

Research Digest

Young Travellers and youth work in Ireland

Lessons from the literature and some stakeholder perspectives

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Introduction

Youth work has an important role to play in non-formal education and personal development of young people, and good youth work is especially relevant to marginalised groups such as Travellers. Irish youth work and education policies emphasise interculturalism, seeing diversity as a strength in society, and encouraging the participation of young Travellers, as stated in the Youth Work Act (2001), and the National Youth Work Development Plan (NWYDP) 2003–2007:

Ensuring that this diversity is seen as a positive thing from which all can gain enrichment, and by the same token countering racism and intolerance in all their forms, are among the key tasks for those working with young people in Ireland today. (Department of Education and Science, 2003: 3)

Young Travellers access youth clubs, projects and services nationwide. Some youth organisations run Traveller-specific groups, and some Traveller-led organisations have youth programmes. Anecdotally, many ‘participation barriers’ exist for different cultural and ethnic groups in Ireland - including Travellers - in accessing and continuing in ‘mainstream’ youth work. This research sets out to understand the reasons behind the low participation of Travellers in particular. A comprehensive literature review reveals a lack of research in this area, and there are few records of the numbers of Travellers accessing youth work in Ireland. Anecdotal evidence suggests that Travellers’ participation is far below that of the settled population, and that Travellers who do attend either hide their identity or only attend Traveller-specific groups.

This research looks at youth work from an equality perspective and reviews how the sector accommodates diversity. It focuses on the specific example of young Travellers in youth work, and looks at mainstream and targeted programmes, identifying the benefits and limitations of both. In the light of the fact that a number of significant policy statements and initiatives of recent years have adopted an inclusive position regarding young Travellers, it asks why such inclusiveness is not yet reflected in practice.

Below is a review of the literature related to young Travellers and youth work, followed by the findings of a small scale study exploring the perspectives of some Irish stakeholders working in this area.

Literature Review

In reviewing the literature it is necessary to understand the past and current situation of Travellers in Ireland, relevant Irish policy relating to young Travellers, Travellers' experience in formal education, and finally, the purpose and vision of youth work.

Irish Travellers

The Traveller community is indigenous to Ireland, thought to have been present before the 10th century AD and traditionally leading a nomadic way of life (Fitzpatrick and Loftus, 2009). While many Travellers no longer practice nomadism, they often still identify with it as part of their culture:

It is important for the youth worker to fully understand nomadism and how it is more than simply physical movement – it is a mindset and a particular view on life. (Fitzpatrick and Loftus, 2009: 2)

Varied terminology has been used in referring to the Traveller community. In the past, terms such as 'tinker', 'itinerant' and 'Gypsy' were used in policy and practice. These have now been generally rejected as unacceptable, in favour of terms consistent with what the community itself identifies as: 'Travellers' or 'members of the Traveller Community' (Fitzpatrick and Loftus, 2009). In contrast, 'settled' or 'majority' community are generic terms used to describe the rest of the population.

According to the most recent full census data that we have of the population in Ireland, there are 22,435 Travellers living in Ireland (Government of Ireland, 2007), although the real figure is thought to be higher given that some Travellers may not complete the census form, and others may not identify as Travellers. According to the All Ireland Traveller Health Study ('Our Geels') in 2008, there are 36,224 Travellers living in the Republic of Ireland. Officially, Travellers make up 0.6 per cent of the population, but 42 per cent of all Travellers are under the age of 15, and 63 per cent of Travellers are aged under 25. This means that Travellers constitute 1.5 per cent of the total population under 25. Results of the 2011 census will be available in the first half of 2012.

The 2006 Census was the first to include an 'ethnic identifier' for Travellers, including 'Irish Traveller' as an option in response to the question on ethnic and cultural background.

Travellers in Ireland have experienced widespread disadvantage and discrimination. The reality of poor health, negative media coverage, almost total exclusion from elected politics and the refusal of access to public amenities is well-documented (NCCRI, 1998; Council of Europe 2008; FLAC, ICCL and IPRT 2008). Given that 'Travellers are widely acknowledged as one of the most marginalised and disadvantaged groups in Irish society' (NCCRI, 1998: 1), this research aims to review Government policy aimed at combating discrimination and promoting equality.

