



Developing Early Years Literacies through
Gypsy, Roma and Traveller heritage

Good Practice Guide

For working with early years Gypsy, Roma
and Traveller students



I Climbed The Tree*

I climbed the tree because it felt good. I knew that I could trust its wood.

I climbed the tree to challenge me, to see just how high I could be.

I climbed the tree for the thrill. I knew it wouldn't make me ill.

I climbed the tree to show them all, I could be so very tall.

I climbed the tree to get away, sometimes it's hard to stay.

I climbed the tree because I could, and if you can then you should.

I climbed the tree to help me see, all that was in front of me.

But most of all, more than anything else – I climbed the tree

because I'm myself and I wouldn't want to be anyone else.

*This poem was inspired by a 6-year-old English Romani boy, who was in the process of a school exclusion. This was an incredibly stressful time for him and his family. During our observation, he climbed a tree – an act that conveyed more than words ever could. Our creative designer, Katy Boswell, encapsulated this act in a poem.

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Who is this guide for?

This good practice guide is intended for schools, local authorities (LAs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and practitioners who are supporting and working with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and families.

It has been developed as part of the University of East Anglia's (UEA) ROMLIT project, which was funded through the Joyce Morris Legacy Fund on Early Years Literacies.

The ROMLIT project team worked with schools, communities and families and identified ways in which young children and families from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities are best supported to develop diverse literacies at home, in their communities and at school.

Acknowledgements

The ROMLIT project team would like to thank all the individuals and organisations that have contributed to this project.



1) ROMLIT's approach to literacy

1.1 What are literacies?

When people talk about literacy, they often think about phonics, reading, writing and how to test these 'formal skills'. These are important, but they are not the only aspects of literacy that matter.

For ROMLIT, literacy is embedded in daily social practices, both at home and outside of it, rather than simply a set of skills¹.

We prefer to talk about literacies rather than literacy, because we want to stress their diversity and multiplicity in terms of form, content and medium through which they are expressed. Literacies, therefore, are daily practices which can be expressed through different means of communication, such as writing, reading, singing and talking. Literacies can be intergenerational, emotional, traditional and cultural. This means that literacies are complex, dynamic and contextual.

1.2 How does literacy learning happen?

ROMLIT recognises that literacy learning happens through a diverse range of interactions and practices. Formal literacy learning, including reading and writing, happens in different spaces including educational settings.

Informal literacy learning occurs in everyday life in communities and families, including through participation in shared activities.

The toys, language(s), tablets, mobile phones, books and other things used at home with siblings, parents/carers and grandparents and others all play an important role in literacy learning.

1.3 Are all literacies valued equally?

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children often find themselves in settings that are alien or hostile to their culture, background and literacy traditions.

Their everyday literacy practices may not fit with conventions in the formal education system or expectations within current government policy². In mainstream school settings, written traditions are often valued more than oral traditions, while literacy learning is often treated as though it happens the same way for all children everywhere³.

Little is known about the literacy practices of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families. Their literacies are often ignored or undervalued by early years practitioners, educational authorities and the public⁴.

One result is that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children are sometimes viewed as 'difficult' by schools⁵ and treated as though their literacy practices are deficient and in need of correction.



1.4 How does this guide support literacy learning?

This guide shows ways to learn from and build on the diverse literacy practices of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. It shares ways in which young children and families from these communities can be best supported to develop diverse literacies at home, in their communities and at school.

Further to this, the guide has been developed by and with members of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities and provides early years practitioners with a resource that can act as a catalyst for literacy development within their contexts; this practice is in line with best practice in Europe⁶.



**Developing Early Years Literacies through
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2) Who are the Gypsy, Roma and Travellers?

People mean different things when they say 'Gypsy', 'Roma' and 'Traveller' people. Some people do not like these terms at all.

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities are very diverse. They have varied experiences, traditions, customs and practices. They use different languages and dialects. They also have diverse histories.

