into mainstream schooling, especially at the secondary phase of education. This is exemplified in the LA which is the focus of this study (and referred to from here on as Saltfield LA<sup>3</sup>), where many Traveller families were found to be using EHE as an alternative to school. Nevertheless, my sample of Traveller families is particular in its social characteristics and therefore the take-up of EHE by Travellers in this LA may not be typical when compared to the national picture.

Defining a Gypsy, Roma or Traveller is a matter of self-ascription and does not exclude members of these communities who live in houses. Indeed, ethnic or cultural identity is not lost when members of Traveller groups settle, instead it continues and adapts to new circumstances. Many Travellers today live in a mixture of trailers, mobile homes and permanent housing (D'Arcy, 2011). Ethnicity encompasses common elements which all people use to differentiate themselves into a group (Lander, 2011). Nevertheless ethnicity and culture are often used to discriminate against certain groups, and it is culture, not colour, that is increasingly the focal point of racism (Gillborn, 1995). Within this thesis I use the term racism to describe deliberate acts of prejudice; however, my particular focus is upon the less obvious forms of racism which operate through a discourse of culture and difference (Gillborn and Youdell, 2000). Sadly it seems that the more a particular culture deviates from the assumed norm<sup>4</sup>, the higher the chance that it is excluded (Lander, 2011). Racism and its consequences for Traveller communities and education is a recurring theme throughout this thesis.

### **Mainstream School: A Space of Inequality**

The difficulties Traveller pupils experience in school are well documented, with most commentators focusing on the Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller communities but with

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<sup>3</sup> Pseudonym for LA under study.

<sup>4</sup> The assumed norm in England is still perceived to be White middle class and Christian (Lander, 2011).

insights which often reflect the experiences of other groups, especially the Showmen community.

The difficulties Traveller children experience in schools were noted as early as 1967: 'They are probably the most severely deprived children in the country' (DES, 1967:60). Since that time numerous reports and research studies have highlighted the barriers Traveller children continue to face in school. These include racism, bullying, discrimination, negative teacher attitudes and inconsistent or inadequate support (Lloyd and Stead, 2001; Taylor, 2005; Lloyd and McClusky, 2008; Wilkin *et al*, 2010, Foster and Norton, 2012). Traveller boys have the highest school exclusion rate of all ethnic groups (Foster and Norton, 2012). Within mainstream school Traveller children are more likely to be identified as having a Special Education Need (SEN<sup>5</sup>) (DfES, 2005; Wilkin *et al*, 2010). Traveller pupils also have the lowest school attendance rate of all ethnic minority groups (DfES, 2005; Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2010). Although the situation in many primary schools has improved there are still grave concerns for secondary-aged Traveller children. There is generally a lack of understanding and respect towards Traveller children and consequently expectations of Traveller students are low and the rate of drop-out during the secondary school phase is high (Derrington and Kendal, 2004; Wilkin *et al*, 2009). The key barriers are discussed below, and will be reflected upon throughout my study.

### *Attainment*

Within current educational policy, research and practice, measurable attainment has become the absolute priority and is considered to be the best way to judge the effectiveness of schools, teachers and pupils (Barber and Mourshed, 2007). Yet Stobart (2008) warns that 'when a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be a good measure' (p.125). The fact that British education systems remain heavily focussed upon performance and enhancing pupil attainment does, in many cases, reduce the attention given to individual pupils' needs and the promotion of social inclusion (Jordan, 2001; Law, 2010). Moreover, research has shown that when, because of testing, teachers are forced to prioritise their attention on different children, teachers disproportionately dismiss children from ethnic minorities and offer fewer opportunities to improve their attainment (Gillborn and Youdell, 2000).

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<sup>5</sup> A statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN) sets out a child's perceived needs and the help they should receive. It is reviewed annually to ensure that any extra support given continues to meet a child's needs.

Within an educational system that is focussed upon performance, Travellers have historically been described as the group most deprived (DES, 1967) and the most at risk in the education system (DCSF, 2009a). Another report (DfES, 2003) confirmed that the education system continues to fail a significant number of pupils and Travellers remain the one minority group who are too often 'out of sight and mind' (p.21). Thus all Traveller children continue to experience high levels of inequality in relation to attainment and trends reveal that, while attainment levels for most groups have improved, for Traveller pupils these levels have deteriorated (DCSF, 2009a; The Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2010). Yet the discourse which concentrates on ability is frequently discussed in isolation from wider questions about social disadvantage, race inequality and educational opportunities (Gillborn, 2002), meaning that equality issues regarding racism and discrimination are not often heard.

### *Racism and Discrimination*

Issues of discrimination and race equality are a significant factor in Travellers' educational success. Over the past 20 years educational reports (DES, 1985; Ofsted, 1999) and research (Lloyd *et al*, 1999; Jordan, 2001; Derrington and Kendal, 2004) have continued to highlight the nature and persistence of racism and racist name-calling experienced by Traveller children in English schools. Showmen pupils who are on the road for most of the academic year are also marginalised on account of their nomadic lifestyle and because of the association with 'Gypsies and vagabonds' (Danaher, 2001:3). Thus widespread racism towards Travellers in education is visible. Indeed, Phillips (as Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality) described racism towards Travellers as 'the last respectable form of racism' (BBC, 2004). Within education, this so-called *acceptable* racism and Travellers' own *Whiteness* means that issues of race are often diluted and ignored. This is partly because Traveller children can, and do, play White; hiding their ethnicity in order to gain acceptance from the majority group and minimise threat. Moreover, a common response by Traveller children to racial abuse is to self-exclude from school (Derrington, 2007).

Racism is complex and ever-changing. The dictionary definition summarises the majority definition of the term *Racism* as 'the belief that all members of each race possess characteristics, abilities, or qualities specific to that race, especially so as to distinguish it as inferior or superior to another race or races' (Oxford University Press, 2012). Chatto and Atkin (2012) propose that this ideology has been replaced by cultural racism, a perspective which sees cultural and religious difference as a threat to national identity and dominant white cultural values. Barker (1981) suggests that this is

not a totally new approach; nevertheless it is a matter for concern as it focuses upon cultural difference rather than racial superiority and inferiority and in doing so this new racism avoids racist claims because *race* plays no part in the discourse.

Scholars (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002; Stovall, 2006; Gillborn, 2006; DePouw, 2012) approach the study of race and racism in increasingly complex ways. They draw attention to the intersection of inequalities that minority groups experience on account of racism, culture, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality and other *differences*. The limitation of analysing intersecting inequalities together is that the process and findings may be overly complex and dilute focus away from race equality. In this study I recognise and address these challenges. I maintain that racism, as defined above in the cultural sense, is a necessary term through which to highlight and challenge the educational inequalities of all Traveller children.

#### *Low Expectations and Secondary School Drop-out.*

Expectations regarding Traveller children's educational aspirations and achievement in school are generally low, especially around the time of transition to secondary school (Derrington and Kendal, 2004, 2008; Derrington, 2007). This transition is certainly an issue for highly-mobile Travellers (Marks and Rowlands, 2010). As a result, the issue of improving educational outcomes becomes particularly serious for secondary aged Traveller pupils. Transition to secondary school is a key point when many Traveller children 'drop out' of the education system. Even where Traveller children do transfer from primary to secondary school, retention is problematic and recent research has shown that only one in five Traveller children completes secondary school nationally (Wilkin *et al*, 2010).

There are, consequently, some serious barriers within mainstream schooling which impede Travellers' inclusion, their educational needs and long-term prospects. Recent research shows that one of the biggest challenges regarding secondary transition is the use of *scripts*<sup>6</sup>. As a professional I have heard such scripts; some Traveller families state that secondary school attendance is not commonplace within Traveller culture. Still, in my experience, such scripts are also employed by schools and this is a matter I return to later on.

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<sup>6</sup> Wilkin *et al* (2010) define a *script* as 'a common response or phrase which may be consciously or unconsciously applied as a form of personal or cultural observation, defence or protection' (p.108).

### *Lack of Understanding and Respect for Traveller communities.*

The literature on Travellers' experiences in school highlights many problems with an educational system in which stereotypes and misunderstandings of Traveller communities are commonplace (Wilkin *et al*, 2009). Lloyd and McClusky (2008) suggest that central to the negative educational experiences of so many Travellers lies a denial of difference and the complexities of cultural identities. Accounts of Travellers' failure in education commonly emphasise Travellers' reluctance to participate in education and this is presented as a feature of Traveller cultures (Piper and Garrett, 2005; Wilkin *et al*, 2010). This position has been described by Yosso (2006) as *deficit thinking*, whereby minority students are seen at fault for their poor performance and she warns that this is one of the most prevalent forms of contemporary racism.

Nevertheless, it is also important to acknowledge that Traveller children can experience difficulties in negotiating home and school cultures (Wilkin *et al*, 2010). This difficulty has been succinctly defined by Derrington and Kendal (2008) as *cultural dissonance*. They express cultural dissonance as 'a sense of discord or disharmony experienced by individuals, where cultural differences are unexpected, unexplained and therefore difficult to negotiate' (p.125). The fact that the education system is focussed on a very narrow set of indicators to define success means that schools often do not appreciate the breadth of cultural knowledge and skills that many Traveller children have. Moreover, Levinson and Sparkes (2006) suggest that 'different demands of home and school can lead to feelings of cultural dislocation and anxiety' (p.79). Kiddle (1999) describes Showmen children's home and school cultural experiences as trying to exist between two worlds. Yet Travellers' marginalization often arises from being viewed as different and deviant: 'sometimes they don't understand that we're more or less like them but just travel on' (Showmen child in Danaher, 1995:43). Wyer *et al* (1997) go on to refer to the process of cultural dissonance as requiring children to negotiate *border crossings* between cultures and warns that it is important not to underestimate the detrimental effect of blinkered perceptions (from teachers) which then act as a barrier to their education. The '*two worlds*' analogy is very apt for Travellers; it illuminates that there is a gap between home and school, with EHE located as a potential educational space within this gap.

Many teachers also remain confused about what Traveller cultures actually embody and therefore may either deny that difference or construct it as deviant (Lloyd and Norris, 1998). Achieving inclusive education in schools is challenging and often misunderstood. For example, when Rousseau and Tate asked teachers about their

response to the needs of increasingly diverse student populations, teachers universally described 'treating students equally, as their approach for ensuring equity' (2005:14).

In summary, there is a significant body of literature which concentrates on the poor educational experiences and outcomes of Traveller children in school. Interestingly, within educational policy, the focus of minority ethnic Traveller children's education is often centred upon low attainment in school and driving up teaching standards for these groups. Yet research substantiates that it is actually discrimination and Traveller children's social and emotional wellbeing that is central to the question of raising achievement. Wilkin *et al* (2010) suggest that schools need to fully recognise that, if Traveller pupils are unhappy in schools, they are unlikely to achieve or attend. Indeed, Lloyd and McClusky (2008) suggest that concerns about the preservation of cultural and family values and well-founded fears of bullying and assault in school mean that many Travellers in Britain 'wish, but do still not feel able to, participate fully in state education, particularly at secondary school level' (p.336). Thus Travellers' experiences in school have direct consequences for EHE as an educational alternative. I will now provide a critical overview of the position of home-education as an alternative educational space to school.

### **EHE as an Alternative Educational Space to School**

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) Article 28 states that all children have a right to an education. However, this right is interpreted differently across individual nations' educational policies and practices. For example, in Germany, The Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and Greece EHE is illegal and Petrie (2001) suggests that these countries have confused a child's right to education with compulsory schooling. Galloway (2003) asserts that the fact that home-education is an alternative to statutory provision means that it can represent a challenge to that education system. Consequently, EHE policy and practice varies from country to country. Badman (2009) compared EHE approaches across different nations and claims that England presently adopts the most liberal approach towards EHE.

To help explain the EHE context in England, a useful starting point is the Education Act (1996), which guides current workings of EHE policy and practice:

The parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him to receive efficient full-time education *suitable* (a) to his age, ability and aptitude, and (b) to any special educational needs he may have, either by regular attendance at school or *otherwise* (Sec. 7).

This paragraph provides the foundation of EHE policy and practice in the UK. In England education is compulsory for children of statutory school age; however, schooling is not. Gabb (2004) confirms that while there is a duty for parents to educate their children there is no duty to send them to school, as the Education Act (1996) permits *suitable* educational alternatives, a matter which is further explained in the following chapter.

Recent educational developments on children's rights and welfare under Labour governments drew attention to EHE as the *Every Child Matters* agenda<sup>7</sup> encouraged a scrutiny of any policies or practices that did not protect children and ensure the development of their potential. This analysis, coupled with the growing number of home-educated children and increasing disquiet from LA children's services<sup>8</sup> regarding the current effectiveness of EHE systems, came to a head with the death of a 7 year old girl who was home-educated (Webb, 2010). Consequently, in January 2009 the Government commissioned Graham Badman to assess whether the current system of supporting and monitoring home-education was the right one for all home educated children to receive a good education and stay safe and well (DCSF, 2010). I will now expand briefly on the process and outcomes of this review.

### **The Review of Elective Home Education in England (Badman, 2009)**

The review of EHE in England in 2009 was led by Graham Badman, who was formerly the Managing Director of Children, Families and Education Directorate for Kent County Council. Interviews were held with home-educating parents and children, LAs and home-education groups. There was a call for evidence from the public via an on-line consultation and over 2,000 responses were received. In addition, questionnaires were sent out to all top tier<sup>9</sup> LAs in England with a 60 % response rate. The review was also informed by a literature review and a consideration of practice and legislation in other countries.

Badman (2009) concluded that regulatory and legislative changes to the EHE system were indeed necessary. Overall Badman suggested 28 recommendations. For the purpose of this introductory chapter, I will summarise the four recommendations, which Badman proposed should be implemented immediately (no.1, 7, 23 and 24). The first

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<sup>7</sup> Where the aim was for every child, whatever their background or their circumstances, to have the support they need to 'be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic well-being' (DCSF, 2004:6).

<sup>8</sup> Practitioners working for, and with children and young people.

<sup>9</sup> Those LAs judged to be providing the 'best' quality services.

recommendation proposed a common, national registration scheme across all LAs for all children who are or become home-educated. The seventh held that those LAs should have the right to access the dwelling of home-educating children to establish their safety and wellbeing. The 23<sup>rd</sup> recommendation suggested that other LA services must inform those responsible for EHE about any substantiated concerns they have in terms of home-educating parents' ability to provide a suitable education. The 24<sup>th</sup> recommendation held that the DCSF should make necessary legislative changes to enable LAs to refuse EHE registration on safeguarding grounds.

Badman's report and recommendations were initially accepted by the DCSF and made available for further public consultation until October 2009. Nevertheless they faced strong rejection by powerful (non-Traveller) home-educating groups<sup>10</sup> who coordinated a campaign to defend any changes to existing policy. This opposition to Badman's report was linked to concerns about the way in which government and the press associated home-education with child abuse (Thomas and Pattison, 2010). There was also anxiety that the recommendations would act to replace 'parental rights' with responsibilities from the state (Education Otherwise, 2009). Section 7 in the 1996 Education Act does state that it is a parent's duty to ensure their child receives a suitable education; however, it does not state that the child's education is a parental right. Monk (2009) is therefore accurate when he suggests that the notion of rights in education, as in domestic law, should not envisage 'unfettered autonomy for parents but a relationship between parents, children and the state' (p. 160).

Yet the notion that education should involve a more equal relationship between parents, their children and the state is not a view shared by many of the vocal home-educating organisations. Their influential rejection of Badman's (2009) report alongside the political pressures of an impending election reduced the number of official recommendations for change. These recommendations were part of the previous Labour government's Children, Families and School Bill (2011), but none were passed in the Commons. Subsequently, in effect there was no change to EHE as a result of this review. Many professionals and practitioners were disappointed with this outcome, as LA and children's organisations had expressed concerns around the effectiveness of the existing EHE system, an issue which remains unaddressed for the time being.

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<sup>10</sup> Education Otherwise and Home Education UK.

Throughout Badman's Review of EHE in England, I observed that there was no reference to Travellers' use of EHE, despite the significant numbers of Traveller families who decide to follow this route of education. Before this review there had already been reported concerns from Traveller Education Services (TES) about the increasing numbers of Traveller parents opting for EHE. In 2004, The Ethnic Minority Achievement Unit commissioned a study into the current policy, provision and practice of EHE for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and estimated a 40% year-on-year increase in Traveller families electing for home-education (Ivatts, 2006). The high numbers of Travellers choosing home-education are of concern for several reasons, which I will now explain as they have influenced my aims and research questions and justify the need for this study.

### **Aims, Research Questions and Justification of this Study.**

Although there is substantive literature and research on the difficulties Traveller children experience in school, there is very limited research about their experiences of EHE. I want to explore Travellers' reasons for taking up EHE as well as their own experiences and perception of EHE as Travellers are a distinctive and ever-growing group of home-educators, attracting much criticism from professionals about their ability to provide their children with a suitable education (Ivatts, 2006).

Ensuring that Travellers' voices are heard in this debate is crucial in order to give centre stage to Travellers' own accounts, rather than rely on those held by professionals alone. Moreover, Ivatts' research (2006) indicates that Traveller parents are often manoeuvred into EHE at secondary school level due to fear of cultural erosion, a judged lack of relevance regarding the school curriculum, and fear of racist and other bullying (p.4). This finding indicates equality issues that are currently diluted, appropriated and ignored (Kitching, 2011). Badman (2009) confirmed within the review of EHE in England, that there should be concerns regarding those families who choose home-education *by default* rather than elect for home-education for positive reasons. Framing these concerns clarified my research questions, the aims of my research, my theoretical perspective and the data I needed to collect.

The aim of my research is to explore the reasons why Traveller children are being home-educated and to illuminate issues of educational inequality. To accomplish this I consider two educational spaces: school and EHE and my research questions are as follows:

1. *Why do Traveller families choose home-education?*

2. *What are the experiences and perceptions of Traveller families regarding Elective Home Education?*
3. *Are there emerging equality issues concerning Traveller families' use of EHE?*

In the literal sense, equality means sameness (Thompson, 2011). Nevertheless this can be unhelpful as politicians and policies often refer to equality when they mean uniformity (Gillborn, 1995). As Liegeois (1998) reminds us, 'policies towards Gypsies and Travellers have always constituted, in one form or another, a negation of the people and their culture' (p.36). The drive for equal opportunities is not simply about ensuring that opportunities are there for everyone, it is about ensuring everyone can access those opportunities (Knowles, 2011) and achieve equitable outcomes. The notion of *Equality* within this thesis refers to fairness and not treating people unfairly on account of their difference (Thompson, 2011).

The challenge in developing a more equal society that does not treat Traveller communities unfairly is posed by mainstream discourse concerning Travellers' *cultural difference*, which perpetuates all Travellers as undeserving. Critical Race Theory (CRT) scholars use an *interest-convergence* theory to explain the symbolic and structural barriers which face advancements in race equality. Interest convergence holds that the dominant White culture will only tolerate minority success when such successes also serve their interests as Whites (Bell, 1980; Delgado, 1995). To address prevalent, negative stereotyping and discrimination towards Travellers there needs to be a change in attitude and willingness to act accordingly, which are matters highlighted throughout this thesis.

### ***Research Design***

This study employed an interpretive paradigm. An interpretive approach recognises that research participants' views are diverse and numerous, and 'the goal of the research is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied' (Creswell, 2009:8). Data was collected through two sets of semi-structured interviews with two Showmen and nine Romany/Gypsy families over five months from October 2010 to February 2011. The sample comprised families from different Traveller groups, geographical locations and socio-economic status. I also interviewed the two main professionals responsible for EHE in Saltfield to find out how this LA manages and monitors EHE and documents their views on EHE and Travellers' use of EHE. The decision to use semi-structured interviews was underpinned by existing research, ethical and practical reasoning and will be elaborated in my methodology chapter.

My research design includes a theoretical dimension, which has supported my understanding of equality issues as I have approached them in a new or different ways (Wellington, 2000). My theoretical framework draws upon CRT, which has helped shape my study by providing a critical lens through which I can address my aims, research questions and illuminate processes of racism and 'othering' that normalize and validate Traveller children's educational inequalities. I also draw on the conceptual tool of storytelling and counter-stories within CRT to build a challenge to mainstream assumptions (Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995). CRT resonates deeply with my own research approach and views and has been described as a useful approach towards anti-racist work (Gillborn, 2006).

The analysis of my data was served by the work of Miles and Huberman (1994) who propose convincing qualitative research strategies to illuminate 'the ways people in particular settings come to understand, account for, take action and manage day to day situations' (p.7). My analytical process was based upon Miles and Huberman's 'ladder of abstraction' which uses analysis to construct a deeper story of the data. More details about my theoretical framework, methodology and methods are provided in the following chapters. I will now briefly explain my positionality as a researcher to strive for transparency and trustworthiness in this study from the start.

#### *My Positionality as Researcher*

The philosophical position and fundamental assumptions concerning social reality, the nature of knowledge and human nature and agency divulge a researcher's positionality (Sikes, 2007). Historically, the traditional positivists' perspective claimed such matters should not influence research. Although a value-free doctrine has its origins in Weber's effort to create a genuine social science, Gouldner (1962) argued that an objective, value-free approach is more of a legend than a reality. Indeed within the social sciences, there is acceptance that a researcher's ontological and epistemological assumptions influence their research approach and procedures and should therefore be made explicit. Clough and Nutbrown (2007) have defined ontology and epistemology as, respectively, the theory of 'what exists and how it exists.....and how we can come to know those things' (p.33).

Although there remains criticism about researcher involvement and that their research may be biased and partisan (Tooley and Darby, 1998; Hargreaves, 2001), Carr (2000) suggests that 'educational researchers cannot study education without some commitment concerning its purpose, value and goals' (p. 440). I state my positionality

below in order to clarify the frame of reference from which I conduct this study to illuminate 'where I am coming from' (Sikes, 2007:5) to demonstrate the trustworthiness of this study and to enable others to locate and make better sense of the enquiry (Wellington *et al*, 2005).

My ontological position is based upon the notion that reality is subjectively constructed and the result of people's thoughts and experiences (Wellington *et al*, 2009). My epistemological position is founded on my view that knowledge is personal and subjective. I concur with Banks (1993), who defines knowledge as the way reality is interpreted and explained. Furthermore, the knowledge people create is influenced by their experiences and positions within particular social, economic and political systems and structures of a society (p.5). With reference to human nature and agency, I consider people to be able to decide on their own actions, although I also identify that such decisions may well be influenced by the social power and agency available to them within wider political structures. In education I contend that Travellers' decisions about education are restricted by their marginalised position in society.

My experiences of working with Traveller families and seeing racism and discrimination towards them firsthand influenced my choice of research approach and methods. As Clough and Nutbrown (2007) suggest, decisions about research often seem practical, yet they can carry deep, unarticulated values and beliefs. Direct racism towards Travellers remains tolerated; in addition there are more subtle variants of racism at work. The press, particularly *red-tops*<sup>11</sup> perpetuate negative discourses concerning Traveller communities. Thus the purpose of a critical enquiry in this study is to highlight the consequences of direct racism and those more subtle, institutional structures, attitudes and prejudice which drive the difficulties Travellers experience in accessing and achieving in education. These matters are discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters. Clarifying my positionality has not been a one-off occurrence as I have documented my thoughts and methods throughout in a reflective research journal. Guba and Lincoln (1985) suggest that such a technique has broad-ranging application to the establishment of trustworthy research. The next section of this chapter discusses the significance of my study and highlights the sensitive nature of the topic and the consequential gap in research on EHE and Travellers.

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<sup>11</sup> Tabloid newspapers that target mass readership and use sensational and populist content. They contrast with 'broadsheets' which adopt a more thoughtful and reasoned approach (Foster and Norton, 2012).

### ***Significance of the Study***

Both EHE and Travellers are sensitive research matters for different reasons. Research into EHE is difficult as it does not take place in an institution and involves studying families' ways of life (Webb, 2010). There is often suspicion on the part of home-educators, of researchers who are not home-educators themselves but show an interest in EHE (Nelson, 2011). My own suggested reason for this suspicion is the EHE monitoring process itself as home-educating families are often only visited in order to monitor the home-education provision. Where provision is deemed unsuitable, families can be served with a School Attendance Order which requires them to send their child back to school. Families may therefore be rightfully concerned when others take an active interest in them. As EHE takes place in family homes there are inherent difficulties with research into home-education (Winstanley, 2009), especially where so-called hard-to-reach and marginalised groups are involved. This is an ethical issue I recognise and respond to in the methodological design of my study.

Studying Traveller communities is also difficult as all Travellers are geographically and socially marginalised communities who are discriminated against on a personal, social and institutional level in society. This marginalisation has a direct impact on their social power and agency, an issue my research seeks to address by enabling Traveller communities' voices to be heard on educational matters. The importance of marginalised groups' voices in research has already been noted. *Voice* asserts and acknowledges the 'importance of personal and community experiences as sources of knowledge' (Dixson and Rousseau, 2005:10).

The subject of Travellers' choice and use of EHE is under-researched. Within the two studies I found on EHE, consultation with Travellers themselves was limited. Ivatts (2006) only consulted with Traveller Education Services and LA staff. Bhopal and Myers (2009) were able to interview six adult Travellers and suggested the need for further research to include the views of Traveller children. My research has involved 11 families and captures the experiences of 42 children overall. Traveller families from different cultures and ethnicities, socio-economic groups and geographic areas are represented. My research is therefore significant on a number of different levels. The significance of my study can be summarised into three main points which reflect my aim and research questions.

First, the vast majority of Traveller children in England do attend primary education, yet drop-out during secondary transition and at secondary school remains high. Tracking of

an entire cohort of Traveller children between 2003 and 2008 revealed that although 80% of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils transferred to secondary school, only 51% were still attending by Year 11; the final year (Wilkin *et al*, 2010:70). Not all Traveller children who drop out of mainstream education take up EHE; many children are simply not registered in any provision, although families may be providing informal family based learning (see p.8). Nevertheless, Ivatts' research (2006) indicated that the numbers of Traveller families taking up EHE are rising. We need to know more about the reasons behind the move to EHE and my research analyses the literature and Travellers' own experiences in order to investigate inequalities in school.

Second, my study recognises the notable gap in research on EHE and Travellers. There is a lack of Travellers' own voices within educational debates and this research will enable Travellers' own views regarding their EHE experiences to be heard. I explore EHE as an alternative space to mainstream school and Travellers' own experiences and perceptions of this educational alternative. This is important because the limited literature on Travellers' use of EHE is predominantly based on education professionals' views and beliefs alone. I hope that my research may inform understandings and approaches in policy and practice by documenting Travellers' own accounts. The third reason that my research is significant is that it will illuminate potential issues of inequality within these two aforementioned spaces.

In summary, this research provides a critical discussion of school and EHE, and Travellers' experiences and views of these two educational spaces in order to produce new understandings of those who are placed at the margins of education and help address educational inequalities. This study is likely to be relevant to other scholars and my findings may facilitate new understandings and approaches in practice for those who are *Othered*<sup>12</sup>. I also hope that this research may be of interest to policy makers and those working in EHE and Traveller education and to all educationalists and academics who are passionate about working towards more equal and just education systems.

### ***Structure of the Thesis to Follow***

This introductory chapter will be followed by Chapter Two which contains my literature review, the product of systematic and critical analysis of relevant research literature in

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<sup>12</sup> The literature suggests this might include those who, like Travellers, are over-represented in the home-education community e.g. children with so-called Special Educational Needs (Arora, 2006) and children who are referred to as Gifted and Talented (Winstanley, 2009).

the field. The purpose of this second chapter is to identify the issues and debates from within existing research literature, to inform my study and explain my theoretical framework which supports the need for, and value of, my research. Chapter Three concentrates upon my chosen methodology and methods. This chapter provides an explanation of the applied methodological procedures and a critical study of research methods and their use. I discuss the process of data collection and analysis and expand on the role of my theoretical framework in my study. Finally, I expand on my ethical considerations and the trustworthiness of this research and reflect on the strengths and limitations of my methodology and methods.

Chapter Four provides a report on my research findings. This chapter is a summary of the data analysis and provides an explanatory framework for the data from interviews with Travellers families and EHE professionals. I use my data to illuminate how EHE is managed and monitored in Saltfield. I then concentrate upon my sample of Traveller family practices and their experiences of EHE. Thereafter I provide three in-depth vignettes to tell the story of three different Traveller families undertaking EHE. The final part of this chapter revisits Traveller respondents' reasons for EHE and illuminates issues of inequality.

Chapter Five provides a discussion of my findings and their implications for educational equality across all three of my research questions. I elaborate on my development of theory concerning Travellers' use of EHE. I then summarise my findings and recommendations. Chapter Six is my conclusion, which begins by relating my findings to my research questions and includes a critique of EHE as a safe space. I then elaborate on my recommendations for research, policy and practice. Thereafter I consider the limitations and strengths of this study, its contribution to knowledge and the wider implications of my findings. Finally, I offer a brief reflection on my learning journey before concluding.

## **Chapter 2: A Literature Review: Elective Home Education, Travellers and Education.**

### **Introduction**

This literature review is the product of systematic and critical analysis of relevant research literature in the field. The purpose of this chapter is to identify the issues and debates from within existing research literature, to inform my study and produce a coherent argument that justifies the need for my research. As Wellington *et al* (2005) suggest, a literature review should position the intended study within a wider body of knowledge and build up a theoretical rationale for the research. Accordingly, my theoretical rationale is discussed in part four of this chapter.

The aim of my research is to explore the reasons why Traveller children are being home-educated and illuminate issues of educational inequality. The selection of literature reviewed was driven by these aims and the nature of my research questions:

1. *Why do Traveller families choose home-education?*
2. *What are the experiences and perceptions of Traveller families regarding Elective Home Education?*
3. *Are there emerging equality issues concerning Traveller families' use of EHE?*

My research pays critical attention to the reasons that Traveller families choose EHE. To address my research questions the literature reviewed is organised into two main themes: 1) Elective Home Education and 2) Travellers' experiences in mainstream school. This is because I want to illuminate the complex equality issues which exist for Travellers across different educational spaces. As the majority of Traveller children do attend primary school before opting for EHE, I believe it is important to explore Travellers' experiences in school and EHE to understand the whole EHE picture. As the issues I seek to explore are set within an English context, I found that on the whole, the literature most relevant to these two themes derived from English government-funded and independent studies, rather than those from the US or Europe.

My themes have guided the content of this chapter which contains five parts. The first part provides a critical review of the content and context of EHE in England. I contemplate EHE terminology, history and reasons why parents choose this form of education. I review the different perspectives of EHE within the global EHE discourse and reflect on my own position within this debate. There follows a short overview of current EHE guidance concerning LA and parental responsibilities. The final section returns to Badman's Review of Elective Home Education in England that began in 2009 as it portrays the current policy context, issues and debates in the EHE field.

The second part of this chapter contains a critical review of a number of different texts concerning EHE and Travellers, as they illuminate equality issues. I chose this literature to highlight the dominant and marginalised discourses regarding Travellers' use of EHE and to address my research questions. I begin with three texts which reflect dominant discourses. I then compare these texts to the two studies found on Travellers and EHE in England as they reflect marginalised discourses, evidence my critique of the dominant discourses and inform my research. This section concludes with two examples of research which concern children with so-called SEN and Gifted and Talented children. Although these groups may initially seem very different to Traveller children, I selected this literature to help address my research questions as they highlight reasons for EHE which are similar to those of Travellers and reveal issues of educational inequality.

The third part of this chapter provides an overview of the literature on Traveller children in mainstream education to document and demonstrate how school represents a space of inequality. I provide a brief historical perspective on Traveller Education Services and their role. I also analyse the main difficulties for Travellers in school. The fourth part explains and justifies my theoretical framework. CRT emerged through a critical consideration of the literature, my aims and research questions. Finally, in part five, I present my conclusion to this chapter, where I review the significant issues and debates from the literature reviewed which inform my knowledge, understanding and investigation of my research questions. I will now elaborate upon the context and content of the EHE literature.

### **2.1. Elective Home Education: A Contextual Background.**

Although the official term for home-education in England is EHE, alternative terms include *home-education* and *home-schooling*, the latter is more commonly used in the US. These terms can be confusing as they imply that all education takes place in the home. Many families provide educational activities outside the home, such as swimming and library visits. For this reason it can be useful to think of home- education as a temporary or permanent alternative form of education that takes place within or around the home and is not subject to curriculum regulations, age-based learning goals and testing (Taylor and Petrie, 2000; Rothermel, 2002).

Traditionally, home-education has been particularly popular with affluent families, who can forego their own earnings and resources and yet be able to provide for their child's education (Lubienski, 2003). Indeed, Gabb (2004) claims that it was the custom of

kings and queens to have their children home-educated. For other families home-education has been a necessity; geographically isolated families, such as those living in Australia, had no choice but to home-educate.

There remain many reasons why home-education is still considered as an alternative to mainstream school. DCSF (2007) guidance<sup>13</sup> suggests that the main reasons parents home-educate in England include: distance or access to school, religious or cultural beliefs, philosophical or ideological values, dissatisfaction with the education system and, especially, bullying. EHE can be a short term intervention for a particular reason or a long term approach in response to dissatisfaction with mainstream education or simply because parents desire a closer relationship with their children. The decision to home-educate can consequently be part of a well thought out plan by families, or as a reaction to a crisis.

Rothermel (2002) undertook a four year study to explore the aims and practices of home-educators in the UK and also investigates the possibility of classifying home-educators according to their motives. Rothermel (2003) considers and reports on the various categories proposed within earlier research from the UK and US (Blacker, 1981; Mayberry, 1989; Van Galen, 1991; Lowden, 1993; Stevens, 2001; Apostolosis, 2002).

Blacker (1981) proposed three categories of home-educators: *competitors*, *rebels* or *compensators*. Competitors were formally qualified parents, competing with school in providing a better education. Compensators agreed with the philosophy of school but were making up for the school's failure with their child. Rebels were parents who had chosen an alternative lifestyle; they wanted individual freedom and rejected social institutions. Other taxonomies were based upon US home-educators and included: pedagogues and ideologues<sup>14</sup> (Van Galen, 1991; Stevens, 2001).

