

## **Book Review**

### *Traveller, Nomadic and Migrant Education*

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It is the measure of a persuasive, convincing and thought-provoking book when, after turning the last page, you find that you are left with a lot more questions to ponder than those that have been answered for you in the preceding text. For example, what initiatives and policies can best facilitate the integration and education of mobile populations? Does the provision of an appropriate and suitable education demand the settlement of such nomadic populations, at least for a certain period of time? Is there a useful distinction to be made between the cultural traditions and norms that fuel movement, as opposed to "mere" economic and commercial necessity? What geographies and populations work "best" in providing messages and lessons to which other countries and groups can aspire, both in a literal and metaphorical sense? And, above all else, does education – for mobile populations and other such groups – have to take place in schools and other public/state institutions or can education now be delivered, thanks largely to advancing Information and Communications Technology (ITC), via a number of imaginative and innovative methods that allows for nomadism and education to cohabit and stop being regarded as somehow mutually exclusive? Thoughts, arguments, opinion on all of the above rage on, of course, but *Traveller, Nomadic and Migrant Education* makes a bold and ambitious contribution to the debates and acts as a fascinating example of the advantages and drawbacks of aiming "big" and sharing experiences from a range of geographies and communities under the banner of a single edited text book.

As part of the established Routledge Research in Education series, this multidisciplinary edited collection gathers together an eclectic mix of interests, topics, research

methods and scholars that takes the intrigued reader across the globe in search of established and new ideas, knowledges and practices that relate to the education of "Traveller, nomadic and migrant" communities. It is a highly ambitious task to bring such diverse elements together and as William Binchy (p. Xxv) concedes in the first sentence of his preface, "This is a difficult and challenging book." But what makes it such hard work for editors, authors and readers alike? For one thing, and taking into account the numerous editorial disclaimers across the work, the reach of this project is rather stretched, both in geographic terms and in group terms. It is evident, by the time we reach the final "Respondent's text" contribution of Judith Gouwens (p.221-224), that similar (but by no means identical) experiences of discrimination in different types of education systems only unites the communities under discussion so far. This is not to fault editorial selection of the case studies that are presented here, as such. The fourteen substantive chapters that comprise this collection certainly display, to different degrees, the qualities that we look for in chapters that can feed into detailed debates surrounding the general topic under discussion – in essence, what is the historical and current position of Traveller, nomadic and migrant education across a rapidly changing world and what can be done to improve the experiences (and learning) such groups encounter?

In order to connect the geographies and issues under discussion, the organising themes proposed by Kenny and Danaher in their introduction (p.1-12) are: "mobilities and identities" (that is, the cultural and economic values and practices of nomadism), "status" (here meaning the labels and attachments that officialdom places upon such communities) and "prejudice and place" (defined as the dominance and challenge of sedentary ideology to nomadic norms and operations). These themes are solid foundations, in actual fact, and are productive as a kind of guiding

framework for the individual contributions on display. However, as is the issue with many such edited collections, some authors stick to the given editorial remit a lot more than others and as such this book might be best drawn upon for certain individual parts rather than the collective whole. Having said this, whether located in Scotland, Australia, Italy, Spain, England, Russia, Nigeria, Ireland or India, it is clear that such communities are indeed connected in a most fundamental way, and, for a host of different reasons, they are not accessing or taking-up the education they are entitled to. At times this resistance and refusal to participate and be included within state systems of education is actively chosen for very sound “internal” group/community reasons (witness, in particular, the illuminating chapter by the ethnographer Martin Levinson regarding the “interface between Gypsy culture and the educational system in England,” p.59), at other times exclusion from school-based systems is enforced and is the legacy of a hostility that runs deep over many years towards groups who are seen as “other” in just about every sense (witness, in particular, the struggles of the Rabaris of Kachchh in India, as detailed by the linguist Caroline Dyer).

Indeed, this is a theme – inclusion, exclusion, “other” – that runs through most of the chapters that are presented in this collection and is also reflected upon by the editors in opening and concluding the book. In terms of other chapters of note, it is difficult to pick and choose in a rounded or meaningful way as different readers, with different concerns and needs, will select those chapters that most apply to their interests. For example, given my own research interests and preferences, I draw most from those half-dozen or so chapters that deal specifically with the plight and situation of Roma, Gypsy and Traveller groups in Scotland, Spain, Ireland, Australia and England. Then again, it is interesting and perhaps telling to note that the individual chapters I enjoyed reading and learning from the most in this collection were actually examining the “reclaiming” of language by the Sami in Norway (Özerk) as well as the story and fate of the travelling attractionist Gappi family in Padua, Italy (Gobbo). This revelation goes to show, perhaps, that you really cannot judge a book by its cover and you need to explore and open your mind to new ideas and experiences outside your usual and specific field of study. What can be said, in conclusion, is that the range and wealth of geographies, illustrations, communities and research methods on offer in this finely edited collection is unmatched, to my knowledge, by any other comparable text in the general area and for this reason alone the book should be an essential item in any educationalist’s library where the trials and tribulations of people who move, and the education they receive, is a key scholarly concern.