Did you know that there are Manouche, Sinti, Gitanos and Romanichel communities in Western Europe?

The Kalderash, Lovari, Churari, Gurbeti and Boyash are from Central and Eastern Europe.

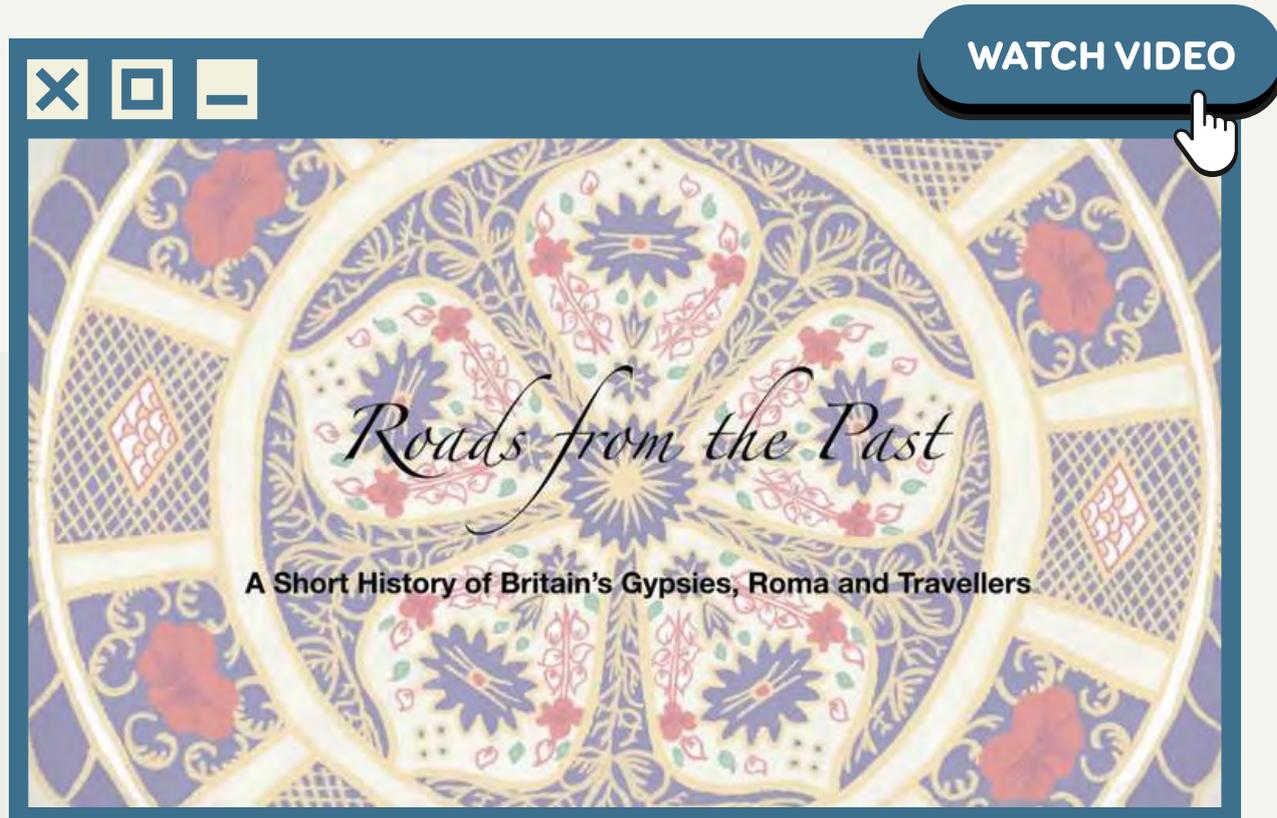
Pavee or Mincéirí Travellers are from Ireland. Nawkens or Nachin Travellers are from Scotland. The Kale are from Wales.

There are also English Gypsies, Showmen and Boaters. And this is not a complete list!