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<sup>13</sup> This is the most up to date guidance on EHE published by the DCSF; the subsequent Department of Education has stated that these home education guidelines were produced by the previous administration and will be reviewed in due course (DfE, 2011).

<sup>14</sup> Ideologues and pedagogues are directly related to Christian EHE movement in the US. 'Ideologues' object to what is taught in schools as they follow a philosophy of Christian fundamentalism. 'Pedagogues' have educational reasons for homeschooling: school teaching is viewed as inept and the parents want to foster a broader interest in learning (Rothermel, 2003).

Rothermel (2003) found that such taxonomies do not accurately portray the diverse motives of home-educators and should be treated with caution. Although Rothermel warns against categorising EHE families, others continue to do so. In Webb's (2010) book on EHE in the UK, he makes two broad distinctions: those who *choose to* undertake the education of their children as a positive decision and those who feel *compelled to* do so. These positive and negative categories are also referred to in DSCF (2007) guidance on EHE and Badman's (2009) Review of Elective Home Education, with particular concern about the latter category of families who elect for home-education 'by default'.

Kiddle (1999), a professional in the Traveller Education field, also categorises home-educating families into those with positive, well-thought-out plans and those with more negative reasons. Yet Kiddle (1999) adds a third, 'less informed route' for Traveller families that is 'ignorant of the alternatives or is based only on fears or hearsay about what goes on in schools' (p.68). I agree that fears about secondary school reflect some Traveller parents' reasons for adopting EHE. Still, I classify these reasons among the negative as parents feel compelled to elect for EHE due to concerns about their child's welfare within school. Interestingly, Kiddle confirms that Travellers' fears about school include bullying and victimisation, harassment by officials and a lack of understanding of Travellers lifestyle and 'respect for their cultural values' (p.69), rather than a rejection of formal education, which reinforces my point.

The literature on EHE certainly reflects an interest in the reasons families elect for home-education, yet this interest is not reflected in government guidance. The DSCF (2007) suggest that LAs primary concern should lie, not in parents' reasons for home-educating, but in the suitability of parents' educational provision (p.3). Nevertheless, it is evident from the literature that parents are diverse in their motivations and approaches to home-education. I agree with Rothermel (2003) that generalised trends and taxonomies should be treated with caution. My first research question considers why Traveller families home-educate. Still, I do not intend to generalise findings from my sample to the entire Traveller or home-educating community as this may have negative consequences for Traveller families, a point I expand upon later in my critique of the EHE literature.

### **Different Perspectives regarding Elective Home Education.**

This section introduces and discusses the different perspectives of EHE within the literature which I have considered as they can inform and direct my research and help

make sense of my data (Ridley, 2008). I begin by comparing the different positions within the global EHE discourse and then state my own place within this debate. Positions regarding EHE vary; there are those who are critical, those who argue for better regulation of EHE systems and those who advocate home education.

Critics include Brighouse (1997), Apple (2000), and Lubienski (2000; 2003). Lubienski states that EHE removes children and social capital from public schools, to the disadvantage of those students left behind. Social capital is not specifically defined by Lubineski (2003); however he is suggesting that because people are increasingly opting for individualised routes in education, traditional norms of reciprocity and important social networks are broken down. Lubienski (2003) also proposes that EHE is problematic because it inhibits home-educated children's social networks and their long-term vocational choices because 'true choice is based on autonomy where individuals are empowered to select from a range of alternatives' (p.174). Indeed, one of the dominant issues concerning EHE is 'the extent to which the home can offer the kinds of social contact found within the school' (Wyness, 2012). Brighouse (1997) also asserts that granting parents unconditional rights towards their children's education jeopardises children's opportunities to become autonomous. Thus EHE can perpetuate inequality as it prevents children accessing important opportunities.

Within the EHE debate, there are also those who argue for the need for better state guidelines and control of home-education. Reich (2002) is critical of the manner in which home-education is currently regulated and argues that a minimum of instruction is necessary to ensure a balance of the interests of the child, parents and the state. Reich (2002) also suggests that educating is not the same as parenting and parents must share authority over the education of their children with the state and the child.

Others defend the legitimacy of current approaches. Ray (2000) argues that home-education is often carried out as a result of care and concern for today's children. In addition, Ray suggests that home-education does not harm the social capital of society, as home-educated children will ultimately serve their communities. Others argue that home-education preserves parental freedom in education while satisfying state interest (Carper and Tyler, 2000). Many home-education associations in the US (for example, the Home School Legal Defence Association) and UK (Education Otherwise) invoke parental rights to educate their children and the rise in home-education may well be concurrent with the increasing demand for parental choice in education. These

perspectives are useful reminders that school is a relatively new phenomenon and individuals feel very differently about mass education.

Within EHE discourse there is evidently criticism about parental choice and the way in which parents alone decide upon the form of educational provision their children receive. Brighouse (1997) proposes that education is something that society owes to each individual child. As Reich suggests (2002), there are tripartite interests at stake in the education of children concerning the state, the parents and the child, yet children's own voices and influence regarding educational matters remain limited. In recent years there has been a growing interest in children's rights within education. The UNCRC (1989) set a precedent to ensure children's involvement in matters which affect them. Badman (2009) made it very clear in his report of the review of EHE that there needed to be a better balance between the rights of the parent and the rights of the child. Thus within the literature there is a heavy focus upon rights, yet educational equality issues do not really feature. The contribution of my research is that it considers EHE in relation to educational equality and wider social justice.

The complexity of the EHE situation rests upon philosophical ideologies regarding the nature and purpose of education. The issue, as Ray (2000) suggests, goes to the core of a continuing debate about equality and who should be in the principal position of control in the educational lives of children and what impact the answer may have on society. I contend that for this reason EHE cannot be researched in isolation from broader educational and social contexts. While differing in their perspectives, most researchers do agree that the home-education movement offers a fascinating critique of contemporary education systems (Gerwitz and Cribb, 2009). Whilst it is not the purpose of my research to advocate for or against a specific form of education, I am troubled about the situation in which parents are compelled to home-educate.

My particular disquiet is that for Travellers, the decision to home-educate may be the product of racial injustice in education. Tate suggested in 1997 that race remained a significant factor in society and education in particular, a view that Gillborn (2008) and others uphold today. Research and guidance concerning EHE will show that the reasons parents elect for home-education are often associated with difficulties within conventional schooling (Arora, 2006; DCSF, 2007; Winstanley, 2009; Webb, 2010). Although I acknowledge that EHE appears to offer an educational 'escape route' from challenging school systems, my research will consider the emerging equality issues concerning Traveller family's use of EHE. In this way my research may offer an

important contribution to knowledge and understanding about racism, Traveller communities and their exclusion in education. I now provide an overview of current EHE guidance.

### **Elective Home Education Guidance**

In England there is no EHE policy, only government guidance, which is optional advice for LAs and parents. Although the Education Act (1996) requires all children of statutory age to receive a full-time education there is no legal definition of *full-time education*. EHE guidance (DCSF, 2007) states that although children in school normally attend between 22-25 hours a week for 38 weeks in the year, this measurement of contact time is not considered to be relevant to home-education because it can take place outside of normal school hours or be made up by periods of one-to-one tuition. Moreover, home-educators in England are not required to teach the National Curriculum, or to have a timetable or specific plan of learning activities. Current guidance does not require the teaching of formal lessons, marking completed work or assessing children's progress against school-based age specific standards (DCSF, 2007). Furthermore, a parent or tutor who teaches home-educated children needs no particular qualifications or training.

Parents in England do not need to seek permission from their local LA or inform them of their decision to home-educate. If their child is registered at school, they do need to inform the school of their intent to home-educate in writing; the school then reports the child's removal to the LA. There is an exception for children who have a registered Special Educational Need, as consent to home-educate these children must be obtained from the LA. Gabb (2004) suggests that this exception is not intended to prevent home-education; instead it ensures that the LA can maintain continuity in its provision for SEN<sup>15</sup>. Guidance suggests that LAs should offer advice and support on EHE matters if requested, yet it seems that current EHE guidance is more focussed upon what home-educators do *not* need to do, than providing guidance on possible approaches. The feasible reason for this may be that home-education is not simply another teaching approach, instead it involves a different lifestyle (Webb, 2010). Although the responsibility for a child's education lies with parents, LAs also retain specific duties and the next section considers LA and parental responsibilities under current guidance.

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<sup>15</sup> I will discuss the use of educational labels such as SEN later on in this chapter.

### *LA and Parental Responsibilities: A Suitable Education?*

In England children are legally required to be in educational provision up until they are 16 years of age. Nevertheless, all provision must be *suitable* and LAs must 'make arrangements to enable them to establish the identities, so far as it is possible to do so, of children in their area *who are not receiving a suitable education*' (DCSF, 2007:5). This is complex as there is no legal definition of a suitable education. Nevertheless, case law (Juridical Review, 1985) with reference to a Jewish school, broadly described it as an education that:

equips a child for life within the community of which he is a member, rather than the way of the country as a whole, so long as it does not foreclose the child's options in later years to adopt some other forms of life if he wishes to do so.

Indeed, Badman (2009) recommended that the definition of a *suitable education* regarding EHE required improvements<sup>16</sup>. Moreover, LAs do not currently have any statutory duties to monitor EHE on a routine basis nor do they have the power to enter the homes or see children for the purpose of monitoring EHE provision (DCSF, 2007). Many LAs therefore have to *ask* parents to inform them of their decision to home-educate and to agree to a visit by an EHE advisor. Consequently, LAs ability to fulfil their EHE duty is restricted (Hopwood *et al*, 2007).

The vagueness of EHE legislation must be equally complex for parents who are new to home-educating, as there is no clear guidance on the nature or content of what they might teach at home. Arora (2006) consulted with home-educating families and confirmed that parents with children with so-called SEN would have liked more contact with the LA on the subject of their child's educational progress, access to resources and advice on specific educational problems. Hence, research indicates that professionals and home-educating families want clearer guidance and regulations for EHE.

Interestingly, Monk (2004) traced the wording of the current Education Act concerning EHE back to the 1870 Elementary Education Act. He found that in 1870 parents of children between the ages of 5 and 13 years were required to 'cause such children to attend school', but provided that 'a reasonable excuse' would be where children 'were under efficient instruction in some other manner' (Elementary Education Act 1870, s71 (1)). Changes in society, education and employment since that time do raise the

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<sup>16</sup> This was Badman's second recommendation following his review of EHE in England- see Appendix A for full detail.

question as to whether current legal wording, based on educational practices and societies in 1870, is still relevant or useful today.

A further complexity within the practice of EHE is that judgements regarding provision are often based upon mainstream school standards. Within educational discourse the words *education* and *school* are often used interchangeably. This can be a limiting supposition and one that has been contested within research, evaluations and the monitoring of EHE (Taylor and Petrie, 2000; McIntyre-Bhatty, 2007). For example, Kendall and Atkinson's (2006) research indicated a prevalence of school bias as EHE officers with teaching backgrounds conducted visits to monitor EHE practice. In addition, I have noted a trend of consultation with school professionals rather than EHE experts within reports, evaluations and studies of EHE in England. The fact that EHE is often judged by school standards is questioned and McIntyre-Bhatty (2007) proposes that educational evaluations of EHE, which are based on established school practices and educational policies do not transfer easily and may therefore be inapplicable, inappropriate and inaccurate.

The fact that EHE legislation is vague and LAs do not have the power to monitor provision has resulted in assorted EHE practices and procedures across LAs in England. This is in part because judging a *suitable education* is complex and contested: there is no specific definition of what a suitable education might comprise. Clearly EHE, like mainstream schooling, is made up of children and families with very different needs. My concern is that it is often only confident and powerful individuals who may benefit from the current system as they have the resources to deliver home-education and can also ensure that their voices are heard in debates on such matters, a theme I return to within the following discussion of the Review of Elective Home Education in England.

### **Badman's Review of Elective Home Education in England.**

Early in 2009 Graham Badman undertook a review of English EHE systems to assess whether they enabled all children to receive an education and stay safe and well (DCSF, 2010). Badman was to concentrate upon two main issues: firstly, the barriers to LAs in effectively carrying out their safeguarding responsibilities and secondly, whether LAs were providing the right support for home-educating families. The DCSF (2010) stated that its rationale for the review was based upon their commitment to ensure that systems for keeping children safe and ensuring they receive a suitable education were

as robust as possible. The accountability of government bodies was therefore an influencing factor in initiating and conducting this review.

In June 2009, Badman produced his commissioned report, in which he suggested that current guidance was *not* sufficiently robust to protect the rights of all children and EHE guidance should be better defined and supported through improved access to services and facilities. He proposed the introduction of a national registration scheme and new legislative powers to LAs so they could monitor and refuse EHE provision, which would certainly bring English EHE regulations in line with other countries' regulations. Although the overall effect of Badman's 28 recommendations would not go as far as those in European countries which made EHE illegal. Badman wanted to strike a balance between the rights of parents and children and the need for greater safety, but the suggested reforms were met with outcry and evidence from home-education groups who set out to substantiate that child-abuse was not a relevant concern (Berlow and Cox, 2010). Yet Badman was merely attempting to redress the balance of rights between child and parent within EHE, surely a positive and commendable development from the perspective of children's rights.

Analysis of Badman's review of EHE brings to light the way perceived problems regarding EHE were driven by state professionals and governmental accountabilities, and disputed by vocal home-educating organisations. The process of Badman's review undoubtedly unearthed deeply philosophical questions about who decides about the nature and content of a *suitable* education for home-educated children, and the meaning and purpose of education in modern society (Monk, 2009). EHE is a form of education, and it is therefore not surprising that it is a similarly contested field. Yet the failure to agree on any changes to EHE policy or guidance means that the vague regulations regarding EHE make this form of alternative education stand apart from wider educational policies and practices. Questions about the relative rights and responsibilities of the state, parents and the child and the systems for ensuring a suitable education for all children remain.

Contemplating the political situation reveals that only certain powerful voices have been heard (those of children's service professionals and home-educating groups). Traveller families make up a significant number of families who continue to choose EHE as an educational pathway for their children. Yet the limited amount of literature on the area of EHE and Travellers indicates a considerable gap on Travellers' views of educational matters. This is a gap that my research seeks to address and the theme of

'voice' runs throughout this study. Within the next section I will be analysing recent EHE reports and the specific references they contain regarding Travellers in order to highlight the consequences of Travellers' silenced voices.

## **2.2. EHE & Travellers: Dominant and Marginalised Discourses**

Over the years the subject of home-educating Traveller families has been noted sporadically (Kiddle, 1999; Ofsted, 2001; Ofsted, 2003; Derrington and Kendal, 2004). As early as 2003 Ofsted noted the growing trend among secondary-aged Traveller pupils to be home-educated and stated concerns about its suitability as 'the adequacy, suitability and quality of such provision is uneven and raises serious concerns' (p.5). My analysis of more recent literature on EHE noted that dominant discourses consist of an over-reliance on cultural assumptions and consultation with educational professionals regarding Travellers' use of EHE. I begin this section with a critique of three specific texts which reflect these dominant discourses to highlight equality issues and address my aims and research questions. The texts comprise: a recent Ofsted (2010) report regarding LAs and home-education, a summary of evidence related to EHE in the UK (DCSF, 2009) and finally a book on Elective Home Education in the UK (Webb, 2010).

### **EHE and Travellers: the Dominant Discourses**

#### *Local Authorities and Home-Education (Ofsted, 2010)*

The aim of this recent Ofsted (2010) report was to evaluate how well 15 LAs discharged their duties towards home-educated children and young people. Ofsted officials consulted with members of public body departments, such as LA staff and head teachers, and held meetings for home-educating parents and their children to attend. Ofsted officials also received questionnaire responses from parents and children. In my view there are two key criticisms of this study.

First, the methodology and sample are questionable as Ofsted's sample concentrates upon consultation with professionals from mainstream education, rather than experts on home-education. Group meetings were also arranged to confer with home-educating parents. In my experience such meetings rarely include so-called *hard-to-reach* groups, such as Travellers. Traveller communities may not read public notices or receive questionnaires as they often live in geographically isolated areas. Moreover, the limited levels of literacy within the adult Traveller community (Equality and Human

Rights Commission, 2010) curb the written responses Travellers might like to make. Consultation with Traveller communities requires outreach<sup>17</sup>, which is time-consuming and more costly than sending out questionnaires or displaying public notices inviting people to a meeting; as such consultation with Travellers often does not occur at all. In practice, the characteristics of the home-educating parents and children who volunteered to attend these meetings were unlikely to be representative of all those engaged with EHE within the LAs under study.

The second criticism of the report is based upon the accuracy of its single reference to Travellers in their report, which alluded to an urban LA where out of 31 EHE families, 15 were Travellers:

Some Traveller, Gypsy and Roma families chose home education so that they *could continue children's education whilst travelling*. The Travellers' Education Service in all the authorities visited were well aware of the specific needs of these groups *and were striving to support them flexibly and effectively* (Ofsted, 2010:7).

This reference is controversial for three reasons. First, although mobility issues still impact on access and attendance for some Traveller children, particularly highly-mobile families such as Showmen, many families today lead less nomadic lifestyles (Ivatts, 2006). Research indicates that mobility is no longer the most significant factor regarding Travellers' education (Derrington and Kendal, 2004; Wilkin *et al*, 2010). Whilst some families may use EHE to continue learning whilst travelling, there is seemingly no reference in the report to the reasons why other Traveller families, in the LA under study, elected for EHE.

Second, there is an assumption that TES deal with all Traveller issues. In actual fact, EHE is usually *not* within most Traveller Education Services remit, as TES are funded to improve attendance, achievement and attainment within mainstream schooling (Bhopal and Myers, 2008). My concern with this Ofsted study is, therefore, that the sample is non-representative; the findings are based on 'school' professionals' views. Moreover, the voluntary nature of participants means that research findings are unlikely to be representative as they do not reflect all home-educators' needs and viewpoints. Third, my disquiet lies with the reported case of the LA where 50% of the total EHE

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<sup>17</sup> Outreach is where services literally reach out to the community, by visiting families face-to-face. This is because an 'open door' policy in itself is not enough for the most hard-to-reach groups: the service it provides is in effect closed to anyone who does not know it and has no relationship with it ( Save the Children, 2007)

population were Travellers. In this case one would expect the authors to have included these families in their consultation. Yet there is no reference of this happening.

Still, for the purposes of my research, Ofsted's findings regarding the reasons parents home-educate were interesting. Most parents had de-registered their children from school rather than never sending them; a third of parent respondents had removed their children from school because of bullying, and a quarter of the home-educated children were reported to have SEN and had been withdrawn as their parents believed their needs were not being met. These reasons correlate with other research and do indicate a connection between issues in school and uptake of EHE. Moreover Ofsted's findings illuminate equality issues concerning Travellers, evidenced by a failure to gather any evidence from the Traveller community itself and the subsequent reliance on stereotypical propaganda about Traveller communities and Traveller Education services alike.

*Elective Home Education: An overview of evidence (DCSF, 2009).*

In 2009 the School's Analysis and Research Division (DCSF, 2009) compiled a summary of evidence on the subject of EHE in the UK, which included an overview of the legality of EHE in different countries. The subsequent report contains intermittent references to Travellers including: the high proportion of Travellers engaging with EHE, the increase in numbers of Traveller children electing for EHE and the fact that twice as many secondary Traveller children are home-educated than those of primary age. The report also notes some specific reasons for uptake of EHE among the Traveller community: for example, 'a fear of cultural erosion, a judged lack of relevance with the secondary school curriculum and the fear of racist and other bullying' (p.3), which is an unreferenced quote from Ivatts research<sup>18</sup>. This DCSF report then goes on to quote a section of Ivatts' (2006) research:

An investigation of Traveller home-educated children found that few parents of these children have knowledge, skills and resources to provide or deliver full-time education that is efficient and suitable (Ivatts, 2006 cited by DCSF, 2009:8).

This selective citation is misleading as within Ivatts' report this sentence does not end at the word "suitable" but continues by stating:

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<sup>18</sup> See p. 40 where I review Ivatts' (2006) study.

.....given the research findings about school curricular irrelevance and racist bullying the developing situation re EHE is a clear example of racial discrimination and social exclusion' (Ivatts, 2006:22).

Debates regarding race and racism are often hidden from view (Craig *et al*, 2012). The consequence of not publishing all evidence regarding racism towards Travellers is that the issue is diluted and ignored. Moreover, it perpetuates the notion of the community as deviant and as showing a lack of care about their child's education. Ivatts (2006) does advise readers of his own report to note the potential pitfalls in relation to the interpretation of information and research on Travellers. He states that his report should not be interpreted as a criticism of Traveller families or the provision of EHE, moreover he highlights his concern regarding the 'creation and or confirmation of stereotypes either positive or negative within the context of a short research report constrained by the need for brevity' (p.6). This DCSF overview of evidence is therefore misleading as it does not heed Ivatts' advice and does not report his research findings in full. The validity of this DCSF report is also questionable as the authors fail to reference the sources from which their evidence is drawn.

#### *Elective Home Education in the UK (Webb, 2010)*

Webb's (2010) book on Elective Home Education in the UK contains very few references to Travellers. Yet within the half page or so that covers Traveller home-educators, Webb makes many unfounded claims. First, he suggests that it is a concern that many Traveller children are home-educated, but does not state why or who holds this concern. Second, he suggests that 'traditionally, this group [Travellers-KD], values practical skills over academic achievement' (p.103). Again this statement is not referenced or justified and reflects a derogatory picture of Traveller communities as one homogeneous group. Given the significant body of literature research confirming that Travellers do want their children to be educated (Acton, 2004; Lloyd and McClusky, 2008; Wilkin *et al*, 2010) and the lack of information on the actual numbers and practices of home-educated Traveller children, it seems dangerous for him to have reached such a strong conclusion about the reasons why Travellers home-educate.

Third, he suggests that the monitoring of Travellers' home-education provision is hampered by their semi-nomadic lifestyle and then refers to Travellers' high rates of absence and exclusions. Again there is no explanation given for these two statements, nor why he places them together in the text. In my view, they merely confirm the over-reliance of cultural assumptions rather than informed research. Research with highly-mobile Traveller families highlights that mobility is an issue in learning progression but

parents still advocate education (D'Arcy, 2008). Ivatts (2006) also confirmed that mobility was not a significant causal factor for uptake of EHE. Derrington and Kendal (2004) and Wilkin *et al* (2010) also established that mobility is no longer the main issue regarding Travellers' attendance and disproportionate exclusion levels. Indeed, it is discrimination against Travellers and the feeling of being alienated from the system that lies beneath these statistics. As Derrington and Kendal (2004) suggest, 'individuals who feel isolated, socially and culturally are unlikely to reach their full potential' (p.178).

Fourth, Webb (2010) categorises Travellers, along with Muslims, Christians and Jews, as those who choose to home-educate for religious or cultural reasons. There may certainly be some cultural aspects related to these communities' decisions to home-educate. Nevertheless, Webb is relying merely on weak anecdotal evidence<sup>19</sup> to support this claim. This is a classic example of the way in which those who are culturally *different* are placed apart from the *norm*, implying deviance.

Finally, Webb (2010) proposes that there is a suspicion that Traveller girls are not provided with any formal education after the age of eleven. Although he suggests that this suspicion was raised by the Children, Schools and Families Select Committee (2010) as part of the Badman review, I have not been able to find such a reference. In my professional experience it is certainly not the case that all female Travellers drop out at the point of transition to secondary school; many do complete their education. Again, I would suggest that a more cautious statement is necessary, unless such claims are adequately substantiated. This book also demonstrates negative dominant discourses regarding Travellers and education which send out worryingly inaccurate or inappropriate messages to readers. This is particularly concerning as it is the only recent book on EHE in England.

By critically reviewing the three texts I have found an over-reliance on stereotypical assumptions of Traveller communities. The texts reflect the general way Traveller communities are labelled as *different* and *deviant*. Thompson (1997) rightly suggests that it is simply not helpful to have 'over-reliance on cultural explanations for educational issues as this distracts attention from significant emotional factors and structural factors such as class and race' (p.71). Moreover, the focus on Traveller culture implicitly associates the problem with cultural practices and behaviours of the

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<sup>19</sup> Webb's evidence for this claim is anecdotal evidence from home-educating groups' Internet lists that 'suggest that a fair number of Muslims are also choosing to educate their children at home for religious and cultural reasons' (p.35) !

*Other* rather than the failure of education to understand and engage with difference (Craig *et al*, 2012), a tension which is reflected throughout the literature and my own research. Other scholars (Teranishi, 2002; Yosso, 2006) have used CRT as a lens to critique and problematise deficit theorising and data which is not informed by the subjects of such debates.

This literature has informed my methodology and methods and validates my theoretical framework, which is discussed shortly. Exploring the literature on Travellers and EHE has revealed important theoretical links to existing research, enlightening my own study. Critiquing the literature also justifies the need for rigorous and trustworthy research into Travellers' own experiences and perceptions of EHE to highlight the struggles and conflicts that lie at the heart of their educational exclusion and this is one of the aims of my study.

### **Specific research on Elective Home Education and Travellers in England.**

I have already made reference to the notable gap in research on EHE in England and the very limited research on Travellers' use of EHE. Monk (2009) suggests that this is because some groups are overlooked; 'gypsies and travellers (sic) are often not perceived as home-educators at all' (p.158). This section will provide a critical review of the only two studies I found on this particular subject. These studies are especially useful as they highlight issues of inequality that are largely marginalised and ignored. I will begin with a study commissioned by the Department of Education and Skills that was written by an expert in the field of Traveller Education (Ivatts, 2006). I will then discuss a study commissioned by Hampshire County Council into the use of EHE for Traveller children in their county (Bhopal and Myers, 2009).

*The situation regarding the current policy, provision and practice in Elective Home Education for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children (Ivatts, 2006).*

In November 2004 the DfES initiated a small scale research project to investigate the particular situation regarding Travellers' use of EHE. This research was in response to reports from the Traveller Education Services about the increasing use of EHE within Traveller communities. Data collected in Ivatts' study comprised two detailed questionnaires which were sent out to professionals<sup>20</sup> across 23 LAs. Findings revealed genuine concerns about Traveller children receiving appropriate educational provision (Ivatts, 2006:5). Respondents felt that EHE was often used as a device by

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<sup>20</sup> responsible for EHE within LAs and TES

Traveller parents to avoid school attendance without legal penalty. Yet, Derrington and Kendal (2004), independent researchers who have worked with Traveller communities, provide an alternative, a more balanced and insightful analysis of this situation. They suggest that EHE:

is a mechanism by which parents can avoid prosecution but still not send their children to secondary school and, conversely it is a way the LA and 'Gauje'<sup>21</sup> society can deal with Traveller students' non-attendance at secondary school (p. 142).

In other words, EHE allows Traveller children to drop out of mainstream school, or 'slip through the net' (Ibid.:142) with ease, which is convenient for schools and parents alike.

Respondents also noted concerns about the suitability of Travellers' EHE provision. Reasons included Traveller parents' sometimes limited motivation, commitment and enthusiasm for education, their low academic skills and capacity to judge their child's educational needs, attitudes and aspirations. As a professional who worked for the TES I was surprised by some of these negative observations of Travellers' use of EHE. Yet it reflects the ethos of many professionals and the problem of judging EHE by school standards. TES are funded to improve access into mainstream provision and many staff are ex-school teachers. Despite the issues in mainstream education, educational discourse still secures an often unchallenged notion that school attendance is necessary and essential for children's welfare (Monk, 2004).

Ivatts' research findings suggest that the reasons Traveller families choose EHE are diverse. Many Travellers use EHE to avoid school, but not because of a lack of interest in their child's education or the fear of prosecution. Instead predominant reasons are based on 'a fear of cultural erosion, a judged lack of relevance within the secondary school curriculum and the fear of racist and other bullying' (p.4). Ivatts' study also confirmed that the 'practicalities of a nomadic lifestyle were not seen as a significant causal factor for most families' (p.4). These findings challenge professionals' views of Travellers' use of EHE. Ivatts' research is refreshing as he does not perpetuate cultural assumptions or deficit thinking towards Travellers. Instead Ivatts redirects attention to the fact that problems in school drive Travellers' choice of EHE.

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<sup>21</sup> Gauje is the Romani word to describe non-Travellers; Travellers would use this to describe non-Travellers. It is not a derogatory term.

EHE can be the outcome of tensions between the promotion of inclusion and securing academic success in mainstream education; a debate which is already familiar territory within the *special needs* world (Jordan, 2001a). Jordan suggests that state education can rarely meet the needs of all its learners. Unfortunately, few service providers listen with respect and act supportively to uphold the views of parents (Jordan, 2001a). In this context it is understandable that Traveller parents, and other parents, may lack motivation, enthusiasm and commitment towards schooling.

The strength of Ivatts' work is that it is the first study to consider the specific EHE situation for Traveller children. Ivatts' research supports and justifies my theoretical framework because he demonstrates the perceived deficiency of Traveller communities' use of EHE, and substantiates my concerns that Travellers' decisions to take up EHE may be the product of racial injustice in school. Despite Ivatts' findings and his effort to ensure that his was not another report of generalisations or criticisms of Traveller communities, it is evident from the earlier DCSF review on EHE that dominant, stock explanations remain. Ivatts argues for a need to look *at the reasons why these families are choosing EHE*, as in his opinion it is a case of discrimination within mainstream education, where schools are not meeting the needs of Traveller children. Ivatts' study also demonstrates the way in which dominant discourses ignore racism; consequently this study supports my aims and the need for my particular research questions.

The limitations of Ivatts' study concern the methods used and the fact that there is no consultation with Traveller families themselves. Although I have been told by Ivatts himself that this was simply a matter of time available for the study, this omission continues a trend of non-consultation with Travellers themselves regarding education. The use of questionnaires may also have limited the responses professionals could make. Other methods, such as individual or focus group interviews, even if these were over the phone or on-line, could have produced deeper and more insightful findings, and might have reduced misunderstandings and misquotations in other research, as seen in the aforementioned DSCF report (2009). Furthermore, the study made no attempt to capture Travellers' own perceptions. These limitations and strengths of this work justify the need for my own research and the equality issues raised by Ivatts have been important considerations for my methodological approach.

*A pilot study to investigate the use of Elective Home Education for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children in Hampshire (Bhopal and Myers, 2009).*

Bhopal and Myers (2009) were commissioned by Hampshire LA to examine the use of EHE by Travellers in their county. They interviewed six Traveller parents and four professionals. Despite their relatively small research sample the researchers remarked on the wide discrepancies found in EHE practice. There were two basic reasons given for uptake of EHE and many parents' decisions were based on both, the first concerned dissatisfaction with the type of schooling available, the second reason was 'the positive benefits of receiving a home education' (p.8). Bhopal and Myers reported that every family in their sample was fearful about their adolescents' vulnerability within the *foreign* cultural values of secondary school. They also found a dichotomy between these Travellers' reasons and the professionals' views regarding the reasons for take up of EHE. Although professionals referred to the problems of bullying, name-calling and lack of understanding for Traveller cultures in school, all stressed that the highly-mobile nature of Traveller families was the key reason. Professionals assumed that Traveller families were moving around, yet this 'was not a reason given by any of the families interviewed, none of whom currently lived mobile lives' (p.12). It seems that these professionals were either ill-informed or simply relying on cultural stereotypes to explain away Travellers' reasons for home-educating. This illustrates the dangers of relying on professional advocacy on behalf of the marginalised.

The authors found that there were wide discrepancies in terms of the scope and quality of home-education among their sample. Four families used tutors to cover a wide range of curriculum topics. One family employed a tutor to teach curriculum based subjects for an hour or two per week. In addition the father was teaching his sons the family business, reflecting an apprentice learning model. Other, less affluent families were hampered by a lack of resources. Two mothers had only a laptop and some photocopied materials, which were inappropriate for their own children's ages. These families had tried to access practical work-experience or training for their children but 'I couldn't get nobody to take him on' (Quote in Bhopal and Myers, 2009: 10). They were worried about the fact that their children were not receiving a suitable home-education. Bhopal and Myers (2009) report a consistent expression among families for more resources, such as help with tutor costs. They suggest that in the specific context of Traveller families, the lack of resources and support for EHE might be read as 'the perpetuation of school provision that fails to address their needs' (p.4). The authors recommended that there needed to be more support and resourcing for EHE,

particularly for low-income families to ensure their children received a suitable education.

In spite of its small sample, Bhopal and Myers' (2009) research is valuable as it begins to document Traveller parents' own voices regarding EHE and wider educational debates. Of particular interest is the way that one family described secondary school life as unsafe and immoral, whereas their 'own Gypsy culture was understood in terms of a moral and safe world' (p.8). Indeed the authors' findings relate to Kiddle's (see p.28) and confirm how Travellers' decisions to take up EHE were not based on a rejection of school, but their concerns about schools themselves. Although EHE represents a safe educational space, the fact that Traveller families are fearful of their child's welfare in school raises important questions about equality in education, hence the need for my research.

Both Ivatts' (2006) and Bhopal and Myers' (2009) studies are constructive as they attend to the particular issues my research seeks to address. Within the overall EHE and Traveller literature there is generally a deficit view of Travellers' use of EHE by professionals, including those within the Traveller education field. Yet, Bhopal and Myers' and Ivatts' research provide important, alternative counter-stories to these dominant accounts. Their work substantiates my concern that for Travellers, the decision to home-educate may be the product of racial injustice in school. Bhopal and Myers research includes some Traveller parents' perspectives; the lack of children's voices in this research is a gap which I have responded to in my study. When combined, their studies justify the need for this work, my aims and research questions.

EHE is a relatively new field of research. It is clear from all the literature I have reviewed that home-educators, even Traveller home-educators, are not one homogeneous group. My review of the literature reveals worrying inequality issues for Traveller families and there remain some very important debates to be had to ensure that all perspectives are voiced and EHE can be better understood. Thus CRT is a relevant theoretical perspective to support a full understanding of Travellers' use of EHE, to highlight equality issues and listen to the voices of those who are not often heard. Policy makers, researchers and the vocal home-education associations have spoken. Special attention now needs to be paid to those *Other* groups and this section will conclude with two examples of such research into EHE (Winstanley, 2009; Arora, 2002, 2006).