Irish policy

Traveller-specific initiatives as well as government policy in relation to human rights, young people and youth work are all relevant to this research. Over the last twenty years Ireland has acceded to a number of International and European Human Rights Treaties including the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of

Racial Discrimination (1965) in 2000, and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (1995) in 1999. Ratifying these treaties commits Ireland to upholding the rights of all its citizens, tackling discrimination in all its forms, and promoting the protection of minorities including Travellers. Travellers are not recognised as a distinct ethnic group in Ireland, but the Equal Status Act 2000 names them as people with a shared history, culture and traditions, supports their protection, and makes it unlawful to discriminate in providing goods and services because an individual is a 'member of the Traveller community'. Some organisations advocate for Travellers' legal recognition as a distinct ethnic group in the Republic of Ireland, just as they are recognised in the UK (see Cemlyn, 2000b; Council of Europe 2007; FLAC, ICCL and IPRT, 2008).

Ireland ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1992, which promotes the principle of non-discrimination as well as access to education, promotion of distinct identities and cultures, and participation in leisure and recreation for all children. In the domestic framework, the National Children's Strategy 2000 sets out Ireland's national goals including:

Children will be educated and supported to value social and cultural diversity so that all children, including Travellers and other marginalised groups, achieve their full potential. (Department of Health, 2000: 47)

The Strategy also identifies main areas of concerns to be addressed, including access to play and leisure, as well as 'discrimination in children's lives' (p. 9), both of particular significance to young Travellers.

Formal education

The research available in Ireland illustrates that the experience of Travellers at school has generally been one of cultural racism, a biased curriculum and social rejection (Lodge and Lynch, 2003; Shevlin and Rose, 2004). A survey among students highlighted assimilationist tendencies including:

The values of an education system which, for a long period of time, has been characterised by segregation and lack of recognition for difference and diversity in its institutional processes and structures. (Lodge and Lynch, 2003: 31)

In addition, young Travellers are four times more likely than their settled counterparts to leave the formal education system with no qualifications (Fitzpatrick and Loftus, 2009: 3).

Historically, research has been hampered by a relative lack of data regarding Traveller participation and attainment at school, which is seen 'in itself as an indication of the lack of importance accorded to the education of Travellers' (Lodge and Lynch, 2004: 94). The Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy highlights the need to compile such data, and for an integrated, inclusive education system that respects Traveller culture including nomadism (Government of Ireland, 2006: 10). The 2006 census (Central Statistics Office, 2007) revealed that 63.2 per cent of Traveller children under the age of 15 had left school, compared to 13.3 per cent nationally. Some statistics are starting to be gathered in the formal education system. For instance, in 2008, 50 per cent of Travellers completed their Junior Certificate, and

13 per cent completed their Leaving Certificate (Foróige, 2010).

The Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy also highlights issues that continue to marginalise young Travellers in education including a lack of access to youth work opportunities, early school-leaving, and the need to reinforce cultural identity (Government of Ireland, 2006: 81).

The TEACH report on Traveller adult education highlights ‘a significant gap between the state’s aspirations to support intercultural education and the provision of applied policies and resources which might support this process’ (Hourigan and Campbell, 2010: 2).

Ongoing efforts are needed to bridge the gap in educational provision for Travellers. Non-formal education such as youth work is ideally placed to do so. However, as Fitzpatrick and Loftus warn:

A lack of visibility of Traveller culture within the school system can contribute to feelings of isolation and lead to poor self-esteem. Youth workers working with young Travellers must make sure that these experiences are not replicated in their youth service. (Fitzpatrick and Loftus, 2009: 12)

Youth work

According to the Youth Work Act (2001), youth work is:

... a planned programme of education designed for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young persons through their voluntary participation, and which is (a) complementary to their formal, academic or vocational education and training; and (b) provided primarily by voluntary youth work organisations.

The National Youth Work Development Plan (Department of Education and Science, 2003) highlights the value of youth work, upholds the right of all young people to participate, and promotes equality and inclusiveness. The as yet unpublished Report and Recommendations for an Intercultural Strategy for Youth Work also highlights the need to include Travellers - as an indigenous minority community - in youth work (NYCI, 2008). Traveller organisations such as Pavee Point and INVOLVE (formerly the National Association of Travellers’ Centres, NATC) highlight youth work’s relevance in providing non-formal learning opportunities as an important complement to formal education for young Travellers, many of whom are early school leavers, and in breaking cycles of exclusion and marginalisation (Government of Ireland, 2006).

