

Chapter 8

Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

From a Romani perspective, this research aimed to provide a deep, informed understanding of attitudes held by two groups of Australian Rom towards formal education and sought to identify needs that could be addressed by educational policymakers. This is the first such study to examine educational issues in an Australian context. It provides the first analysis of formal education provision in Australia for the Romani people and the difficulties they face. One of the most significant discoveries emerging during the conducting of this study is that while the Romani people may be culturally unique, the hardships they face in formal (mainstream) education may be comparable, in many respects, to those of migrants

from non-English-speaking backgrounds and those from low socio-economic environments.

This chapter discusses the overall findings and bases of recommendations which follow. The recommendations highlight the major areas of concern arising from this research, as directed by the research questions, but they constitute by no means complete or exhaustive answers to the problems raised. Whilst concentrating on information provided by the case studies on two *vitsi*, much of the data has been provided by willing participants from many different *vitsi* and therefore, recommendations arising from this study could be easily applied to a much wider range of Rom in Australia. This chapter also looks at the implications for the future of education of the Romani people in Australia and discuss the applicability and usefulness of the recommendations in the Australian context. A comparison of the expected outcomes with the actual outcomes, areas for further research and a look to the future conclude this chapter.

Customs, Beliefs and Values Influencing Attitudes to Formal Education

As discussed in Chapters Two and Six, much of the modern antipathy towards education is founded in traditional attitudes which have frustrated efforts to rectify the 'disadvantaged position' that the Rom occupy in every society in the world. The Rom feel that they have no part to play in these societies and because they face so many

challenges in mainstream society, retaining their sense of self worth and identity is dependent on maintaining the differences between Romani and Gajé society. This is a world-wide phenomenon.

Fears about the loss of the ethnic identity of the Romani people, are widely held, not only in Australia, but also the rest of the Romani world. Formal education is seen as the major instigator of this loss. Acceptance of the cultural package that goes with entering the school environment requires that cultural individuality be compromised, with possibly disastrous results for the minority culture:

Most “ethnic” Australians show varying degrees of biculturalism [which means they] have generally kept aspects of their native cultures while acquiring many of the ways of the majority culture. The nature of multiculturalism among ethnic Australians, however, varies according to generation. In this respect, the picture that emerges is far from rosy. Ethnic cultures are not being transmitted to the next generation in their “authentic” and integral form, but only in their folkloric versions. The climate for multiculturalism may be more favourable than in the past, but the need for ethnic cultural maintenance and development is still not fully understood.¹

¹ M. Morrow, ‘The Romani People In The Australian Legal And Social Context’, Proceedings of the International Study Conference, September, 1991. *Roma, Gypsies, Travellers East/West: Regional and Local Policies*, trans S. ní Shuíneár, Pavee Point Publications, Ireland, 1997, p. 37.

Another often mentioned concern was that the Rom feel that the Gajé education system does not uphold any of the traditional Romani values. Often unverballed, but ever present, the rules of *marimé* preclude Rom participation in Gajé society. These deeply held beliefs are practised by every Romani community (although to differing degrees), forming an integral part of life. Much of the distrust of Gajé arises from here. There is an unwillingness to allow children to be exposed to the influences from a people considered *marimé* and at the same time, an unwillingness to provide their own version of 'formal education', believing strongly in the power of the family and its traditional structure of training.

Attitudes and Beliefs of the Roma Towards Formal Schooling In Australia

The links between formal education and promotion of the dominant culture are made clear in the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act 1986, Schedule Three, Declaration of the Rights of the Child which states (in somewhat sexist or exclusionary terms) that:

... He shall be given an education which will promote his general culture and enable him, on a basis of equal opportunity, to develop his abilities, his individual judgement, and his sense of moral and social responsibility, and to become a useful member of society.²

² Commonwealth of Australia, Parliament, *Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act 1986*, AGPS, Canberra, 1986, p. 57

School is seen by the Roma in Australia as an institution which is exclusively and totally part of an environment dominated by 'Others'. In this environment, their children are taught vocational skills which will not help them find work. They learn literacy skills that make them different, and given attitudes that make them seem foreign to the rest of their *familie*. Even in Australia, education and the school environment are used as a means for the implementation of forced assimilation into the dominant society. From this perspective, even today, in Australia, formal education confronts the Rom as an hostile institution, and one which wants to take their children from them.³

In Australia, many of the Rom, literate and illiterate, are suspicious of and even hostile towards the school environment. They feel that the education of living the Romani way of life provides life skills much more vital to survival than that which is taught during a school-based education. Most of the older Rom have never seen the inside of a school building let alone spent time within its walls. Those Rom who are uneducated put forward an air of being unconcerned about their lack of education and on the whole unconvinced of the value of attending mainstream schools. In particular, the stories which they hear about the experiences of others in school strengthens their resolve not to send their children to these institutions.⁴

³ Marie, Personal Interview, Brisbane, 17 November, 1997.