## **‘Other’ Home-Educating Groups’ Experiences of EHE**

*Too Cool For School (Winstanley, 2009).*

I begin with Winstanley’s research which concentrates on the reasons families with highly-able children, often labelled as *Gifted and Talented*<sup>22</sup> (G&T) adopt home-education. This group of children is a very distinctive subset of the wider home-education population, not unlike Travellers. Winstanley (2009) suggests that the reasons many of these children are home-educated, does not fit into the traditional ‘taxonomies of home-education deployed by US scholars which concerns the ideology and pedagogy of mainstream education. Indeed, Winstanley found that many gifted families opt for EHE in response to schools’ inability to cope with their so-called *unusual* children, suggesting that G&T children, like Travellers, are ‘Othered’; ‘stereotyped and identified as different’ ( Kershen, 2011) in school.

Winstanley suggests that mainstream schooling fails G&T children due to its inflexible and exclusive structures. Her paper is insightful as the issues and experiences of highly-able children are very similar to those I personally observed and have read about concerning Traveller children. Another group of *Othered* children in mainstream education, who consequently share similar experiences, are children deemed to have SEN. These children were the focus of Arora’s (2006) study.

Before I go on to discuss Arora’s research I will briefly reflect upon the *labels* which are applied to many groups of children within the schooling system. Children are increasingly labelled according to their educational needs, talents, behaviour and even family income. The use of labels such as SEN and G&T derive from a general condemnation by society towards any characteristics that determine an individual as different from the *norm* (Fulcher and Scott, 2003). The problem with such labelling is that it draws attention to this special characteristic, which in turn becomes the central focus. Consequently, professionals may refer only to the label, for example “He is Special Needs”. Moreover, labelling can become self-fulfilling for the individual as teacher expectations are constructed according to the assigned label, rather than the individual child. Nevertheless, the label can also initiate specialist support. Within this thesis I have referred to children with SEN and Gifted and Talented children, not

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<sup>22</sup> 'Gifted and talented' describes children and young people with an ability to develop to a level significantly ahead of their year group (or with the potential to develop those abilities): 'gifted' learners are those who are considered to have abilities in one or more academic subjects, like maths and English. 'Talented' learners are those who are considered to have practical skills in areas like sport, music, design or creative and performing arts.

because I agree with such labels but to illuminate that other children share similar educational experiences with Traveller children that are based on their perceived *Otherness*. In doing so I suggest that these children *pay the price* of the existing unequal structures in school education which disadvantage them to the extent that their families feel they must withdraw them.

*Elective Home Education and Special Educational Needs( Arora, 2006)*

Arora's research (2002) on Elective Home Education in Kirklees found that a large number of parents withdrew their children from school due to concerns about inadequate academic support, bullying or other unhappy experiences. Arora later wrote a paper on Elective Home Education and Special Educational Needs (2006), as high numbers of parents with children with SEN statements were withdrawing them from school because their specific educational needs were not being met. Yet families did repeatedly try to make school work for them, 'it was only after a period of unhappiness and stress that they reluctantly started to home-educate' (p.59). Such findings correlate with Ofsted's (2010) study which also reported that just over half the parents they surveyed were frustrated and upset by experiences in school.

Hence the literature suggests that school failure to include and support the most vulnerable groups of children often results in their move to EHE. Yet, the current EHE system leaves parents alone to cope with this situation. Arora (2006) therefore proposes that LAs should retain some responsibility for advice, resources and monitoring as part of a more flexible education plan. She also recommends that more support is needed when parents are considering EHE as this allows for various educational alternatives to be explored properly and necessary support to be made available.

Both Winstanley (2009) and Arora's (2002, 2006) research provide more detail about reasons why families opt for EHE. Documenting the reasons parents decide to home-educate reveals important educational and equality issues. Thus their research helps address my research questions. Arora (2006), Winstanley (2009), Webb (2010), Ivatts (2006) and Bhopal and Myers (2009) and even Ofsted's (2010) research indicate a connection between the choice of EHE and what is happening in schools. The literature indicates that as Blacker (1981) suggested, there are a worrying number of parents who are home-educating in order to compensate for school's failure with their child. This failure seems to be focussed on the child's difference, whether this is race, culture or learning ability which excludes them from the curriculum.

Badman (2009) recommended in his Review of EHE in England that all LAs should analyse the reasons parents choose EHE and report such findings to Children's Trust Boards to help determine local Children and Young People's plans. Although these plans and Trusts are no longer a statutory requirement under the present government, these research reports confirm that further investigations to help understand EHE could certainly have wide-reaching implications for education and educators alike. My first research question concerns the reasons Traveller families choose EHE to illuminate their educational trajectories. The final part of this chapter will briefly discuss research into the issues faced by Traveller children in mainstream education to complete the contextual picture of my research.

### **2.3. Traveller Children in Mainstream School**

The aim of this section is to highlight the historic and continuing difficulties Traveller children experience in mainstream schools, because my concern is that mainstream educational structures and attitudes play a part in Travellers' increasing uptake of EHE. Disappointingly, few schools have sufficient knowledge about the history, culture and modern day lifestyles of Travellers. Travellers are too often still the invisible and unfavoured minority (Jordan, 2001). As previously suggested, reports of racist name calling and physical bullying of Traveller children dominate research that seeks Travellers' views and experiences of schooling (Lloyd and McClusky, 2008). Deeper cultural factors also play a part and reviewing the literature on Travellers' experiences in schools unveils intensely complex and challenging discourses.

#### **A Historical Perspective and the Role of Traveller Education Services**

Traveller children's educational under-achievement has been a historical cause for concern. The Plowden report (DfES, 1967) suggested that Traveller children's needs went largely unmet and described Traveller children as the most educationally-deprived children in the country. Some twenty years later Swann (DES, 1985) reported that the educational situation that Traveller children find themselves in 'illustrates to an extreme degree the experience of prejudice and alienation which faces many other ethnic minority children' (p.740).

One response to the Plowden Report can be seen in the beginnings of TES in some LAs during the 1970s. The Swann Report (DES,1985) added to the pressures but it was not until later, in the 1990s, that centralised funding enabled LAs to bid for funds which facilitated the systematic development of TES to improve the access and integration of Traveller children in mainstream education (Derrington and Kendal,

2004). The role of the TES today is still to support all Traveller families and schools in order to improve Traveller children's inclusion, access and achievement within education. TES staff support school staff in traditional in-school teaching and have used innovative distance-learning strategies<sup>23</sup> to support Traveller education. TES are recognised as targeted services which have enhanced Traveller children's education experiences (Bhopal 2001; Bhopal and Myers, 2008; Avebury, 2011). Avebury (2011) notes that the TES is a 'pan-European exemplar, recommended by the newly-adopted EU framework for national Roma integration' (14 Jun 2011: Column 741).

Many schools have responded to Travellers' needs especially at primary level, yet there is still much work to do in order to retain Traveller children at secondary school level and reduce their gap in educational achievement. In 2003 Ofsted reported that as many as 12,000 Traveller children might still not be registered in any form of education. In 2010 Traveller children were the only ethnic group whose educational performance had deteriorated in recent years (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2010: 303). The strength of the TES has been its positional power within LAs to advocate for Travellers' educational needs. Unfortunately specialised Traveller education support is rapidly declining under recent government cuts (Doherty, 2011) which are driven by an educational agenda in which race inequality has disappeared from view (Gillborn *et al*, 2012).

### **Traveller Children's Experiences in School**

Since 2004 Gypsy Roma and Travellers of Irish Heritage have been identified as two distinct ethnic groups in school census data<sup>24</sup>. This has helped build up a more informed picture of their educational situation. The UK picture of Traveller education is certainly better than in some other European countries, especially around inter-cultural practice (Wilkin *et al*, 2009). Inter-cultural practice relates to educational practice involving, or representing, different cultures. Showmen are not recognised as ethnic minority groups; consequently there is little data on their attainment in school. Nevertheless research has indicated that their achievement and attainment is below average (Marks, 2010).

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<sup>23</sup> The Electronic and Mobility Project (ELAMP) supported on-line distance learning to work towards improving educational continuity for Showmen and other highly-mobile Traveller families ( D'Arcy, 2010).

<sup>24</sup> The Pupil Level Annual Schools Census (PLASC) began to record data for 'Gypsy/Roma' and 'Travellers of Irish Heritage' in 2004.

In reality, the approaches individual schools adopt determine whether Traveller children fail or succeed in mainstream systems (Derrington and Kendal, 2004). In their longitudinal research following Traveller children from primary through secondary school, Derrington and Kendal used the terms 'Oaks' and 'Willows' to compare contrasting school standpoints. The 'Oaks' portray a rather unyielding approach to individual children's needs, whereas 'Willows' represent a more flexible and receptive approach to all children. Retention in secondary school is particularly problematic for Traveller children (Derrington and Kendal, 2004; Wilkin *et al's* (2010) with many opting for EHE as an alternative.

Research reports suggest that all Traveller children make equal progress where conditions are right. Traveller children want to learn but the barriers within current educational systems often prevent them from achieving success within these systems (Warrington, 2006; D'Arcy, 2008, 2010; DCSF, 2009a). Under the recent Labour government a number of publications and research reports were commissioned to promote examples of good practice in schools. Yet Lord Avebury (2011) commented<sup>25</sup>, that 'good intentions have done little for Traveller children over the past 50 years and governments have yet to match their deeds to their words' (2011:Column 709). It is clear that focussing on the needs of marginalised communities is certainly not the same as responding to those needs (Craig et al, 2012). Consequently, there remain many issues for Traveller children in mainstream education and these are well documented by key theorists in the field of Traveller education (Liegeois, 1998; Kiddle, 1999; Jordan, 2001, Bhopal, 2001; Derrington and Kendal, 2004; Levinson, 2007; Lloyd and McClusky, 2008).

There are many more researchers who have drawn attention to the barriers<sup>26</sup> that prevent children from different Traveller cultures from staying and achieving in mainstream education. Although there is limited research on Showmen's children, Danaher's (1995, 2001) research from Australia is revealing. Danaher (1995) suggests that schools can be uncomfortable places, 'at best temporary resting stops on the show circuit, at worst dehumanised environments' (p.13). Kiddle (1999) reported on Showmen families' accounts of school in England, when parents complained that children were ignored at the back of class, given some colouring to do or brought to the front to tell the class about life on the fairground. For the majority school was 'a sad

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<sup>25</sup> In his stated concerns within the House of Lords regarding the new Education Bill 2011.

<sup>26</sup> Please see p.10 in Introduction for full discussion of these barriers.

waste of time and opportunity' (p.99). Thus the picture of education for Travellers is complex and both ethnic minority groups and Showmen are marginalised on account of deficit cultural assumptions.

Accordingly, many Traveller students resort to specific coping strategies to deal with cultural dissonance and their social exclusion. Derrington (2007) suggests that these maladaptive strategies can be summarised as *fight, flight and playing white*. *Fight* describes the physical and verbal retaliation to racial abuse, yet research has shown that this often leads to their own exclusion (Lloyd et al, 1999; Ofsted, 1999; Derrington, 2007). *Flight* refers to Travellers' low attendance and self-imposed exclusion. Indeed, I would add EHE to the flight category as it is a method of escaping the school system and the difficulties there. *Playing White* describes the concealment of one's ethnicity or denying one's heritage and is a fairly common institutional response adopted by Travellers to cope with deep-rooted racism (Derrington, 2007). Considering all the difficulties Traveller children have to contend with in school indicates how attractive EHE might be as it represents a much safer educational space.

### **Racism and Prejudice**

There is a direct relationship between the State and Travellers' consequent positioning as the *Other*. Historically there have been 'a series of laws continuing up to the present time that effectively outlaw Travellers way of life' (Foster and Norton, 2012). There are currently no legal requirements for LAs to provide Traveller sites, as the 1968 Caravan Sites Act<sup>27</sup> was repealed, yet the case of Dale Farm<sup>28</sup> revealed how LAs are willing and able to spend millions on evicting families. The inclusion of Travellers within mainstream society is openly acted against among the public (Ipsos MORI, 2001). Interviews with police officers (Coxhead, 2007) revealed that prejudice towards Travellers was *expected* in the Force. A further example is the fact that it has taken until 2011 for the national census to include Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller communities as distinct ethnic groups.

School can represent a microcosm of wider society for young Travellers. It is a place where racism, prejudice and cultural invisibility are commonplace. Indeed, Drudy and Lynch (1993) suggest that for Travellers, the problem is that schools expect Traveller

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<sup>27</sup> This required LAs to provide for the accommodation needs of Travellers and provided funding to do so.

<sup>28</sup> A large Irish Traveller site where almost half of the residents were living without agreed planning permission.

children to adapt to their static timetable and curricula even though the systems exclude Traveller cultures and life-styles. Wilkin *et al* (2010) suggest that many schools still relate the low attainment figures for Traveller pupils back to parental and community attitudes. Wilkin *et al* (2010) also noted a lack of respect and understanding towards Traveller cultures as well as a focus upon mobility, driven by outdated stereotypical views of Travellers beyond the classroom. In my professional experience the reliance on cultural issues is often used to abdicate responsibility towards Travellers' educational needs. This is not to suggest that mobility is not an issue for learning continuity, but there is an assumption that all Travellers are mobile. These unthinking attitudes obscure issues of racism and discrimination and blame Traveller children's low attendance and achievement in school firmly upon the communities themselves (Wilkin *et al*, 2010); rather than critically analysing the oppressive structures and attitudes that exist within society and schools. In regard to EHE, Travellers' ability to provide a suitable education for their children is also questioned. This highlights how cultural stereotypes of Travellers function not only as a form of victim-blaming, but they also embody a reframing of historical and contemporary cause-and-effect that obscures race and renders it neutral (Dixson and Rousseau, 2005; DePouw, 2012).

The visibility of deficit thinking towards Travellers within the literature has been noted, yet the challenge in addressing this matter is exactly because schools often code it as *cultural difference* (Yosso, 2006). Negative cultural generalisations are in many ways an indication of the way in which Traveller communities in England are continually castigated and thought to be undeserving. Jordan (2001) suggests that the 'they bring it on themselves' attitude means there is little directed educational response to their needs. Thus it can be argued that oversimplified rhetoric concerning cultural difference masks inequalities and allows abdication of responsibility in meeting Traveller needs. The difficulties Traveller children experience in education clearly reflect their wider discrimination in society.

I argue therefore that it is racism and the continuing short-sighted, judgemental approach towards Travellers that drive their educational choices and uptake of EHE. The aim of my research is to explore the reasons why increasing numbers of Traveller children are being home-educated and examine issues of inequality. To support these aims I frame my argument within Critical Race Theory (CRT) and the relevance of CRT within my study is explained next.

#### **2. 4. Critical Race Theory**

In this study CRT will be used as a theoretical framework and analytical lens through which to illuminate educational inequality (Ladson-Billings, 2009) for Travellers. This part will discuss the development of CRT, its theoretical tenets and conceptual tools and their application to my research. Before I do, I consider the use of the word theory. When *theory* is used in daily conversations it signals no magical powers. Wolcott (2009) suggests that theory can become destructive when used by researchers in its exalted capital 'T' sense. However, within my study, the use of CRT has created important insights and links with other studies which locate my research in the field (Wellington *et al*, 2005). CRT also helped crystallise my own thinking and positionality and developed my own premises regarding my findings.

Critical Race Theory developed from the work of American legal scholars who were working towards the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eradicating wider forms of subordination (Matsuda *et al*, 1993). CRT draws from a wide literature base in law, sociology and history and is developing within education and women's studies (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002; Smith-Maddox and Solorzano, 2002). Much of the literature concerns developments in the US and concerns people of colour. In England CRT is in its infancy, yet it is emerging as a focus point for work on race in an educational context. Gillborn (2005) suggests that CRT offers a unique perspective on racism and is applicable to UK systems and structures as it recognises the multi-faceted and deeply embedded nature of racism. Ladson-Billings (2009) applied CRT's use in law to education for the same purpose. CRT scholars argue that although there is rhetoric of equal opportunities in law and education, racism remains a significant and influential factor in outcomes (Dixson and Rousseau, 2005). This is because the rhetoric of equal opportunity ignores past and continuing inequalities which disadvantage minority groups.

Hence, CRT is about raising critical questions and challenging hidden operations of power that disadvantage minority ethnic groups (Gillborn, 2008). The aim is to work towards more equitable and socially just relations of power (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Yet, CRT is fluid, like British anti-racism 'there is no single, unchanging statement of what CRT believes or suggests' (Gillborn, 2006:251). This fluidity reflects the character of racism which is also complex and ever-changing. Nevertheless there are several theoretical tenets, or basic insights which inform CRT outlined by Solorzano (1997, 1998). They include the centrality of racism, the challenge to dominant ideology, the

importance of experiential knowledge, the use of an interdisciplinary approach and a commitment to social justice. I now discuss these concepts in relation to my study to demonstrate that CRT is a relevant theory to support my research.

### **The Centrality of Racism**

CRT is pertinent to my research because there is a central focus on the continuing and embedded existence of racism and in particular, its *normalised* role in society and education and 'its routine (often unrecognised) character' (Gillborn, 2008: 27). I have defined my use of racism which concerns cultural difference earlier (p.8-10). Racism has its roots in discourse that defines those from differing ethnic groups as *Other*. Others are stereotyped according to a set of negative dispositions that seemingly justify their exclusion from full participation in society (Devine *et al*, 2008). Reviewing the literature on Travellers reveals the embedded nature of racism against Travellers with an identifiable ethnic background and how they are depicted as *Other* (DES, 1985; Drudy and Lynch, 1993; Jordan, 2001; Bhopal and Myers, 2008). Some aspects of CRT are also directly relevant to an understanding of the perceived Otherness and prejudice which can characterise attitudes towards the Showmen community.

I propose that CRT is relevant to this study as it helps address my aims and research questions through its acknowledgement of direct racism and perhaps more crucially, the subtleties of hidden racism and cultural Otherness for Travellers within education. My literature review has illuminated these subtleties of racism; the cultural stereotypes which depict Travellers as *different* and *deviant* are equally if not more destructive than direct racism, because they are an ingrained and invisible day-to-day feature (Carmichael and Hamilton, 1967). The fact that CRT scholars recognise the centrality of race is important in the context of Traveller education as many people continue to openly express racist views towards Travellers (Willers, 2012). Racism is a highly-contested and provocative term. It sounds unforgiving so people often react in defence to any suggestion that they might be involved in actions or processes conceived as racist (Gillborn, 2008). I am familiar with this situation through my professional experience. Indeed, when I have challenged people about racist remarks or behaviours they often became extremely defensive and as a result, refused to work with me. Sometimes therefore, little progress could be made in improving the situation for Travellers.

## **The Challenge to Dominant Ideology**

Within this chapter I have juxtaposed the dominant, often racist, discourses regarding Travellers and education against the marginalised discourses to challenge dominant ideology and illuminate issues of inequality. Interestingly, CRT emerged out of the very need for a new vocabulary that could name and address the hidden race-related structures of oppression. CRT scholars use critical White studies to raise challenging questions and analyse what it means to be and not to be White (Gillborn, 2006). These studies are not an assault on all White people. They do, however, represent an assault on the social construction and persistently reinforced power of White identities and interests (Gillborn, 2008). This is because White power and advantage can determine a right to exclude others. An example of this type of social construction and exclusion in relation to Travellers in education is demonstrated in Eastern Europe where for generations many Roma children have been automatically placed in segregated or special schools for the mentally disabled (sic) (Equality and the Roma Education Fund, 2011; Wilkin *et al*, 2009). Even where Roma are educated in mainstream schools they are often separated internally from the other children on the grounds of their cultural differences (European Commission, 2004).

In England there is a more subtle variant of such segregation. Traveller children are often classified as low achievers and inappropriately labelled as having SEN (Wilkin *et al*, 2009). Therefore, like Roma in Europe, Traveller children in England are segregated by achievement and labelled as SEN on the basis of their cultural difference. Here we see evidence of the way in which race and assumptions of cultural differences single out the Traveller child as deficient. This is not an issue for Travellers alone. I have observed an interesting parallel within DePouw's (2012) work on Hmong American students:

Majority explanations of inequities in Hmong American education often describe Hmong American student and family experiences in terms of 'culture clash' or profound cultural differences thereby obscuring the ways in which Hmong Americans have been racialized as refugees, Southeast Asians and as 'Blackened' and gendered low income communities of color (p.223).

The benefit of CRT is that it can provide a critical lens and vocabulary to analyse, understand and disseminate such inequalities (Dixson and Rousseau, 2005). In addition to the basic tenets, CRT also provides several conceptual tools which include critical White studies, storytelling and counter-stories and interest convergence (Gillborn, 2002). My research draws mainly upon storytelling and counter-stories

although I have referred to the relevance of White studies. I now discuss the concept and relevance of *Whiteness* and *interest convergence* in relation to Travellers and education.

#### *How does Whiteness work?*

It is important to note that *Whiteness* as a system of beliefs and privileges does not automatically map onto skin tone (Gillborn, 2010). Many Travellers in England are white-skinned; nevertheless, this will vary from family to family. Indeed, Roma communities tend to have much darker skin tones. Still, my review of the literature has indicated evidence of racism and marginalisation in society and education to suggest that all Travellers are depicted as being outside the majority culture. Accordingly, in the political and sociological sense that CRT uses the word *Whiteness*, all Travellers are a minoritised racial *Other*, and in the context of CRT they are *not White* (Gillborn, 2011). Moreover, the fact that many Travellers in England do have pale skin tones means that they can 'pass' or 'play white' (Derrington, 2007) which is problematic in addressing racism as their particular difficulties can be easily diluted and ignored.

Some minority groups have become White, yet CRT scholars argue that this process only takes place when it benefits White self-interest and is therefore based upon *interest convergence*. To expand on this notion<sup>29</sup>, I refer to the situation of Irish people in the USA. In the 1800s Irish people immigrated to the US to escape racial oppression and religious persecution in their own country (Takiki, 1993). When they arrived they were regarded as working class and were socially closer to Blacks than Whites (Leonardo, 2002). When competition for employment increased, the White bourgeoisie sought to disrupt Irish and Black partnerships to preserve their power. Thus they provided opportunities for Irish immigrants to join them socially, to become *White* and maintain White superiority. The Irish people embraced this opportunity as it secured their social mobility and economic independence (Leonardo, 2002).

In England the Race Relations Amendment Act (2000) placed new duties on public bodies, including schools, to address institutional racism. Gillborn (2006) is quite accurate when he states that although the language may have since changed the reality of race equality has not. Many Travellers still play White in order to survive in school (Derrington, 2007). For Travellers to 'become White' in the CRT sense, the dominant majority must encourage this process. Within the literature, evidence of overt

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<sup>29</sup> An initial explanation of interest convergence is found on p.18.

and covert structures of racism towards all Traveller communities, highlights that there is currently no *interest* in enabling this process, a situation which limits Travellers' social power and agency and impedes their children's educational opportunities. CRT is important in this thesis as it highlights *interest convergence*, allowing me to demonstrate the levels of racism Travellers experience and the barriers in overcoming these.

### **The Importance of Experiential Knowledge: Storytelling and Counter-Stories**

Critical race scholars often locate the voices of the marginalised in order that they are able to share their lived experiences of racism and inequalities. Indeed they use the notion of *voice* to assert the experiential knowledge of minority people and their communities (Ladson-Billings, 2009). CRT scholars argue that the experiential knowledge of marginalised communities is legitimate, appropriate and necessary to understanding education (Ibid; 2009). My research seeks to document Travellers' own accounts to add their voices to the educational debate. This is because enabling marginalised voices to be heard can redirect the dominant gaze and enable others to see from a point of view that has been there all along (Taylor, 1993:8). In my view the importance of hearing marginalised voices over the dominant majority opinion concerning EHE is vital and I have chosen research methods which can ensure that the research task for research is largely one of 'turning up the volume on the depressed or inaudible voice' (Clough, 2002:67).

Documenting Travellers' accounts may also provide important counter-stories. A counter-story is a means to counteract or challenge the dominant story (Dixson and Rousseau, 2005). Solorzano and Yosso (2002) state that the counter-story is a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are often not told. Moreover, they are a way to expose, analyse and challenge the majority's stock explanations regarding minority groups. Indeed, Stovall (2006) suggests that for this reason counter-stories are essential as they disrupt the dominant stories which depict minority communities as *anti-school* or *anti-intellectual*. Counter-stories can be built up using a range of data, for example Solorzano and Yosso (2002) created counter-stories using a combination of their data, the existing literature on the topic(s) and their professional and personal experiences. I take the same approach with particular emphasis on documenting Travellers' own accounts of EHE and education to challenge the literature that depicts Travellers in a negative light. The theme of *voice* runs centrally through my research project and is one that will also be expanded on in the next chapter

concerning my methodology and methods. I now discuss the final two CRT tenets together in relation to my research.

### **The Use of an Interdisciplinary Approach**

CRT is interdisciplinary and activist in nature and insists upon critical race work that recognises the complexity of discrimination and is part of a broader movement towards social justice (Stovall, 2006; DePouw 2012). CRT draws upon scholarship within different disciplines such as law, history, sociology and education to better understand the effects of racism, sexism and classism on marginalised groups (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002). In England approaches in working with children and young people already advocate an interdisciplinary approach<sup>30</sup>. Yet closer actions are required to address racism. The Macpherson Report (1999) investigated racist issues surrounding the death of Stephen Lawrence and suggests that in order to eradicate racism 'specific and co-ordinated action'.....both within agencies and society in required, 'particularly through the education system' (para.6.54, p.33).

CRT also recognises the intersectionality of race and racism with other forms of oppression, which have been described as 'the layers of subordination' (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002; Phoenix, 2009). I concur that acknowledging racism is of central importance, yet in my professional experience individual Traveller children may experience additional inequality on grounds of their gender, social class and cultural group. The matrix of oppression is commonly referred to as intersectionality where 'cultural patterns of oppression are not only interrelated but are bound together and influenced by the intersectional systems of society' (Collins, 2000:42).

The concept of intersectionality can be a valuable analytical tool in tracing how certain groups are situated as not only different but also deviant (Staunæs, 2003). For example, Teranishi (2002) uses CRT as a lens to 'problematise traditional notions of race by examining the intersections of ethnicity, social class and immigration' among Asian Pacific Americans (p.146). Intersectionality is highly relevant with regard to Travellers' educational experiences as for some families, their position as the Other is driven by complex and intersecting inequalities which increase their disadvantage on a number of levels. Observing race as Travellers' only disadvantage would be a limiting proposition and I draw upon CRT as a framework that supports radical critique and praxis in order to address my research aims and questions and illuminate the complex

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<sup>30</sup> E.g. Every Child Matters (DCSF, 2004).

nature of racism and other forms of exclusion (Gillborn, 2008). Still, it is not enough to simply use CRT as a framework to illuminate racism, scholars must also 'propose radical solutions for addressing racism' (Ladson-Billings, 2009:33) and I now discuss the last CRT tenet.

### **The Commitment to Social Justice**

CRT scholarship advocates a creative, pragmatic approach to challenge the dominant ideology and works towards ending oppression (Matsuda *et al*, 1993; Stovall, 2006). CRT is underpinned by basic insights and specific conceptual tools which I have discussed and related to my study. Many scholars use a range of these tenets and tools to challenge racism and other oppressions. For example, Housee (2012) uses CRT as a tool to unpack Islamophobia in her teaching and to inform debate regarding social justice in education. She builds up counter narratives from the media and students' own voices to make sense of media racism. 'A discussion of the misrepresentation of the other was particular useful in understanding the West/East/Us/Other discourse' (p.107). Another creative example can be seen within Rollock's (2012) work on the invisibility of race. As a Black academic she uses autobiography, data analysis and counter-narrative to critically interrogate the norms and practices of educational spaces. She combines her own voice and parents' accounts from her own research findings on 'The Educational Strategies of the Black Middle Classes' to highlight 'the pervasiveness of the racial power dynamics at play across the education system as a whole' (p.67).

The advantage of CRT is that I can draw creatively upon its tenets and tools to develop my own argument regarding school inequality and Travellers. Although all the dimensions of CRT are applicable to my research I have drawn specifically on certain aspects of CRT to deepen my analysis of the literature and my data. For example, by drawing on storytelling and counter-stories as tools to illuminate inequality I demonstrate that social exclusion on the grounds of racism remains an issue for Traveller families. I particularly favour CRT's concept of *interest convergence* which provides a recognised scholarly approach to reveal the subtle and hidden, yet persistent aspects of racism which perpetuate minority groups' social exclusion. Showmen communities are not legally defined as an ethnic minority group and are in many ways are very different from other ethnic minority Traveller groups. Still, I use CRT to highlight racism towards all Traveller groups, a connection which has been made before within Traveller literature and consequently this research may contribute to the development of a new dimension within CRT.

## Conclusion

The aim of my research is to explore the reasons why Traveller children are being home-educated and consider implications for educational equality. My review of the literature has identified a number of equality issues and debates which inform my knowledge, understanding and research questions, which I now discuss in turn to conclude this chapter.

### *Why do Travellers choose home-education?*

Within the EHE literature the reasons families take up EHE are categorised into negative and positive reasons (Badman, 2009; Webb, 2010). Yet others (Rothermel, 2003) have warned against the use of simple taxonomies as families' EHE practices are diverse. The same is true for Traveller families (Bhopal and Myers, 2009). The dominant discourse, which is informed by professionals' opinions, suggests that all Traveller families take up EHE for mobility reasons, avoidance of school and lack of interest in education. Yet research which consults with Travellers themselves reveals the opposite is true. Traveller families do want an education but fears of racism, safety and relevant educational provision hamper their inclusion. Thus mobility is not the reason for EHE, but complex problems in school are. Nevertheless, scripts regarding mobility marginalise all Traveller communities and provide stock explanations to allow abdication of responsibility towards Travellers' educational needs. The difficulties Traveller children experience in school, combined with the views that these issues are the community's own fault raise a number of critical questions about Traveller children's inclusion in school, the cultural politics of the education system and the function of current EHE systems.

### *What are the experiences and perceptions of Traveller families regarding EHE?*

The literature illuminates that there is very limited data on Travellers' own experiences of EHE. Bhopal and Myers (2009) small study is the only one to date which has consulted with Travellers in England regarding EHE. Their findings are informative as their research reveals that EHE practices are also diverse. Families who used tutors for academic subjects and provided their own 'hands-on' apprentice model for vocational subjects offered 'the opportunity of a very wide ranging education' (p.11). Yet those families with limited resources struggled with EHE provision. Consequently findings suggest a need for more support and resources for EHE families, a recommendation also supported by those advocating on behalf of children with so-called 'SEN' (Arora, 2002, 2006). The literature reveals similarities between several groups of children who

are all Othered in school which suggests that equality is still an issue in schools and a matter worthy of investigation.

*Are there emerging equality issues concerning Traveller families' use of EHE?*

Reviewing my literature reveals that there are several equality issues concerning Travellers' use of EHE. Equality in accessing education is not simply about ensuring that opportunities are there but ensuring everyone can access and benefit from those opportunities (Knowles, 2011). I have highlighted how the 'master' narrative communicates implicit, and often unfounded, assumptions according to stereotypes of one homogeneous, deviant Traveller community. The use of such scripts perpetuates a lack of appropriate response to Traveller children's needs and means that Travellers' opportunities in school are limited.

The literature substantiates my disquiet regarding EHE and inequality and indicates that the decision to home-educate might well be the product of racial injustice in school and society. The literature informs my developing premise that EHE is chosen by Traveller families as a safe space away from the racism and inequality in school.

Reviewing the literature has assured me that CRT is a useful theoretical framework to facilitate the aims and research questions in my study. Moreover, my research may be able to build upon the application of CRT in education in England to provide insights about Traveller groups, like Showmen, when seen through a 'non-White' lens. Faced with a research project where there are multiple and often competing ethical and political viewpoints requires caution when presenting findings and possible solutions. Yet Gerwitz and Cribb (2009) confirm that researchers must take seriously the practical judgements and dilemmas of the people we research and take responsibility for political and ethical implications of our research. This will be the focus of my next chapter which outlines and discusses my methodological approach.

## Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

### Introduction

Methodology refers to the theory of attaining knowledge and includes a consideration of the best methods through which to collect and analyse appropriate and relevant data (Sikes, 2007). Thus methodology describes the choice and justification for the research methods deployed to obtain data. Critical analysis of these methods is important to clarify and justify the research strategy and thereby improve and extend knowledge about the subject under scrutiny (Sikes, 2007). The purpose of this chapter is to introduce, justify and evaluate my methodological approach and the methods used.

My research seeks to explore the reasons why Traveller children are home-educated and to illuminate issues of educational inequality. The research employs an interpretive paradigm. An interpretive paradigm is characterised by a view that human behaviour and knowledge are subjective and constructed by individuals and the aim is to explore perspectives and shared meanings to develop insights into phenomena (Wellington, 2000). Accordingly, I undertook two sets of interviews with two Showmen families and nine Romany/Gypsy families and individual interviews with two EHE professionals, to address my research questions as set out below:

1. *Why do Traveller families choose home-education?*
2. *What are the experiences and perceptions of Traveller families regarding Elective Home Education?*
3. *Are there emerging equality issues concerning Traveller families' use of EHE?*

This chapter is set out in four main parts. The first part begins with a definition of methodology and methods, after which I discuss research paradigms. I have drawn upon CRT as my theoretical framework and the role of theory is explained next. I make reference to the application of CRT throughout this chapter in order to clarify and justify its application to my study. Thereafter I provide more details of my positionality as a researcher. I then revisit my research questions and discuss their importance within my study. The second part of this chapter explains my chosen methods, my reasons for selecting interviews for data collection and my consideration of other methods. I also discuss my interviews with Traveller families and EHE professionals and how I piloted these. I consider my research sample, data collection and the interview process and provide a detailed explanation of my data analysis to aid understanding and transparency of this process. Finally, I explain my use of vignettes to document Travellers' voices and address my aims and research questions.

The third part of this chapter concerns ethics. Ethical considerations have been an important and continuing element within my research project, as my respondents are members of marginalised groups who are widely discriminated against within society, educational policy and practice. This section highlights the ethical considerations which arose as part of the planning and practice of this study. I also discuss the practical ways in which I have worked towards establishing the trustworthiness and rigour of my research. The concluding part of this chapter summarises the strengths and limitations of my chosen methodology and methods. I conclude with a critical reflection on the tensions, challenges and reassurances along my research journey.