UK research on Travellers and youth work suggests that many young Travellers do not go to ‘mainstream’ youth clubs, and youth organisations who do engage with Travellers report low numbers attending (Cemlyn et al. 2009; Beddows, 2000). Given past interaction of the Traveller community with other services, the ‘voluntary’ nature of youth work may not go far enough:

Within the context of this particular group, who have experienced such extremes of persecution in the past, it is by no means a simple matter of opening doors or providing resources. This history of assimilation disrupts the

simplistic view of social inclusion versus social exclusion. (Hester, 2004: 49)

So, even though youth work providers may say 'our door is open to everyone', this may not be enough in overcoming significant 'participation barriers' that young Travellers experience in society generally, and youth work specifically.

In 2010 the County Monaghan Vocational Education Committee undertook the first county-wide survey and diversity audit in Ireland of who is accessing youth work. This provides the only such data currently available on young Travellers attending youth work in Ireland.

The estimated numbers of young people aged 5 – 25 in Monaghan is 318, living mainly in Monaghan town, Castleblayney and Clones. This puts the number of young Travellers in these areas higher than any other ethnic group in the county (County Monaghan VEC, 2010: 14).

The diversity audit 'has shown no engagement with members of the Traveller community in youth activities in Co. Monaghan', although a follow-up interview indicated some engagement in a Garda Youth Diversion Project (GYDP). GYDPs are projects aimed at improving relations between young people and the police. Most young people attending are referred to these projects, which means there is no strictly voluntary attendance by young Travellers – who identify as such – in youth work in County Monaghan.

Targeted youth work seems more successful and good practice is detailed in a number of the resources which highlight the need for outreach work; establishing a family-oriented approach; taking the time necessary to build trust and involving other agencies working with Travellers (National Playbus Association, undated; Cemlyn et al, 2009; NFER, 2008).

Hourigan and Campbell advocate for dedicated spaces for Travellers in non-formal – and in this case, adult – education:

Because of the extremely low levels of self-esteem and confidence amongst Travellers and the expectation by many Travellers that they will experience prejudice from the settled community, there will continue to be a need for dedicated Traveller adult education spaces within the Irish education system (Hourigan and Campbell, 2010: 4)

As demonstrated in the '12 Steps' resource (NYCI 2010), The Base youth centre in Ballyfermot has significant experience of working with young Travellers. The Base has taken both targeted and integrated approaches in their work. With Travellers an integrated approach is generally used. However, one group of boys from the Traveller community is still uncomfortable about taking part in an integrated programme and they are being accommodated separately until they are ready to mix more. The Base's Equality Officer commented that 'it took two years of weekly site visits, structured activities and individual work before we got anywhere, building up enough trust and relationships before we got any of the kids down here. It was a huge investment of time and resources but it was worth it' (quoted in NYCI, 2010: 90)

There seems to be widespread agreement on the need for a dedicated or special youth work provision for Travellers; yet how best to go about this is contested in the literature. It has been suggested that:

Specialism is not an end in itself, and must avoid becoming part of the problem by further ghettoising and marginalising services, and pathologising Travellers. (Clark 1998, quoted in Cemlyn 2000b)

However Cemlyn et al (2009) also rightly remind us that some of the most successful examples of youth work with Travellers are in 'specialist' agencies.

As regards interculturalism in youth work, there is much still to be done. The Report and Recommendations for an Intercultural Strategy (NYCI, 2008) although approved by the National Youth Work Advisory Committee, has not been published, much less acted on, by the Minister. In terms of practice, Devlin and Gunning (2009) noted that work with Travellers was one of a number of 'equality' areas in which youth workers themselves acknowledged that insufficient progress has been made. There may also be some ambivalence about the purpose and profile of intercultural work, as the following comment quoted in NYCI's 'Access All Areas' diversity toolkit makes clear:

One thing I'd like to say is that I never mentioned that this was an intercultural youth project to the young people. Because I realised through discussion with adults and young people that Irish people often assume interculturalism is just about minorities and the Irish won't come along (NYCI, 2009: 48).

This would suggest that at least some members of the majority settled community are either oblivious to, or more likely not comfortable to address, the realities of prejudice and racism in Ireland.