⁴ Group Discussions, Adelaide, 4 January, 1997.

In addition to this, it is felt that Romani children are natural scapegoats for gangs, because they are different and tend to be shy and polite around strangers. The state schools in the areas in which Romani people live tend to be quite rough and there are many reports of children wearing knives to school. Many parents believe the schools are meeting places for juvenile delinquents and drug addicts.⁵

Some of the parents have enrolled their children in the distance education school and these parents are quite happy for their children to work, at their own pace, towards the completion of the full year's work. Despite the difficulties with this system, this shows an acceptance of the parents towards the education of their children, when surrounded by peers of their own and in an environment considered suitable by the parents.⁶

This represents a significant breakthrough in the fight against illiteracy.

Specific Educational Needs of The Roma That Need to Be Addressed

Before the question of educational needs can be addressed, it is necessary to first clarify from whose perspective we are looking. Reiss described the situation accurately when he said:

⁵ Group Discussions, Sydney, 10-12 May, 1997

⁶ Group Discussions, Sydney, 12 May, 1997.

If literacy were all, then our problems would be relatively straightforward - providing that literacy training is delayed until the stage of reading readiness. But what else do we teach besides literacy? What of our middle class curriculum is relevant? There is also the whole question of occupational training so necessary as the [Romani] community passes through such momentous change. Even if we wanted to, and if it was even desirable, how could you change 600 years of fact and resistance to change and the total failure of Gajé attempts to force conformity. [Romani] children take their roots not from the geographical pinpoint on the globe but from the family and the travelling family takes its own decisions and has a fundamental and unassailable right, not always protected by the present laws, to do so. And the family takes its roots from the [Romani] tradition that has endured through every external blow we have thrown at it in the past.⁷

The Rom in Australia, except for a few, are on the whole not yet convinced of their need for formal education. Therefore the first need to be addressed is to convince them that they have a need. For most *familiyi*, once the children have basic reading and writing skills, there is no need for any further schooling and these children continue their normal *familia*-based instruction. They are aware of their legal

⁷ C. Reiss, 'Current Trends in Education of Travelling Children', in *Current Changes Amongst British Gypsies and Their Place in International Patterns of Development: Proceedings of the Research and Policy Conference of the National Gypsy Education Council*, ed., T. Acton, National Gypsy Education Council, Oxford, 1971, p. 24.

requirement to send their children to school and do so for as long as the children need to go, in their view.

One of the unashamed, implicit uses of school is as a means of social instruction and so, the question remains - it will probably always be so - how much induction into the Gajé social system do these children need? Is it likely that they will want or be forced to assimilate or integrate into mainstream society? There is then the question of socialising of Romani children - although there is much social interaction with children and adults of other Romani *familiyi*, here is rarely this same level of mixing with Gajé children. Therefore, mixing with Gajé children in the school environment may sometimes take place in the schoolroom, but will almost invariably not occur in the playground or after school, with the rare exception of the children of the closest neighbours if relations are good. This would mean that Romani children would require some form of socially interactive training if they are to be easily assimilated, or even integrated, into the school system and classroom. This type of education does not sit at all comfortably with the parents.

If there was an increase in socialisation between Romani and Gajé children, there is also the fear that there would be a much higher degree of intercultural 'borrowing' and hence adaptation would occur at a faster rate than currently which is already too fast for some Romani people.

For many Romani *familiyi* in Australia, accommodation may change between a rented house and a caravan quite often which means that personal belongings are severely limited. This may also affect a child's ability to recognise and manipulate toys and gadgets that are a common feature of mainstream society.

The adults are in dire need of basic literacy skills, however, it may be too late for them to be receptive to social instruction in a school environment. Most of the older Rom have their attitudes so ingrained that illiteracy has become almost a status symbol. It would, therefore, take a massive transformation of the whole of the Romani community for even one of these people to be able to openly access available literacy services. It would require acknowledgement that the Gajé were 'right' and that the Rom need to be able to read and write in order to survive and progress.