Even though there are so many different Gypsy, Roma and Travellers who have been living among us for hundreds of years, many people know very little about them.

2.1 History, culture and community

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities have contributed to life and culture in the UK since the Middle Ages. Roma arrived in Europe from India in the 14th century⁷. The following short, animated video⁸ provides a brief history of Britain's Gypsy, Roma and Travellers.



2.2 Languages

Different Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities have distinct dialects and linguistic heritage.

Romani is an Indo-Aryan language. Its roots lie with people who travelled westwards from northern India about 1200 years ago⁹. Various dialects of Romani developed as the latter came into contact with different European languages. By the eighteenth century, different dialects of Romani were well established.

There are no reliable figures for the number of people who speak Romani globally. It is estimated that there are 10 million Romani speakers in the European Union¹⁰. This makes Romani the largest minority language in the EU.

In the UK, English and Welsh Romani speak English Romani or Angloromani. This is a dialect closely connected to those from continental Europe.

In 1926, 'The dialect of the Gypsies of Wales', compiled by the scholar and linguist John Sampson, was published. This dictionary of English and Welsh Romani words and phrases showed the richness of the language and gave an insight into lifestyle and culture¹¹. Romani (or Romanes) includes over 20 words for different kinds of road, showing the importance of travel to the Romani people.

Today much of this language is lost. But some Romani origin words remain and have moved into mainstream vocabulary. For example, the word 'savvy' is Romani and means to be knowledgeable.

Many Irish Travellers speak MincÉir Thari. MincÉir means 'Traveller' and Thari means 'talk', so the name could be translated as 'Traveller talk'. It is also called Shelta, Cant, or De Gammon. It is close to old Irish. MincÉir Thari has different dialects and spelling and is still widely used today¹².

Scottish Gypsies and Travellers, or Naken people, speak a version of Cant. The language is almost entirely oral and has different localised dialects influenced by geography, family and social practices. Scottish Cant is closer to other Romani languages than to Gaelic languages¹³.

2.3 Home learning environment

In Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, family units are often large. Cousins, aunts and uncles live close by each other. Families support each other in different ways, including sharing work opportunities and lending money in an emergency.

Learning is intergenerational and practical. Families often educate their children by giving them opportunities to take part in activities, including construction, caring for animals and income-producing activities. Children observe, participate in, and gradually assume a shared responsibility within the close and extended family.

Children develop embodied and emotional literacies through being present, while adults have 'grown-up' conversations with them on, for example, health, economic issues and working on daily tasks.

Some Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children can find it daunting to transition from the ways they learn at home to classroom learning¹⁴.

Some of the factors contributing to this are:

- Tasks are no longer rooted in real-life activity.
- Children are separated from their family unit and the close relationship with the adult mentor/teacher is not applicable in schools.

If they are living in a Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community, children move from belonging to the majority group to finding themselves in the minority.

2.4 Discrimination

Romani Gypsies, Irish Travellers, Roma, and Scottish and Welsh Gypsy and Travellers are all recognised ethnic groups under the UK's Equality Act 2010. However, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people face continuing discrimination.

An anti-bullying report highlighted that 86% of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students reported that the biggest challenge at school is bullying, followed by racism at 73%¹⁵.

Hate speech and hate crime are still very frequent against Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people. In relation to this, 78% of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people reported incidents of hate speech/crime occurring on a constant or daily basis¹⁶. This included discrimination from and within education and health services, online racial hatred, and incitement of racial hatred within the media. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people are the number one target of online hate speech in the UK¹⁷.



2.5 Inequalities

Structural social inequalities have meant that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities have been severely disadvantaged across a range of areas within society (e.g., education, health, employment, criminal justice¹⁸). Children and young people from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds have been systematically disadvantaged, which has resulted in:

- The lowest attainment of all ethnic groups throughout their school years¹⁹.
- Some of the highest rates of school exclusions.
- Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children are less likely to stay in education after the age of 16²⁰.