Positive integration of Travellers is unlikely to happen spontaneously. Youth work has a very important role to play in promoting a positive experience of integration for both majority and minority communities. It is a space of welcome and interaction that can combat racism and prejudice. It can contribute to social inclusion of young people who are marginalised. It can contribute to young people's experience of education and combat unemployment, and simply be a fun space for all young people to enjoy recreational activities (Foróige, 2010). All of these elements are areas of youth work that young Travellers can benefit from, and more importantly, contribute to.

Traveller identity in mainstream society

Similar to schools, a Traveller 'ethnic identifier' question is considered by some to be necessary in youth work given the otherwise almost impossible task of measuring engagement and attainment of Travellers, and developing appropriate services. However, the paradox of Travellers on the one hand feeling pride in their culture and on the other hand hiding their identity in order to avoid racism is ubiquitous. The threat of social rejection is evident from the comment quoted in Ureche and Franks (2007: 158):

'No one knows I'm a Traveller and that's the way I want it'.

One of the objectives of the TEACH report is to identify the success of Travellers in progressing from adult education into paid employment. It provides extensive evidence of the complicated relationship many Travellers have with their identity. A significant proportion of Travellers who do enter the predominantly 'settled' workforce

often hide their identity completely from settled colleagues in order to avoid prejudice. Those who do so usually weaken ties with their own community and extended families (Hourigan and Campbell, 2010: 53).

Hourigan and Campbell refer to these Travellers as 'trans-cultural Travellers' who have 'assimilated' into the settled community to a certain extent. However managing two opposing value systems can be demanding, as one person interviewed in that research explained:

When I come into work here in the morning, I shut myself down from home.. and when I go back home in the evening time my life is completely different... I've a different aspect of life at home altogether because being a Traveller, y'know... a different aspect altogether... but I can play... I can do both roles... I'm good at it'. (Hourigan and Campbell 2010: 51)

The fear of being 'found out' also weighs heavily on many Travellers' minds: 'I didn't want to have to face that.... If I stood up I would become a target...If I said I'm from the Traveller community it would have changed' (in Hourigan and Campbell, 2010: 52). Another interviewee demonstrates that her fears were well-founded: 'It came out obviously that I'm a Traveller and I don't think I was treated the same since' (ibid). In the same report, some education providers saw the success of Travellers in education or work, and the practice of hiding their identity, as 'evidence of successful integration, rather than assimilation' (ibid: 91). For other Travellers, the cost of success in education or employment is simply too risky: 'You just feel that the cost is too great, you might become just like the settled girls and then your own won't want you.' (ibid: 86)

A lack of understanding of Traveller culture is pervasive in society, and for many settled people the only associations they have or make with Traveller culture are negative. So even Travellers who work and learn alongside others are afraid to reveal who they are, given that 'Traveller cultural differences can be pathologised as part of a perceived unsatisfactory lifestyle' in mainstream society (Cemlyn, 2000b: 354).

Methodology

In deciding which research method to use for this small scale study, the author considered quantitative questionnaires and qualitative interviews as well as case studies of particular organisations. In the end, a qualitative approach was deemed most appropriate given the short time-frame, and the added flexibility of semi-structured interviews to uncover relevant information. A questionnaire would have been useful to try to gauge participation rates. However, based on the experience of such surveying in England (Beddows, 2000) and in Ireland (Co. Monaghan VEC, 2010), significant time would be required to follow up and ensure an adequate response, which was unfortunately beyond the scope and time-frame of this study.

In order to gain access to a range of perspectives on the issues under consideration, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five purposively selected key respondents:

- Interviewee A: national Traveller organisation, education programme coordinator, Settled, female over 30
- Interviewee B: national Traveller organisation, youth work programme

coordinator, Settled, female under 30

- Interviewee C: national Traveller organisation, youth worker, Traveller, male under 30
- Interviewee D: Lecturer in youth and community studies, Settled, male over 30
- Interviewee E: mainstream youth work organisation, Traveller outreach youth worker, Settled, male under 30

It is important to stress that these respondents did not claim to be, and are not here presented as being, 'representative' of their organisations or institutions, and that other interviewees might have offered different responses or opinions. It is also acknowledged that the small numbers of individuals and organisations included in the sample mean that no claim for generalizability to the youth work sector as a whole can be made. These responses do however provide insight into how the issues relating to Traveller participation in youth work are perceived by some of those most directly involved, and it is hoped they will provide the basis for further investigation.