How Best to Address These Needs

There is no one answer to this question. This much is obvious from the multitude of approaches currently being trialed. Collectively, the countries of the European Union are approaching their own unique problems from a number of different directions, many of which may yet show real promise in the addressing of the needs of Romani children. The United States has adopted a different focus - from the available literature it appears to approach the problem by setting up segregated schools, which certainly seem to have the acceptance from Roma, albeit a cautious one. The fact remains to

be seen whether the aim of one of these projects, integration into the mainstream school system, ever comes to fruition.

This conundrum is further complicated when it is realised that should there be a sudden influx of these uneducated Romani children into the schools of Australia, teachers will be faced with a new difficulty. Most of these children may never have previously attended *any* school and, because of their wide variation in ages, the potential arises to open the doors to a new magnitude of educational problem.

Those children and adults who appear to have had the most success with education, measurable by the years of schooling received and degree of literacy, are those who have had the chance to receive schooling outside the mainstream system. The difficulty here is that at least in one state, South Australia, these children do not appear to have the chance to complete their final school exams and therefore their chance of gaining access to higher education is limited.⁸ Of those children who have had no choice but to attempt to progress through the state system either by contact or through open access, few have completed primary school and most are still only semi-literate. Irregularity of attendance is the easy answer to the question why, and this would account for many of the difficulties encountered. But then the reasons

⁸ The final matriculation must be completed at a recognised secondary (or distance education) school in order to be able to sit for the final Year Twelve and Thirteen examinations. Successful completion of these examinations is required for entry into tertiary institutions. This means that any child completing home schooling cannot sit for these examinations. This information was given verbally in a telephone conversation between myself and an officer of the Children's Services Department. No justification or proof was forthcoming. No written verification of this has been forwarded, despite its request. This information could not be located in any state government act, regulation, or department produced literature.

given for this non-attendance need to be addressed. It should be pointed out here, that those parents who have really wanted their children to receive an education have certainly achieved their goal, using different means, and usually under conditions of adversity, but they have done it nonetheless. There is also an increasing number of parents who want their children to be educated but do not manage it using the means currently available to them. However, there are still a large number of Roma in Australia who want no part of the educative process for their children.

Most surprising, is the revelation that even with those parents who want their children to be literate or gain a professional career, there is an overall air of indifference and lack of interest in formal education and statutory attendance regulations.

This scenario is by no means a purely Australian experience - the Romani people not only travel, but they have a heritage that owes nothing to education or literacy. The children have a characteristic set of needs according to the society in which they live, and those needs often make mainstream education, as a part of the dominant culture, not only irrelevant, but in many cases it has had a destructive effect on their lives. Education of only some of these children has made them outsiders in their own cultural group, different from their peers and incapable of contributing to their own communities.⁹

⁹ Reiss, p. 24.

The feature that makes this experience unique in Australia is that it is both unrecognised and unacknowledged. Many government departments, both those dealing with education and multicultural affairs, have expressed amazement that there are any 'Gypsies' living in Australia. Although there is an immediate curiosity and a barrage of questions, there is no understanding of the culture and/or lifestyle of the Romani people and therefore no understanding of their difficulties.

This became obvious on the occasions during the conduction of this study, when parents were confronted with officials from the state education authorities demanding that the parents send their children to school. So many times, this request was not complied with and these officials would return, usually bringing with them a number of implied threats, such as the parents would face large fines, imprisonment and interference in their lives by the family welfare department who would look at how they were raising their children. This was followed on five occasions by the family relocating in the middle of the night, once by the return of the children to the local school, twice by the return of the children to a different school and for two children, enrolment in the distance education school and the return of the family to their travelling lifestyle.

Before considering or choosing one or more strategies to improve the situation, the overall, potential impact needs to be considered. It has been found that the availability of only limited resources for projects designed to overcome social and educational disadvantage in England and America resulted in them having no lasting or significant

effect on those who need it most. This same study found that 'one-off, small scale programs which are not part of the mainstream of education and are not fully supported by the education system managers are unlikely to succeed in overcoming disadvantage.' It was recommended that strategies being assessed for their ability to assist with overcoming educational disadvantage needed to incorporate the following fundamental elements as part of their implementation plan. These elements are pre-school provision, communication between the home and school and continuing education.

It was considered that key aspects of the educational development of the child take place at home, and therefore both parents and teachers need to be participants in the process. Part of this was rejection of those compensatory schemes which treat the parents as 'deficient' and the domestic culture of the child as a hindrance to 'appropriate' educational behaviour (as they have been shown to have had particularly unfortunate consequences for many children of ethnic minorities).¹⁰

Keeping all the above points in mind, and the lessons learned from the past as explored in this study, a range of strategies that may be appropriate are summarised below:

¹⁰ J. Mortimore & T. Blackstone, *Disadvantage and Education*, SSRC/DHSS Studies in Deprivation and Disadvantage 4, 1982, in A. Jakubowicz, *Education and Ethnic Minorities, Issues of Participation and Equity*, 1984, p. 9.