Ongoing discrimination in services and employment, mean that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities suffer health inequalities:

- Life expectancy is 10-12 years less than that of the non-Gypsy, Roma and Traveller population²¹.
- 42% of English Gypsies are affected by a long-term health condition, compared with 18% of the general population²².
- One in five Gypsy mothers will experience the loss of a child, compared with one in a hundred in the non-Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities²³.

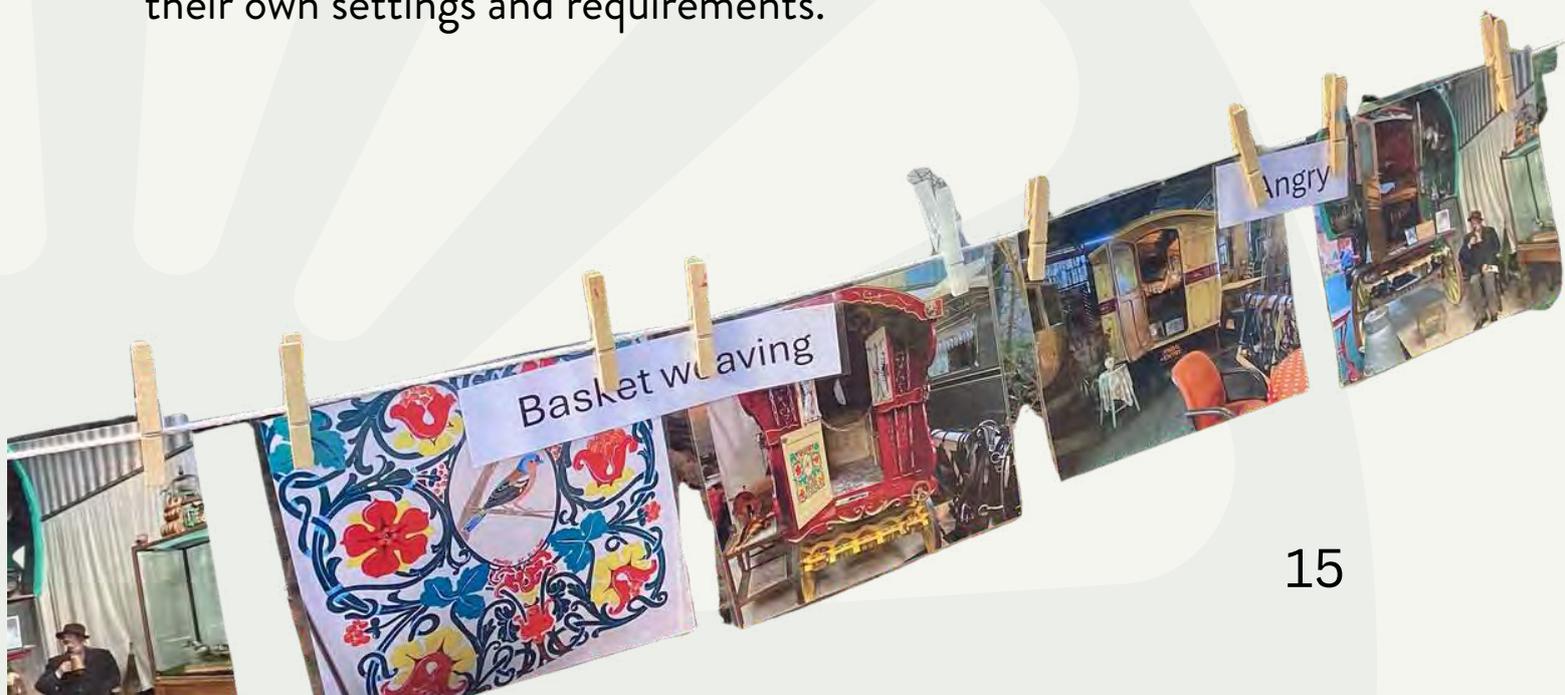
3) Creating an inclusive early years environment for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children

To effectively support Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children, early years settings must understand the complexity and richness of their literacies, cultures and histories. This requires challenging stereotypes and addressing discrimination through targeted training for all staff.