While there was a set of standard items for the semi-structured interviews, questions varied slightly depending on the role of the interviewee or the need to ask for supplementary information. Each interview lasted approximately 90 minutes and was audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed for thematic analysis (major themes corresponding to the subheadings of the Findings section below).

Interview transcripts were shared with interviewees to ensure their perspectives were fairly portrayed. Confidentiality was also ensured, though the interviewees were at times reluctant to be openly critical of some youth work practices and asked for certain comments to be removed from the interview transcripts. The interview questions were designed to be sensitive to cultural concerns and diversity and were deemed appropriate by all interviewees.

Findings

This section presents a descriptive overview of the findings from the interviews. The format is based on the common themes which arose, and to some extent the structure of the interview questions.

Targeted and mainstream youth work

The main finding of the research is that those Travellers who do engage in youth work are far more likely to participate in Traveller-specific groups than with mainstream youth work providers. According to the interviewees, targeted work in particular has two overarching purposes: firstly to engage Travellers in youth work and build trust between the youth organisation and Traveller community (if the organisation is not already located within the community) and secondly as a space to address Traveller-specific issues, such as identity and culture, and also the experience of marginalisation and discrimination as a minority in society.

Unfortunately, young Travellers may not feel comfortable to attend mainstream services initially, and at the moment, mainstream youth work providers may not have the capacity or confidence to engage with Travellers.

Very little outreach is done or effort made to really engage with young Travellers. If Travellers do engage with the youth organisation, but perhaps

only attend once, there is rarely follow-up by the youth workers to see what happened. A lot of effort is needed to engage young Travellers, but a lot of work is needed so that youth workers understand what is involved. (Interview B)

Exploring identity with Travellers

While acknowledging the importance of work on identity with young Travellers, the interviewees noted that there may not always be space in mainstream services to do this. Ideally, youth work should provide the setting to explore aspects of young people's individual identities in a safe space, but given the prolonged history of exclusion and marginalisation experienced by Travellers as a group in Irish society, this may be not so straightforward.

A lot of young people would be ashamed of their identity, hiding their identity at school, getting off at a different bus stop, saying they don't live on a Traveller halting site, they're not a Traveller. So basically they're not settled people, and they're not Travellers. They don't know who they are. (Interview C)

Exploring such issues in the context of a predominantly 'settled' mainstream, young Travellers may feel self-conscious; suppressing their identity in order to 'be like everyone else' (Interview D).

Travellers may not want to explore their identity with people who are not Travellers:

Intercultural themes in youth work and school can turn Travellers off. If they know there will be a session on 'culture' they may not come in that day as they are embarrassed by being asked to talk about Traveller culture. They are worried about being made fun of by their classmates. (Interview C)

Added to the complexity of young Travellers' relationship with their identity can be the fact that some young Travellers can feel disconnected from some traditional aspects of Traveller culture (Interview E). This disconnect can lead to denial of culture and identity, and vice versa, and is possibly something that only other Travellers can understand.

There is certainly a need for Traveller-specific youth work, which should be a place where Traveller-specific issues can be addressed, such as conflict, leadership, participation, identity and this youth work setting should be a Traveller-only space ... facilitated by Travellers... where possible. (Interview B)

Traveller-specific work is valuable for identity and cultural issues, but the interviewees saw no reason to do other youth work separately. Youth work was considered hugely beneficial to young Travellers. The value of Travellers engaging in mainstream youth work is that they have access to the same opportunities as other young people. It also gives Travellers the chance to try out new things that they may not usually do, for instance young males doing drama (Interview E).

Youth work and outreach

Reflecting the literature, interviewees suggested that youth work opportunities can provide great experiences to young Travellers for learning and education, all the more where the experience of formal education has not been a positive one.

The benefits for Travellers of integrated youth work are the same as for all other young people. (Interview C)

Youth work is very beneficial to young Travellers, and there's definitely not enough. There's not enough support in the mainstream youth services, there's not enough funding there and there's not enough in those services getting done with young Travellers. (Interview C)

All of those interviewed agreed that targeted outreach work specifically focusing on Travellers should help the young Travellers to feel comfortable and confident to access mainstream services. This approach may require at least two years of targeted work, focusing on what the young Travellers need to engage with mainstream services.