Systems of Schooling

1. Segregated schooling in special Romani schools with Romani Teachers / Teacher Assistants
 - i. The use of Information Technology to assist with the expansion of the open access system or the setting up of a system parallel to the open access system, for Romani children, which allows for students to progress at a rate commensurate with their abilities.¹¹
 - ii. The use of mobile schools setting up in various caravan parks, which are capable of moving all over Australia.
 - iii. Contact (face-to-face) Romani schools in the major capital cities.
2. Setting up of a Romani school to teach the culture and language to Romani children in a less formalised setting with children attending mainstream classes.
3. Initially segregated schooling in special Romani schools, with a long term view to integration.
4. Home schooling with the parents participating with their own children, with permission of the education authorities.¹²
5. Integrated schooling with support for the Romani children in the schools and assistance to succeed.

¹¹ Currently the open access system permits entry only to those students disadvantaged by distance and those whose behaviour is such that it precludes attendance at school. The Open Access School has its own teachers who liaise with the students, the role of the parents is usually to assist with distribution of materials and direct the proceedings. Illiteracy is the one of the main reasons given to Rom parents for their inability to enrol their children.

¹² Currently home schooling requires the parent / teacher to be literate. Illiteracy is the one of the main reasons given to Rom parents for their ineligibility for home schooling registration.

This support and assistance could be facilitated by and for:

Policy Makers and Administrative Strategies ensuring:

Multicultural Policies / Issues

1. Mainstream educational institutions recognise and acknowledge that students who already speak a second language at home, regardless of attendance at other cultural or language programs as may be provided by ethnic schools, do not need to learn a third language.
2. Multicultural policies are realised in school policies and curricula.
3. Awareness of teachers and school staff of the implications and methods of implementation of the multicultural policies currently in place is ensured.
4. Education Department, Children's services staff and school staff are both aware of and responsive to the cultural backgrounds of the children in their communities.
5. Organisational procedures and programs are responsive to the cultural backgrounds of the children in their communities.

Literacy Strategies

6. The introduction of negotiated curricula for both contact and Open Access Schools.
7. Training courses be provided whereby literate Roma could work in their own community under the supervision of a trained teacher, whilst attending intensive training courses.

8. Access to free coaching facilities with a qualified person of Romani descent, or a person familiar with Romani customs, on a one-to-one basis.

Support Networks

9. Development of mechanisms for improved liaison and communication between the home and school, where requested by the individual family.
10. Federal and State Education Authorities ensure that the various Romani associations are informed of their members' rights to assistance and how to access assistance.
11. State Education Authorities to have available to schools a list of Romani volunteers available to schools who can assist with following up early school leavers, assessing their problems and providing support and counselling where required.

Teacher Training

12. Training on how to cope with students of different literacy levels in one class.
13. Production and distribution of cultural information literature or packages for children to take to school.
14. Teaching of multicultural education and policies to all new teachers in universities/teaching colleges.
15. Teaching of basic literacy skills to be a readily available resource at all levels of primary and early secondary school.

Administrative Measures

16. The use of alternative methods of student assessment which look at the child's abilities rather than their disabilities.

17. Each (Romani) child be issued with an individual report card outlining the level of education received and the skills that the child has (rather than the ones they do not) to facilitate movement between schools (both intra- and inter- state).
18. Introduction of flexible times for school attendance
 - i. Minimum number of days (or weeks) that must be attended (or school-based work completed),
 - ii. Work set on a regular basis to be completed within a set, negotiated time irrespective of term/holiday times.

Initiatives for Schools and Teachers

1. Production and use of culture specific teaching materials and aids (not believed to be achievable in non-segregated schools).
2. Ensure that multicultural policies implemented at national and state level are translated into school policies and curricula.
3. Teachers make an effort to become aware of, and responsive to the cultural backgrounds of the children in their classes.
4. Provision of teacher assistants who understand and are familiar with Romani customs and dealing with Romani children in schools.
- 5.