The ROMLIT model

Researchers from UEA partnered with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller organisations, communities, families and schools to develop resources that make the contribution of people from these backgrounds respected and recognised in education.

The following case studies demonstrate practical applications of our approach, with reflective questions to help educators adapt them to their own settings and requirements.



3.1 Case Study 1 – Continuous professional development “Developing early years literacies through Gypsy, Roma and Traveller heritage”

What this case study shows:

The ROMLIT project found that while schools had inclusive policies and ethos, many teachers felt unprepared to support Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families. Working with one partner school, the project identified key knowledge gaps and developed targeted solutions.

Key knowledge gaps identified: Staff identified three main areas where they needed support:

- Understanding Gypsy, Roma and Traveller cultures, lifestyles and history.
- Access to culturally relevant resources and activities.
- Awareness of specific language needs.

The solution: Targeted continuing professional development (CPD).

Sessions: ROMLIT developed practical training sessions addressing these gaps, using Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community knowledge and real experiences. The pilot sessions were delivered as one-hour after-school sessions to staff from the partner school.



Core training topics: The CPD training covered eight core areas:

1. Addressing myths, prejudice and discrimination.
2. Understanding Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children as learners.
3. The role of families and communities in learning.
4. Engaging effectively with families.
5. Heritage and culture in literacy learning.
6. Intergenerational influences on literacies.
7. Culturally appropriate resources.
8. Building on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller language and literacies.

How to make it work in practice - representation:

- Include Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in all teaching resources.
- Ensure these communities' voices are appropriately represented at every level.
- Specifically mention Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children in key documents, such as School Improvement Plans.

Curriculum and teaching approaches: Traditional school approaches can limit literacy to narrow definitions, excluding different ways of learning.

Many Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children respond well to:

- Physical, outdoor learning (such as Forest School approaches).
- Multiple and emotional learning approaches, using different senses and ways of communicating.
- Activities that build on intergenerational cultural knowledge passed down through families.

3.2 Case Study 2 - Integrating Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture into the curriculum

What this case study shows:

Weaving literacies that reflect Gypsy, Roma and Traveller heritage, such as oral storytelling, into the curriculum helps all children see the contribution of these groups and supports all children to develop oracy and listening skills.

Who was involved:

Romani-Gypsy storyteller Richard O'Neill, MBE, worked with the entire early years and Key Stage 1 (KS1) cohort across three different schools in Norfolk to collaboratively write a story titled 'The Perfect Playhouse'. The children also worked with illustrator Michelle Russell, from the Showman community, to illustrate the story. All three schools involved in the project have large numbers of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children, mainly comprised of English Romani students. The schools work closely with the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller service at Norfolk County Council, who also played a vital role in shaping the aims and outcomes of this activity.

Making it work in practice:

Richard and Michelle's work with teachers, students and families adopted a 'doing with' approach. This approach placed emphasis on co-creation and partnership, fostering trust, equity, resilience and meaningful engagement²⁴. Richard's sessions consisted of KS1 assemblies, where the idea for the story was launched, and was followed by smaller group sessions in which the children could develop their ideas alongside their teachers and teaching assistants. Follow-up sessions with Richard and Michelle took place via videoconferencing and in-person, in which they captured ideas from students, teachers and teaching assistants to integrate into the story.

Reflecting on the approach:

The approach in this case study fosters the idea that, whilst it is beneficial for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students to have their contribution recognised and supported by the school, this approach simultaneously serves the needs of all students. The two-way process resulted in the production of advanced literacies and school resources that represent all students, including those from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller background. The feedback from schools that participated in these sessions was excellent:

- According to one headteacher, it created an opportunity for 'students to write for a real-world purpose'.
- Teachers reported a genuine sense of engagement and excitement among students, particularly those from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds, who have often felt excluded from traditional educational approaches²⁵.