### **3.1. Defining Methodology & Methods**

The terms methodology and methods are often used interchangeably and this can cause confusion, therefore I define them in turn. Grix (2004) describes the methodology as a much needed, critical study of research methods and their use. Clough (1994) proposes that the methodology is an essential feature of any research project, as it links the different research elements together. That being so, any methodology should clarify and justify the choice of research strategy by integrating the research aims, questions and approach to enable the value of research to be properly understood and assessed (Wellington, 2000).

Methods signify a range of available techniques to gather data and support the interpretation of the social phenomenon under scrutiny (Basit, 2010). Research methods can also be described as the tools with which we pursue knowledge (Grix, 2004). Gathering the right tools for any job is important. Yet, within research, the tools should not direct the process, instead they should be carefully considered for their purpose (Thomas, 2009). My methods were decided upon once my research questions and methodological approach were clear and the literature had been reviewed.

So, methods differ from methodology yet they also interconnect as they are both elements of the same research strategy; the methods are the practical techniques used and the methodology is a reflection on those techniques (Wellington, 2000). Importantly, it is on this match of methodology and methods, aims and research questions that the credibility of any findings depends; thus the importance of methodology cannot be understated (Sikes, 2007). In deciding upon my methodological approach, my starting point was a consideration of research paradigms, theory and my positionality, which I now discuss.

## **Research Paradigms, Theory and Positionality**

### *Research Paradigms*

A paradigm can be described as a way of looking at the world. Sikes (2007) defines a paradigm as 'a basic set of beliefs that guide action' (p.6). Cryer (2011) suggests that a 'research paradigm' is a 'school of thought' or 'a framework for thinking' about how research ought to be conducted. An understanding of the different research paradigms can help researchers locate their research within the relevant academic field, ensuring they are aware of common terminologies, theories, agreed methods and practices (Grix, 2004).

Within the philosophy of the social and human sciences there are commonly believed to be two main research paradigms that can be perceived as being located at opposite ends of a continuum. At one end is positivism, which upholds that all true knowledge is based on observable phenomena (Wellington, 2000) and on the other is interpretivism which endorses subjectivity (Grix, 2004). Between these two paradigms there lie a variety of other approaches, such as post-positivism and constructivism that range from those which explain social reality to those seeking to understand it. Nevertheless some scholars challenge this binary view as a false polarization in which 'all the mistaken attributes of positivism are alleged to be present in any quantitative approach' (Wellington, 2000:17).

Recognising the competing worldviews that frame social enquiry enabled me to locate my research within an interpretive paradigm. Interpretivism is 'typically seen as an approach to qualitative research' (Cresswell, 2009: 8). An interpretive approach recognises that research participants' views are diverse and numerous and seeks to document their understandings of the situation being studied. Appropriate data collection methods include interviews, discussions and observations. Accordingly, the priorities of interpretive research correlate with my research questions which seek to capture Travellers' own understandings of their experiences and views of EHE.

### *Theory*

The role of theory in my research is important. CRT in education has provided a theoretical and practical framework which has underpinned my research. Good theories select out certain factors as the most relevant in providing an explanation of a particular situation (Stokes, 1995). CRT selects several theoretical tenets (see p. 53-59) as the most relevant in developing better understandings of race and inequality in an educational context. Alongside these tenets, CRT provides theorizing methods to

conduct research that can address issues of racism and inequality. Gillborn (2006) describes these theorizing methods as the conceptual tools of CRT and they include: critical White studies, storytelling and counter-stories and interest convergence. My study uses stories to document Travellers own experiences of EHE. I use counter-stories to 'expose, analyse and challenge majoritarian stories of racial privilege' (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002: 32). I also use interest convergence to illuminate the challenge in addressing racism towards Travellers and propose solutions in later chapters. CRT resonates deeply with my own beliefs, values and positionality.

### *Positionality*

Interpretive scholars recognise that a researcher's beliefs, values, ontological and epistemological assumptions will affect the nature of the research and the observations and interpretations they make (Thomas, 2009). Consequently it is important to state one's position as researcher and highlight any past experiences and prior knowledge that may bias the researcher's role and their influence upon the research process. Wolcott (1995) suggests that research must confirm a 'healthy bias', which he describes as a well-considered stance that clarifies how the researcher was attracted to a particular issue and in which ways their research will advance knowledge and understanding. Grix (2004) confirms that it is of paramount importance that researchers do understand and clarify their position and consider how their view of the world impacts upon their research process. This is because the researcher's positionality is the most significant factor influencing choice and use of methodology and methods (Sikes, 2007).

Although there is an acceptance within interpretive research that a researcher is an active and integral part of the research process, critics have wasted little time in pointing out that their reports may be biased and partisan (Tooley and Darby, 1998; Hargreaves, 2001). Stating one's position will therefore not necessarily persuade audiences that research findings are credible or worthy of attention. Researchers therefore need to adopt a range of strategies to ensure rigorous and trustworthy research. I began this process in Chapter 1 by stating my positionality and I now elaborate on my experiences and prior knowledge and how they have influenced the conduct of my research.

### *My Positionality as a Researcher*

I began my professional career as an educator in early years' education, after which I trained as a teacher and then a youth and community worker. I am currently working as a lecturer in Higher Education. Most of my working experiences have been situated within the margins of education, where I have supported a variety of vulnerable and often disengaged children and young people. One of my most recent roles focussed upon improving Traveller children's access and inclusion within education. This work increased my knowledge, awareness and understanding of equality issues in wider society and current education systems.

My knowledge and experiences have led me to use my research as a tool to work towards greater educational equality, an intention which is reflected in my research aim, questions and theoretical perspective. I have been drawn towards EHE as it is an overlooked, yet important area of education and provides a fascinating critique of contemporary education systems (Gerwitz and Cribb, 2009). I am seeking to document Traveller families' views and experiences on educational matters to raise awareness and give *voice* to Traveller opinions and experiences of education. Although 'voice' has many meanings in research (Guba and Lincoln, 2005), my position can be articulated as a political and moral research response to equality issues faced by an oppressed and silenced minority group (Nutbrown and Hannon, 2003).

My methodological approach includes a deliberate choice to focus on Travellers' voices. Although my thesis is written in the first person, I draw on Travellers' own words to describe their experiences in later chapters. As Mitchell (1993) confirms, the informed researcher's voice no longer provides an authoritarian monologue. I document the voices of Travellers, to assert their experiential knowledge. I use storytelling to highlight Travellers' views, and not those of educators as they have already been documented and form part of the master narrative which so often portrays Travellers in a negative light. Omitting the voices of those who experience EHE systems first hand and who play such an important part in my research, would certainly reflect a form of bias (Guba and Lincoln, 2005).

I recognise that I am in a more privileged position than other researchers, as I had access to Traveller families through my professional working practice. In some ways I could be considered an *insider* in the Traveller community as I have worked alongside many Traveller families. This experience has enabled me to understand Travellers' situations and what they say in a way that no newcomer could (Reinhartz, 1992). I am

also a Gorja or Gauje, a non-Traveller, and clearly not an insider, or member of the Traveller community. In their research with Traveller students in secondary schools, Derrington and Kendal (2004) suggested that the fact that they (the researchers) were not Travellers was bound to influence responses. They also noted that some of the responses were likely to be influenced by the unnatural experience of being interviewed by a Gauje in education. The same is true in my research. I have been conscious that my study demands a lot from families as I asked them to cross personal boundaries and share private family practices and thoughts with someone who is not a Traveller and worked for an LA. I have now clarified my positionality and its influence on my research. I will now revisit my research questions which define, direct and assess this study.

### **The Importance of Research Questions**

Thomas (2009) suggests that a research project begins with an interest or an uncertainty about a particular issue, which is framed into a research question. Hence research questions should be the starting point of the research process because they define the investigation and define research boundaries, helping one to stay focussed (Wellington, 2000). Clough and Nutbrown (2007) suggest that research questions should be phrased and rephrased until they are focussed and distinct. Although prima facie questions are formed at the outset, they do often change. Indeed Thomas (2009) states that 'it is to be expected' that research questions are changed and refined as the study progresses (p.14). My research questions were refined. As I reflected critically on the literature, my aim, my data collection and analysis, it became clear that issues of equality were central to my investigation, yet this clarity was not obvious in the original wording of my research questions. I therefore re-articulated my third research question to capture this focus.

I decided that the best way to address my research questions was to document Traveller families' views and understandings of EHE. I therefore chose interviews as my research method and the next section of this chapter will explain and justify my choice of semi-structured interviews to collect my data.

### **3.2. Methods**

Research within an interpretive paradigm typically concentrates upon research participants' views of a given situation in order to understand the way they construct their social world (Grix, 2004). The aim of my research is to explore why Traveller

children are home-educated and investigate issues of educational inequality. I have used interviews to facilitate data collection as they allow Travellers' views to be expressed in their own words. This section begins with some discussion about different interview strategies in order to justify the use of semi-structured interviews within my study.

### **Selecting Interviews for Data Collection**

Through history, human beings have learnt from each other through conversation and discussion. Still, research interviews are more than an everyday conversation as they have a particular purpose and are constructed so that the researcher can investigate and prompt discussions. Webb and Webb (1932) describe the interview as a conversation with a purpose. Wellington (2000) suggests that this purpose revolves around giving a person or group of people a *voice* (p.72). Fontana and Frey (2000) confirm that interviewing is one of the most common and powerful ways to understand our fellow human beings. Interviews therefore offer an excellent way of enabling discussion and allowing respondents to answer questions in their own words, thus providing rich data.

Yet there are a variety of different approaches interviewers might take that need careful consideration. Kvale and Brinkman (2009) summarise the different interview approaches using two metaphors, the 'miner' and the 'traveller'. The 'miner' adopts a positivist stance to collect or extract knowledge to 'prove' their research; their interview process concentrates upon *knowledge collection*. In other words, the researcher takes what they know and leaves (Clough and Nutbrown, 2007). As Travellers are already discriminated against in many ways, a central consideration was *not* to take advantage of families for the purpose of my research. I wanted to work alongside Traveller families to explore their views. I therefore located my interview approach within the second 'traveller' category or *knowledge construction*. This process constructs knowledge through conversation; the contours of the investigation are explored *with* participants who are invited to share their own experiences and views. This kind of approach resonates with CRT which advocates the importance of marginalised communities' experiential knowledge and speaking to those who have experienced discrimination to better understand education. Matsuda *et al* (1993) suggest that 'those who have experienced discrimination speak with a special voice to which we should listen' (p.63). Accordingly, interviews justify the use of my theoretical framework in addressing my research questions.

A further choice regarding interview approaches is the degree of structure. The common distinction is between structured, unstructured and semi-structured interviews, which I shall discuss in turn. Parsons (1984) suggests that the structured interview is little more than a face-to-face questionnaire. Structured interviews involve set questions in a specific sequence. Their benefit is one of consistency and control by the researcher, their limitation is that they are not flexible and may prevent important participant views from emerging. Unstructured interviews lie at the opposite extreme; they contain no predetermined questions. Their benefit is that respondents set the agenda (Thomas, 2009). Their limitation is the variation between respondents. Moreover if participants are not confident in raising their own agenda, rich discussion may be restricted.

Semi-structured interviews are a compromise between the two positions (Wellington, 2000). When using semi-structured interviews, researchers have a list of planned themes or questions, but the exact wording and sequence may vary. This approach enables a more flexible, yet consistent approach in exploring participants' viewpoints. A key strength of semi-structured interviews is that the dimension of openness allows unexpected findings to surface; findings that may go beyond the remit of the research questions. All these advantages underpin my decision to use semi-structured interviews. I will now briefly outline my considerations of other data collection methods, the benefits and challenges of using mixed methods.

#### *Consideration of Other Methods*

My review of previous research on EHE (Ivatts, 2006; Ofsted, 2010) highlighted the limitations of questionnaires and voluntary participation, which I will discuss in turn. Questionnaires are restrictive as they do not require physical interaction with research participants and thus responses may be limited and questions understood in a different manner than was intended by those completing them (Walker, 1985). Due to the low literacy levels within the adult Traveller population (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2010) and their frequently geographically isolated living arrangements I felt that questionnaires would not provide quality data for two reasons. First, if posted they might not reach the homes of respondents<sup>31</sup>. Second, a questionnaire format would not invite rich descriptions about individuals' experiences and views.

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<sup>31</sup> In my own professional experience letters to Traveller families were often lost due to complex or inaccurate postcodes on sites.

Voluntary participation also has its limitations as it can influence the quality and validity of a research sample. In the field of home-education, Nelson (2011) proposes that research is often conducted by ‘insiders’<sup>32</sup>. Arora (2002, 2006) also raises concerns about the number of voluntary, self-selected samples within EHE research as they can be biased. Indeed Arora proposes that the main critique of previous EHE studies is this self-selected nature of participants who are more highly-motivated and better-educated than the entire home-educating group, with the result that their children are at an advantage. In my critical review of Ofsted’s report on EHE in England (2010) (see p. 35), I also suggest that the voluntary nature of their research participants did not ensure a representative sample. In estimating the effect of EHE from these studies, Gabb (2004) suggests that we may be in the position of a man who studies gambling, because we are only listening to those ‘who come forward and talk about their winnings’ (p.18).

Being aware of the limitations of questionnaires and voluntary research participants, I chose interviews as a method that could support interactive research and capture participants’ subjective meanings and worldviews (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009). Moreover, the advantage of the interview process is that it allowed me to attend to Travellers’ own voices, the research aims and questions. Yet Grix (2004) suggests that using interviewing as the sole method is not wise because it does not allow for triangulation, which enables the phenomena to be informed from different angles. Hence, I initially planned to include a visual research tool alongside my interviews. This tool was simply a large blank circle on paper called ‘My week’ (Christensen and James, 2008).

### *Mixed Methods*

Mixed methods offer additional ways to collect data. The proposed ‘My week’ tool allowed families to record their weekly EHE activities through any medium they chose, for example dividing the circle into days, drawing pictures or using photographs. I chose this tool as a way to shed more light on EHE as it offered a more interactive, visual method to interest families. Nevertheless, in practice, take up of the tool was limited. Only two families chose to use it, others declined. Families stated children were too old or did not want to complete it. As their participation in my research was voluntary I felt it was important that families selected which elements of the research, if

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<sup>32</sup> Those who are home-educated themselves.

any, they participated in. Among the two families who did use the tool, the first family used photographs with notes; the second divided the circle up into days of the week and wrote the main activities in each day. I decided not to include this data as it raised issues about incomplete data sets, although I have referred to it as a source of background data.

Although I have not been able to use mixed methods to triangulate my data, I have engaged with triangulation in my analysis and documentation of Traveller families' views by member-checking my data and asking experts in Traveller education to review my work. As Wellington (2000) suggests 'triangulation can be achieved by checking with individuals that your interpretations match and accurately reflect their views and attitudes' (p.25). Triangulation is a practical way to establish trustworthiness, a topic that is revisited towards the end of this chapter. Overall, the decision to use semi-structured interviews was underpinned by my research aims and questions and my desire to document Travellers' own views as within EHE literature there is a significant gap in consultation with Travellers themselves. I now discuss the piloting and the process of my interviews.

## **The Interviews**

### *Piloting Interviews*

Piloting has the principle function of increasing the reliability and practicability of certain data collection processes (Oppenheim, 1992; Morrison, 1993; Wilson and McLean, 1994). Piloting enabled me to rehearse the interview schedule and formulate clear, consistent interview questions. I piloted my interview questions with two Travellers and my previous Traveller Team manager before I began data collection and as a result I removed one question which focussed upon recommendations for changes to EHE, as the first interview was simply too early to ask this question. I also added a question (see question 12, Appendix A) to ascertain whether families knew how to re-enrol their children in school if they wanted to.

At the outset I had also planned to pilot the interview process by selecting one family as a pilot, but their interview went so well and the data collated was so rich that I was reluctant not to use it. Piloting an interview can provide researchers with experience and therefore more confidence in the process (Bryman, 2008). Removing the family as a pilot can be seen as a drawback, yet I was fortunate in that I could rely on previous

personal experience of conducting semi-structured interviews with young Travellers and their families (D'Arcy, 2008; D'Arcy, 2010).

#### *Interviews with Traveller Families*

I planned for two interviews per family. The first set of interview questions (Appendix A) related directly to my first two research questions. These questions focussed upon Travellers' reasons *for choosing EHE* and their *perceptions of education*, which included both EHE and education. The second set of questions promoted discussion about Traveller families' *actual experiences and practices of EHE*. The first interview provided rich, exploratory interviews into EHE and school education. After the first interviews had taken place I undertook a broad thematic analysis of the first data set, which created a series of further questions to confirm my first stage of analysis. The second interview (Appendix B) always began with a review of the first interview, which enabled me to member-check the transcribed interviews for accuracy and discuss and check my findings with families, an important part of ethical research and trustworthiness of my study. Member-checking is a vital part of any research which seeks to assert voice and another practical way in which to ascertain trustworthy findings<sup>33</sup>.

#### *Interviews with Professionals*

One interview was held with each of two EHE professionals and I was able to email them copies of their interview transcripts for checking after the interviews. My literature review revealed discrepancy and diversity among different LAs concerning their EHE practices and systems (Hopwood *et al*, 2007; McIntyre-Bhatty, 2007). The aim of these interviews was to gain insight into EHE policy and practice from practitioners' experiences to enrich and extend understanding of Travellers' use of EHE from an LA perspective. I also raised some of the issues from my literature review (professionals' concerns about EHE, reasons for families electing for EHE and the Badman review) and some matters arising from initial interviews with families. Hence, the interview questions for professionals (Appendix C) were structured to gain an informed view of how the EHE process was managed in Saltfield where Traveller family respondents were located and the nature of my research sample is explained next.

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<sup>33</sup> I member-checked all initial interviews and vignettes with families. I then returned to member-check all the extracts from interviews which I wanted to document. I was able to do this with 9 families as two had left the area permanently. This is a limitation I return to in my conclusion.

## Research Sample

Wellington (2000) describes a sample as a small part of anything that is intended to represent the whole. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) suggest that the selection of a sampling strategy depends on the focus of enquiry and the researchers' judgement, as to which sampling approach will yield the closest understanding of the phenomenon under study. The sampling strategy is therefore an important element of research plans.

The two main sampling strategies are described as *random* and *purposeful* strategies (Cohen and Holliday, 1982; Schofield, 1996). Random sampling is, as the word suggests, a random sample of research participants, a strategy which Wellington (2000) suggests is best suited to high volume questionnaires. Purposeful sampling involves using or making contact with a specific purpose in mind (Wellington, 2000). Qualitative researchers tend to use purposeful sampling strategies as they often concern small samples of people and random sampling could result in biased selection (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Nevertheless, within both qualitative and quantitative educational research sampling is complex as one cannot assert that any sample is totally representative of the population from which it is drawn. This is because when undertaking research with people we can only ever estimate a certain probability that the sample represents the wider research population (Wellington, 2000).

I have highlighted the limitation of self-selected and voluntary participation within the previous chapter. I did not want to select a biased sample and my research sampling strategy can be described as purposeful as I asked a selection of different Traveller families to participate. My main selection criteria specified that families needed to be registered as providing EHE. As a professional who works in the field, it was certainly my expectation that there were many more home-educating families than those registered, as there is no current legal requirement for families to inform the LA of their intent to home-educate.

Nevertheless, I decided to invite only those on the registered list as otherwise I might be inviting children who were not registered in any educational provision and were deemed 'Missing from Education'<sup>34</sup>. This could have difficult ethical implications

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<sup>34</sup> Children and young people who are not receiving education and whose whereabouts are unknown.

regarding the responsibility to report such families to the LA. Adopting these criteria left me with a list of around 45 children which I condensed by further subgroup criteria, which are outlined below.

In Saltfield there are large numbers of Travellers residing across the entire county. The main groups of Travellers include English Romany / Gypsies, Travellers of Irish Heritage and Showmen. The Romany/ Gypsy families are reasonably settled; yet, Travellers of Irish Heritage and Showmen are highly-mobile and move in and out of the county. As there were no Irish Travellers registered as EHE I did not include these families in my research<sup>35</sup>. Travellers' socio-economic situations are also diverse. Some families are very poor, others are very affluent. The subgroup criteria I applied therefore related to those from different geographical locations, different travelling patterns, a range of socio-economic status and different Traveller groups in order to broadly represent the characteristics of the Traveller population in Saltfield and build up an unbiased and trustworthy sample. Thus, my sampling strategy can also be compared to the *quota selection* approach, which Miles and Huberman (1994) define as one which identifies major subgroups and then selects a number from each. Involving a range of informants is classified as a form of triangulation and also supports the credibility of research (Shenton, 2004).

My research sample concentrated on family units. This was for ethical and practical reasons. Families could themselves select who was part of the interview; children could be part of the interview if the family wished and parents were present at all times. Many family units included more than one child who was home-educated and across the 11 families there were 42 children, 32 of whom were being home-educated or had been in the past. The other 10 children were in education, of pre-school age or old enough to work.

Other important considerations in the planning of the sampling strategy include the time, resources and access needed. At the outset of this project, I decided that I would be very satisfied if I could interview approximately 10 Traveller families. Collecting data from many more families would have led to an overload of data. I had initially been very concerned that Traveller families would not want to participate in this research as

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<sup>35</sup> Undertaking research into those not registered formally as providing EHE would be a further, research study of interest as there remain many Traveller children who are not registered in any educational provision.

it is a sensitive area (Winstanley, 2009; Bhopal and Myers, 2009). Yet in reality, there were surprisingly few families who declined to participate. I was able to interview 11 families which facilitated a broadly representational sample of different families' characteristics. Nevertheless, I recognise that mine is a very small and specific sample which is quite particular in its social characteristics and therefore the take-up of EHE by Travellers in this LA may not be typical when considered on a national scale. I will now discuss my sample of professionals.

### *EHE Professionals*

In deciding who to interview to gain an LA perspective on EHE, I could have included a number of different professionals or staff in schools with high numbers of children de-registering in favour of EHE. I chose to include EHE professionals in order to research the context of EHE in Saltfield. Moreover, educators and TES' opinions have already been documented (Ivatts, 2006; Wilkin *et al*, 2010; Derrington and Kendal, 2004) and I wanted to assert Travellers' views. Like other CRT scholars (Teranishi, 2002; Housee, 2012; Rollock, 2012), I use my research to concentrate on the voices that have been marginalised.

There were only three professionals involved in managing EHE in Saltfield. Their roles can be described as an attendance manager, an EHE administrator and an advisor<sup>36</sup>. All three professionals were contacted via an email that provided an outline of my proposed research and asked if they would consider participating in an interview. The manager and administrator readily agreed but unfortunately the advisor declined. The advisor was a consultant and I was not able to get hold of their direct contact details, as I had been informed by the EHE manager that any contact had to be through her. I did go on to suggest by email, via the attendance manager, that the advisor might provide written answers to the questions rather than meet for an interview. I did not receive a response to this request, which was disappointing.

The first interviews with Traveller families took place between October and December 2010. The second series of interviews were conducted between January and February 2011. The interviews with professionals occurred towards the end of the first round of interviews with families and I will now explain the process this involved in more detail.

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<sup>36</sup> Their roles and responsibilities are further discussed in chapter 4.

## **Data Collection**

Data collection is the procedure through which different data sources are produced and brought together (Grix, 2004). I had a short period of time in which I needed to undertake my interviews as my sample included highly-mobile Showmen families who are on the road across England and Europe between February and November each year. They are therefore only *home* at their winter base between late November and February. The first stage of my data collection process involved gaining informed consent.

### *Informed Consent*

Informed consent has been defined by Diener and Crandall (1978) as the procedure in which individuals choose whether or not to participate in a research project after being informed of all the facts likely to influence their decision. The principle of informed consent derives from the subjects' right to freedom and autonomy. Consent protects and respects the right of autonomy as participants have the right to refuse to participate and can withdraw at any point (Frankfort-Nachmais and Nachmais, 1992).

Before I began my interviews I needed to gain informed consent. The process of approaching families to gain informed consent was time consuming due to my concerns around the sensitivity of the topic and the time needed to do this ethically and effectively. Qualitative interviews do have the reputation of being labour intensive (Weiss, 1991). In terms of access, I had met four families previously<sup>37</sup>, yet I purposely ensured that I did not know the majority of my participants as this might be regarded as a self-selected sample. Colleagues were able to act as gatekeepers to families I did not know; they provided me with an initial opportunity to explain my research and invite participation. This was a time-consuming process as initial meetings with families had to be coordinated with colleagues and the families concerned. Although I was able to meet most families face-to-face to ask for informed consent, I did try to telephone two families who both declined. This perhaps reflects the importance of initial face-to-face communication to establish trust in a sensitive research area.

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<sup>37</sup> I had not had prolonged engagement with any of these families, I had been in contact through my working role regarding primary to secondary school transition. Prior contact merely facilitated the initial meeting. Indeed, several families I knew did not agree to participate. Thus knowing families did not influence participation.

Burman (1994) states that researchers should be as open as possible about their aims to ensure that research participants are provided with the necessary information. I also wanted to ensure that my research participants could understand this information and make informed decisions about their participation. I was particularly aware of the low literacy levels within some families and knew that providing a research information letter alone would not ensure that participants were sufficiently informed. I therefore approached families face-to-face to share and explain my research information letter in detail and ask for their participation. Those families who agreed to participate were then asked to sign a consent form (Appendix E). Gaining informed consent is also a practical way to establish trustworthiness and only when I had gained informed consent did I arrange a date and time to return at the families' convenience and undertake the first interview.

### *Interview Process*

Most interviews took place in families' homes as this was the natural setting where home-education took place. I also believed that holding interviews in an office or away from the Travellers' homes would reduce participation as families had children to care for and jobs to get on with. Participants genuinely seemed more comfortable and relaxed in their own environment and to facilitate this I wore casual clothing and interviews were held as conversations, using questions to focus discussion. Burman (1994) suggests that whilst the interview schedule can be reassuring for the researcher, as it contains key issues the researcher wants to discuss, flexibility is needed to ensure participants are not intimidated or fail to follow the researcher's perspectives. This was certainly the case within my interviews. As Clough and Nutbrown (2007) suggest, it should be the schedule that *guides* rather than *directs* the interviews.

In many cases children were present and contributed sporadically, depending on their age and interest. In most cases the mother led in the interviews and the children participated as and when they liked. In a few situations the young Travellers led in the interviews; this was because their families considered their perspectives most important. Nevertheless, family members were still present and contributed as and when they wanted to. No fathers were present during interviews, although they were often around in the background, getting on with other things. In two cases grandmothers were also part of the family group.

Clough and Nutbrown (2007) state that audio and video recordings are by far the best way to obtain interview data as relying on hand-written notes inevitably means that some comments are lost. Interviews were recorded on a digital recorder with the permission of all participants. I planned to make notes throughout the interview but I felt this was both intimidating and distracting for participants and myself and hindered the flow of discussion. I therefore relied heavily on the digital recorder, which in two cases let me down due to data overload and batteries running down.

In all cases I wrote a short reflective account of the main points straight after interview. This research diary proved useful when I lost my two interviews and is another practical way to establish the trustworthiness of my findings. Planning two interview opportunities with every Traveller family was helpful when data was lost. I was able to revisit some of the original questions and retrieve their input during the second interview. In one case I had to write down all responses by hand on paper, as the respondent's place of work, which was suggested as the preferred place for an interview, was incredibly noisy. Although hand-written notes did limit data collection in this particular case, I was able to have a second interview meeting to extend these notes.

Although I had planned for two interviews for all families, there was one family who I did not manage to interview on two separate occasions. The first interview took place towards the end of data collection and the respondent informed me that she might be leaving the area shortly. Consequently I amalgamated some questions from the second interview schedule into the first so this family did also broadly answer the same questions as others. The limitation was that I could not member-check this interview. Although I visited most families twice for interviewing, in practice I returned once or twice more to member-check the data I wanted to document with families and give them the opportunity to confirm or contest it.

I transcribed each interview as soon as possible, while it was fresh in my memory. I completed this process myself by listening to the recorded interview, writing it out by hand and then typing it up. I then listened to the interview several times with the typed text in front of me to check for accuracy. During this process I noted topics of discussion and this information fed into my first stage of data analysis. Transcribing is a lengthy business. Nevertheless, transcribing your interviews yourself provides a valuable opportunity to revisit the interview in-depth. Although a limitation of

interviewing is that it is time-consuming, the advantages, in my opinion, outweigh the disadvantages and the reasons for this are outlined below.

Interviews can sustain interactive, ethical research and reveal participants' subjective meanings and worldviews (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009). Interviews are the right tools for an interpretive methodology and justify my use of CRT because interviews can capture Travellers' voices, inform understandings about education and highlight issues of inequality. Such data is incontestable as the participants' words provide concrete, vivid and meaningful data, which is more convincing to readers than any researcher's opinion (Miles and Huberman, 1994). CRT scholars use the conceptual tool of storytelling to document the lived EHE reality of participants. Following the work of CRT scholars such as Solorzano and Yosso (2002) and Dixson and Rousseau (2005) (see p.57), I document Travellers' own accounts alongside critical analysis of relevant literature to build up counter-stories to challenge the negative discourse which surrounds Travellers in education. Hence, the choice of semi-structured interviews was guided by my research aim and questions and justifies my theoretical framework. I will now discuss and explain my analysis of the data.

### **Data Analysis**

The aim of this section is to explain and defend the methods used to analyse my data. I begin by explaining the importance of effective data analysis. I then elaborate on my analytical process and the contribution of my theoretical framework. I provide a visual model of my analytical framework and explain each level of analysis.

Data analysis is an integral part of the research. Wellington (2000) confirms that the quality of the research project does not necessarily derive from the quality or quantity of the data collected; instead it is the interpretation of this data and the connections made with existing theoretical models that are important. Data analysis has been an ongoing part of my study. CRT has provided the necessary lens and framework to address my research questions and connect my work to other CRT scholars such as Villenas *et al.* (1993) and DePouw (2012) who use CRT to document and analyse the accounts of marginalised communities in order to illustrate racism and inequality in education.

The first important element of data analysis is immersion in the data (Wellington, 2000). Although I transcribed my interviews as soon as possible, I gave myself plenty of time to read and re-read my interviews over a number of months in order to understand the data and begin to organise the issues in my mind. A more general issue within data

analysis is whether you apply an inductive or deductive strategy. As Wellington (2000) suggests, you may analyse *a priori* or use inductive analysis, with pre-established categories or alternatively, *posteriori*, deductive analysis, where categories derive from the data itself. I used a mixture of both inductive and deductive strategies, as my research questions and theoretical framework guided my interview questions, yet I also allowed findings to emerge from the data itself during analysis.

In order to decide upon the best way to analyse my data, I read and considered numerous approaches to data analysis. At a practical level qualitative research produces large quantities of data and I needed a simple analysis strategy to reduce data 'whilst keeping the relations between parts intact' (Miles and Huberman, 1994:56). I also needed a strategy to simplify the messy business of data analysis (Wellington, 2000). I found many ways to analyse data, yet my key concern was to remain true to the voices of the research participants and build up responses to the research questions (Clough and Nutbrown, 2007).

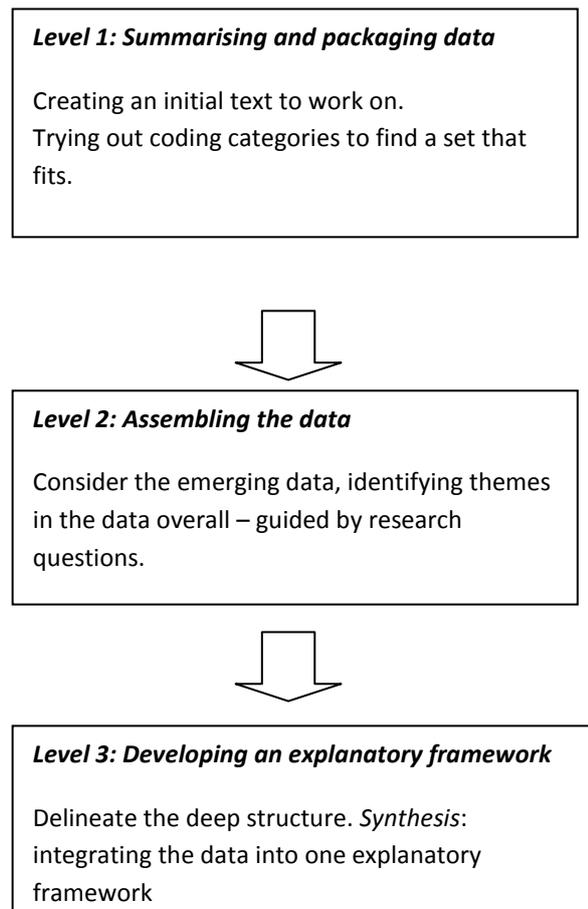
I have based my data analysis process upon Miles and Huberman's (1994) 'ladder of abstraction' which comprises a simple three level analytical procedure by which to reduce and summarise data and construct an explanatory framework of findings. First, one begins with a text and coding categories are tried out on the text. Then, themes and trends are identified to describe the underpinning issues. Finally, one contextualises and integrates the data into an explanatory framework (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The three levels of analysis helped me depict and justify a relatively clear, progressive process through which the views and perceptions of Traveller families and EHE professionals regarding EHE could be revealed. I also drew on CRT to place racism at the centre of analysis, which is important as my study seeks to highlight racism and the consequences for Travellers' educational opportunities.

Assumptions of race can imply 'nature or relatedness through genealogy or blood.....yet race and racism are not only descriptive terms for physical difference but involve potent metaphors and value judgements justifying discriminatory attitudes' (Chattoo and Atkin, 2012:27). Within this framework the definition of racism is appropriate in the context of Romany/Gypsy families and Showmen. Although Showmen define themselves as a business community that has a distinctive travelling culture and history and they are not by law a minority ethnic group, they are in the CRT sense, a minoritised racial Other and are not *White*.

A useful example of critical race analysis is found in DePouw's (2012) work (highlighted on p.54). DePouw uses his analysis to highlight how *culture clash* explanations of American Hmong students 'avoid race and blame the victim' (p.224). These explanations correspond to the *scripts* I have discussed within my work so far. DePouw (2012) also highlights how *culture clash* explanations undercut more effectual forms of analysis which might generate useful responses to these students' needs.