Funding should be available to hire specific youth workers to target Travellers over two-three years by which stage they could be involved in mainstream. This would give services the time to involve Travellers step-by-step. (Interview C)

The aim of outreach should be eventual integration into mainstream youth work. (Interview A)

In an ideal world with unlimited funding, youth workers would be employed to only do outreach and engage young Travellers in mainstream youth work. But this would have to take place over a few years. (Interview B)

All youth work organisations should have workers which are focused on engaging young Travellers. This is needed also in order to encourage them to attend mainstream youth work. (Interview E)

There should be specific workers for Travellers and there should be the chance to work in Traveller-focused groups for certain projects. Then they would probably get involved in all youth work. (Interview E)

Ethnic identifier

Youth work is generally considered to be a relatively safe space for young Travellers. However, it was highlighted that Travellers rarely feel completely 'safe' (Interview C) and are often anxious about how they will be received by settled people. The need to engage with young Travellers as a group was important, letting them feel 'safe in numbers' (Interview E). However, at present, there is very little data on those who actually do engage in mainstream youth work.

None of the interviewees used an 'ethnic identifier' in their workplace. This is in keeping with the situation reflected in the literature and is indicative of the almost complete lack of data on participation rates of young Travellers. The interviewees acknowledged the need to collect data, but how best to go about this was considered challenging. Here, the fact that some young Travellers in mainstream youth work want

to hide their identity, while at the same time feeling pride in it, is once again significant.

Again, the opportunities provided by youth work and the role of the youth worker are crucial in promoting pride in and visibility of Traveller culture, and giving young people the confidence and possibility to positively identify as a Traveller.

Minority groups must be recognised and valued in mainstream youth work.

They need visibility, not assumptions and assimilating. (Interview D)

The youth worker can be a huge force for positive change in this case, and they must also play an active role in encouraging the young Traveller to be proud of their identity.

The youth worker has to give the positive reasons for why the young person should identify as a Traveller and be proud of who they are, like 'it's ok if you don't want to do that, but you should be proud of who you are' – giving the young person that confidence as a youth worker. The young Travellers can really trust the youth workers, and youth workers have a very big impact on the young Traveller's life. (Interview C)

In youth work, it has to be about self-identification. It's all about Travellers identifying themselves if they want to. (Interview B)

Social inclusion through youth work

Integrated youth work also provides a space for contact between Travellers and the settled community, and where this contact takes place relations tend to be very positive (Interview E). The integration of Travellers into mainstream youth work would also benefit the youth work provided to all young people. It would promote social inclusion and raise the awareness of all young people about diversity in their own community.

The NQSF [National Quality Standards Framework for Youth Work] in its reporting should ask about ethnicity and diversity. If youth organisations say they are doing this, they should have data on who they are reaching. (Interview B)

Youth work should have to demonstrate that their service is reflective of the community and city/town it takes place in, for example, by comparing numbers to other statistics, census data and so on. (Interview D)

However, youth workers need to have the skills and understanding to address any conflict that may arise.

Youth work can be, should be, and most of the time is a safe place for young Travellers, but when discrimination between young people arises it may not always be challenged. Training for youth workers is crucial. (Interview B)

Cultural competency, training and attitudinal change

According to those interviewed, not enough learning around intercultural issues for youth workers happens in their formal training. On-the-job training was more common as some organisations have provided training run by Travellers to their staff and volunteers. Limited time for volunteer training is an additional challenge. A

perceived lack of a structured approach to learning about culture – particularly Traveller culture - and intercultural youth work was evident. While some training institutions devote considerable attention to interculturalism and related issues, and while the North South Education and Training Standards Committee for Youth Work (NSETS) sets out requirements for the content of professional-level programmes, not all institutions and not all levels and types of training may be addressing these matters as fully as they should.