Strategies for the Roma to Help Themselves

1. Building a Romani support network, to ensure a loud enough voice for action.

2. Asking for assistance for those Romani people who complete school so that they can gain higher qualifications and help others within their community.
3. Using Romani associations to liaise between Education Departments and officials and Roma in each state, or on a national level.
4. Special efforts be made by those Roma in contact with children who leave school early, or have never attended school, to ensure that the family and the child are aware of the need for their children to be educated AND to assist wherever possible the child (or children) with finding the most appropriate form of schooling for their needs.
5. The Roma must make a commitment to their children's formal education, cooperating with schools and other government agencies at all possible times. This rather extraordinary statement has many implications when considering that the law states that schooling is compulsory. However, this commitment may be facilitated by:
 - i. Romani Associations informing Federal and State Education Authorities about Romani culture and the difficulties faced by the Romani people.
 - ii. Education of the Rom about schooling and the education system.
 - iii. Programs to inform adult Roma, where appropriate, about the availability of community literacy programs.
 - iv. Involving parents in the child's education, in a home-based learning environment, such that they could also gain literacy skills.

The Discussion Continued

Whilst some of these strategies appear to be feasible in theory, they would possibly find little practical success in an Australian context as the implications of some are too far-reaching. Many would require investigation into teacher education and training, re-structuring of the whole formal education system, making wider use of information technology and the advancement of distance education. However, with research being undertaken from a position of current knowledge about the situation of the Rom in an Australian context, many possible avenues for action research could emerge.

For example, the mobile schools in caravan parks would be difficult to implement because of the wide dispersal of Romani populations and the large distances between towns and cities in Australia. There is also no set pattern of migration and *familiyi* may leave a caravan park or house to go in separate ways depending on *familia* needs. Action is needed on all aspects if literacy for Romani children is to be achieved. It is most likely that a combination of these efforts is required. Some of these issues are further explored in the examination of the research question 'How can the participation of these Roma in key aspects of Australian culture, such as education, be improved, whilst at the same time ensuring the preservation of their heritage?'

Some of these strategies have already been tried, with little success. In November, 1996, Dr Glenice Hancock, Executive Director, Schools Operation Division of the Department for Education and Children's Services, South Australia was sent a paper from Romani International - Australia Inc. The paper briefly set out an introduction

to the Romani people of Australia and highlighted some of the problems with the provision of education for Romani children. It was sent in response to difficulties that two Romani families were having with the Open Access School administration. The paper was acknowledged by the Executive Director whose response included the statement 'I have made a copy available to District Superintendents of Education'.¹³ Despite this claim, a District Superintendent in an appointment six months later, on a related issue, had no knowledge or interest in any such paper, or the problems experienced by the Romani people. The children involved in this incident received assistance and schooling from the Open Access School for only a further two months before they were once again refused schooling.

Current Government Education Policies and Strategies That Best Suit The Needs Of Roma In Australia

Even though the Roma have never been officially declared an ethnic minority in Australia, this discussion is based on the reality that the Romani people do constitute an ethnic minority by the virtue of the definition of the term. They have a common ancestry and 'share a common heritage defined in terms of language, culture and social attitudes, values and practices.' The Rom can be distinguished easily by their

¹³ Dr G. Hancock, Executive Director, Schools Operation Divisions, Department for Education and Children's Services, Letter to President, Romani International - Australia Inc., 22 November, 1996.

cultural boundaries which are 'maintained by social interaction, consciousness and group identification'.¹⁴

Australia is an ethnically and culturally pluralistic nation and the relatively harmonious integration of so many people from different backgrounds that we enjoy requires a philosophy of acceptance of others, rather than just tolerating or pushing to one side those who are different. A truly multicultural society may be a difficult one to really accomplish in every sense that the word conveys. Although Australia has come a long way from the days of the political 'White Australia' policy, Australian society still perceives itself as a dominantly Anglo-Celtic society, and has strong roots in this culture. Ethnic minorities in Australia are still struggling for equality of outcomes of education and to abolish their second-class citizen status in an Anglo-Celtic dominated society. Multicultural policies, most notably those in education, are attempting, at least on paper, to redress some of the disadvantages of belonging to an ethnic minority in Australia.

It would appear that one of the major difficulties with the policies of multiculturalism and multicultural education, is the difficulty inherent in their implementation. Unfortunately whether they impact on the children, adolescents, and adults, who need them is dependant on the extent to which the states enforce their own policies and whether adequate policies are being formed and put into practice at school level.

¹⁴ National Advisory and Coordinating Committee on Multicultural Education, *Education In And For A Multicultural Society: Issues And Strategies For Policy Making*, (L. Jayasuriya, Chair), AGPS, Canberra, 1987, pp. 18-9.