Within qualitative research most analysis is explained using words. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that words alone can be cumbersome and difficult to access, especially when trying to explain a complex process such as data analysis. Visual models and diagrams combined with words can often offer more clarity. Figure 2 below therefore provides a visual representation of the basic elements of my analytical process which are explained in turn below.

**Figure 2: My analytical framework**



## Levels of Analysis

### *Level 1: Summarising and packaging data*

According to Miles and Huberman (1994) the first level of analysis involves summarising and packaging the data into workable texts. The process of summarising is, according to Guba and Lincoln (1985), indeed 'the first step along the way to data analysis' (p.314). I initially summarised and packaged my data into the two categories of my first interview schedule which were informed by my second research question. Figure 3 below depicts these categories.

**Figure 3: Initial analysis categories**

<b><i>Perceptions of Education</i></b>	<b><i>Actual experiences and practices of EHE</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Why families chose EHE</li><li>• Mainstream school experiences and views of education</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Day to day EHE practices</li><li>• Experiences of monitoring &amp; support</li></ul>

This first level of analysis incorporated an inductive strategy as I analysed my initial interviews on which to try out coding categories. I used this analysis to inform my second set of interviews.

### *Codes*

Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that one tries out coding categories to find a set that fits the data. 'Codes are tags or labels for assigning *units of meaning* to the data collected' (Ibid: 56). Codes can be attached to words, phrases, sentences and even whole paragraphs. The focus is on the *meaning* of those words, rather than the words themselves (Ibid.). This is important in my study as I concentrated upon Travellers' subjective meaning of EHE and education. My coding categories are essentially the main topics which arose from my aim and research questions. Our discussions focussed on the reasons why Traveller families choose to home-educate and their experiences and perceptions of EHE. Rather than refer to my analytical categories as 'units of meaning', as they read rather awkwardly in the text, I refer to them as the main topics of discussion.

I carefully listed these main topics that arose via this initial analysis process. For example, when I analysed Traveller families' actual *experiences and practices of EHE* one of the topics that emerged was *bullying and discrimination*; in taking up EHE they were protecting their children from these negative influences of school. I kept a list of

these topics and used it as a basis for the second level of analysis. Analysis of EHE professionals' were also coded according to my research questions.

### *Level 2: Assembling the data*

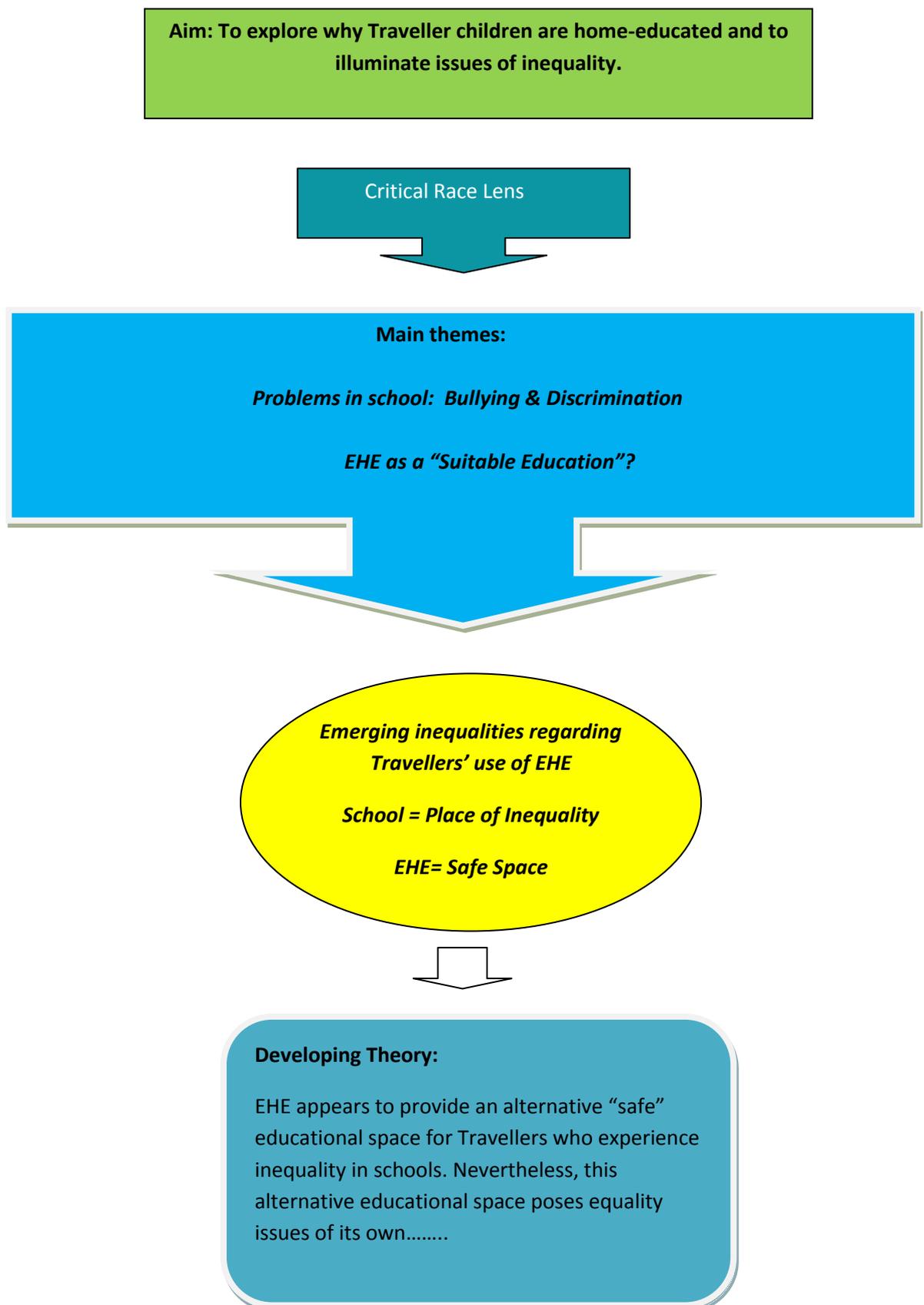
The second level of my analysis took place once all interviews were completed and transcribed. I read through all my transcripts many times. Again, I coded the main topics as well as highlighting anomalies. I considered the emerging data which revealed two themes: 1) Problems in School: Bullying and Discrimination, and 2) a Suitable Education. A theme, in terms of my research, can be described an important subject which emerged via analysis. These themes were guided by my research questions and revealed a number of equality issues. Thus the data that emerged from initial analysis allowed me to analyse according to CRT; I used critical race analysis to highlight emerging issues of inequality concerning Travellers' use of EHE which address my third research question. This process took my analysis to a new level and helped me develop an explanatory framework.

### *Level 3: Developing an explanatory framework*

Although I did not ask my respondents particular questions about inequality, critical race analysis provided a lens through which to view my data and identify two central issues of inequality concerning school and EHE. This process enabled me to address all three of my research questions as well as my research aim. Thus the combination of Miles and Huberman's (1994) analytical approach with CRT allowed me to contextualise and integrate my data into an explanatory framework which asserts the views of Travellers and illuminates issues of inequality.

In order to help readers understand my data analysis process and findings, figure 4 below presents the process in a visual model. I then justify my use of vignettes.

**Figure 4: Overview of data analysis process**



## **Vignettes**

Although analysis filters and explains my data, it does not convey the richness of this data, nor does it allow real insights into Traveller families' individual experiences of EHE, which are diverse and complex. I therefore include three vignettes to name Travellers 'reality' (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 2006). Vignettes can 'give a flavour' of being a Traveller undertaking EHE. Vignettes provide graphic narrative accounts that serve the same purpose as storytelling and counter-stories in CRT. For example, Rollock (2012) documents Black middle-class parents' accounts to evidence how they manage racist incidents and Othering. Hence, vignettes can facilitate a more informed account with a deeper and more appreciative understanding being attempted (Rogowski, 2006). Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that vignettes can indeed help portray the rich *pockets* of qualitative data which are especially representative and detailed.

I member-checked the vignettes and other interview excerpts with relevant families by providing a copy of the text I planned to use<sup>38</sup>. Throughout this chapter I have referred to my ethical considerations and the next section will elaborate on these as part of the planning and process of this research. I then revisit the topic of trustworthiness.

### **3.3. Ethics and Research with Marginalised Groups**

This part of the chapter will discuss the ethical applications in undertaking research with marginalised groups and explain the process of gaining ethical approval for my study. Sieber (1993) describes ethics as the application of moral principles to protect from harming others, to promote the good, to be respectful and fair. Ethical research is of central importance to me due to the position of Travellers in society as marginalised people. For these reasons, ethical considerations for my study went beyond the usual issues of confidentiality and consent alone.

#### **Ethical Procedures: Planning and Practice**

##### *Planning*

The University of Sheffield has its own procedure to enable students to acquire ethical clearance for their research. All research involving human participants is subject to an ethical review that includes various ethical procedures to establish the highest standards in ethical practice in educational research. This process aims to ensure that

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<sup>38</sup> Where necessary I read this out to families.

all staff and students planning research give appropriate consideration to the ethical issues that might arise while undertaking it. Consequently, researchers must ethically justify the practices and procedures they intend to adopt throughout their work (The University of Sheffield, 2011). This ethical review process is supported by a research ethics application form which must be completed and agreed by a student's supervisor and other named staff. I obtained ethical approval in October 2010, a copy of which can be found in Appendix F.

In order to consider relevant ethical issues, I initially drew on different educational research organisations' ethical guidelines (BERA and ESRC<sup>39</sup>), which certainly recognise the researcher's responsibility with regard to those people under study. Nevertheless, as each piece of research is unique, such guidance alone 'may not be sufficient to prevent harm and therefore needs to be considered in its own right' (Sikes, 2007:16). For this reason I have found Te Awekotuku's (1991) ethical guidelines more relevant as they are based on her research with aboriginal groups, who are also a marginalised group and as Smith (1999) suggests have historically been exploited through research. Te Awekotuku's main criteria included *a basic respect and presenting yourself to people face-to-face*. I agree and uphold these principles within my work with Travellers and applied these to my research. My wish was to avoid exploiting Travellers for this research. I have checked the interview data with Travellers and documented this verbatim out of respect for Travellers' knowledge and contributions.

### *Voice*

The theme of voice runs through my study and I have drawn on CRT's conceptual tool of storytelling and counter-stories to do so. Within research more generally there has been growing ethical interest in the representation of those voices which are not often heard (Smith, 1999; Clough and Nutbrown, 2007). My review of the literature on EHE found that there is little data or research on Travellers' views. Listening to and documenting the voices of the marginalised requires important ethical considerations. I have been particularly mindful of the power hierarchy that can exist between the researcher and the researched. I have questioned the issue of voice and relationship constructed with individuals under study and Tierney (1995) and Liebow's (1993) work on the subject has been insightful. Liebow (1993) openly shared his research process

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<sup>39</sup> BERA -British Educational Research Association, ESRC- Economic and Social Research Council.

and positionality with his homeless interviewees. He debriefed those with whom he worked about his opinions of the issues involved and discussed recommendations to improve the situation.

I followed similar procedures in my research by explaining to respondents the research aims, process and possible consequences of their involvement. I also shared my research findings when I revisited families for the second interview and to member-check vignettes and quotes I wanted to document. This was a useful process as families agreed with my findings and my development of theory which is further discussed in the following chapter. Tierney (1995) also suggests that researchers should present their work so that it is accessible and enables the reader to observe the voices of those interviewed. Thus the dissemination of research is also an ethical consideration.

#### *Dissemination*

Concerning the presenting of research, Tierney (1995) adds that researchers need to share findings with those studied and not make exaggerated claims regarding their research. For this reason and to maintain trust with the families I interviewed, I will provide a summary of my research findings for those who have been part of the study. There are diverse ways of disseminating research findings and ensuring the research reaches those who have contributed and my summary will need to be creative, clear and attentive to limited literacy levels. I will also make clear in the dissemination of my research, that the findings of my research only represent the views of a small number of families.

My literature review indicates how research findings can be misquoted to the detriment of those under study (see p.38). I cannot prevent my research from being misquoted. Nevertheless, I can share my research findings with my participants and ensure that families who participated in my research are informed and agree with my conclusions. Having discussed my research plans, I now discuss the importance of ethical practice.

#### *Ethics in Practice: Respect for Others.*

Ethics is about the conduct of the research practice and respect for others (Thomas, 2009). Sikes (2007) suggests that researchers should think about what they can give back to informants, in other words, they should seek some sort of reciprocity. I initially planned to involve a photographer to work with Traveller families and children in taking photographs about EHE. I felt this would facilitate participation and provide families

with photographs to keep. However, ethically I could not justify the involvement of an additional person collecting photographic data of Travellers' personal lives as this data could harm participants if leaked to unsecure institutions such as the media. My proposal was therefore revised to remove photography and to ensure I alone was responsible and involved in this study. In doing so it also reduced the participation and reciprocity of the study.

Researchers also have a responsibility to protect their participants' well-being. Participants need to understand any consequences of their involvement and agree to participate. Participation in my study was entirely voluntary and I ensured that all participants understood that they could withdraw at any point. All interviews and meetings with participants were structured to prioritise respect and protect their privacy, well-being and confidentiality. No names or addresses of any participants or details revealing the identities or locations of the respondents have been published or discussed formally or informally. To secure privacy and confidentiality I created a pseudonym for the LA under study (Saltfield) and have not provided any data on the Traveller communities in Saltfield. Participants' identity was also safeguarded by using pseudonyms. A list of participants' pseudonyms is provided at the beginning of chapter Four.

Any data that contained personal information was kept in a secure space and coded so that even if found, names could not be linked back to participants or locations. Only data that was relevant and appropriate to the study was transcribed and used for this research. Data was kept in accordance with Data Protection Act (1998). I did not feel that my research posed any potential for psychological harm. Nevertheless, I was aware that some interview questions might raise sensitive issues for families. I therefore explained to participants at the outset of interviews that if they felt uncomfortable answering any questions, they did not need to respond and did not have to give a reason for doing so. Tina (2011:11) was very sceptical about the outcome of her interview and voiced her opinion of previous consultations. 'You never hear anything else about it and if they do come around they say it's no further forward!' I was unable to promise that my research would change the discrimination her children had experienced in school which resulted in her withdrawing them for EHE. This interview reflected the frustrations and the problems Travellers experience in education and with consultation, especially when the latter provides little response or improvements. Yet it is important to document these difficulties as an open and honest approach is one of

the practical ways I have worked towards establishing the trustworthiness of my research.

### **On Trustworthiness**

Within the conventional positivist research paradigm, validity is an essential measurement of credible conclusions. Validity represents the degree to which any method accurately measures what it suggests (Wellington, 2000). Still, this view is based upon a belief in objective reality. The notion of validity is not necessarily relevant to interpretive and qualitative research communities, as the notion of reality itself is questionable; the idea of a single *truth* is unthinkable (Sikes, 2007). Accordingly, interpretive investigators like Guba and Lincoln (1985) prefer to use different terminology such as credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. I now discuss my own actions and considerations with regard to these four constructs.

#### *Credibility*

Within interpretive research, credibility is about justifying interpretation claims and convincing others that the research findings can be believed and trusted. Guba and Lincoln (1985) propose that credibility is one of the most important factors in establishing trustworthiness. Researchers must ensure their methods are well established in their discipline. Within an interpretive paradigm, interviews are a credible and effective way to collect data (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009; Hambleton, 2012) and I have justified my reasons for choosing interviews as the most appropriate data collection method for this study.

Triangulation also improves the prospect that ‘findings will be found credible’ (Guba and Lincoln, 1985:305). I included a range of Traveller families in my research sample. I also investigated EHE professionals’ viewpoints and compared my findings to relevant literature. I sought opportunities for scrutiny of this study by other academics. Ken Marks<sup>40</sup> reviewed my first full thesis draft and provided valuable feedback. I have had my research ethically approved and held frequent debriefing sessions with my supervisor who enabled me to consider my approach and methods at a much deeper, critical level.

My ethical considerations are also mechanisms to support honesty in research participants. All participants gave informed consent and were informed that they could

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<sup>40</sup> An academic with many years of studying Showmen and Traveller families.

withdraw from the research at any point. Thus my respondents represent those Traveller families who were genuinely willing to participate and be interviewed. I have also ensured caution in my findings and had findings approved by my respondents. Guba and Lincoln (1985) confirm that the member-check, whereby data, analytical categories, interpretations and conclusions are checked with research participants, is the most crucial technique for establishing trustworthiness. Member-checking supports both credibility and dependability and Guba and Lincoln (1985) remark on the close ties between the two, arguing that, in practice, a demonstration of credibility goes some way to ensuring dependability.

#### *Dependability*

Stenton (2004) adds that researchers should provide a full description of the process and product of their research to enable readers to understand and assess the methods and their value. The purpose of this chapter has been to explain, justify and evaluate my methodology and methods.

#### *Transferability*

Transferability is concerned with the extent to which research findings can be applied to other situations (Merriam *et al*, 2002; Thomas, 2009). I have provided a detailed description of my research including my plans and process, my research participants, data collection and analysis methods employed, the number of interviews and the time period over which interviews took place. I also reflect on the strengths and limitations of my methodology and methods shortly, in order that others could replicate the study if desired.

#### *Confirmability*

Confirmability concerns the degree to which findings are determined by participants and the conditions of the enquiry and not by biases, interests and perspectives of the researcher (Guba and Lincoln, 1985). The audit trail is critical to this process. I have provided a transparent and reflexive explanation of the entire enquiry itself, stating my position, justifying my decisions and engaging reflexively with my research in order to re-trace and explain the course of this research. I also kept a research diary to record my personal thoughts, actions and growing insights of the study. Furthermore, I have documented my data verbatim and had it member-checked. In doing so I hope that the research findings will speak for themselves. There are therefore several ways I have worked towards establishing the trustworthiness of my research. I now provide a critical

reflection of the strengths and limitations of my methodology and methods in turn to complete this process.

## **Strengths and Limitations of Methodology and Methods**

### *Methodology*

First, a strength of my choice of interpretive methodology is that it correlates with and compliments my chosen theory and methods. A second strength is that my research questions define my research and enable me to address the most important and substantive issues and meet my overall aim. Critical reflection as an ongoing process throughout my research has been a key mode of engagement. I kept a research diary to note my reflective thinking and how it changed. Although the focus of equality was there from the start and I had naturally applied my own critical lens to my research project, I had initial difficulty in naming any theory. Hence my final strength was locating CRT as it was enlightening. CRT illuminated and substantiated my position, my aims and research questions, methodology, methods and presentations of findings which emphasise Travellers' voices. I tested the applicability of CRT during analysis and found that it complimented Miles and Huberman's (1994) analytical process and enabled me to advance and enhance my analysis.

I may be accused of at least three methodological limitations, but have sought to address these. Although interpretative research accepts that the researcher influences the study, this may also be regarded as a criticism. I have worked towards a 'healthy bias' (see p.65) by clarifying my interest in this study and the ways this research will advance knowledge and understanding. I have drawn on CRT as it supports the exploration of Travellers' views to understand and develop insights into educational inequality. A second limitation may be on the basis of my use of voice and stories. Storytelling is perceived as unscientific and subjective and therefore problematic (Litowitz, 2009). Yet Duncan (2006) asserts that CRT studies are scholarly, trustworthy and more importantly encouraging of ethical scholarship as they prompt multiple consciousnesses. Pizarro (1999) suggests that CRT has been propelled by the critical standpoint that demands that scholars ask who they are writing about and why. I have followed the good practice of other CRT scholars, such as Rollock (2012) and DePouw (2012) who do not merely use *voice*, they place the voices of the marginalised centre-stage to advocate their importance and work towards trustworthy and honest research. Finally, the fact that I place Travellers' voices centre stage might be a further criticism,

however I assert that this is important as the views of educators have already been documented.

### *Methods*

The use of interviews is a strength in the study because they generated rich data. Interviews are deemed appropriate methods for interpretive research and I was pleased with the number of families who agreed to participate in my study. The process of interviewing was time consuming and labour intensive, yet it was ultimately enjoyable, interesting and effective. The use of CRT informed and supported my methodological development and confirmed my use of interviews because of the significance it attaches to respondents' voices.

A further strength is my data analysis. My adaptation of Miles and Huberman's (1994) proved to be a very helpful way to reduce the bulk of the data and produced themes to form the 'building blocks of my analysis' (Thomas, 2009:198). Miles and Huberman's (1994) analytical process linked nicely with CRT as a theoretical perspective. Nevertheless, there are also limitations.

Mixed methods may have yielded more data but Traveller families' own lack of interest in documenting their EHE activities using the suggested visual tool, indicated that this was not a possibility for this study. Having learnt from this research project that my respondents did not necessarily like all the methods I had planned, next time I would ask participants themselves at the outset which methods they would prefer. I could have considered ethnographic research as this may have allowed for a deeper insight into Travellers' EHE experiences. A further limitation was my inability to member-check all the data I wanted to document as two families had moved on. If I were to repeat this study, I would check out likely moves with families in advance to try and avoid this scenario.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude this chapter I now reflect on the tensions, challenges and reassurances I encountered. In considering my positionality, I discovered tensions between my previous work role and some TES professionals' opinions. TES are funded to improve the access and attainment within mainstream education for underachieving groups of children, an ideology reflected in research (Ivatts, 2006). There is a dominant rhetoric that perceives schools as the best place for all children (Monk, 2004). Yet my own experiences of working with Traveller families and undertaking this research have

confirmed my doubts and concerns about existing inequalities and injustices within mainstream education. My interviews raised many issues of inequality and discrimination which were ethically challenging and made me feel frustrated and sad. Yet they also increased my determination to document and address these issues. The use of CRT was also challenging. I wanted to apply this theory to Travellers, who are White. Moreover, my participants involved Romany/Gypsy and Showmen families. I therefore needed to be very explicit about my definition of racism and the application of CRT within my research. This initiated self-critical reflexivity regarding the nature and purpose of education, racism and my own beliefs and values. Nevertheless, I have also found CRT reassuring and encouraging as it linked me to a community of scholars who think in a similar way to me; critical about current education systems and determined to work towards equality. The next chapter documents my analysis of findings within this long-term aim.

## Chapter 4: Data Analysis & Report on Research Findings

### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an account of my findings and address my research questions. I document the reasons why my sample of Traveller children are home-educated and their families' experiences of EHE. It is important to note that this sample of home-educating Traveller families in Saltfield is quite particular in its social characteristics and may not be typical when considering take-up of EHE by Travellers on a national scale (see p.74). I also illuminate issues of educational inequality. My data comprised of two sets of interviews with two Showmen and nine Romany/Gypsy families. I also undertook individual interviews with two of the three professionals responsible for EHE in Saltfield LA. Illustrative quotes are used throughout this chapter to give voice to all my research participants. The pseudonyms of all children, young people, parents and professionals referred to, are listed below. None of the schools, teachers or other professionals they spoke about are named. In some cases I have added words to these quotes in brackets to aid understanding. These are labelled with my initials.

#### Pseudonyms of Traveller respondents

Parent/carer name	No. of children in the family	Children referred to directly in study
Patricia	3	Marsha, David and Victoria
Elizabeth	3	Shannon, Nathan and Patricia
Jolene	4	Amos, Albie, Bobbie and Joe
Teresa	6	Bobby
Anona	1	Kelly
Tina	3	Ronnie and Davey
Anita	2	Tony and Libby
Marie	7	Rocky and Caprice
Vicky	6	Crystal and Alfie
Vanessa	3	Courtney
Carol- Anne	4	Roseanne and Davey
Total	42	23

### Pseudonyms of professionals

Professional role	Pseudonym
EHE Admin support	Jane
EHE manager	Sheila
EHE advisor ( declined interview)	Derek

The content of this chapter reflects my analytical process and contains five parts to ‘tell the story’ of EHE. The first part of this chapter draws upon my interviews with EHE professionals to explain how Saltfield manages and monitors EHE. LAs in England have a duty to ensure that home-educated children are receiving suitable education and must intervene if they judge provision to be unsuitable. I also report on professionals’ responses to Badman’s Review of EHE in England (2009). Analysis of this data revealed two main topics of discussion which covered: a) Reasons for EHE, b) Traveller families’ use of EHE. These topics are essentially my analytical coding categories, which are related to my research questions (see p.81).

Part Two of this chapter concentrates upon Traveller families’ practices and experiences of EHE, which were found to be diverse and subjective. My literature review revealed a distinct lack of research on Travellers’ experiences and their own views of EHE. I document Travellers’ use of EHE in their own words to address the gap in research and illuminate issues of inequality. Travellers’ accounts also play an important part in challenging negative discourses; they provide counter-stories to dispute the majoritarian explanations of Travellers’ use of EHE in the literature.

Part Three of this chapter contains three family vignettes. Erickson (1986) describes a vignette as ‘a vivid portrayal of the conduct of an event of everyday life’ (p.149-150). Miles and Huberman (1994) confirm that vignettes can help portray the rich ‘pockets’ of qualitative data which are especially representative and meaningful. The use of vignettes reflects the principle of stories and counter-stories in CRT. The vivid accounts of the lived experiences of EHE provide evidence of Travellers’ inequalities in education, thus they also address my research questions.

Part Four completes the documentation of findings from the initial analysis process. I elaborate on the main reasons that Traveller families take up EHE and document the themes that emerged from analysis: 1) Problems in School: Bullying and Discrimination and 2) a ‘Suitable Education’. Synthesising the data allowed me to analyse my

research findings according to CRT. I used critical race analysis to highlight emerging issues of inequality concerning Travellers' use of EHE which are summarised in the concluding part of this chapter.

#### **4.1. How Saltfield Manages and Monitors EHE.**

Within Saltfield LA, there is a County Attendance Manager, Sheila, who holds responsibility for EHE as a small part of her overall job role. There is also a part-time administrator, Jane, who deals mainly with the registration of EHE children and organising Derek's visits to EHE families. Derek is the advisor and monitors provision. LAs have a duty to ensure that children of compulsory school age in their area receive a suitable education (Education Act, 1996, sec.432). Yet EHE processes and practices vary across LAs and Sheila explains the system in Saltfield:

When we hear of a child who wants to be home-educated, or the parents of a child who want to be home-educated we will request that they register on our system, which means sending us back an information form of the details of the child and the education they intend to provide. If they agree then usually after a while we will do a visit as well, to have a look at provision. If they don't agree or if they don't give us any details or we hear about them but they do not contact us we will make an effort to contact them. If they still refuse we will do a bit of investigating to see if there are any causes for concern, if there aren't then there is nothing we can do (2011: 1)<sup>41</sup>.

The 'EHE Information' form is the first stage of registration. This form contains a number of questions to gather basic details about the child, where they were last educated, if they have so-called SEN or learning difficulties and whether parents/carers have made an official request for their child's name to be removed from the school roll<sup>42</sup>. The form also includes a number of questions to ascertain the nature of planned home-education provision including details of learning resources, plans for library use, sports and educational provision and opportunities for contact with other children.

When families return the completed form, Jane arranges for Derek to visit them. Derek's job is to approve and monitor families' home-education arrangements; he judges whether a suitable education is being provided. Jane tries to arrange his visits within one month of receipt of the information form. Apparently, some families ask to have a little longer in order to familiarise themselves with EHE, because they want to

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<sup>41</sup> Both Interviews with Sheila and Jane took place on 31.01.11. Thus I do not repeat the date for each quote, just the page number of their interview.

<sup>42</sup> Parents of children who leave school must provide a request in writing to inform their school they are home-educating in order that schools remove the child from their roll and they can be registered as EHE.

feel that they have something to show the advisor when he first visits. Other families want the adviser to go quite quickly because they want advice. Jane felt that this LA is responsive to different families' needs as they try to comply with such requests.

Once families have registered and provision is approved, progress is monitored annually. Although this may sound a rather formal process, I was told by Jane and families themselves that visits are welcomed as they are a good opportunity for support, advice and feedback. Maintaining positive relationships with families was felt to be important as this facilitated Saltfield's monitoring and support of EHE:

We can help them to make their education appropriate and they often like that, that reassurance that they are doing ok (p.1).

### **Judging 'A Suitable Education'**

Saltfield EHE department inform home-educating parents that their children should receive an effective education appropriate to their individual needs and aspirations. They should have access to appropriate resources and opportunities to interact with other children and adults. Although EHE does not have to be delivered by 'subjects' they suggest that children would be expected to develop knowledge and skills in the three core areas of English, Mathematics and Science (Saltfield, 2011).

Sheila told me that the judgements regarding the suitability of EHE in Saltfield were based upon reading ability, writing ability and whether children were making general educational progress. There was an expectation that children should be relatively close to the academic levels of school-aged peers, unless they had particular learning needs, which would have been referred to as SEN in school. Monitoring visits played a key part in assessing suitable education provision as Derek expects to see examples of work to observe progress. Where no evidence of adequate educational provision was observed, specific targets would be suggested to parents in the first instance. If there were still no improvements families would be ordered to return their child to school. The Education Act (1996) states:

If a parent.....fails to satisfy the local education authority.....that the child is receiving suitable education, the authority shall serve on the parent.....a school attendance order.....requiring him to cause the child to become a registered pupil at a school named in the order (Sec. 437).

In Saltfield, School Attendance Orders (SAO) were also served to those families who were known to be providing home-education but did not respond to written requests

from the LA to provide information about their educational provision. Where parents failed to return children to a named school, court appearances and fines could follow. Both Sheila and Jane felt that their assessment process for judging a suitable education were fair and considered different cultural needs:

Derek does a lot of visits to Traveller families for example, and is very aware of their culture and difference and quite happy that this is reflected in the type of education, as long as the sort of basics are included. Derek is seeing that they deal with the basics of literacy and numeracy, if we can achieve annual visits, the advisor notes progress and does advise families on how to store work done so they can map progression.....so when he goes back on visits he can see. So he knows that they have been doing work and are progressing, although not to a level they would have done if stayed in school (p.5).

This LA clearly does compare EHE against school expectations, which has been suggested as problematic (McIntyre-Bhatty, 2007). I now discuss Saltfield's response to the review of EHE (Badman, 2009).

#### *The Badman Review of EHE in England*

Sheila had provided an LA response to the Labour government's review of EHE. Sheila and Jane had had *high hopes* of Badman's recommendations<sup>43</sup>. Still, local home-educating families did not share their views and Jane's quote confirms how certain home-educators do ensure their voices are heard:

Opposition was mostly from the more capable home-educating parents who thought it would be an interference with their lifestyles. I do not think they had taken enough consideration of children who are not high achievers and whose parents had chosen home-education for other reasons (p. 7).

As far as Sheila and Jane were concerned, current, unchanged guidance remained the basis for their own policies and procedures. Still, Sheila did not feel the EHE system was robust:

As far as it goes it is fine but doesn't go far.....There is no means of us knowing the families we don't know, our powers.....we can only intervene if we have cause to .....so.....if that family has not raised its head above the parapet we have no reason to intervene, so I think there are huge safeguarding issues and welfare in the sense of – with some families, we have no idea if they are getting any education or not (p.4).

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<sup>43</sup> Please see p. 16 for an overview of this review.

Despite the fact that no changes were made to EHE guidance nationally, this small EHE team had reviewed EHE procedures, shortening the length of time between visits from two to one year and updating the information they provide to parents. In addition, on the information form, they now ask parents to explain the reasons they have chosen to home-educate. Jane confirmed the suggestion in the literature that LAs find the monitoring of EHE challenging:

It's difficult to work without the backing of something under the law because the area is so wishy-washy. Parents are more aware of their rights, what we can do and what powers we have. We are constrained by what we can do and what the parents want us to do, but we also have to balance that against a child's welfare and safeguarding issues - it is very difficult at times (p.2).

Thus there were concerns about the system's ability to ensure that home-educated children receive a suitable education. Jane was also frustrated with the lack of staff resources for EHE. She struggled to keep up with the rising number of EHE families coming through the system and said that the whole EHE area was understaffed and under-resourced:

I am probably missing the odd child here and there.....I flag things up and task them but the sheer volume I feel like I am drowning (p.2).

Although LAs are required to intervene if it appears that home-education provision is not deemed suitable, limited resources, weak guidance and restricted LA duties did provide real ethical and practical challenges for Saltfield's EHE team. I now document professionals' accounts of the reasons for EHE and Traveller families' use of EHE in Saltfield.

### **Reasons for EHE**

Jane explained that the numbers of home-educated children were rising quickly:

Quite a few of the ones that come out of school are because they are dissatisfied with school or education being provided or circumstances of child – like if they are being bullied, or not doing very well. They are not always negative reasons.....quite a few do it for positive reasons (p.4).

Within the literature (DSCF, 2007; Badman, 2009; Webb, 2010) there was categorisation of positive and negative reasons for EHE. My interviews with LA respondents confirmed that this EHE sorting strategy is also common in practice. Jane classified the groups of parents who do EHE for 'negative reasons' into five areas: Children considered to have SEN, Traveller children, children whose parents want to

protect them from the increasingly demanding world, Gifted and Talented children and finally school-refusers. I will discuss these in turn.

Jane spoke of a significant rise of children with so-called SEN in the LA and those who were under special provision at school, for example for dyslexia. Her view was that as their parents became more knowledgeable about SEN they also became increasingly dissatisfied with school provision. In terms of Traveller children, Jane suggested the reason they take up EHE is:

Because of their lifestyle. They don't agree with secondary education or very limited secondary education (p.4).

Jane proposed that distinct issues regarding secondary education were the main reasons for Traveller families' uptake of EHE. Jane told me that overall, the number of home-educated primary and secondary-aged children, were almost equal, however Travellers' high uptake of EHE at secondary age affected this balance:

The [LA-KD] figures might be slightly tipped towards the secondary age because of the Traveller situation. They will educate at primary level and then withdraw immediately at transition time to secondary.....or within a year or two.....(p.4).

National research undertaken by Ivatts (2006) confirmed that twice the number of secondary-age Traveller pupils are home-educated than those at primary level.

Jane also referred to the increasing numbers of parents, who as she put it, 'are being very cosseting of their children because the outside world is demanding' (2011:4). Yet what she described sounded more like parents who want to protect their children from the harming influences at school and a distinct lack of appropriate school response:

In situations like bullying, parents are very concerned about their child's welfare in school, they show dissatisfaction with the way schools are handling bullying situations.... I often get families saying that their children are still expected to go into school but the school are not doing anything about the bullies, they are not removing them from school, they still have to go in and face them and they can't have their child crying their eyes out every morning (p.4).