The interviewee who is a lecturer explained that the intercultural studies module was no longer offered on the Youth and Community Studies course on which he taught, and while it was intended that the relevant material would be incorporated across the curriculum, this is not always enforced:

Equality and interculturalism is now covered in some aspects of other courses such as Social Studies, but a lot depends on the approach of the individual teacher. (Interview D)

The lecturer also felt that training explicitly focusing on interculturalism, what it means in practice, and how it differs to other approaches such as assimilation, is necessary to address entrenched attitudes that ‘settled’ society often has. Even though there may be more diversity among students themselves, opinions about Travellers can be so ‘entrenched’, that settled students may alienate individuals, or simply consider that person an ‘exception’ to their negative stereotype of Travellers. For instance, there was a Traveller student on the lecturer’s own course, but this contact did not sufficiently challenge the other students’ views: ‘They’d say “You’d never think she was a Traveller - she doesn’t look like one”’ (Interview D). Some students also expressed a ‘denial of difference’, such as ‘why can’t we all just be the same?’ This assimilationist tendency is also consistent with the situation described in the literature. However it should be acknowledged that such an approach would be vigorously challenged by many educators and institutions.

Similarly, staff at the Traveller organisation felt that there needed to be more focuses on issues of interculturalism in youth work.

There needs to be awareness training on intercultural issues for staff and volunteers to incorporate wider diversity in the organisation. Also diversity and cultural training should be built into youth work courses at third level. (Interview B)

When further prompted as to why current training was not sufficient in her opinion, the interviewee continued:

Training for youth workers needs to contain very strong elements of diversity, awareness and identity... The training materials are focused on legislation (e.g. UN conventions), and sometimes the language and images used, but there is very little critical analysis of discrimination, oppression, prejudice, and power. It is crucial to challenge our own views and opinions through discussion rather than too much lecturing (Interview B).

Training courses available from other providers such as the National Youth Council of Ireland are helpful as they do include specific reference to Travellers (Interview B), but

such one-day courses should be based on a firm grounding in third-level studies.

Many youth workers are not familiar with a rights-based approach when they qualify as youth workers. This seems to lead to a lack of willingness to do work on identity, belonging, attitudes and related issues that young people discuss. At the moment, these issues should be (but are not) addressed through professional practice, with principles and theories of youth and community work. Practical application of the studies and theories is not done, but this is crucial when doing direct work with young people. If youth work is about empowerment, activism and development of the young person, this needs to be addressed. (Interview A)

Interculturalism and integration were seen as a two-way process, in which we all need to understand our own cultures, before we can try to understand others. There is also a need to do work on identity, culture and values with all young people attending a youth organisation.

At the moment youth workers, including Travellers, are doing a good job, but often within the boundaries they are comfortable with or understand. They don't have the necessary understanding of their own identity to effectively engage on these broader issues with young people. Youth work can be based on the understanding of the provider, rather than the understanding of the young Traveller. (Interview B)

Finally, there was a perception that intercultural training that did take place with youth workers focused on 'new' communities, and diversity was somehow a 'novelty' or something that has happened recently in Irish society.

Recently focus on interculturalism seems to be on new communities, not the dynamic of the majority and minority in society. (Interview B)

There is very little cultural training provided on Traveller culture. Students may study Traveller culture for a week during their studies and that could involve compiling a project and many of them just get the information from websites without actually meeting or engaging with Travellers. (Interview C)

The energy around interculturalism may disappear in a recession, coincided with the fact that difference is becoming more visible in a longer-term view in Ireland (Interview D)

Diversity among staff and volunteers

Having staff and volunteers from the Traveller community was seen as extremely beneficial when engaging with the Traveller community. Organisations approached this in different ways; from taking affirmative action to hire Travellers (Interview B), or relying on Traveller volunteers for specific skills such as the boxing club (Interview E).

Exploring Traveller-specific issues in youth work settings with adult Travellers can have an added benefit:

The young Travellers would see Travellers as youth workers, so it's kind of giving them a sense that they can have a future. (Interview C)

Participation barriers

Some participation barriers for Travellers in youth work were identified by all interviewees, in particular the reluctance of members of the Traveller community to allow young women and men to mix in youth work settings. Youth work needs to take account of this reality. Parental attitudes could be difficult for settled youth workers to comprehend. A lack of understanding of Traveller culture and norms was highlighted, and the need to be open-minded: ‘there are lots of unwritten rules, and some things you just have to learn as you go along’ (Interview E).

However, for youth workers, the added-value of working with Travellers was apparent in the motivation and enthusiasm of the young people, and the appreciation of the community.

The Traveller outreach was the best role in youth work I’ve had. Once they accept you and things are going well, the Travellers are very appreciative of everything you do – more than just the young people, the parents and the whole site will offer you a cup of tea when you call by and want to chat to you. (Interview E)

For others the most significant barriers to participation for young Travellers were attitudes, and anxiety around the perceived prejudices, of the majority community reflected in the findings on attitudes within society and the need for targeted support for young Travellers to engage.

