

Review of Chris Tyler (ed.), *Traveller Education: Accounts of Good Practice*, Trentham Books, Stoke on Trent, UK and Sterling, USA, 2005, ISBN 1 85856 308 9

Phyllida Coombes, Independent Scholar, Cawarral, Australia

(coombes@cqnet.com.au)

Patrick Alan Danaher, Faculty of Education, University of Southern Queensland,
Australia (danaher@usq.edu.au)

Emilio A. Anteliz, Faculty of Engineering, Universidad Central de Venezuela,
Venezuela (antelize@ucv.ve)

The *International Journal of Pedagogies and Learning* is an international, peer-reviewed journal that focuses on issues and trends in pedagogies and learning in national and international contexts.
© Copyright of articles is retained by authors. As this is an open access journal, articles are free to use, with proper attribution, in educational and other non-commercial settings.

According to Chris Tyler, editor of *Traveller Education: Accounts of Good Practice*, the book is underpinned by two key concepts. “The first is a recognition of the need to examine and make concrete the pedagogy of Traveller Education...[as a] strand of educational theory and practice in its own right...[The second is] a recognition of the collegiate nature of Traveller Education” (p. viii).

“Traveller Education” in the context of the book refers to educational provision for two principal categories of learners: those whose families’ occupations require them to be mobile; and those whose cultural backgrounds are associated with Gypsy Travellers. In the United Kingdom (specifically England), where the book is set, the main groups within and across these categories are English Gypsies, Irish/Scottish/Welsh Travellers, fairground and show people, circus people, Romany Gypsy refugees and asylum seekers, New Travellers, bargee and water craft Travellers and migratory seasonal workers (pp. x-xi).

The proposition that these various groups of learners need and receive a specialised form of pedagogy known as “Traveller Education” is promoted throughout the book’s 14 chapters, of which we have space to refer to only a few. The opening chapter, by Arthur Ivatts, who had national responsibility for Traveller education as one of Her Majesty’s Inspectors of Schools, explores the conflict between inclusive schools and an exclusionary society, thereby highlighting traditional and contemporary prejudice towards “Gypsies” and mobile communities. In Chapter Two, Brian Foster and Hilary Horton draw on achievement data across seven London Local Education Authorities to interrogate the National Primary Strategies developed to strengthen the teaching of basic skills, and conclude that “...there is always a danger that Travellers, for reasons beyond their control, will miss out on or benefit less from initiatives designed to meet their needs” (p. 21). Chris Tyler’s own chapter elaborates a number of key principles that need to underpin effective Traveller education practice, including “The school as inclusive mirror”, “Travellers will travel”, “Achieving inclusivity”, “Whole school planning” and “What happens if they go?”.

Other chapters deal respectively with early childhood, primary and secondary education for Traveller learners. Ken Marks's chapter explores the provision of distance education "learning packs" and the possibilities afforded by information and communication technologies, such as wireless laptop computers and datacards, to link mobile technologies with a mobile lifestyle. The final chapter, by Jim Donovan, focuses on "housed Travellers" in the London borough of Camden, and underscores the complexities of identity formation among Irish Travellers and East European Roma who are living in individual houses yet are determined "to maintain their way of life and principles" (p. 145). The book concludes with three appendices: an example of a whole school planning document; a "Literacy for All" list of strategies for teachers; and a school self-evaluation pro forma for the effectiveness of provision for "Gypsy and Traveller pupils".

The editor and authors are all experienced Traveller educators in one way or another. Chris Tyler (who along with Lucy Beckett and Margaret Wood, two of the authors, was interviewed by the second-named reviewer during study leave in 1999) worked previously as a travelling teacher to a circus and is currently Head of the Hertfordshire Traveller Education Project. The authors represent services in Basildon, Buckinghamshire, Cambridge, Durham, Essex, Hertford, Leeds, London, Norfolk and Oxford.

The book is intentionally positioned as "a handbook for all schools that have Traveller pupils" (back cover), and it fulfils its promise admirably of "outlin[ing] good practice, based on proven success in schools" (back cover). This fulfilment is a testament to the editor's and authors' decades-long experience in and commitment to Traveller education as a specialised set of pedagogies for promoting learning. At one level, experienced educators might regard these pedagogies as 'common sense' and as applying generically to all learners. Yet what becomes clear from the book is that Traveller education pedagogies are highly contextualised, contingent and situated – that is, that educational provision is successful when it is located in, and integrated with, the learners' lifeworlds from which their understandings of and aspirations for themselves and others derive.

Thus *Traveller Education: Accounts of Good Practice* is most effective when it describes a Year One student called Freddy not being interested in reading until he saw pictures in a class book of trailers on a Traveller site, leading him to say to his teacher, "I live in one of those. What does it say about them? Read it to me" (p. 79). Or when a Year Seven student named Paddy used the Internet in class to find information about his great uncle, who had played the Irish Eulean pipes in the 1930s, and when Paddy's teacher located one of his great uncle's recordings (p. 119). Or when an Irish Traveller woman stated that her two grandchildren "were bullied at first because they are travelling children, but the school quickly talked to the other children and sorted it out and now we are very happy with that school" (p. 144). From this perspective, effective Traveller education pedagogies are strategies that engage explicitly and sustainably with the complex and diverse range of Travellers' lived experiences, and that provide a strong foundation for ongoing interactions between Travellers and educators.

The book's second central concept – “the collegiate nature of Traveller Education” (p. viii) – is also significant and is well-represented throughout the book. What emerges is that teachers of Travellers have challenging and potentially stressful responsibilities, negotiating pathways between sometimes hostile Travellers and at times unhelpful educational officials. The character of Traveller educators' work that emerges from the book is collaborative, reflexive and strategic – and from the perspective of at least some Traveller educators potentially socially transformative.

In the opinion of the reviewers, readers of the *International Journal of Pedagogies and Learning* have much of value to learn from reading *Traveller Education: Accounts of Good Practice*. This ranges from the Traveller education pedagogies to the contexts in which those pedagogies are enacted to the implications of such pedagogies for understanding education in the early 21st century to the impact of such pedagogies on the work of the teachers who enact them. As Chris Tyler notes at the end of the foreword to the book:

So there can never be one correct approach to the education of Traveller children....What this book aims to do is to pose the correct questions and then begin to examine some of the answers. It is up to practitioners themselves, at whatever level, to explore their own good practice and for us together to begin to right the educational wrongs levelled for generations against Traveller families. (p. xi)