Jane added that some children had tried to commit suicide:

Very few..... there have been two or three cases, where children have got to that point and are now being home-educated (p.4).

Bullying is a common reason for home-educating (DCSF, 2007). In his writing on the British perspective of EHE, Gabb (2004) stated that in 2002, twenty children per year<sup>44</sup> committed suicide because of bullying and other pressures in school. Although Jane was not referring directly to Traveller families in her statement, the concerns about bullying and the perception of secondary school, as a microcosm of wider, dangerous society, are very similar to Traveller families' views within my research sample. Interestingly, the Review of EHE in England (Badman, 2009) was triggered by concerns about the safety and suitability of EHE provision. My research indicates children's safety and educational provision in school may be more concerning than that of EHE. Indeed, school reflects a dangerous space for many Traveller and Othered children. Jane confirmed that many parents are compelled to home-educate because it provides a *Safe Space* for their child:

People are sometimes just backed into a corner.....they don't know what else to do, often they are making the decision to EHE without the skills to deal with it.....or the resources (p.9).

Although my research is focussed upon the exclusion of Travellers, more inclusive systems and attitudes would be beneficial to all children.

Jane proposed that Gifted and Talented children were another group of children who were frequently home-educated due to the failings of the mainstream system. She said: "The state system does not allow them to fly" (p.4). Jane described G & T parents' roles as home-educators as a sacrifice:

I think it is a sacrifice on their part because they have to put so much into home-education .....you can see the amount of effort parents put in.....it is astounding!..... Often they do not just have one child but may have three or four – so hats off to them.....they really do well. Exceptionally well in some cases (p.4).

Finally, Jane described those parents who chose to home-educate to avoid prosecution for not sending their children to school<sup>45</sup>. These parents often had numerous issues to deal with in their lives and could not always deal with trying to get their children to school. Nevertheless, it tended to be these families that needed 'chasing' by the LA for registration purposes as they failed to respond to requests to provide information about their EHE provision and did not agree to monitoring visits.

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<sup>44</sup> These findings are based on all children, not Traveller children *per se*.

<sup>45</sup> Jane did not suggest that these families were Travellers.

Obviously Jane's taxonomy of typical groups of children who take up EHE are her own. Jane is, however, dealing with EHE families on the ground every day. Although I would not go as far as to say that her account accurately portrays the complete situation in Saltfield, it cannot be denied that her voice is useful in gaining an official perception of the EHE population. Jane's story confirms the key messages in the literature which suggest that EHE families are diverse, yet also have many commonalities.

Sheila and Jane's responses also confirm that school (particularly at secondary level) represents a microcosm of wider society that concerns many parents in terms of their child's safety and welfare. Consequently, a general, worrying pattern is emerging of parents who default to home-education provision rather than choose home-education for positive reasons. This issue raises questions about mainstream education and the inclusion of those children, who are labelled as 'different' in schools today. The next section discusses the particular situation of home-educated Traveller children in Saltfield.

### **Traveller Families' use of EHE**

This section concerns professionals' perspectives of Traveller families' use of EHE. I begin by documenting the numbers of Traveller children registered as home-educated.

In March 2011, 289 children passed through the EHE system<sup>46</sup>. Just over a quarter ascribed themselves as Travellers (64). The particular Traveller groupings were not recorded by the LA and it is worth reminding readers that these figures may not reflect the national picture of EHE take up by Travellers. Furthermore, of the total 289 EHE children in the LA under study, nearly one in ten were deemed to have Special Educational Needs (30). The cohort of Traveller children included six children considered to have SEN (10%). This data therefore correlates with the literature (Badman, 2009; Arora, 2006) regarding the disproportionate numbers of Travellers among the general home-educating community and the high uptake of EHE by children with so-called SEN.

Sheila also referred to Travellers' high uptake of EHE at secondary school level:

They are not getting what they want from school, they don't want to send their children at secondary level, but how do you overcome that, is there an alternative? (p.4).

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<sup>46</sup> Figures show numbers passing through the EHE Register in the academic year and those pending as at the end of July.

She suggested more needed to be known about the issues Travellers experience in secondary school, and that this was the TES responsibility. Assuming all Traveller education issues are solely TES responsibility is a limiting, yet common script, which in my professional experience is used frequently by schools. This attitude reflects deficit thinking as Travellers are homogenised as the Other; their needs are assumed to be someone else's responsibility on the grounds of their *cultural difference*. My literature review confirmed that even though the problems Traveller children face in school are well-documented, government response has remained limited and I would argue that scripts and deficit thinking regarding Traveller cultures are some of the reasons why.

Neither Jane nor Sheila mentioned mobility as a reason why Traveller families in Saltfield chose EHE. Within the EHE literature I reviewed, mobility was commonly cited as the main reason for Travellers' use of EHE. Here we see the value of using CRT within this study; I draw on professionals' voices as evidence, as counter-stories, to challenge the dominant EHE discourse. Jane and Sheila's stories confirm that problems in secondary school, not mobility, are a key contributing factor in Travellers' reasons for EHE. Once again I am not suggesting that mobility is not a factor or a reason for EHE for *some* families (especially Showmen), what I am arguing is that dominant discourses suggest *all* Travellers take up EHE on account of their cultural itinerancy. Such discourses act as powerful scripts to justify a lack of acknowledgement and response to the real reasons Traveller families withdraw their children from school.

The fact that Travellers make up a quarter of all registered EHE children in Saltfield should raise questions about equality in schools. Jane was also concerned about equality of opportunity in EHE:

As an LA employee .....it is their [Travellers'-KD] choice of lifestyle and we are doing the best we can, given the resources we have to support them. As a mother I feel.....I wonder if children are being given opportunity to make a choice.....of whether they want to continue to carry on that lifestyle or develop a different lifestyle. It is not a question that we are wanting to change them, but to give them the opportunity to develop (p.6).

Jane's concerns reflect my own regarding Travellers' use of EHE. Mainstream school is a place of inequality, but so is EHE, even though it does provide what can be called a safe space.

Jane and Sheila's stories confirm that EHE families are diverse yet also share similarities. Indeed they reveal a worrying trend of parents, including Travellers, who

choose EHE by default because their child's needs are not being met in school. Jane and Sheila also suggest that problems in secondary school drive Travellers' uptake of EHE. Their accounts provide a counter-story that challenges the dominant discourse of mobility and avoidance of prosecution as the main reasons Travellers take up EHE. Applying a critical race lens to these stories illuminates inequality and develops my own premise regarding EHE. I now present Traveller families' experiences of EHE in response to my second research question.

#### **4.2. Traveller Families' Practices and Experiences of EHE**

My research participants included two Showmen families and nine English Gypsy/Travellers. All the families I interviewed lived in mobile homes or trailers (caravans) on different sized sites across the county. Their socio-economic circumstances and geographical locations also varied.

Across the eleven families interviewed, there were a total of 42 children. The number of children in each family ranged from one to seven, with an average of four children per family. Out of these 42 children, 32 had been or were currently being home-educated. Nine of the remaining siblings had attended school, or were still attending, one was still a baby. Interviews concentrated mainly on those children who were currently being home-educated, although families frequently made reference to their other children's experiences of EHE and schooling. I begin this section by documenting families' understanding of the term EHE.

#### **The Term: Elective Home Education**

Seven out of the 11 families were unfamiliar with the official term of 'Elective Home Education'. These families explained that they tended to describe the practice of home-education as 'home-tutoring' or 'home-educating'. Vanessa, a young Traveller defined home-education as:

Where you get taught at home, you get the same things that you get taught at school, but just at home (2011:1).

Four families had heard of EHE and some provided their own definitions:

It's you choosing which way you want your child to be educated (Jolene, 2010:1).

They stay at home, they have someone to come in and help them, or you [parent-KD] help them. There are certain books that qualify to the law. Then they [LA-KD] come and check them and say "That's fine, that's ok". That keeps you inside the law as well as the children learning what they need to learn (Elizabeth, 2010:1).

I understood it to mean that the children do not have to go to school and they can be educated in the way that runs a line between the way I want them to be educated and the way the authority wants them to be educated. So it's within the law (Patricia, 2010:1).

These responses reflect the way that EHE allows parents to have more control over the content and nature of their child's education, whilst according with legal expectations.

### **EHE Practices**

Research tells us that home-educating practices are diverse (Rothermel, 2003) and this was reflected within the Traveller families interviewed. Nevertheless, there was one broad distinction that could be made. Seven out of the 11 families paid for additional tuition, the rest of the families delivered provision themselves.

Among those who paid for tuition, four families employed a tutor to come to their home. These tutors taught children *the basics*: spelling, reading and writing. Maths and ICT skills were sometimes included, although competence in number and calculations were often developed through more practical experiences, such as the family's trade.

Two families within my sample took their children to a private learning centre on a weekly basis where they were tutored by a qualified teacher and covered all curriculum subjects. There was also one family who, at the time of interview, was searching for a tutor. Paid tuition, whether by tutor or in a centre, tended to last between one and two hours per week. Bhopal and Myers (2009) found the same in their research on home-educating Traveller families. My research found that most children completed 'home-work' tasks set by the tutors between sessions. The length of time these lasted varied and depended on the tutor, age and ability of the child.

Interviews confirmed that finding a tutor tended to be done by word of mouth in the community. Some families suggested this process was challenging because others would not share details of their tutors. Moreover, current government guidance suggests that LAs cannot endorse tutors or give out lists of recommended or even qualified tutors. Those who teach EHE children require no formal professional qualifications. Consequently, some families were vulnerable, as they relied heavily on their tutors to be honest, capable and provide their child(ren) with a suitable education:

It's a good job she [tutor-KD] knows what she is doing because otherwise I would be in a pickle to be honest with you (Tina, 2011:3).

If I never had trust in the teacher [ tutor- KD] to put me on the right road.....I don't know.....I am not a teacher.....I don't know truly where I would be without the teacher (Anona, 2011:4).

Four out of the 11 families delivered home-education provision themselves. Some bought educational books for a specific Key Stage level in English, Maths or Science. Some families had a specific educational routine, others varied what they did from day to day. Patricia kept a diary of activities for Derek to monitor when he visited, others worked on laptops or completed a set number of pages in educational books every week and kept this work as evidence of progress.

Jolene based learning on her children's interests. For example, they went on a bike ride and then each child wrote up an account of the trip on their laptop. This Gypsy/Roma family completed my visual research tool, which was useful as it provided visual data of this process. Anita, from a Showmen family, based her children's learning on the places they were travelling through and they compiled scrapbooks together of their routes and visits to historical places of interest. Both these mothers emphasised the importance of getting into learning *routine*. Comparing their EHE practices reveals similarities in educational provision across different Traveller cultures. Perceptions of education were also similar:

Main factors of education, from my point of view.....I think reading, writing, adding-up.....things like that is an essential; the top 3 things. If you have got those, obviously if you can read, then you can learn more. If you can't read you are sort of stuck. If you add up and do sums and timetables.....if you can do things like that so that is good. If you can spell it is a bonus. They are the three most important things. I think socialising, learning to talk to people, learning to do things..... that is good too (Patricia, 2010:2).

For me, it's the boys had to be able to read and write – if not I'd go back to a house and they would go back to school. It's learning things..... especially that they have got an interest in. Going to different places and seeing the place. It's much nicer if you are doing history when you are actually at a castle and then you can see it and it sticks in your head better. For me it was better being able to show them the places and tell them history and geography side of it. It made it more exciting (Anita, 2010:5).

Alongside teaching *the basics*, families provided a range of learning activities, often based on the family's needs, such as cooking, needlework (for females), caring for horses and dogs and helping out with family business activities. Thus EHE often mirrored a vocational, yet gendered, apprentice-model of education. Parents often had extra input and support from friends and relatives who between them had a range of knowledge and skills to support the education of their children.

Although most research participants stated that they did not experience specific difficulties concerning EHE, early concerns were reflected upon in several interviews. Many families had relied on other EHE families or friends to advise or show them what to do. Furthermore, Traveller mum Marsha had informed the LA that her daughter would be home-educated in September 2009, yet she was not registered by the LA until March 2010. She suggested that a shorter start up time would have been beneficial to her family. Responses also highlighted some parents' low level of confidence in delivering home-education, particularly during the early stages:

I felt a bit lost.....I did not know if I was teaching them the right things. I don't want to do wrong by my kids' education (Jolene, 2010:2).

All mothers expressed a clear wish to do the best by their children, yet some expressed concern about having to wait for annual visits as they did not know if provision was 'right'. Carol-Anne was reluctant to send Rosanne to secondary school because her older brother had been bullied there, yet she also did not feel confident about taking up EHE so she asked the primary school if Rosanne could repeat her final year. Her request was refused. Rosanne told me that:

She [mum-KD] did not know what she had to do to home-educate, she thought if she could keep me in [school-KD] another year, it would just be easier all round (2011:1).

This EHE story confirms that Traveller parents do not reject mainstream school. Nevertheless, their experiences of racism and bullying leave them with little choice- EHE is the only available option.

All families had a very clear understanding that EHE was their sole responsibility:

You take them out, you sort them out (Anona, 2010:3).

You have made the choice, you do it (Jolene, 2010:3).

As Jane suggested, all families also appreciated monitoring visits and the reports of these visits. Good reports made parents very proud:

Visits are every 12 months. They go through all her work. I had the loveliest letter from the education people I ever wished. It was beautiful, it made my year (Anona: 2010:6).

Although many felt EHE was acceptable and suited them, some felt that systems were too vague, which allowed some families to use EHE as a *smokescreen*. Analysis revealed that within the Traveller community there are concerns that the vagueness of the system allows children to 'slip through':

You make the decision you do it, but I think there a lot of chances that kids can slip through. It's the ideal option for people who don't really want to take their kids to school – EHE but not for the right reasons. They use it as an excuse and because there is not a lot of back up I think kids will fail and that's a shame because I do think kids need their education (Jolene, 2010:3).

The fact that home-educated children may not receive a suitable education is also an equality issue reflected in the literature. TES respondents in Ivatts' study (2006) suggested that EHE can be used to avoid attendance in school. Yet, Jane's interview highlights that this is not a concern regarding Traveller families alone. Still, it is an equality issue which comes at the expense of having a very liberal EHE system.

A further equality issue which emerged from my data concerned economic and cultural capital. Cultural capital has been described by Bourdieu (1986) as forms of knowledge, skills, education and advantages that a person has, which give them a high status in society. Parents who have acquired this cultural capital can support their children with the necessary knowledge (dispositions) and resources to succeed. Parents who have less cultural capital are, for no fault of their own, less able to support their children to succeed. EHE children are solely reliant on families' resources for their education. Consequently, families' financial and cultural capital has a significant impact on the level and standard of educational support and breadth of learning opportunities in EHE. This was evident in my small research sample. Low-income families also struggled with the financial responsibility of home-education<sup>47</sup>.

Documenting the reality of EHE for Traveller families illuminates particular equality issues concerning some home-educated children within the English EHE system, which was regarded by Badman (2009) as the most liberal in comparison to other European countries. Emerging equality issues concern poverty, ethnicity, race, gender, culture and class which can be experienced simultaneously. Observing these intersections of inequalities is important as they demonstrate the complexity of the lived practices of EHE. Although a liberal EHE system may suit many families in England, I want to draw attention to the consequential inequalities of the system and their impact upon minority groups' experiences of education.

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<sup>47</sup> the funding of tutors, books and computer equipment.

I have documented professionals' and Travellers' accounts. These begin to address my first two research questions: there are cross-cutting reasons for adopting EHE and experiences of EHE are diverse. The next section contains three family vignettes, which provide a deeper insight into individual Traveller family circumstances. Following a CRT tradition I use these vignettes to document the authentic voices of Travellers themselves and illuminate issues of inequality. Within the vignettes the text in italic gives my own words and reflections; all other text is transcribed verbatim from interviews.

### **4.3. Three Family Vignettes**

#### **Kelly's story**

*Kelly is 13 years old and an only child. She lives with her mother, Anona, a young widow and her extended family on a small, rural Traveller site. Kelly's experience of mainstream education was very short-lived. Her experience of school and the reasons she was home-educated are explained below in the words of her mother.*

I started Kelly late at school because we had a bad tragedy – she was something to cling to, perhaps I should not have done that. I was selfish but.....I am her mum and she is my only one.....I started her at 7. She went in the October. I stayed with her for the first few days, then I got a phone call to say she didn't feel well, so I went to get her.....nothing wrong with her. Then the next day same phone call and the teacher never picked up on it, never said a word, never asked "What is the problem?" Kelly was 7 and they put her in reception, she only did 2 full weeks until Christmas from October!

I said to my mum "She's worrying me, she can't keep saying she got this and that". So my mum talked to her and she said "I don't like school". It wasn't that she did not like school, it was the teacher. Because Kelly knew she was going to get told off about something stupid. She never came back with something that she would not do in school – it was never about the work. There were other children in there who would be climbing the walls! I used to think what are they doing? She was never like that, but it was always that she did not have the right plimsolls, fruit, drink.....it was always a pick to me.....well that was how it felt . So I do think if she got a different teacher or a different school that things would have been very different. They never gave me that option.

I went one day to pick her up .....she did have a full day, that day, at school! Kelly said "I got pulled out today". "Oh, what for?" Because she's not a naughty girl .....and she said "This lady pulled me out to give me extra help". "Why is she giving you extra help?" You know.....surely the teacher should have spoken to me about that, before she just took it on board and done it? Then when I questioned that to the teacher she said "Well, she's a Traveller, she needs extra help". Why? She didn't. They just thought Travellers needed that. I didn't like that.

*Anona was very unhappy with this particular school's assumptions about Kelly's needs and the way she was picked out, she was concerned about inequality and Kelly's welfare in school. I ain't making her unhappy, and that what I done it [EHE-KD] for'.*

But I do think if the teacher had helped her a bit more, never pulled her out or made her feel different then.....Obviously when she went to school she was different because she's was the Traveller, which is not nice. I've been there, it's not nice. Secondly, the teacher made her feel different by pulling her out. That's how I feel. They should have asked me before they done it. She's only a child. So that's why I pulled her out. I signed her off the register and done it myself.

I do think school is better and I do truly believe today that if I had sent Kelly to a different school, which I have regretted, not once but a million times.....she would have got a different teacher. She would still be in school. A proper education is to understand them. Learn her, she's there to be learnt, not pick on her for what fruit she is eating. I am her mum, I want the best for her. I try, touch wood, to do the best with her.

*On reflection Anona said she regretted electing for home-education as she has found it financially and educationally difficult, especially because Kelly is dyslexic. Mum describes her personal experience of electing for-home education and reflects upon the way this process made her feel that Kelly's education and welfare was not of interest to mainstream teachers and professionals.*

They [the school-KD] kept phoning: "Kelly's not in school". I said "She's not coming back to that school". People visited and asked "Why is she not going back?" So I explained "She's going to be home tutored". The lady said "You've got to sign a letter". She did it for me and I signed.....They never said: "Well why?". They never said: "Well can't we try her.....we'll put her in a different class or school". It was just another Traveller out the school. That's how I felt, so I might as well be honest. "Oh well, we

ain't got to mess with her now, that's another one out the way". That's my feeling. Why bother with her when we can bother with our own. I'm not against nobody, but that is how I felt. I thought, well they are not going to give her the opportunity.

*Kelly and Anona are content with the way EHE is working now, however they would like more specialised EHE input. Mum describes their EHE practice below.*

We go to, well I call it a school. You go into a very big room and there are tables and laptops and Kelly does her work on that and she gets homework to bring home with her. I sit every week and do it with her. I thought it was the best thing. She's [the tutor-KD] got equipment, she's got the research, she's a proper teacher.

Kelly likes it there, so it's good you know.....at home you are just at home. Kelly gets up on a Thursday and knows she got to go to school, the computer is there. I think it gives them a bit of a space, I think it is good. We've done well.....been there for 4 years<sup>48</sup>. We like it, but they have just turned it into a learning centre now, so we go there, but it's the same thing, same person. We go for 2 hours on a Thursday. Kelly's got homework then from Thursday to Wednesday, what she does every night at home. We've done tapes, booklets.....everything there is in school we have done at home. She'll [her tutor-KD] mark it while Kelly is on the computer and then we start a new week. That's it, that's how it goes, its good, I think it's very good.

She's got today. She knows that today she has got an hour to set aside for homework. Whether at 9 am or 6 pm, she'll do it, whenever.....but there is an hour set for homework. We have worked really hard but Kelly is dyslexic so that is a bridge now we got to get over together. I am not a teacher but there is nothing we have not got over.....sometimes on the Thursday we have had to go back and say "I don't understand it" [homework set-KD].....She'll [the tutor-KD] explain it.....and to be honest when I read it, it does not make no sense to me because I left school was I was 11 myself. So what I do is I write it how I understand it and then I learn Kelly how I understand it.....but she could have been getting a better education in school if the teachers had given her that. She could have been learning me.....but it ain't gone like that.

EHE is very hard, very hard.....The government won't help you with them, not one bit, not half, not anything. You took them out, you got to sort them out. We have to pay and

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<sup>48</sup> Before this they had a tutor who came to the home [KD].

you can't afford to pay twice a week, so I do think they should help us a bit more, because they do it if she's at school.

*It seems that Anona's reasons for EHE were twofold: first her dissatisfaction with the way her daughter was treated differently and second, her daughter's ensuing unhappiness at school. EHE was a pragmatic choice and this family was making the best of the situation they were in, a finding reflected in Winstanley's (2009) research concerning G & T children. Nevertheless, Anona wished that Kelly had been given more opportunities at school and that they could afford more EHE tuition. Interestingly Anona's response mirrors that of Traveller families in Bhopal and Myers (2009) research, who suggested that lack of support in EHE and school was read as 'the perpetuation of school provision that fails to address Travellers' needs' (p.4)*

### **Libby's story**

*Libby is 15 years old and part of a Showmen family. At the time of interview he had just started home-education. His family are highly-mobile and they are only 'home' on their winter ground for about three months of the year, between late November and February. Libby has an older brother who completed mainstream secondary education via distance learning. His mother, Anita, explains a little about their lifestyle and their experiences and views of education.*

I am not from a Traveller background, only their father. When I first met him, I still had a house and the way things progressed, we had the boys.....but it was so difficult. He could be at Cornwall or Cumbria and I'd have to travel on the Friday to see him and I was just worn out at the end of the weekends so.....we actually rented the house out first of all and bought a showmen wagon to see how we would get on. I loved it. When you are knee-deep in mud it's not so good but I loved travelling all over the place. I found it easier.....we weren't all so tired and with all the travelling about all together. When we first decided I'd be out full-time, we said we've got to see how it goes. I wanted the boys to have an education, to be able to read and write: the basics.

Eventually we got a piece of land down here and Libby went to primary. They were fabulous, we met the Traveller Team teacher and she was brilliant and organised. When we are travelling we got in a routine, no matter what the weather or how close to the beach we were, we got the work done. Most of the time it was really good..... the only hiccup was when Libby went up to secondary school.

*Anita had real concerns about her son's welfare at secondary school. Below, she describes the level of unhappiness and stress attending the school caused him. She also describes her disappointment about their secondary school. Anita compares this experience to the experience at primary, where the school had been well-organised, creative and caring. At primary school Libby's travelling experiences were shared with the class to extend their understanding of his lifestyle and different geographical places, which ensured he was not forgotten by his class when he was away.*

He did not like the school [secondary-KD]. I think it was because it was so big after being in a little primary. They didn't seem to bother so much with him. There was no interest in him, none of the kids knew who he was when he was back, he got himself all wound up about it. Every time we left, I felt like I was pestering them for work. They would call us up for meetings, which was fine and we'd sit there "What do you want to learn?" "Yes we'll sort this out and send work back". But when we sent work back nobody ever emailed back to say: "Oh that is good" or: "You need to work harder on this". Just.....nothing.....and Libby hated it. He hated going.....he says not, but I don't know if he was being bullied. I don't know. Libby is diabetic and every day it was torturous. The Traveller teacher would meet me at the gate and prise him off me and take him in, but then by 11 -11.30 a.m. I would have to go back up there because he got himself so worked up his blood sugars had all gone to pot. It was a nightmare..... a nightmare.

It was a shame because he loved the primary school. He loved the teachers. I think because they all took the time with him and kept him involved with the other children so they did not forget who he was. The best thing was a map of England, we'd send postcards and they would stick them on the map and chart where he was. They did bits in class on where we were and it was nice, they all remembered him.

Primary was ok, but going up here [secondary school-KD] I thought AGGHH..... I could just picture how he felt going in because they didn't put him in classes where he knew anyone. It must be awful, it's almost like they lose their identity because there are so many. They all knew him at the little school but he was just a number up there.....it was not the same. So this time, when we got back I thought, I am not sending him back up there. I just could not face it and he did really, really not want to go.....so I said: "We will sort something out". Because he will end up ill. It's a shame.....but saying that he's got lots of friends. He's always out with friends. He learns other things you know.....His Dad is teaching him soldering. He's out there doing spray-painting this morning!

*Libby was clearly a talented and confident young man. He had travelled across the world with his family. During the winter when I visited he had renovated a horse-box singlehandedly and helped build a veranda around their mobile home. He could build a motorbike from scratch and he helped set up and perform their show when they were on the road. It cannot be argued that this apprentice model of home-education does not offer a suitable education. Nevertheless this depends on one's understanding of 'suitable', as EHE certainly does not offer a comparable education to that of school. Below Anita describes how she and her husband supported the boys' education whilst travelling and her views on the purpose of education.*

Whichever place we went to, we would try and take them out somewhere for the day. I would, from my school days, tell them about places, history and whatever I knew and they would write that up in a scrapbook. I sat there and helped him do it. I've got a little computer. It was interesting. He was sat there at the little table writing it all up. I'd say "Well here's an interesting bit"..... and I thought that was more useful for Libby in his travelling side. His older brother stayed until the end of secondary school but he did not do his exams. He's been to night school and done welding and got certificates and stuff. With this lifestyle that's more useful to them.

Libby can read and write. He's good at maths because he builds a lot with his dad. His dad is always at him about doing the measuring and that, he's good. He can do plumbing, electrics. It sounds awful, but when his friends come down from the village, his conversations seem much more grown up. He can talk about more than they can. Then I think, maybe it's not such a bad thing doing the travelling and seeing other things as well, it broadens your outlook. It's a shame you can't see him [do a show-KD]. He's quite a shy boy really.....but when he does the show inside he'll quite happily go on the microphone, there could be 200 people there. Introducing acts and then he'll go up the front because everyone will want to talk to him. He will just sit and talk.....its totally different. But if I say to him "Just pop up to the shop and get me a paper", he asks me to go with him. He can run circles round other boys. Although they probably know more about dates in history, for everyday living Libby knows a lot more, he's seen a lot more. A lot of things they learn at school, they don't use again after school. The stuff Libby learns he is using every day.

*Anita's reasons for home-education were Libby's health, identity and exclusion at secondary school. She was committed to education but suggested that the secondary school curriculum was not necessarily relevant for her sons' careers. This interview*

*indicates that EHE is chosen as an alternative to school because it does allow highly-mobile children to continue their education while they travel.*

*Yet, within school there are already necessary measures in place to enable this<sup>49</sup>. This story also provides evidence to show that the primary school did make distance-learning work effectively, allowing this family to feel included even when they were not physically present. Although Showmen do not belong to an ethnic minority culture they are still marginalised by cultural assumptions and in this case the secondary schools' lack of flexibility and willingness to meet the specific learning needs of their highly-mobile pupils. Libby's story reveals how once again EHE was the only available educational option.*

### **Marsha's story**

*Marsha is 12 years old. She attended nursery and primary school and started home-education instead of going to secondary school. Marsha has two younger siblings who are both still at primary school. Marsha's family have their own business and both her father and mother work in their shop during the week. Her mother, Patricia describes the reason they decide to home-educate Marsha. She also explains how the EHE process worked for her.*

It was not that I was personally worried about school, because from my experience I would have been worried about nursery school because I did not have none of that. So it wasn't the school that was frightening, nothing like that, it was because she was not happy in going. Marsha was not happy going to the secondary school we picked for her to go to. It got so that she started crying every time it was mentioned. She was unhappy in school [primary-KD] because of the thought of going to the secondary school. It was not just that school, it would have been any school. If she'd been different and happy to go there would not have been: "Well, you are not going because we are Travellers and you are not going". She would have gone, but it was just she was not happy so.....it was just the way it worked out, we had the opportunity to do home tutoring, so we done it!

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<sup>49</sup> The law recognises that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families may have an additional reason to keep their children from school, which is different from non-Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families. This is that children are of 'no fixed abode' and their parent(s) are engaged in a trade or business that requires them to travel from place to place and therefore prevents them attending school. Nevertheless, each child must attend school as regularly as that trade or business permits, and children over six years old have to attend at least 200 sessions in each rolling 12-month period (DSCF, 2008).

I asked questions because I did not know anything about it [EHE-KD]. I was completely in the dark about it. I just generally asked questions and tried to learn. The only thing that did hold it up for a bit was the head-teacher at the secondary school, as he needed to send some papers back. I call them release papers but I don't think that's the word for them. You know, to say that she wasn't going to go no more and she would be home-educated.

The inspector was really, really helpful. I did not know anything about it.....I didn't even know if there was a set time to do it, one hour a day or 2 hours? He said it is "Down to you" and providing everything is done within the 12 months that is fine, they are happy with it. We keep a diary of what she is doing. A lot of things come under it [EHE- KD] that I did not think about.....Home-economics.....She does a lot of these things so.....He was really good.

What I would say is that we don't have a set week. She does a lot at home that comes under home-economics which is good because she loves cooking so we do that.....She helps me in the shop, normally on a Wednesday. We haven't got a set time on it like Monday we do this, Tuesday we do this.....Wednesday we go swimming. It is sort of random but it all gets fitted in. Some weeks probably we don't do things we have done other weeks, but then we'll do it twice the next week.

*For Patricia there were many advantages about EHE, which are described below in her own words and indicate her commitment to her daughter's education.*

I thought in the beginning I would find a lot of it [EHE-KD] difficult but no, not really. I said, when she said she wasn't going to secondary school: "Whichever way this turns out, she not going to school so this has got to work". Once we got down and thought this is the way it has got to be and also they told us a lot of things so it was not hard, it was ok.

Flexible that is the nice thing. This sounds horrible, but you are not tied to a school, even though the other two [siblings-KD] go. Her going to school as well would not have come into that, but it is just easier. Because with our culture we are happy with the way she is reaching out and the way she is being taught. You know, some of the things probably she would have been taught now [if she had stayed in education-KD], we would not have been happy about [sex education-KD]. So she would not have been doing it anyway. I feel like I have got more control.

*Patricia's views about primary school were very positive. Below she explains how satisfied she was with her daughter's educational provision and progress at primary school and how this played a part in their decision about choosing EHE. She also describes what she saw as the purpose of education.*

The school [primary-KD] is wonderful. They have done the groundwork and have given her the basics. She is a wonderful reader, she is a wonderful writer. She is good in lots of things. Probably I would have been different if she was not good at these things. If she was a lower grade or something....I would not have been as eager to try this [EHE-KD]. Whereas she's got the ground basics.

You only get one life, if they can do things....Marsha's been going to her granny's and her aunt's. I know that is making her thrive, she is seeing different things, she is with her family, that is all part of learning anyway and they are happy in doing it. If they are happy they will learn and if they are not happy they will not learn, they will lose interest in school and then it's an ever decreasing circle isn't it.

*Patricia's view of education is holistic and the reason for Marsha's non-transfer to secondary school was to protect her happiness and well-being. Patricia is satisfied with EHE because she has more control over the content of Marsha's education and she likes the flexibility. EHE means her daughter can learn and help in their trade; she can socialise with different people and see more of her family.*

Ladson-Billings (2009) advocates the use of CRT in education; she suggests storytelling is a means by which the experiences and realities of the oppressed can be communicated. My vignettes tell the stories of individual Traveller families and highlight how different each family's experience of EHE can be. Analysis of the three vignettes also illuminates a number of equality issues. Kelly experienced discrimination on account of her ethnicity as a Traveller. Libby's secondary school experience was in stark contrast to his primary school experience. His secondary school showed distinct lack of interest and commitment for his emotional, social and learning needs, his case illuminates the hidden subtleties of 'cultural racism', whereby Showmen pupils social and educational needs are not met due to their perceived 'difference'. Patricia's story confirms that schools are not quick to follow up Traveller children's withdrawal. All three stories highlight how Traveller children are simply not a school priority.

These vignettes also show how the quality of EHE provision depends on family's resources. Anona struggled with the financial burden of EHE and the provision of

appropriate education, particularly as Kelly is dyslexic and Anona declares limited literacy skills. Patricia felt able to ask lots of questions to ensure she got EHE right, yet she had to wait for six months before the LA registered Marsha. Some might also suggest that Marsha's home-education was very gender-based. Thus there are also equality issues concerning EHE, as arrangements are poorly supported and monitored (Cemlyn *et al*, 2009). These vignettes do serve an important purpose in illuminating issues of inequality which are helpful in addressing my research questions. The next part continues this process by documenting the analytical themes concerning Traveller families' reasons for home-educating.

#### **4. 4. Traveller families' Reasons for EHE**

This section begins by quoting verbatim some of the reasons Traveller families choose EHE. Nevertheless these do not capture the complexity and multi-faceted nature of the reasons families opt for EHE. Consequently, the rest of this section concentrates on the two main themes analysis revealed. Bhopal and Myers (2009) investigated the reasons Traveller families took up EHE. The reasons their small sample home-educated was summarised into two categories: a) dissatisfaction and disaffection with the type of schooling available and b) the positive benefits of home-educating. My analysis revealed similar themes: 1) Problems in school: bullying and discrimination and 2) EHE as a *suitable education*, which are discussed in turn. I refer my findings to other researchers' work throughout this chapter to highlight the links with other studies on EHE and race equality.