A student's drawing of a vardo (Romani wagon)



Richard O'Neill, MBE, 'storytelling' with early years and KS1 students



Reflective practitioner questions:

- How can you integrate Gypsy, Roma and Traveller contribution (as well as knowledge, heritage, history and culture) into daily literacy activities in your setting?
- In what ways can you show that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller knowledge, heritage, history and culture is valued in your setting and holds equal importance to other knowledges, heritages, histories and cultures?
- Do you use any books in your setting written by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller authors?
- Do you use any books that represent any forms of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller life, culture and experiences?
- Can you create opportunities for working with (i.e., 'doing with') Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families and students in your setting?

3.3 Case Study 3 - The focused approach

What this case study shows:

Taking a whole-school approach by involving children in actively shaping a focused event to celebrate Gypsy, Roma and Traveller literacies can build confidence among Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and support understanding of such groups in a school.

The setting:

Sycamore²⁶ Primary School, Norfolk, have established strong relationships with families from the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community. The school included 'improving offer to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students and families' on their school improvement plan. It is located near a local authority site inhabited by the same family for three generations. Most children from the site attend the school and are English Romani.

Making it work in practice:

Through discussions ROMLIT researchers and school staff organised, Romani children in the school decided they wanted to explore 'what it means to be a Gypsy' and share this with family, friends and staff at a 'Big Day' event in the school.



The children had a tutorial with a Romani designer who showed them how to incorporate traditional Romani designs into invitations for their parents. The latter were invited to join the session, which included cooking and talking around the campfire. Younger siblings were encouraged to join in. The 'Big Day' was held in the school's Forest School setting. The site was prepared especially for the group, creating a culturally relevant space. There was Romani flag bunting, a special 'cosy area' with some objects typical to a Romani trailer, books about Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, and pictures depicting Romani life.

The Big Day honoured the oral storytelling tradition of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller groups with the retelling of a traditional Romani folk tale around the campfire. This was followed by opportunities to engage with various literacies. The children explored 'what it means to be a Gypsy' in unstructured spontaneous play including in the trailer role-play area and through exploring and describing the natural world. They also cooked around the campfire with family, staff and friends and participated in practical activities which hold great cultural relevance for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people, such as wood whittling and basket weaving. With a trusted adult, the children created short videos expressing 'what it means to be a Gypsy' within and beyond the school gates.



Reflecting on the approach:

The focused approach supported:

- Learning in mixed age groups including siblings, extended family and parents, replicating the literacies learning that takes place at home and in the wider community.
- Engagement with traditional and contemporary Romani texts and narratives that reflect Romani culture, but are often ignored by education settings.
- Linguistic identification/representation – traditional Romani language was used throughout the day, and Romani words were recorded in writing for the school to display.
- Opportunities for Romani children to talk with pride about culturally meaningful stories, practices, and experiences.
- The creation of literacies **with** children, rather than for them.
- Staff reported increased confidence and engagement from the Romani students who had taken part. In one case, there was a marked improvement in writing stamina and resilience in class work. The focused approach can be useful if the students/families have suffered prejudice, discrimination or traumatic events linked to their cultural identity.

Reflective practitioner questions:

- What elements of the 'focused approach' event at Sycamore Primary School might you be able to adapt to work in your context?
- How do you engage with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents? Is this successful? Could you implement any of the activities from this case study to engage parents?
- How do you teach literacies in your setting? Could you use any of the approaches discussed here?
- Sycamore Primary School has made their work with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families sustainable by embedding it into their school policy. How might you be able to embed sustainability in the work you do with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families?



3.4 Case Study 4 – Working with literacies at a horse stable yard

What this case study shows:

Understanding how Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children develop literacies in their communities can enhance literacy learning in educational settings. Informal literacies are complementary to formal literacy learning and they should be recognised by the formal curriculum.