The rhetoric of multiculturalism, in all its confusion, may be a subtle way of appearing to give members of ethnocultural groups what they want in education while in reality giving them little that will enhance their life chances, because a great deal of multicultural education emphasises only life-styles, in a safe, bland, politically neutral panacea.¹⁵ Twenty years ago, there were many who felt that the ideologies of social and cultural pluralism, which underpin multiculturalism, had not completely displaced the ideology of assimilation either in educational practice, or in general community attitudes.¹⁶ To what extent is this still true in Australia? The persistence of racism in multicultural Australia is still a burning issue.¹⁷ Perhaps more now than before due to the political focus provided by Pauline Hanson.

The application of the definition of multicultural education in Australia through its policies appears to relate mainly to people of non English speaking backgrounds, despite claims multiculturalism is not confined only to immigrants in Australia.¹⁸ There is no acknowledgment by this society, that people who *appear* to have an English speaking background may also have a culture of their own.

The gradual loss of Romanes, the Gypsy language, by the younger generation has resulted in the loss of a possible pigeon hole in which the children could be placed

¹⁵ B. Bullivant, *The Pluralist Dilemma in Education*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1981, p. ix.

¹⁶ J. Martin, *The Migrant Presence*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1978, pp. 136-7.

¹⁷ E. Vasta & S. Castles (eds), *The Teeth are smiling: The persistence of racism in multicultural Australia*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1996.

¹⁸ National Advisory and Coordinating Committee on Multicultural Education, p. 18.

within the school environment. Romanes is understood by the younger generation, but rarely spoken by people under the age of thirty. It is becoming mixed to a large degree with words brought across from the language of the last host country of residence. This means that new immigrants are bringing with them a Romanes mixed with Serbian, Czech or German. The old language is dying slowly. Thus Romani children born in Australia are having problems with two (and sometimes three) languages, with no firm base in any of them, on which to base their learning experiences.

In summary, although the multicultural policies of the Federal and State Governments appear to have worthy if not notable aims, it is their implementation at the school level which is causing difficulties. Interpretation of some of the statements made in these policies has resulted in further educational difficulties for Romani children in school. For example:

Maximal potential: the right of all children and students to quality education and care that provides knowledge, skills and understanding that will enable them to participate effectively in culturally and linguistically diverse societies on a national and international level.¹⁹

In South Australia, this statement means that every child must learn a second language. In state schools, there is no choice of which language - each school has one

¹⁹ Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia: Sharing Our Future*, AGPS, Canberra, 1989, p. vii.

second language which they teach. One of the key informants in this study was enrolled in the Open Access School the language taught in this school was Spanish. When the family was denied re-enrolment in this school, the children were enrolled in the local school, the language taught in this school was German. That meant that a child coming from a home environment where both Romanes and English were spoken interchangeably had first to learn the concepts of a third and then fourth language. This child, already having difficulty with expression in English is now doubly penalised. But this was not the concern of the local school. Their policies and curriculum stated that every child had to learn a second language and it was to be German. The Principal of the school suggested that the parents take up their concerns with 'the Education Department'.

Therefore, to reiterate, while multicultural policies may have notable aims, it is their interpretation and subsequent implementation which is causing difficulties for the Romani people and doubtless other ethnic minorities.

Issues Affecting Participation of These Roma in Key Aspects of Australian Culture, Such As Education, Whilst At the Same Time Ensuring the Preservation of Their Heritage

As long as the established school system fails to take account of the particular needs of the Romani people, there can be no positive answer to this question. The Roma will continue to evade the attendance officers and their children will receive no more

education than they do now. This is not the first time that the school has come under attack for its lack of flexibility, and it will probably not be the last.

If one can accept that the acquisition of formal education and literacy skills would not result in the death of the Romani culture in Australia, then one can see that perhaps they may make more certain its survival. The task therefore remains the provision of education that will be both suitable and successful. The options open to the Romani people are very few under the current system, there are the state schools, the private schools and the distance education schools. The state schools are not being considered as an option, the private schools are out of reach for financial reasons and the distance education schools do not welcome these students.

Although no cases in which the state system was successful came to light during the eighteen months of this study, it should not be overlooked. This statement is made given that most of the Romani children currently in school have made very little or no progress and remain only in the lowest or remedial streams. Where the parents could find the money to do so, private school education proved to be relatively successful for one child, although none of the siblings could claim similar success. In four other cases, private tuition, either from the mother (an overseas educated teacher) or outsiders achieved, a high degree of literacy.