#### **Why do Traveller families choose home-education?**

Analysis of the interview transcripts suggests that all Traveller families felt compelled to take up home-education because of concerns about school. Seven families spoke about direct bullying experiences involving school staff or students, while other parents referred to the more subtle influences of cultural Othering and concerns about their child's safety and wellbeing in an environment dominated by a different culture. All the following extracts, except the last, are directed at secondary schools:

Marsha was not happy to go to the secondary school we picked for her to go. Not just that school, any school, it got so that she was crying every time it was mentioned (Patricia, 2010:1).

Ronnie was being bullied and the school locked him in a room by himself. Davey got anxiety at secondary school and that is why he has been pulled out (Tina, 2011:1).

I was being bullied at school and I was unhappy at school, I did not like it. I did not have any friends at this school (Courtney, 2011:1).

They did not seem to bother much with him. He hated it, he hated going..he says not but I don't know if he was being bullied (Anita,2011:1).

Crystal was offered drugs in the playground and Alfie was told he would be bullied (Vicky, 2010:1).

Well, there was a couple of reasons really..for one main reason I did not like the things what was said in the playground [at primary school-KD], it wasn't things I like my kids to be involved in. The things my kids were having said to them were disgusting.....Amos told me about it. Home-education is the way to go with Amos anyway, because he's.....well he is at home and he was uncomfortable at school (Jolene, 2010:1).

Amos was diagnosed with Autism after his mother reported her concerns about his behaviour to their doctor. At least three other children, who were currently home-educated, had been identified as SEN and this played a part in families' decision to home-educate:

Safer to keep her at home, and she wasn't..... I would not have said this to her.....up to scratch to go to big school, I don't think she would have coped with it (Elizabeth, 2010:2).

That's another thing, we've known for 12 months that she is dyslexic but would they have picked that up in school? I don't think they would have done. Because it would have been: 'Oh, she's a Traveller'. That's how I feel about it (Anona, 2010:5).

The latter response indicates that Anona perceives her child's ethnicity and culture to be a limiting factor in the response by the school to her needs. Documenting Travellers' own voices reveals intersecting inequalities which impact on the educational opportunities of Traveller children. Through a critical race lens it seems that children's experiences of education depend on the way they do, or do not fit in with the *norm*. Hence, my research findings illuminate equality issues for those who are Othered.

I now contemplate the two themes my analysis revealed, which expose more equality issues.

### **Problems in Schools: Bullying & Discrimination**

As previously suggested, the reasons for uptake of EHE among Traveller families were complex and the discussion of findings in this section reflects this complexity. Yet, I did my best to summarise the problems in school and checked these with families, who

agreed that the list below covers the main reasons, particularly at secondary level and I discuss the first four of the problems in turn<sup>50</sup>:

- Bullying
- Discrimination (by teachers / children)
- Traveller children not being safe
- Being seen / treated differently by teachers
- Traveller children learning things that are not in keeping with their culture

### *Bullying*

The review of the literature indicated that discrimination, name-calling and racist bullying are very real problems for Traveller children in school (Lloyd and Stead, 2001). The convergence of race with assumptions of profound cultural difference means that Traveller pupils, including those who are not ethnic minorities, are often racialised as deficient (DePouw, 2012). Seven of my respondents spoke of direct bullying incidents and at least four families spoke of wider discrimination and their child's segregation due to being a Traveller. In addition, some children were segregated because of low literacy levels. I use CRT to develop my analysis of inequality by documenting the intersections of inequalities among Traveller families. Hence the next section is divided into two parts: *Racism and Bullying* and *Illiteracy and Bullying*.

### *Racism and Bullying*

Carol-Anne had been bullied in school as a child. When her son received similar treatment he was withdrawn and this decision also affected his younger sister's education:

My son went to secondary school and had a terrible experience, yes....because he's a Traveller. He got picked on, even by the teachers. I was not prepared for Roseanne to go through that. We had the same when we went to school, my brother and sisters so.....(2010:1).

Courtney, a young Traveller, said she had been bullied for some time at school before she was home-educated:

I was being bullied and honestly don't think it was a very good school altogether, I told near enough every teacher in school (about the bullying) but they never said anything

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<sup>50</sup> The last problem: 'Traveller children learning things that are not in keeping with their culture' is discussed under the 'suitable education' part (p.126).

about it really, they just said if it happens again come back. I kept going back and back [to teachers for support -KD] but nothing.....(2011:1).

Her older sister, Vanessa added:

They should take bullying seriously.....other children have killed themselves. They should not take it lightly.....She [Courtney-KD] is a strong person, she'd come home and have a cry and get on with it .....some children are not like that (2011:6).

Ureche and Franks (2007)<sup>51</sup> found that 63% of the Traveller children in their study had experienced bullying and/or physical attacks. 86% had experienced racist comments. They confirmed that Traveller children left education directly because of the bullying they experienced there. Many of the Traveller parents I interviewed spoke of their anxieties about bullying in secondary school:

That is a big worry with Traveller children.....bullying - he had a bit of bullying and would not entertain it (Teresa, 2010:2).

Cemlyn *et al* (2009) confirm that (within the literature), 'racist bullying and harassment of Traveller pupils is the most prominent theme, combined with inadequacy of many schools' responses' (p.97). Lloyd and Stead's (2001) research substantiated that teachers frequently do not believe Travellers' complaints about bullying or dismiss them. Courtney and Vanessa's quotes above confirm such attitudes. Tina also remarked on the way teachers do not acknowledge bullying:

It's the bullying as well, they [school- KD] say it does not happen but it do happen (2011:p.3).

Rocky came from a Showmen family, he was made to wait in the school office to prevent him being bullied whilst waiting for the school bus. Yet his mother only found this out by chance when she picked him up from school one day. Although seven families cited bullying as one of the main reasons for home-education, others did not mention bullying outright as a problem. To substantiate this point I have included Teresa's initial explanation for home-educating her son:

Usually when Traveller children turn 11 and change schools, they don't usually go to secondary school. It is very rare that Traveller children go to secondary school. I

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<sup>51</sup> Ulreche & Franks (2007) completed a study on the views and identities of Roma, Gypsy and Traveller young people in England. Their sample included 201 children and young people from English/British Gypsies, Rroma, Irish Travellers, other British Travellers and New Travellers. I did not critically review this study in my literature review as it does not concern EHE specifically.

decided to home-educate because that way he would still be learning things without having to go through the system of going to school (2010:3).

It was only later on in the interview, when I asked Teresa about her opinion of the positive aspects of EHE that she elaborated:

Travellers usually find it hard to mix in secondary school, with EHE there is not a problem with bullying and things like that.....That [bullying-KD] is a big worry with secondary school and Traveller children. I mean he did go to the college [secondary school-KD], but he had a bit of trouble. He had a bit of bullying. He would not entertain that. It's different when you get lots of Traveller children going but when you only have one or two .....when there is a lot [of Traveller children-KD] it is usually ok. Primary was easy because there was about 50 Traveller children.....so they are used to them and they go from when they are small.....then they change [schools-KD]. You usually get other children going from other schools to the college [secondary school-KD] what perhaps have not even had any contact with Traveller children (2010:9).

This short extract is important for two reasons. First, Teresa's response gives insight into the perceived difference between primary and secondary schools and the factors that are seen to influence bullying and discrimination. Second, Teresa's initial response about why she home-educates is, in my professional experience, a typically common response or *script*, inferring that that is just the way it is: Traveller children don't go to secondary school. Derrington and Kendal's (2004) research showed that non-transfer to secondary school was seen as a form of cultural protection on behalf of Traveller families. Scripts are powerful historical and ideological foundations which act as a 'system of circular relations which unite structures and practices' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977:203). Scripts can be compared to Bourdieu's notion of 'habitus' which describes socialised norms or tendencies that guide behaviour and thinking. Habitus signifies durable 'schemes of thought, perception, appreciation and action' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977:40). Habitus is acquired through unconscious processes of internalisation and in turn provide a driving force for individuals' actions (Gewirtz and Cribb, 2009). Hence Travellers' scripts may not initially reveal the racism they experience. Still, my research findings indicate that Traveller families use EHE as a legal educational alternative to protect their children from racism in schools.

In 2010, Wilkin *et al* (2010) completed an extensive research project to improve Traveller children's educational outcomes. The authors confirmed that scripts are 'used consistently by Traveller communities to justify actions for non-transfer' (p. iv). The problem with scripts is that issues of racism are not revealed. Furthermore schools use their own scripts regarding *mobility* and *cultural difference* to abdicate responsibility for

Travellers' educational needs. Consequently, scripts play a significant role in all Traveller children's exclusion from secondary school. Critical questions need to be raised about Travellers' withdrawal from school. Although EHE professionals in Saltfield documented families' reasons for taking up EHE, what would be done with these responses was not clear, whereas they could provide important evidence to address inequality in school. The omission to reveal and address this data provides an apt example of *interest convergence*, or in other words, the symbolic and structural systems which prevent advancements in race equality. Critical discussions between EHE staff, schools and families are clearly needed to tackle the damaging nature of scripts in perpetuating discourses of exclusion. As Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) suggest, habitus is not fixed or permanent, and can be changed.

### *Illiteracy and Bullying*

Within my sample, one Showmen family and one Romany/Gypsy family spoke of bullying incidents that were related to the fact that their children could not read or write:

The class were all looking at a certain page in their books, the teacher said "not you, you look at a picture book instead as you can't read or write" (Marie, 2010:2).

Marie asked the school if they could focus more on Rocky's reading and writing, but was told that this was not possible as the National Curriculum did not allow this. I was not able to verify this account as the teacher in question was not named, nor is it the purpose of this research. The purpose is to listen to Travellers' voices in order that their reality is named. Marie's account raises serious equality concerns, as reading and writing are central to the taught curriculum and supporting children's educational needs. Another mother's comment suggests Rocky's situation may not be an isolated incident:

My older son went through primary and then up to big school and he could not read or write and they just called him stupid. Secondary school is awkward isn't it .....when they get up there.....it's a different step up there and I suppose they can't take it (2010:2).

My respondents' comments highlight how entering secondary school and having low literacy levels can present significant barriers for Traveller children. These Traveller children were discriminated against on account of their culture, ethnicity and low literacy skills which impacted on their experiences and retention within school education.

## *Discrimination*

Discrimination can be defined as unjust process or treatment of different categories of people, which leads to oppression (Thompson, 2001). Six families referred to wider discrimination and the way in which their children were treated *differently* as a Traveller:

I don't like this new one [headteacher-KD], she pretends, we can tell. You can walk in a room and know if a person likes you. We have lived this lifestyle for a lot of years. I am 40 and I can tell in a minute and thought.....you are playing a game. You have to play the game. You can tell by certain things, tell by her attitude.....I can't say he was ever bullied.....but I know he felt different. He knowed he was different and he knew the teachers knew he was different and I think they were a little bit more peppi-handed <sup>52</sup> with him (Elizabeth,2010:9).

I don't think it was more the children, it was more the teachers than children, not violent bullying but they call you square peg compared to other children (Shannon, 2010:9).

It's like we go swimming every Monday. There is a lady there who is swimming instructor, for people who can't swim and every week she tries her hardest. 'Please come in pool'. You can really see she's really wants you to do it – with a school teacher, you want to feel they do want my child to be there - they do want them. But I never got that..... Once I had signed that letter to say I pulled her out, I will home-educate on my own, never heard from them from that day to this. So it proved to me that they did not want her there, that is how it seems and I think I was right and I don't regret pulling her out.....not at all.....no, definitely not (Anona, 2011:2).

Marie, from a Showmen family, told me that not one of her seven children were ever invited to other people's homes for parties or to play, and how excluded from the community this made her feel. As a child Marie also experienced segregation:

When I went back everyone said don't play with her, she don't stay around long and I stood in the corner and felt alone.....then I ended up playing with 'backwards' (sic) children.....which suited me and suited them (2010:3).

The subject of segregation and being constructed as the *Other* was commonplace and not just for those families who are recognised as ethnic minorities. These findings help address my research questions and illuminate equality issues. Although race and racism are at the centre of CRT analysis, CRT scholars recognise the intersection of race with other forms of subordination (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002). I use CRT to

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<sup>52</sup> This mothers own word for describing how they treated him differently to the other children.

extend the notion of racism and examine the intersectionality of inequalities that those from different Traveller backgrounds experience. Marie comes from a Showmen family, Anona is a Romany/ Gypsy, yet both feel discriminated on account of their ethnicity and culture; both parents also felt that their children were discriminated against in school on account of their learning needs (dyslexia and illiteracy). I present their stories as evidence of inequality in school, which reduces Traveller families' willingness to allow their children to access mainstream education and explains why they opt for EHE.

I also noted that most Traveller families<sup>53</sup> in my sample were not questioned about their reasons for withdrawing their children from school:

I decided to take my kids out of school and there was no feedback what so ever, nobody said "Is there a problem? Would you like to discuss it?" I just said the boys are not coming back anymore and it was "Ok thank you" just send a letter in.....that was it. If I was a teacher I would like to say: "Would you like to make an appointment and we'll see if there is any reason or discuss if best move for the children. Do you know what you are getting yourself into? Do you know what they need?"(Jolene, 2011:5).

There should be more feedback from school, even though you have made the decision and you can't say they are responsible now.....it's not that.....it is just that..... just like that.....let them go.....(Vicky,2011:5).

I think it depends on the problem.....because if it's a high rate [big problem- KD] they will close down on you, they will back the teacher the whole way because they have to.....if its low rate they may help you but then again they see you in a different category. They know it's not going to go any further so they think.....ok we will try and stop it, but if we don't they will pull them out anyway .....and that's how they see it and 90% of Travellers will do that - just pull them out 'coz what's the sense in being tortured (Elizabeth,2011:4).

Kiddle (1999), Derrington and Kendal (2005) and Wilkin *et al* (2009) have all noted that Traveller pupils' absence is not always followed up quickly by schools. My respondents' accounts confirm that Travellers do not feel wanted in school, they also feel that if their issues are raised they may not be addressed because schools assume that Traveller children will eventually be withdrawn anyway. Hence, discourses of *cultural difference* are also an exercise of power, which reflect 'what can be said and thought, but also about who can speak, when, where and with what authority' (Hall, 1992:290). Negative

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<sup>53</sup> Only two families out of 11 had been asked about the reasons they withdrew their children from school.

discourses perpetuate the inequality Travellers' experience in society and school and undermine effective responses to their children's needs.

Faced with these situations, many Travellers simply give up with school. All Traveller children in my sample who were being home-educated at the time of interview, had previously attended school. Eight families had withdrawn their children at the point of transition from primary to secondary school or during secondary school. Most parents had limited experience of school education themselves and only two parents had experienced secondary school. Many were particularly anxious about secondary school and their safety and well-being there.

### *Traveller Children not Being Safe*

The main issues regarding Traveller children's safety in school concerned bullying and racism, which I have already discussed. Concerns about safety related to the space of school itself:

Traveller people are not looking on school and her learning to read and write and sit in uniform, we are not worried about that – what we are worried about is what is going on in that school (Elizabeth,2011:4).

Anxieties about school spaces often centred on behaviour and language of other pupils. Crystal was offered drugs in the playground and children made derogatory remarks about her mother<sup>54</sup>. Rosanne, a 16 yr old, reflected upon her transition into secondary school and how her ethnicity as a Traveller affected her security, self-confidence and learning:

Going into school mixing with new people and then being a Traveller as well feels like a big weight on your shoulders. Like the whole world is on your shoulders. If you go into school confident and happy you sit there and take it in, if you are nervous you worry about things, what will happen at playtime instead of thinking about what you should be-your school work (2011:7).

Safety was also about strength in numbers, the fact that few Traveller pupils' transfer to secondary school means they are literally on their own in a majority environment where they feel vulnerable (see Teresa's comments on p.121). Bhopal and Myers (2009) confirmed that several Traveller parents referred to secondary school life as unsafe, whereas their own Gypsy culture was perceived as a safe place.

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<sup>54</sup> Crystal was told her mother was a whore.

O'Connor (2008) states that when faced with unfamiliar places we often can feel anticipation, curiosity, excitement or fear, anxiety and bewilderment. She explains that the latter, negative feelings can be reduced if we have a sense of being eagerly awaited or know we will be treated with respect. Sadly for those Traveller children who did transfer, their experiences did not reflect support or respect and the assumptions held by teachers were a barrier to their progress and retention in secondary school.

### *Being Seen / Treated Differently by Teachers*

I think if they paid as much attention to Traveller children as other children then I don't think there would be so much of a problem.....but where you have Traveller child and another child in a fight, then the Traveller child is always to blame. When you are in school you can always see Traveller children falling behind. I don't think they pay Traveller kids as much attention as they should pay them (2011:1).

Tina felt that if the school had been better, she would not have taken up EHE. Caprice felt the same; she comes from a Showmen family and was also a *Gifted and Talented* pupil. She is now in her twenties and reflected on her school experiences:

I liked the little school; I was a 'gifted and talented' pupil and top of the class with everyone at primary. I liked the little school..... they [primary school- KD] used to send out work packs for when travelling and I did them because I wanted to. The [primary – KD] school wasn't racist. I dropped down at secondary. I hated it .....I felt excluded. At secondary school you were just a number not a pupil (2011:5).

Caprice described how the level of work she was given was inadequate. She told me that she had wanted to complete her secondary education, but said staff did not bother with her because they assumed that she would follow a career in the family business and did not need a school education. Yet Caprice told me that she *had* wanted to complete her education because it offered her an alternative vocational pathway if she did not want to follow the Showmen lifestyle. This story highlights the use of *scripts* concerning *cultural difference* and the effects of an interplay of inequalities: Caprice's educational needs as a Gifted and Talented student were seemingly undermined by cultural assumptions of her vocational trajectory and learning needs which led to her withdrawal. Interestingly, Ofsted reported back in 1999 that teacher expectations of Gypsy, Traveller children were unreasonably low, and raising teacher expectations was identified as a priority. My research indicates that little has changed.

I have now discussed the main problems in school which can also be described as *push* factors concerning Travellers' uptake of EHE. I now document the second

analytical theme: EHE as a suitable education which reflects the positive benefits of choosing home-education, or *pull* factors.

### **EHE: A 'Suitable Education'?**

In my interviews the idea of the suitability of education was a central topic of discussion among EHE professionals and Travellers alike. Professionals spoke about judging a suitable education and Travellers referred to the positive benefits of EHE. Their voices substantiate how EHE is used as a means to protect Traveller children from the negative experiences of mainstream school, which are related to being from a marginalised culture. Interviews, initial analysis and member-checking with Traveller families confirmed that the benefits of EHE were:

- Children are safe and protected
- Children can continue learning but without attending school
- Parents have better control about the things they learn
- EHE is flexible and can fit into the families' routine
- More time is spent with family
- Learning as part of EHE tends to be more focused on Traveller lifestyle and what children are likely to need to get on in later life
- Children can stick to way of life they are used to

I will discuss all these benefits. Still, as they were also often interwoven elements of the discussion they are not listed in turn.

EHE professionals in Saltfield suggested that a suitable education included *the basics* (English, Maths and Science). Traveller families held a similar perspective. Although I am not seeking to generalise, it is fair to suggest that all eleven families agreed that reading and writing comprised a suitable education:

In school you learn geography, history, art. They are useful for Traveller children but they don't need to know them things for everyday life. It's the basics like.....English and a good knowledge and writing and obviously reading, mathematics is good and computers. I mean he can do all the computer things like that..... It's helpful for them (Jolene, 2010:8).

It's the basics. We don't really need the other ones [subjects in school-KD]. Obviously he is not going to go to University and go get a degree to be a doctor or you know whatever..... (Elizabeth, 2010:6).

The basics is to help get him along. They need to get a driving test and they have to learn to read, it's good to learn to read because it's harder now than what it used to be. See all them things plus computers help them with that.....because it's all done on a computer now isn't it?(Teresa, 2010:4)

I think they should go to school, but not in secondary school. I don't think they help you enough. They think you are grown up now, they don't need help. I think it is better anyway when you learn 1-1. You are concentrating, not distracted by anything (Courtney, 2011:3).

I think they have had a good education. As well as learning all the basics .....they have seen something of the world.....Tony was in Germany when he was 11. Off with German friends.....teaching him a few words. Much more exciting than sat in a classroom. But we talked about it. I'd said if they are not learning. I don't want them struggling, they have to be able to read and write. To get on in life you have to be able to do that. If they wanted to do something different .....they still need that.....you can progress from there , even if don't want to do a Fair life .....You must still have the basics (Anita, 2010:5).

These responses highlight how Traveller families felt that EHE enabled their children to continue learning, while keeping them safe and protected in the community, away from school. Learning was also focussed upon the Traveller lifestyle and what children needed to get on in later life. Thus EHE enabled parents to select, organise and transmit the knowledge and skills they feel are relevant for their children, rather than be subject to the dominant culture's schooling in which they hold little power or agency. Readers of these excerpts might say that some Traveller parents do not seem to have high aspirations for their children. Still, aspirations depend on one's own cultural background and expectations and what is most important and relevant to family and community needs. As Jolene stated:

It is not always the education that gets you a job, sometimes it's a bit of knowledge about everything (2010:3).

Many families combined structured reading and writing opportunities with vocational skills. Within most Traveller communities children are involved in their family businesses from an early age. EHE enables children to spend more time with their families, where they are taught occupational skills important for later life. This type of education can be compared to a vocational, apprenticeship model of education. Libby's brother did not complete his GCSEs but did attend Further Education to complete a welding course. Martha's family owned a shop. She studied Maths, English and Science, completed work on a computer, helped with the cooking at home and accounting and customer service in the business. These stories provide important counter-stories to those which depict Traveller families as not interested or able to provide a suitable education.

For many Traveller families, the reality of discrimination and prejudice has historically resulted in inequality in obtaining mainstream employment (Cemlyn *et al*, 2009). Tina explains how in this context completing school and obtaining qualifications is actually of little use:

They [education officials-KD] had the cheek to say that Ronnie got to go to secondary school and to college. My cousin passed all the exams you know .....she can't get a job. As soon as she mentions she is a Traveller or place she lives at they don't want to know. But her friend [non-Traveller-KD], applied with less qualifications and got the job (Tina).

Thus, none of these families are discounting the importance of education and learning, but they are in some cases discounting the significance of the curriculum in advancing employment opportunities. These choices might be described as self-exclusionary but indicate parallels with those of working-class young people which are informed by 'a realistic appraisal of the objective probability of their succeeding in a stratified education system in which opportunities for social mobility are severely limited' (Gerwitz and Cribb, 2009:48).

My analysis supports the use of CRT, as Travellers' stories illuminate direct experiences of inequality and also provide important counter-stories to challenge negative discourses of Travellers and education. My findings challenge the dominant discourse which suggests that Travellers' use of EHE is a choice and the consequence of their mobility. Not one single family in my sample suggested that mobility was their reason for uptake of EHE. Instead my research reveals that school systems are failing to provide a culture and curriculum that is inclusive and relevant to children, like Travellers, from diverse backgrounds. Hence, children's safety and wellbeing is of central concern and a considerable 'pull' factor in choosing EHE:

Yes, happiness is top priority. If children are not happy they will not learn..... you know .....and if they are not interested they won't learn... so we try to push them into things they are happy in (Patricia, 2010: 9).

Children need to want to learn, they learn as they go along. My children were not happy to go so EHE made it easier (Marie, 2010:3).

Analysis of my data, in response to my first two research questions, reveals that Travellers perceive EHE as a safe space and I now discuss this developing premise.

### *EHE: A Safe Place*

Myers *et al* (2010) suggest that Traveller families attempt to create protective environments for their children. My respondents' accounts confirm these findings:

Home-education they are here, among Travelling people (Jolene, 2010:1).

Trudy described EHE as a protective bubble:

Girls are sometimes in a bubble situation but that is their lifestyle (2010:6).

Analysis confirms my developing premise that EHE provides a safe educational space for Traveller children. This development of theory provides a relevant explanatory framework for my data and is one that addresses my research questions. EHE allows Traveller children to be close to their families and removed from negative and potentially damaging emotional experiences at school:

Home-education is nice.....I don't think they get into too many things.....in all fairness they don't need half the things they learn in school. The good things are that they can stick to the way of life (Jolene, 2011:3).

You are away from the school environment and I think it's good because you can be taught at home. I don't think you learn less or more than in school, it's just better because you are at home (Courtney, 2011:2).

EHE gives you a chance to grow up and turn into what you want instead of being like everyone else. If you are in school and being bullied you think ' Well, to stop being bullied I need to be more like so and so who is not bullied'..... 'I need to be different' .....it affects your confidence. If you are bullied in secondary school it follows you through, it really does. You feel like you won't fit in anywhere. You don't want to get a job because you think it will be like secondary school (Roseanne, 2011:6).

Nevertheless, the fact that EHE is a safe place is not a solution to racism and discrimination in schools; it is a problem, a matter I discuss further in my conclusion which summarises the inequalities for Traveller children across both educational spaces of school and EHE.

### **Conclusion: Are there emerging Equality Issues regarding Traveller Families' use of EHE?**

Ivatts (2006) suggested that there was a need to look at the reasons why Traveller families take up EHE, because this may be the result of discrimination in schools. My study explored the reasons for EHE and the experiences of Travellers across two educational spaces, EHE and school. My analysis of this data indicates that uptake of EHE is the result of discrimination. Within this chapter I have drawn upon CRT's

conceptual tools of storytelling and counter-stories to address my first two research questions. Travellers' stories reveal that reasons for EHE are complex and interwoven and centre on a number of inequalities. I have found that take up of EHE is associated with both *push* (the issues in schools) and *pull* (the safety of EHE) factors, which I shall discuss in turn. These findings also address my third research question as they reveal equality issues regarding Traveller families' use of EHE.

#### *Push Factors: Issues in School*

My research found that Traveller families are reluctant to keep their children in school, particularly at secondary level because of the racism, discrimination and bullying they can and do face there. Traveller families also reported a lack of appropriate response to racism and bullying and to their children's learning needs. Documenting Travellers' voices reveals that families' decisions to home-educate are the product of overt and covert racism in mainstream school. Traveller families took up EHE as a result of problems in school, not because of a lack of interest in education. EHE was the *only* viable educational option available. Thus Travellers' voices have provided important counter-stories to challenge dominant discourses about their educational desires and decisions.

Still, dominant discourses continue to conceal the racism and inequalities Travellers' experience in school. CRT studies which examine *interest convergence*, race and their intersection with other inequalities have been informative. DePouw (2012) highlights how 'the confluence of race with assumptions of profound cultural difference means that Hmong Americans as a whole are racialised as deficient' (p. 224). Exactly the same can be said for Travellers. Consequently, expectations of Traveller pupils in school remain low and they drop out of school with ease. Travellers' withdrawal does not warrant any response as it is framed as Travellers' cultural choice, which happens to be in the interest of schools.

#### *Pull Factors: Safety of EHE*

Mainstream school systems were not accessible, inclusive or relevant for many of the Traveller families in my sample. Accordingly, EHE as an alternative educational space held many benefits. EHE enables children to continue learning, within the constraints of the law and without having to contend with the difficulties associated with attending school. Home-educating Traveller parents have more control about the content of their child's education and learning can be tailored to specific knowledge and skills that children need to 'get on' in later life. Children spend more time with their families and

are taught a variety of skills from them firsthand. As an alternative to mainstream school, EHE offers Traveller children a safe environment where they do not face racist bullying and discrimination and can be themselves. Hence EHE represents a safe space.

Yet the fact that EHE offers a safe space is concerning as EHE basically represents an escape route from inequitable school systems. This is clearly discriminatory. Expressly because EHE does not ensure that all children can access and benefit from a *suitable education* at home. Current EHE monitoring and support systems are weak and children are ultimately dependant on their families' resources. My findings indicate that Traveller families are doing the best they can with the resources they have available. Nevertheless, some families struggle to access the financial and social resources required to home-educate. In addition, several families were overly reliant on tutors to provide a *suitable education*, yet because there are currently no regulations regarding the people who might deliver home-education, paid tuition does not necessarily ensure a suitable education. My data also suggests that gender trajectories are more pronounced in EHE and Traveller girls do not receive the same educational experiences as boys and vice versa. Excluded from mainstream school, home-educated Traveller children cannot develop the kind of critical intelligence about dominant society which in the long-term might enable Travellers communities to legitimately challenge the racist power structures that exclude them.

It has not been the purpose of this research to argue for or against EHE; instead I have sought to illuminate issues of inequality. I have revealed the consequences of direct racism and more subtle racist structures and prejudices which continue to prevent Travellers' access and achievement in education. Education is both a fundamental right in itself and a means of realising other rights (Save the Children, 2001). Thus it can be argued that denying Traveller children their right to a suitable education denies them a future. These equality issues are elaborated on in the following chapter.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion: Educational Spaces and Equality**

### **Introduction**

The aim of my research has been to explore the reasons why Traveller families take up EHE and to illuminate issues of inequality. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss my findings and their implications for educational equality across all three of my research questions. Thus I begin by contemplating each research question in turn. I compare my findings to the research literature. I also highlight wider implications. I then elaborate upon on the two central equality issues my findings revealed. Throughout this study I have drawn on CRT as a framework to illuminate educational inequalities across EHE and school. CRT scholars highlight racism and inequality but also propose radical ways to address inequality and work toward social justice (Ladson-Billings, 2009). I therefore conclude this chapter with a summary of my findings and recommendations.

### **Addressing the Research Questions**

#### *Research Question 1 - Why do Traveller families choose home-education?*

Documenting Travellers' voices shows that racism, bullying and discrimination in school are common reasons for uptake of EHE. Traveller families are also attracted to EHE as it represents a safer place to educate their children legally, particularly as they reach adolescence. My findings compare to Bhopal and Myers' (2009) study of EHE and Travellers, which suggested that Travellers' reasons for EHE and their withdrawal from school had 'less to do with not wanting their children to receive an education and far more to do with concerns about the school institution itself' (p.4).

Although the general EHE literature suggests that Travellers choose EHE mainly for cultural reasons and criticises Travellers' commitment to the education of their children, my findings challenge this discourse. Indeed, Traveller children's withdrawal from school is not necessarily a choice but the product of racial injustice in school and society. Responses from Travellers reveal that parents are dedicated and interested in their child's education. Mobility was not mentioned by any family as a reason for take up of EHE, even though some families were highly-mobile. Studying the reasons Travellers take up EHE has raised serious questions about equality in schools.

#### *Research Question 2: What are the experiences and perceptions of Traveller families regarding Elective Home Education?*

Travellers' accounts of their EHE experiences and perceptions are diverse and confirm how Travellers share similarities and differences with the wider assorted home-

educating community. Thus I concur with Rothermel (2003) who suggested that general taxonomies of home-educating families should be avoided.

In England legislation denotes that education is a parental responsibility. Although parents can opt for 'suitable' alternatives to school, such as EHE, they are not supported by the state in doing so. Thus EHE provision is solely dependent on family's resources. Bhopal and Myers (2009) found that some Traveller families in their sample were successfully managing home-education, yet others struggled with provision. In my research Travellers' stories about their EHE experiences revealed that families were all doing their best but that the quality of EHE was dependent on each family's cultural and financial capital. Hence EHE can permeate a cycle of disadvantage for the most vulnerable Traveller children and their families. The wider implication is that ultimately neither school nor EHE provides these children with 'an efficient education suitable to their needs' (Education Act 1996, sec 7):

There aren't really any good things [about EHE –KD] other than not having the hassle .....If the children had not had the hassle, then they would still be in school. So it isn't really a good thing. If things in school changed there would be no EHE as Travellers would be quite happy to keep the child in school. But then when you get no support from school so you got to pull them out....you still get no support when you pull them out.....you are still left. The best thing about EHE is that the child is not being bullied or called Pikey (sic) that is the best thing about EHE. There are lots of downfalls because they don't give you enough support because they say you pulled them out, but it's down to them that you pull them out, it's what's happening in the school but they don't understand that. I don't know.....( Tina, 2011:8).

My findings suggest that current education systems and spaces are neglecting the needs of some of the most vulnerable children in society. Although Article 28 of the UNCRC (1989) establishes a child's right to education and stresses that this right must be achieved on the basis of equal opportunity, this is not currently the case for many Traveller children. In answering my first two research questions, grave equality issues emerge concerning Traveller's use of EHE, which addresses my third research question.

*Research Question 3: Are there emerging equality issues concerning Traveller families' use of EHE?*

Ivatts (2006) suggested that uptake of EHE among Traveller families may be the result of discrimination in schools. My findings indicate that Travellers are treated unjustly in school, especially at secondary school level. Racism, bullying, and discrimination towards Traveller pupils were commonplace and Traveller families in my sample were compelled to home-educate. Consequently, EHE is the product of racial injustice in

school. Yet dominant discourse or scripts regarding Travellers' cultural difference conceal racism and bullying. Moreover, scripts portray EHE as Traveller parents' cultural choice, yet EHE is regularly the *only* viable option. Dominant discourses prevent appropriate responses to Travellers' educational needs and perpetuate their withdrawal from school.

The attraction of home-education is that it provides an educationally and emotionally 'Safe Space'. Still, this educational space is also not equitable as the decision to take up EHE is not one of free choice. Ulreche and Franks (2007) state that Travellers' use of EHE 'is clearly unacceptable'.....as no child should 'feel so vulnerable at school that their parents feel that they have to withdraw them and teach them at home' (p.33). The children they interviewed said 'quite clearly that they missed going to school and would like to return, but only if and when they felt safe there' (Ibid.). Thus EHE isolates Travellers within their own communities and sustains their social exclusion. Current EHE guidance cannot ensure that all home-educated children receive a suitable or equal education. Consequently, Traveller children's withdrawal from school can limit their independent and critical, intellectual development which might enable Traveller communities to challenge racist power structures in society in the future.

Accordingly, there are two central issues of equality that emerge from my findings. First, mainstream education is a space within which widespread racism and cultural Otherness for Travellers drives uptake of EHE. Second, as an alternative form of education, EHE provides a safe but inequitable educational space. The wider implication of these inequalities is that currently not all Traveller children can access their right to an education. I now discuss these issues of inequality in turn, drawing on other research for comparison and highlighting the wider implications of these findings.