Making it work in practice:

Literacy observations were undertaken in a stable yard as horses and nature play an important part in Romani culture:

Children range from 2 to 13 years old. They work and play together in mixed age groups. A cart, traditionally decorated, is brought out by some adults to be ridden along the country lanes. The younger children are interested and keen to ride in it. The adults explain what it means to them to be Romani, free from mainstream culture: “we are not ants who follow everyone else”. The children appear to embody this idea through their unstructured play. It is often risky, but the children appear to have agreed personal and group boundaries and successfully resolve differences among themselves without any adult intervention. There is no guidance from adults during the play. The children work alongside the adults to carry out the tasks needed to keep horses. All adults are responsible for all children at the yard, not just their own. Later, children mimic the physical tasks they observed earlier, playing with wheelbarrows, tyres, and bikes and digging in their play. The children explain that the ‘most important thing’ is ‘your bond with the horse’. They discuss how important it is for the horse to trust you and the ways to build a connection with it, such as how to physically position yourself. They comment that riding a horse can bring up a range of feelings including being ‘calm’, ‘nervous’, ‘brave’, and ‘anxious’.

Reflecting on the approach:

The children demonstrate deep knowledge and understanding of how to care for and ride a horse. They have a vast range of subject-specific vocabulary linked to equestrian care and their cultural connection to the land at the stables. They are also able to coordinate their activities and negotiate complex issues, often with little support from adults.

No formal riding lessons, books, or the internet have been used to teach the children. All knowledge has been transmitted from parents and other family members to children verbally and through direct hands-on experience with the horses. To improve their skills, they are encouraged to rely on sensory feedback from the horses and the environment and their own intuition.

Observations of community life in the stable demonstrated a wealth of literacies being used and developed outside education settings. Heritage, meaningful engagement and intergenerational learning lie at the centre of this approach to developing literacies.

Reflective practitioner questions:

- How and why might it be useful to understand the ways Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children develop literacies in their own communities?
- Which aspects of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller learning discussed above is valued in traditional school learning?
- Which is not currently valued and why?
- How could Gypsy, Roma and Traveller literacies be incorporated harmoniously with traditional school learning?

3.5 Case Study 5 – Making literacy resources together

What this case study shows:

Making resources (e.g., books and photobooks) that give opportunities for families to share their heritage and life experiences helps children develop identity and self-esteem alongside early literacy development, as well as making Gypsy, Roma and Traveller cultures more visible.

What happened:

ROMLIT researchers worked initially with parents and grandparents with Romanian and Roma heritage to share ideas for making classroom resources (e.g., books and photobooks) to support early literacy development for their children and all children in the early years setting. As a collective endeavour, the group decided to adapt a traditional Eastern European folktale, called “Stone Soup”, and also produced a photobook called “Things I Love”.

For the photobook, parents were asked to send in photographs of their children at home, doing different activities which they enjoyed. The text for both books was written in English and Romanian, keeping sentences short and repetitive as some parents had low levels of literacy in both languages. One family sent so many photographs documenting their son’s journey from his birth in Italy to family life now in the East of England, accompanied by bilingual text, that we co-created a new book entitled “Hello/Bună”.

In later sessions, the children joined their families and the books were read together as a group. Parents were encouraged to take the lead and activities were designed and implemented based on the texts that were co-created. At the end of the collaborative sessions, all books were professionally produced and a ‘story sack’ was created to accompany the “Stone Soup”. The story sack contained various resources for use in early years literacy settings, including the co-created books and additional craft and literacy activities that are appropriate for early years children.

Making it work in practice:

The school had already reported that they were working hard to establish good relations with Roma families and the ROMLIT project helped to contribute to that 'relationship building'. In addition to the school's relationship building, the ROMLIT team: i) produced bilingual flyers to advertise the collaborative 'resource making' sessions; ii) made contact with the families on the playground and via home visits; and iii) used Romanian as the main session language. These additional steps helped to ensure that all families engaged with the sessions.