In discussions with elders in the Romani community, it emerged that they feel that education must be offered to Romani people in less limited ways and under conditions

likely to make learning a worthwhile and fulfilling experience. When looking for the next step in Australia, heed must be paid to the European, English and American experiences, many of which have used a different approach. The answer could lie in the fact that there is no correct way. The Australian situation is similar, but not identical to each of these societies, although the bottom line is the same with regard to cultural and ethnic pluralism. The ideal therefore, from a pluralistic society perspective, is that at the truly multicultural school, all types of children mix and learn mutual recognition of each other's worth as they discover their differences. Whilst this may seem an idealistic vision, it is one that we should not put aside. It is obvious that continued separation of Romani children from Gajé children will perpetuate the age-old line of division between the Rom and the Gajé. However, the Rom do not want to assimilate into the dominant culture that exists and until a system of education can be devised in which ethnic minorities do not feel the pressure being placed on them to assimilate, this ideal situation can not be reached and the line of division will remain.

There was really only one recommendation that found universal favour with the Rom, that is, setting up a system parallel to open access which allows progression at a rate commensurate with their abilities. The fact that we found even one solution was encouraging as it suggested that the issue was not so much one of a lack of literacy skills, but rather incompatibility of the school system as it currently stands. The strategies listed as addressing the educational needs were put forward to and discussed by the Roma in this study but it was widely felt that most of them were a

waste of time because, quite simply, they would never happen. There was also a defeatist attitude prevalent among the Rom to whom I spoke, they could foresee no changes in the near future. We spent many long hours discussing all the options and a few would become quite excited about them, but towards the end, someone would invariably say, 'well yes, but this is all a waste of time anyway, you are just dreaming'.

Another point around which there was much discussion was the amount of time wasted at school, even in the open access system. Most of the adults felt that painting, craft and sport were activities that should be conducted out of school. These were considered to be fun for the kids, but not useful skills for finding work. The main reason for agreeing that education had a role in the first place was for acquiring vocational skills, of which 'reading, writing and arithmetic' were considered to be vital components. Discussion on time wasting usually led to a discussion of the absurdity of having to learn another language. All parents were scathing about their children learning a third (and sometimes fourth) language, without a chance to master the first two. Apparently it was the actual learning of the language that was causing the difficulty, and not the learning about different cultures. It was generally felt that learning about how other people live was interesting and fell into the category of 'fun' subjects at school.

Although none of the Rom could verbalise their thoughts about the mainstream education system using the terminology used throughout this report, they were nevertheless unanimous in their condemnation of the system. They did not understand

all the words I used about socialisation, but they understood the concepts very well, and agreed unanimously that I had accurately conveyed their thoughts.

The suggestions that received the widest approval during the third phase of this research are described below. Interestingly they all centred around the open access system, which points to the provision of distance education as being a possible next focus for action.

Some Focused Strategies Put Forward by the Roma

Because in many instances, the mother is going out to work each day, supervision of young children is delegated to the oldest girl. Therefore, the older girls (most of whom have few literacy skills themselves) could assist with the direction and control of the younger children. It was felt that the girls were quite capable of acting as guides for the younger children, and assisting with location of reading materials. This would be within the normal pattern of their life and give them something constructive to do which would encourage some informal learning to take place. This would be especially good for the open access system where the illiteracy of the parents is given as one more reason why Romani people are not being allowed to participate. Although the benefit of education and the learning of new trade skills would provide greater earning power.

As a follow on from this, another group felt that the mothers could be educated at the same time as the children. With mothers and children learning together, the strength of the *familia* would be increased and at the same time, there would be no worries about the morality of the classroom. This suggestion was widely welcomed, but it was acknowledged that unless this education was through the open access system, or in a segregated classroom, the solution was impractical. It was also accepted that the loss of earning power from the women would severely reduce incoming money, and that this would result in more families being required to survive solely on social security payments.

Almost every person consulted had comments to make about the open access system. It was believed that this system was by far the best option that was offered in Australia. At the same time, nearly every *familia* had an account of the treatment that they had received by the administrators of this system. Most of the stories were not complimentary, they ranged from simple rudeness over the telephone in response to enquiries, to being told that the open access school did not care whether the children remained illiterate, they were not going to be enrolled in open access.

On talking briefly to Principals of the Open Access schools in each state, it appears that they have limited government funding and that they only want bright children with educated parents in their schools. Perhaps this was the only way they could justify their funding levels? It was strongly felt that either expansion of the existing distance education system and a more user-friendly approach would possibly result in the

enrolment of more children in this system. The other alternative considered was to set up another system beside the current one and have it administered by Roma, or other willing participants.