One of the most significant barriers is attitudinal. The youth workers have a lack of understanding for Traveller culture, but also for Travellers’ experience of marginalisation and discrimination in society. (Interview B)

Again, often Traveller culture and working with young Travellers are never experienced by many youth workers in Ireland.

We get a lot of mainstream youth services ringing up saying ‘we don’t know how to work with young Travellers’ as if they’re a different species! So how can they work with young settled people basically? They don’t see the young Traveller as a young person. (Interview C)

Conclusions

As already stated, being limited to a small number of interviews and organisations this research cannot claim to be representative of the general youth work sector and Traveller community. However, a range of perspectives has been presented from both settled and Traveller respondents directly involved in youth work. The findings are consistent with the review of the literature while also highlighting underlying dynamics in Irish society between the majority and minority communities. Interviewees identified a number of additional steps that could be taken in the areas of youth work training, funding for outreach work for Travellers, and the collection of data through an ‘ethnic identifier’. Training for youth workers on how best to go about collecting such information would be highly important. A quantitative survey of numbers of young Travellers accessing youth work opportunities and a longitudinal study of

participation and retention would add greatly to the existing limited knowledge base. There is a need not only for additional resources, but also for a change in the way the youth work sector in general considers diversity, particularly dynamics of majority and minority communities, and accommodates and provides for young Travellers.

A strong message from the interviewees was that although youth work with young Travellers may require some specific approaches, 'good youth work is good youth work'; and organisations should remember that a young Traveller is a young person first and foremost (Interview C). Good youth work should start 'where the young person is at' and, as young people are never a 'homogenous' group, be able to effectively deal with issues of identity as they arise. However, in the context of a group which has experienced long-term prejudice and lack of trust in the majority community, many young Travellers will need to explore their experience of and feelings in relation to their identity in a separate space. Other youth work activities can take place in a mixed group, which can greatly enhance the youth work provided to all young people and the social cohesion of the local community.

Given the scale of the disadvantage and discrimination experienced by young Travellers, youth work services designed to meet their needs, whether specifically targeted or as part of mainstream provision, need to be adequately resourced and to allow sufficient time (certainly a period of at least two to three years) to enable meaningful progress to be made.

The attitude of the 'settled' majority is still a significant barrier to equality (including equal rights and equal access to services) for Travellers. Youth work training on equality and diversity should not focus solely on legislation or be limited to 'new communities'. Significant work is needed on understanding the dynamics of 'majority' and 'minority' communities, and how issues of power, prejudice and marginalisation shape all aspects of Travellers' lived experience, including youth work. Training for youth workers must seek to challenge 'entrenched attitudes' about Travellers and promote an intercultural approach in every aspect of youth work. Integration and interculturalism is a two-way process. There is a need to do work on identity, culture and values with all young people, especially majority communities whose culture may be less visible to the young people themselves. Youth work needs to acknowledge that all people have multiple identities. As Amartya Sen suggests: 'Once the complex and diverse nature of everyone's identity is recognised, initiatives which emphasise similarities that exist between us (gender, age, interests etc) can be developed' (quoted in Hourigan and Campbell, 2010: 86)

The legal status of the Traveller community is a crucial issue and the findings of this research support the argument for the recognition of Travellers as a distinct ethnic group in Irish law. This would demonstrate that diversity is valued in society, and that Travellers are part of that diversity. It would further encourage Travellers to identify as Travellers, and share their cultural heritage with the settled majority on a more equal footing.

Despite significant improvements at a policy level in recent years, significant efforts are still needed to transform inclusive statements of principle into a fully inclusive youth work practice. The current austerity programme of the Government is resulting in cutbacks to services targeted towards marginalised groups, including Travellers, both in schools and in youth work. The value of targeted youth work practice with

Travellers seems to either be unknown, ignored or under-appreciated by policy makers. Mainstream youth work still has some way to go to being a fully inclusive practice which welcomes Travellers, and transforms their experience of exclusion to one of equality. It would seem that targeted and focused approaches with young Travellers represent the best way to encourage access to youth work in the short-term and create a society which understands, values and supports cultural diversity in the long term.

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