### **School as a Space of Inequality**

The issues Travellers experience in school and society are not new. In spite of equal opportunities rhetoric, Traveller communities are still discriminated against. Racism in schools is an extension of racism towards Travellers in society, where Travellers are monolithically constructed as racial Others (Bhopal and Myers, 2008). My findings reveal evidence of overt and covert racism in school. Both are damaging to Travellers' educational progress and retention in school. Indeed, the rhetoric concerning Travellers' cultural difference vindicates Traveller children's withdrawal from school. Delgado (1989) explains that dominant groups often justify their power with stories and

stock explanations which construct reality in ways that maintain their privilege (p.24). Hence withdrawal to EHE is rationalised, causing little self-examination of the problems by schools and authorities.

The fact that Traveller children are driven out of school is problematic for Travellers but also for the remaining school community. Schools are less diverse and unable to respond to different educational needs in the long-term. As a space of inequality, schools hold implications for Traveller children and their communities but also for a cohesive society. EHE should therefore be a concern for everybody. Indeed, the impact of the withdrawal of children from school is a core argument amongst critics of EHE. Lubienski (2003) upholds that EHE encourages individualised routes in education and in people's social lives, which is damaging to a cohesive society. The fact that society is not united is also a core issue concerning Travellers' experiences in schools.

Throughout this thesis I have noted the challenge inherent in the development of a more united society that includes all Traveller communities. I have highlighted how mainstream discourse regarding *cultural difference*, perpetuates Travellers as undeserving. Danaher (2001) proposes that it is important not to underestimate the detrimental effect of perceived cultural difference in school as children can fall into an unformed space in-between. My analysis of the literature and my own data reveal that EHE, as an alternative educational space from school, currently represents this unformed space in-between school and home. EHE allows Traveller parents to withdraw their children from school whilst complying with legal education requirements.

Indeed, vague EHE guidance and monitoring, racial injustice and the use of scripts allow Traveller children to drop out of mainstream school with ease, as EHE is convenient for schools and parents alike. Derrington and Kendal (2004) suggested that EHE enables LAs and 'Gauje' society to deal with Traveller students' non-attendance (see p.41). This situation illustrates the CRT principle of *interest convergence*; it is convenient to frame the EHE issue as Travellers' *cultural choice*, because revealing the real reasons behind their uptake of EHE may expose the very systems which socially exclude Travellers. This is clearly not just or equitable. The fact that EHE is chosen because it resembles a safe educational space is a premise which has developed throughout my research as it responds to my research questions.

### **My Development of Theory: EHE as a Safe Space**

The idea of a safe space is not new. The idea has been explored in research about education, looking at safe and unsafe places (Toynton, 2006; Blackwell, 2010; Rollock,

2012). The concept of a safe space or positive space originated in the women's movement and the first safe spaces were gay bars and consciousness-raising groups (Kenney, 2001). A *safe space* represents a physical space or community where marginalised people can express themselves and act without feeling uncomfortable on account of any part of their race, culture or identity. In terms of education, a safe space is one which welcomes, educates and addresses the needs of the Other, it is a place where pupils are not harmed verbally, physically, institutionally or culturally (Kumashiro, 2000).

I was not aware of other research on safe and unsafe spaces when I first proposed that EHE was a safe space. The idea simply emerged throughout my research process as a notion which captured the way in which EHE allows Traveller parents to keep their children safe from the perceived dangers and difficulties in mainstream school. Reviewing the literature confirms that this is not a new finding (DfES, 2005; Ulreche and Franks, 2007; Bhopal and Myers, 2009). Nevertheless most reports on Travellers' experiences in education are based on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller groups who are recognised as ethnic minority cultures. Within my analysis I have used CRT to place Showmen and Romany/Gypsy cultures together because I assert that *all* Traveller groups experience racism and educational inequalities on account of their perceived cultural differences. My findings confirm that experiences of racism and bullying and a lack of response to educational needs are similar for Showmen and Romany /Gypsy families because they are both in the CRT sense not *White*.

Thus I propose that EHE is a safe space for Traveller families from ethnic groupings as well as the Showmen community. EHE is a safe space for *all* Traveller children because it ensures a physically and emotionally safe place away from racism, within which children can be themselves. Yet I have also documented my concerns about the need for Traveller families to resort to this educational space. My suggestion that EHE is a safe space is not proposed as a solution, but as a problem. I use 'EHE as a safe space' to symbolise the two inequality issues my research has illuminated: 1) mainstream school is a space of educational inequality which drives uptake of EHE, and 2) EHE provides a safe space, yet this space is not an educationally equitable place either. Indeed, EHE perpetuates inequality as it prevents children from accessing important opportunities.

Educational provision should be designed to ensure that all children have a realistic opportunity to become autonomous persons and benefit the communities they live in

(Save the Children, 2001; Brighouse, 2007). Yet this is currently not the case for Traveller children. My findings suggest that Traveller children are ultimately denied a choice of futures. Education is complex and decisions about provision ultimately rely on the philosophical ideologies of the majority. Brighouse (1997) asserts that all adults have an obligation as a matter of justice to contribute to the provision of education to each individual child, not simply their own. Thus respect for all children's right to an education is paramount. Yet many of the challenges Traveller children experience in education continue because Traveller communities are not respected.

CRT scholars use theorizing methods such as *interest convergence* to highlight the challenge in addressing racism, social exclusion and inequality. Interest convergence upholds that equality for minorities will only be tolerated when their successes also serve the larger interests of Whites (Gillborn, 2006, 2008). Thus equality will not come about without a fundamental shift in power and thinking (Lawrence, 2012). Travellers' inequalities in school can only be addressed through a renewed, collective educational focus, which responds to documented evidence of Travellers' ongoing inequalities, respects difference and values diversity as beneficial to the educational outcomes of all children.

Schools should rethink how they engage with Traveller communities and cultures to create educational spaces and a curriculum in which they can feel safe and respected. In my research Travellers' stories have illuminated inequality in school and EHE, yet these stories also articulate what a safe educational space looks like. I propose that this information can inform education, address inequality and work towards social justice. This suggestion forms the basis of my recommendations for further research which I expand on in the concluding chapter.

## **Conclusion**

The literature on Traveller pupils' experiences of EHE is limited. Still, my review of this literature highlighted a dichotomy between dominant and marginalised discourses. Whilst dominant discourse suggests that Travellers' take up EHE for mobility reasons, avoidance of school and lack of interest in education, research with Travellers suggests that the decision to home-educate is associated with racism and discrimination. Still the latter is largely ignored. My own research confirms that EHE is the product of racial injustice in school and society. The Traveller families in my sample were committed to their children's education, yet they remain fearful of their safety in school, especially at secondary level. Hence they home-educate.

CRT has provided a theoretical and practical framework to highlight racism and document Travellers' own voices. My study has illuminated equality issues concerning school and EHE, which limit Travellers' educational opportunities and social inclusion. I have documented Travellers' own voices to counter the dominant, negative literature about Travellers and education. Too many Traveller children are still denied their right to an education and there needs to be a radical transformation of school education to address racism. There also needs to be a critical re-consideration of EHE concerning equality, in order that all EHE children, and especially those who experience intersections of inequality concerning poverty, social class, gender, ethnicity and cultural capital, are able to receive a suitable home-education. These are additional recommendations which I expand on in the last chapter and I hope they might influence national policies, school curricula and individual teacher attitudes. As Weiss (1991) suggests:

It takes an extraordinary concatenation of circumstances for research to influence policy directly...(rather) research helps people consider issues, it helps them think differently, it helps them reconceptualise what the problem is and how prevalent it is, it helps them discard some old assumptions, it punctures old myths.

Indeed challenging old myths is a central aim of CRT and one that I uphold within this study.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

### **Introduction**

This chapter provides an important opportunity to summarise what has been learned in the study as a whole. The aim of my research was to explore the reasons why Traveller children are home-educated and illuminate issues of inequality. This chapter begins by relating my findings to my research questions. This includes a critique of EHE as a safe space. I then provide recommendations for research, policy and practice. Thereafter I consider the strengths and limitations of this study, its contribution to knowledge and the wider implications of my findings. Finally, I offer a brief reflection on my learning journey before concluding.

### **Research Questions**

Travellers' reasons for choosing EHE are multi-faceted, yet they can be summarised into *push* and *pull* factors: problems in school and the perceived benefits of EHE respectively. Experiences and views of EHE are diverse. Every Traveller family was different, yet all wanted the best for their children. My research illuminates how widespread racism denies many Traveller children the opportunity to access and benefit from mainstream education systems. Critical analysis of my data revealed two key equality issues regarding school and EHE which I now summarise in turn.

### **School as a Space of Inequality**

First, mainstream education is a place of inequality. My respondents suggested that school was ideally the best place to educate children because of the resources available, yet they do not allow their children to attend school because they are unsafe and their needs go unmet. Travellers' stories challenge dominant discourse which suggests that Traveller parents do not wish to access mainstream education. This is not a new finding, Acton (2004) and Myers *et al* (2010) confirm that there is evidence going back 200 years to demonstrate that Travellers want their children to receive schooling but it is simply not attainable or made available to them. The reality of racism and discrimination in schools means that from a Traveller perspective, school today still represents a dangerous place. Consequently EHE remains an attractive, yet educationally inequitable, alternative.

### **EHE as a Safe Space**

My research suggests that EHE is a safe yet inequitable space. Traveller families were compelled to take up EHE. Although EHE is often portrayed as Traveller parents'

choice, EHE merely facilitates a legal escape route from discriminatory school systems. Yet this withdrawal from school perpetuates Traveller communities' marginalisation.

Current EHE systems do not ensure all children receive a suitable education, which is a grave concern. Traveller children do not have access to the educational resources their families' desire. Because EHE is solely reliant on families' financial and cultural capital, EHE perpetuates inequality. Traveller children are disadvantaged on account of their race, ethnicity, gender, poverty, social class and additional learning needs. EHE also hampers children's vocational opportunities and their ability to become autonomous. These findings resonate with wider research concerning EHE and CRT, involving Othered pupils' experiences of education (Yosso, 2006; Bhopal and Myers, 2009; Kitching, 2011; DePouw, 2012).

The premise that EHE is a safe space is my development of theory which encapsulates the two key equality issues my research illuminated. This premise highlights racism and inequality but I propose that *EHE as a safe space* may also provide a solution. Indeed, paying critical attention to Travellers' criteria of a safe educational space can address racism and inequality and work towards social justice in education. My recommendations for further research suggest how this might be achieved.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

As a distinctive part of education, EHE is complex. My study documented the voices of Travellers and revealed equality issues in EHE and school, particularly at secondary level. My findings show that within current education systems Traveller children do not achieve an equitable outcome in relation to non-Traveller children. Travellers' accounts define the factors that make up dangerous and safe educational spaces. I propose that my research findings about educational spaces can inform inclusive education agendas and the development of secondary schools as safe places.

My data provides important information which can form the basis of a new research project. This project would continue research into Travellers' use of EHE by conducting a longitudinal study over several years with a larger sample of Traveller families. This research would aim to involve those families not registered as providing EHE or attending school. Although my original research concentrated on the voices of Travellers, a development of this work would require the involvement of LA EHE departments, primary and secondary school staff as well as Travellers on an equal basis to re-consider what school as an inclusive space comprises.

The aims of this research would be to develop a deeper understanding of Travellers' use of EHE, their criteria for an inclusive and relevant curriculum and safe educational spaces. Findings could inform a new multicultural, anti-racist curriculum that recognises and celebrates diversity. Such a curriculum would be critical, creative and intellectually challenging; it would draw on and celebrate cultural capital across different cultures. The development of such a curriculum could turn secondary school into a place where Travellers' needs are met and children feel they belong. It has often been said that if education is right for Traveller children then it will be inclusive for all children (Ivatts, 2005). The production of a curriculum informed by Travellers is likely to meet all children's needs. As there is limited research on Travellers' use of EHE and their involvement in research, this research would be constructive and unique.

Although the purpose of qualitative studies is not always to provide solutions to the issues raised, the function of this study has always been as a tool to work towards social justice and educational equality. I now provide some recommendations for policy and practice to address the educational inequalities raised.

### **Recommendations for Policy and Practice**

My research findings show that Travellers experience inequality on account of their cultural difference, whether they are considered a recognised ethnic minority group or not. Consequently we must acknowledge the effect of racism for *all* Traveller children when we consider addressing their educational needs. Following the work of CRT scholars I now present three categories of recommendations which press for the rights of minority groups at the micro- and macro-levels of education (Villenas *et al*, 1999).

#### *1) Government Level Change: Legislation and Educational Policy*

The challenge in improving Travellers' educational situation is directly related to discriminatory state systems and attitudes. Overt racism and discrimination against Traveller communities operate at a national, even global level and educational advancements require the recognition and prevention of racism towards Travellers in wider society. Despite a plethora of equality legislation we have seen little evidence of English governments' will to address and improve Travellers' marginalised positions in the past 50 years (Avebury, 2011).

Legislation can address discrimination, yet it relies on close monitoring, inspection and specific actions to change deeply embedded behaviours and beliefs. Indeed the

widespread range of legislation aiming to challenge racism and discrimination often reinforces political complacency 'suggesting that the issues of race and racism have been dealt with' (Craig *et al*, 2012: 5). In Law, the new Equality Act (2010) replaced previous anti-discrimination laws with a single Act. The Equality Act was introduced under the rhetoric of banning unfair treatment and achieving equal opportunities in wider society and the workplace. The Equality Act applies to public bodies, including schools and its impact on tackling racism in its various forms remains to be seen.

Equality legislation has not yet halted racism and one reason is that policies and incentives are often short-term. An example in education is found within previous Ofsted guidance (2010a) on assessing equality, which has already been revoked:

assessing how well schools promote equality of opportunity, and how effectively they tackle discrimination is a key feature of inspection. Where a school is judged to be inadequate in relation to the extent to which it promotes equality and tackles discrimination, inspectors treat this as a 'limiting' judgement; the school's overall effectiveness is also likely to be judged inadequate (p.4).

Under this guidance schools which did not demonstrate equality of opportunity could not receive a *good* inspection grade. Although Ofsted maintain that new guidance (2012a) still considers the outcomes for different groups, this has limited influence as it does not directly affect schools' inspection grade.

My research illuminated overt and covert racism towards Travellers, yet this racism is often diluted and ignored in mainstream literature. A pertinent example can be found in a very recent Ofsted report on bullying in schools. Ofsted (2012) state that 'a wide body of research indicates that bullying is a problem for many young people and that some of this takes place in schools' (p.4). Yet within this report there is no reference to the well-documented issues of bullying towards Traveller children. Indeed, racist bullying is largely ignored in favour of bullying related to homophobia and disability. Although the latter are significant issues the report highlights how 'race inequity has virtually disappeared from the policy agenda' (Gillborn *et al*, 2012). Consequently, to improve current educational inequalities for Travellers, racism must be acknowledged and prioritised within a long-term education agenda.

My research has shown that current problems in schools can drive parents to home-educate. Consequently, another recommendation has to tackle inequality in mainstream schools at grassroots levels.

## 2) *Grassroots Level Change: Meeting Traveller Children's Needs in School*

My research has illuminated how the use of dominant scripts regarding mobility and cultural difference can perpetuate Travellers' exclusion. Discourses of Travellers' cultural Otherness explain away Travellers' failure in school, yet they mask the fact that racism is the cause of this failure (Villenas *et al*, 1999). Wilkin *et al* (2009) suggest that schools need to 'deepen their approach to inclusion by seeking to ameliorate the conditions of conflict and re-framing perceptions about Traveller communities as departing from the 'norm' (p.32). Thus there is a need for initial and in-service training which enables all teachers to appreciate – that is to recognise, understand, and respect – the multiplicity of cultures which their pupils represent (Liegiouis, 1998).

A commitment to developing positive home-school relations can also bridge cultural divides and challenge dominant discourses or scripts. Traveller parents need to feel respected and accepted and see that racist incidents are dealt with effectively (Bhopal and Myers, 2009a). In my research, Travellers' accounts highlight the benefits of EHE and I have proposed how this information could be used to create culturally inclusive spaces in school. Good quality guidance and good practice in working with Traveller pupils were encouraged under the recent Labour government. The DCSF (2009a) produced some very useful guidance materials to support schools to raise the achievement of Traveller pupils. Unfortunately, these have now been removed from the Internet. Nevertheless, many services and schools retained copies and reviving them for mainstream school use would be relatively straight-forward if there was a collective interest and will to do so.

## 3) *EHE and Resources*

Acceptance of mainstream school, its methods and goals is not universal (Liegiouis, 1998). EHE provides a fascinating critique of mainstream education and highlights important questions about what and whose knowledge is valued and which values are embedded in the official knowledge of powerful institutions (Gerwitz and Cribb, 2009). Although powerful home-educating groups defend the current, liberal EHE system, I have illuminated the inequalities that EHE can perpetuate. My research found that inequality is complex. Race, socio-economic and class circumstances can affect Traveller families' ability to provide a suitable home-education. If EHE is to remain a legal educational alternative then it requires better resourcing to ensure that all children in our society receive a *suitable education*.

A central issue is that the current definition of a suitable education is vague. Consequently LAs find it difficult to ascertain the criteria for suitable and unsuitable provision. Badman (2009) recommended improving the definition of 'suitable' education, not so it becomes overly prescriptive but does secure 'a broad, balanced, relevant and differentiated curriculum'.....that enables home-educated children to expand their talents and career prospects' (p.9). Updating EHE legislation and providing more detail about the basis of a suitable education and how parents might achieve this would help both EHE professionals and home-educating parents alike.

Badman (2009) also suggested that all LAs should 'offer a menu of support to home-educating families' (p.19), including access to a range of public facilities and GSCE examinations without cost. Further research on EHE and recognition of the complex intersections of inequality for different families could provide necessary evidence for additional resources to be made available. I acknowledge that my recommendations derive from a relatively small qualitative study and I now discuss the limitations and strengths of this research.

### **Strengths and Limitations of the Study**

The strengths of this study are twofold. First, it contributes to the small body of existing research concerning EHE and marginalised groups. Second, my research makes an original contribution to knowledge as it documents 11 different Traveller families' experiences and views on schools and EHE which inform the field of education and CRT. This contribution is discussed further shortly. The main limitation is that my research is a small study, a matter I acknowledge and I have been careful not to generalise my findings to the wider Traveller population. I have also highlighted how the incidence of EHE take-up by Travellers in Saltfield may not be typical when considered on a national scale. I have noted several methodological strengths and limitations on (p.91-92) and for the sake of space do not repeat them here. Nevertheless I do expand on the strengths and limitations of my use of CRT.

#### *Strengths of CRT*

CRT has provided an important theoretical and practical framework through which to address my research questions. I have used CRT as a theoretical framework to centre on racism, yet also acknowledge its intersection with other forms of subordination. For the purpose of my analysis and findings I placed Showmen and Romany/ Gypsy cultures together as they are both in the CRT sense not *White* and experience racism and educational inequalities on account of their perceived *cultural differences*.

Applying CRT to Showmen and recognised minority groups presents an opportunity to develop and extend CRT as other scholars have done. I have also drawn upon the CRT analytical construct of *interest convergence* to emphasise the symbolic and structural barriers in education law and policy which operate to secure the dominant majorities' interests.

CRT has also supported the practical methods needed to address my aim and research questions. Within this study CRT's particular strengths are the emphasis on voice and inequality. I used storytelling to document the stories of Traveller families' EHE experiences. I have used this evidence to build up a counter-story to challenge the negative discourses regarding Travellers, EHE and education. My research has given voice to Travellers' own accounts of school and EHE and revealed that racism remains a significant barrier to the access, inclusion and retention of all Traveller children in mainstream school. I concur with Gillborn (2006) who suggests that CRT can provide a useful systematic approach to acknowledge and address racism in education in England.

#### *Limitations of CRT*

CRT also presented a challenge to me, as this theory has not been applied to all Traveller cultures, including Showmen, to my knowledge in the past. To address this challenge I had to be explicit about my definition of racism in this study and highlighted the differences and similarities between Traveller groups.

Like all theories CRT has its critics. A central argument is that a *race only* perspective is limiting. Yet in my study CRT has played an important role in illuminating the intersectional inequalities between race, ethnicity, culture, social class and specific learning needs in shaping Travellers' experiences of EHE and school. A further criticism is regarding CRT's use of narrative, a critique which is also found in qualitative and interpretive research concerning positionality and subjectivity of researchers and respondents (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Litowitz (2009) suggests that storytelling plays on emotion rather than evidence. My research includes stories, but also draws on other research to support my claims. I hope readers do feel emotional about the findings this study has revealed as emotion can invoke change. Litowitz (2009) also critiques the aim of interest convergence as one of 'fatalism, to paint a picture against impossible odds' (p.306). I have used the idea of interest convergence to illuminate the challenge and solution to address racism towards Travellers through a renewed, collective focus

of education which perceives difference and diversity as beneficial to the education of all children.

### **Original Contribution to Knowledge**

I have documented Travellers' experiences and perceptions of EHE which are not often heard. My research asserts Travellers' experiences and perspectives as providing a vital contribution to developing knowledge and understanding of educational spaces. Travellers' stories have contributed:

an angle of vision, a focus for looking at the world. It is a source of illumination on the rich details and tangled interrelationships in that world (Weiss, 1977:17).

Hence my research makes an original contribution to the field of education and CRT. I have noted important correlations between inequitable provision in school and the decision to take up EHE. My research has illuminated racism and the way in which mainstream education is still not accessible for many Traveller children. Indeed this study confirms the complexity of racism and how compounded inequalities prevent Traveller children's access to suitable educational provision, in school and EHE. Documenting Travellers' voices also made visible the way in which dominant discourses of Travellers' use of EHE exists at the expense of Travellers themselves. Educational inequalities and negative discourses perpetuate Traveller communities' marginalisation in society. Accordingly, this research supports new understandings of racism and education and challenges the fact that current education policy neglects issues of race equality.

### **Wider Implications of the Findings**

My research revealed how educational inequality still affects many Traveller children and other groups of children categorised as *different*. Parents of *Gifted* children and children with so-called SEN also resort to EHE as a safe space. My research has drawn critical attention to equality issues in schools. I have considered how future research might develop a more inclusive curriculum and safe spaces in secondary schools to reduce the number of children withdrawing from school. Consequently it is hoped that this research will be informative for other scholars and educators interested in issues of educational equality.

Racism is deep-rooted. The issue with cultural racism is that it does not use the word race but race is still an issue! (Barker, 1981; Gillborn, 1995). CRT scholars use *interest convergence* to illuminate how dominant White interests prevent real advancements in race equality. I have used the theoretical concept of *interest convergence* to illuminate

the way some schools use *scripts* to relinquish responsibility for Travellers' educational needs. I have argued that Travellers' voices can inform education policy and practice, if there is a collective White will to hear their voices. Education policy and practice should celebrate difference and diversity and take a collective interest in *all* children's education to ensure that school becomes a safe place for everyone. As Brighouse (1997) rightly suggests, every adult is responsible as a matter of justice to support educational provision for *all* children, not just their own. I now conclude with a short reflective statement about my own learning from the research process.

### **My Learning Journey**

To say that this research journey has been insightful is a drastic understatement. On reflection I began this journey rather naively thinking there would be a clear cut 'answer' to my research questions. Yet I found that the process of research is not clear cut, it is messy and this study has challenged my feelings about the purpose and benefits of education. I have learnt a great deal about racism. I have heard Travellers' stories of the inequalities they experience on a day-to-day basis. Such stories made me feel guilty for being White and for the automatic advantages that go along with this, such as being able to make my voice heard in matters that I feel passionate about. Yet I can use this advantage to challenge inequality as I have done in this research. Ultimately it is easy to ignore racism and inequality and far harder to unearth and address the issues, yet this is something I am committed to and hope to continue through undertaking further research.

### **Conclusion**

I feel that this research is an important starting point to highlight Traveller families' views and experiences of EHE and one which signals my first major piece of research.

My research has achieved its aim and provided practical and political insight into a particular sample of Travellers families' use of EHE in Saltfield and their experiences of school education. These Traveller families' social characteristics are quite specific and findings may not be comparable on a national scale.

I have found CRT an appropriate theory to underpin this study as it enabled me to name my own critical research perspective. CRT recognises that race in education is a central, yet marginalised issue and a difficult and sensitive topic to challenge. Viewing my research topic through a critical lens helped identify inequalities in school; the outcome of which is rising EHE numbers. This research can serve as a reminder to

educators and policy makers alike, that there is still much to be done to ensure educational equality for Travellers and those who are *Othered*. I really hope that in some small way this study may contribute to that task.

## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix A: Interviews with Travellers (Schedule A)**

#### **How do Travellers perceive EHE?**

1. The official term for home education is 'elective home education' – what do you understand this to mean?
2. Does the way you have described EHE fit what you do? Why do you home-educate? (What was the reason in your decision to home -educate?)
3. How do you home-educate? Can you give some examples?
4. Do you think there are good things about it? What and why?
5. Are there any bad things about it ? What and why?
6. What do you think about education? What makes a 'good' or 'ideal' education?
7. What do you think education should be for?
8. Have you or your children experienced school education? Can you describe it? What do you think of it? Is it any good?
9. What do you think is the best way to achieve a good education?
10. Can you compare EHE with schools education? Which do you prefer and why?
11. Are there any particular aims you have e.g. is there anything specific you want to teach your child through EHE that could not be taught in school?

#### **What is the nature of Travellers' experiences of EHE ?**

1. How long have you been home educating?
2. How many children are involved now or past / future (planned)
3. How did you go about home educating at the start?
4. Has this changed?
5. Have you experienced any difficulties?
6. Have you experienced any support– LA/ TES/ Friends and family
7. Did you feel you might have benefited from more support / information about home educating when still at school/ when started home education or now? If yes - what kind?
8. Have you had a visit from the LA since you registered for EHE?
9. If yes- What happened and what did you think about this?
10. If no – would you like a visit ?
11. Does your child have a Special Educational Need in your view?
12. If you /child decided to return to school – would you know how to do this?

## Appendix B : Interviews with Travellers (Schedule B)

Go over Interview 1 to check is accurate portrayal of their responses. Depending on family- some further questions / discussions are likely to arise from this.

Followed by Questions to all:

1. *The reasons for EHE* tend to be negative views/ concerns about secondary school or negative family experiences.

These have led to withdrawal or non –transition of their child, (some at primary but most at secondary school).

Do you feel this is accurate?

If not, what were the main reasons for you?

2. The *main problems* in school seem to be focused around

- Bullying
- Discrimination by teachers/ children
- Traveller children not being safe
- Being seen / treated differently by teachers
- Traveller children learning things that are not in keeping with their culture

Would you agree with these – are there any you would add or get rid of?

3. The *main benefits* of EHE seems to be that

- Children are safe and protected
- Children can continue learning but without attending school
- Parents have better control about the things they learn
- EHE is flexible and can fit into the families routine
- More time is spent with family
- Learning as part of EHE tends to be more focused on Traveller lifestyle and what children are likely to need to get on in later life
- 1-1 teaching is better than whole class teaching<sup>55</sup>
- Children can stick to way of life they are used to

Do you agree with these? Are there any you might add or get rid of?

Space to allow discussions to extend and expand.

Recommendations?

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<sup>55</sup> This was the one benefit that only several families felt reflected the general benefits of EHE, thus it represented an anomaly in my findings. I therefore did not include it.

## Appendix C : Questions for EHE professionals

1. Can you describe how EHE is organised in your LA? Do you feel you currently have enough resources for EHE ?
2. Can you describe the benefits and the challenges of this educational system?
3. Can you explain your role regarding EHE?
4. How does your LA become aware of families who are home-educating – as there are no legal requirements to inform the LA?
5. Have numbers of registered home educating families in this county increased in recent years, if so by how much?
6. Why do you think this is?
7. Do families give you reasons for home-educating? If so do you know what are they?
8. How does your LA assess whether or not a child is receiving a suitable education?
9. Do you assess on English, Maths and Science – anything else?
10. Do you feel this system is robust and ensures a suitable education is provided?
11. Does this assessment take on board different cultures needs in any specific way?  
e.g. Is a suitable education for Travellers different than for other non-Traveller children?
12. Do you have any concerns about the numbers of Travellers in the county that home- educate or the education they provide for their children?
13. Are these concern similar to those of non- Traveller families?
14. Do you think Travellers have specific needs re EHE? Is this LA able to deal with these needs effectively?
15. Are you able to advise families on tutors / resources ?  
Yes – how do you disseminate this information?

No- Do you think families need this information?

16. Do you have any contact with tutors?

17. Do you find current Government guidance helpful in guiding and support you as an LA to ensure a suitable education is provided by EHE families?

18. Last year there was a review of EHE – were you aware/ involved with this?

19. Did the review have any impact upon LA policy or practices?

20. Did you feel Badman's suggestion re enforced registration and better monitoring and support where helpful from an LA perspective? Did you feel they were realistic (e.g. in terms of resources available to you LA for EHE).

My research -

21. My research so far had suggested that many Traveller families opt for EHE as a reaction to poor experiences at school ( mainly secondary) , is there in your view anything that could/ should be done about this ? ( e.g. when families are opting for EHE that more support could help them address difficulties in school rather than have to leave?)

22. Tutors are hard to find and teaching is varied ( e.g some only focus on literacy / numeracy others follow the whole curriculum, also time spent with family varies). What is your view on this? Could/ should anything be done to improve this under current guidance?

23. Do you have any questions for me?

## Appendix D: Participant Information Letter

### **Elective Home Education and Traveller families**

I would like to invite you and your family to take part in a research project. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to know why the research is being done and what it will involve. This letter aims to explain all details, but do ask if anything is not clear or you need more information.

I work for the Traveller Education Service but am also completing a course at University of Sheffield in my own time, which is the reason I am doing this research. The aim of my research is to gain a better understanding of Traveller families' views on this form of education and the different experiences this might include. Many Traveller parents choose to home educate, yet there is little evidence of anyone asking them about their views and experiences of this. This can mean that any discussions or changes in home education guidance may not take Travellers' needs or wishes into consideration. I hope my research will change this.

I will be inviting a selection of Traveller families who home-educate to take part in this study. I plan to ask members of different Travellers' groups who live in different areas to make sure a mixture of different opinions are included. Your family has been chosen as part of these criteria. If you do decide to take part, then you will be asked to sign a consent form. Even if you decide to take part now, you can change your mind later and withdraw without giving a reason.

If you do agree to take part, the research is likely to involve several stages beginning in October 2010.

- 1) An initial interview to talk about your views and experiences of home educating.
- 2) This would be followed by a practical activity where you would record your learning activities over the period of 1 week. You will be given a sheet of card with a large circle on it. You will be asked to divide the circle up to represent the activities you are involved in over one week. You can choose how to record this. You might like to use drawings, photographs, writing or cut out pictures from magazines.
- 3) I would then revisit after 1 week to collect your work and talk through what you have recorded with you.
- 4) A final meeting would take place to share what I have written up to obtain your agreement about these and add any further contributions you might wish to make.

Interviews will be tape-recorded to ensure accuracy and saved on my password protected computer whilst I analyse and write the work up. The information I collect will be used only for analysis and for illustration in conference presentations and lectures. No other use will be made of this information without your written permission and no-one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings. The information I collect, including any contact details of people taking part will be kept

securely to ensure that personal information is protected and not be shared with anyone else. All your personal details, including names or areas you live will be kept strictly confidential. Any personal information will be destroyed once I have finished the study around September 2012.

I will be the person who organises this research and completes any interviews or activities. If any of the details in this letter change or if the study stops earlier than expected I will get in touch with you immediately to explain the reasons for this.

*Possible disadvantages and benefits*

My research will be assessed by staff at the University of Sheffield. Once completed there will be a copy held in the University of Sheffield library. If there is further interest a report of the work might be published in reports or educational journals which are read by other people in education but also the wider public. The benefits of this are that your views will inform other people about Travellers' experiences of home education.

I am aware that many articles, especially in the media, are often very negative about the Traveller community and for this reason you may see any wider reporting as a disadvantage to you and you may not wish to share any details of your lives with others. To reassure you, the aim of this study is not to assess your EHE practice but to capture your views, needs and wishes. All information will be kept strictly confidential and you, your family and your location will not be able to be recognised in any of my research. Pseudonyms will be used throughout (you will be given a different name in the research).

This project has been ethically reviewed by the Department of Education at the University of Sheffield. If you have any questions about the research you can contact me directly at any time. If something happens as part of the research process that you feel unhappy about then you can talk to me or my supervisor, Chris Winter. This is also the person you would contact if you had a complaint. There is also an independent link below to the University if you have any concerns which you feel have not been adequately dealt with.

Finally, you will keep this information letter and, if appropriate, a signed consent form to keep.

**THANK YOU.**

## Appendix E : Participant Consent Form

**Title of Research: Elective Home Education and Traveller Families in contemporary times: educational spaces and worldviews.**

**Name of Researcher: Kate D’Arcy ( + contact number)**

**Participant Identification code for this research:** Please initial box

1. I/we confirm that I have understood the information sheet dated ..... for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I/we understand that participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw consent at any time without giving any reason.
3. I/we understand that my responses will be anonymised before analysis. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses.
4. I/we agree to take part in the above research project.


Name of Participant	Date	Signature

Name of parent	Date	Signature

*(or legal representative)*

Name of person taking consent	Date	Signature

*To be signed and dated in presence of the participant*

Lead Researcher	Date	Signature

Copies:

*Once this has been signed by all parties the participant will receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, and the information sheet. A copy of the signed and dated consent form will also be kept by the researcher in a secure location.*

## Appendix F: Approval of Research

Kate D'Arcy

Head of School  
Professor Jackie Marsh

Department of Educational Studies  
The Education Building  
388 Glossop Road  
Sheffield S10 2JA

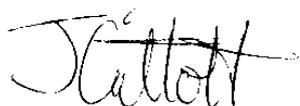
**Telephone:** +44 (0114) 222 8096  
**Fax:** +44 (0114) 279 6236  
**Email:** [jacquie.gillott@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:jacquie.gillott@sheffield.ac.uk)

Dear Kate

**Re: Elective Home Education and Traveller families in contemporary times: educational spaces and worldviews.**

Thank you for your application for ethical review for the above project. The reviewers have now considered this and have agreed that your application be approved

Yours sincerely



**Mrs Jacquie Gillott**

**Programme Secretary**

**October 2010.**

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<sup>56</sup> This document has now been replaced by revised guidelines (2011) which are available on the same website.

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