Another feasible strategy could be development of a modular curriculum that allows ease of transfer from one school to another, including across state borders, for periods of time with no loss of continuity in the chance for acquisition of the basic reading, writing and arithmetic skills.²⁰

We have here in Australia, something which no other country has been able to achieve to such an extent - a consensus of opinion among the Rom about a suitable form of education, with several variations on this one theme. It is acknowledged that one system is unlikely to suit all parties, but the door has been opened for further investigation in this area.

Conclusion

This study has shed some light on a hitherto unknown problem. Exposure of these issues will have implications for policy makers and school administrators, giving them some tools needed to start addressing and hopefully remedying this problem.

²⁰ Morrow, 'The Romani People In The Australian Legal And Social Context', p. 38.

The Gajé, being ignorant of the rules of *marimé* and therefore lacking the proper sense of shame, are considered to be *marimé*, from head to toe, this characterises all contacts with the Gajé, whether they are for economic or (rarely) social reasons. This is but one of the measures adopted to maintain the boundaries between the Rom and the Gajé. Because the Rom are generally aware that they live in a society that despises them, they have erected their own, immovable, boundaries around themselves. This sense of moral superiority is, therefore, not threatened by their relegated position in society or the attitudes of the Gajé towards them.²¹ It has been suggested that this may form a part of the strategy of accommodation, widely used by the Rom in which they adopt those behaviours which enable them to coexist with the dominant group but at the same time retain those social norms and cultural values which permit the group to preserve its own distinctive identity.²²

Not all people within a culture will want to be segregated into isolated communities and 'special' schools, there will be those who wish to assimilate or integrate into mainstream society, those who wish to live side by side and those who wish to have no part in it at all. This is true for all societies where freedom of speech and freedom of expression are the basic tenets.

²¹ A. Sutherland, *Gypsies, The Hidden Americans*, Tavistock Publications, London, 1975, pp. 8-9.

²² M. Andreck, *Ethnic Awareness and the School: An Ethnographic Study*, Sage Series on Race Relations, vol. 5, in M. Salo (ed.), *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*, Series 5, vol. 3, no. 1, February 1993, p. 49.

There are many Gypsy populations especially in Europe, which resent and fear the segregation of their children into these special schools. This fear is substantiated by the fact that these schools are designed for mentally incompetent students. Once in these schools, the children never progress. In Australia, those who need an alternative to the mainstream education system must have sufficient material assets to be able to send their children to one of the alternative curriculum schools such as 'Montessori'. These schools are usually out of reach of the average Romani *familia*.

Open Access and Home schooling are both considered acceptable systems, however, they require the parents to be literate and in the majority of cases, the parents are semi-literate at best. There is still much to be learned about multiculturalism and the implications of its policies. Unfortunately, the sometimes narrow views of those with the power to make a difference cloud the real issues, including those reasons for the non-compliance with the law. Whilst there may be no excuse for this non-compliance, there is a substantial need for concrete assistance.

To those in a position of authority, the Romani families represent individuals who are breaking the law and must therefore be cautioned and threatened with fines and imprisonment. They are not seen as an ethnic minority with a common set of problems based in a long history of difficulties in this area.

To conclude, I would like to reiterate some of my earlier words ...

As the struggle for survival gets tougher, we may find that the very attributes, the cultural capital that Romani children possess and which some educational institutions resent - that is, a mind of their own - will stand them in good stead, provided that they become properly literate along the way. As the provision of these literacy skills is the vital stumbling block, it is the one requiring most urgent attention.²³

The immediate future of education of Romani children in Australia looks bleak. There needs to be changes on every front. This research has highlighted a number of major issues from an insider's perspective and suggested many possible tools and directions for the future.

With a lot of cooperation from both sides, it is hoped that this study will provide the first real step in addressing the issue of educating the Romani children in Australia.

Future Research

The Roma in Australia have given some of their own ideas for possible strategies for the future. Therefore, future research could aim at investigation of whether these are sustainable, with a view to their implementation, or describing ways of making their implementation more likely to be successful. One of the aims of this study was to

²³ Chapter 7, Page 209.

identify avenues for improving the education of Romani children in Australia, but at the same time allowing perpetuation of the culture.

Acknowledgement that the Roma may not want to let their children enter the world of the Gajé may mean that aiming at the older (late or post-primary age) children may be somewhat more hopeful of initial change. The investigation of technical education, leading to the young adults finding work not in conflict with tradition, in particular, for girls and young women, but also for the young men would result in a less threatened feeling amongst the Roma, a vital step towards the education of future children.