Reflecting on the approach:

The relationships built up with families by taking this collaborative, intergenerational approach has helped their children's learning in a wider sense. There is now greater understanding between staff and families over many aspects of school life (including, for example, the need for regular school attendance). One child, whose mum came to every session, is now excelling in mathematics. The parents and grandparents reported that they took great pride in seeing their children's literacy skills in the joint sessions. The sessions also gave an informal opportunity for school staff to talk about the English school system to the families and to discuss the expectations that they had for their children at the school. Feedback from the school about the sessions was very positive.

One staff member commented: “when we talk about where children come from, they share their stories. I see children’s eyes light up if we are talking about something they are familiar with”. The staff member felt children needed more opportunities to personally identify with topics. The families told us they were very proud to be making resources to help all children with their literacy. The children were very happy and intrigued to see themselves in print; the older children took great care in reading the text in both languages.

Reflective practitioner questions:

- Do you have any books written by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller adults and/or children which reflect their journeys in different countries?
- In what way can you use literacy resources that show the richness of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller heritage and culture in the UK, and in wider European contexts, within your lessons?
- Are there any bilingual books, reflecting children’s home languages, that you could use within your classroom?
- Can you create opportunities for working with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families to include their contributions to their children’s literacy development and make links between school and home learning environments?

3.6 Reflections on engaging with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families

Context:

Parents with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller heritage have a range of personal experiences of formal school learning. Some will have completed compulsory education and continued to further or higher education but for many parents school experiences were negative. They often faced discrimination and ways of learning wholly alien to their personal lives and their home learning environment. These memories can make parents suspicious of schools yet wanting to be part of their children's school experience. Quite often parents are keen in supporting their children's education but they do not know how to get involved or what is expected of them.

ROMLIT reflections:

- During the project, we found that the first most important step was to build trust with the families and help them to recognise themselves as partners with the school in their children's learning. Some families may not be keen to get involved with the school. Contact is often around a 'problem' (e.g., non/poor attendance). Additionally, some families have a limited understanding of what a school expects from them.
- Having a dedicated contact person within the school, who builds trust and is the initial point of contact for families, is very important to breaking down barriers and creating a welcoming environment²⁷.

- The ideal situation would be to have someone who can speak the home language of families, but in most settings this is probably not possible. In one school where all the families with Roma heritage came from Romania, we joined the English as an Additional Language (EAL) lead in the playground. As one of the researchers spoke Romanian, it was possible to explain directly to the families about the project and the sessions we would be running in schools for parents and families. The EAL lead knew the children well as they come to her for additional language support. She was able to build up a picture of family circumstances which could affect the child's learning and share this with classroom staff.
- Having someone who families feel they can go to, in order to ask questions or raise concerns, is important. One teacher working with ROMLIT, talked about learning to greet the parents and children in their home language and how much a difference it made to their sense of belonging. She described how one mother's face lit up when she was greeted in her home language.

Considerations for practitioners:

- Having a 'named' person in a school, as a point of contact for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families, can help overcome barriers and develop trust²⁸.
- Although language can be a barrier to building trust with families, communication is also about tone of voice, body language and other non-verbal means of communication.
- Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families may face many problems. Examples include but are not limited to the following: i) possible eviction; ii) low levels of literacy within first language; iii) cultural differences in terms of how they are expected to interact with schools and contribute to their children's learning; iv) lack of understanding about expectations of attendance (e.g., presuming the school term dates are the same as in Romania); and v) concerns about authority.
- Parents may also not have attended school or they might have faced discrimination at school.
- Some Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children may have already lived in different countries across Europe and may already speak three or four languages.

Suggestions for practitioners:

Ways to engage Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and families in the school environment include:

- Establish a key person in the school with responsibility for taking an interest in and making contact with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents and families.
- Use first language where this is possible.
- Use culturally appropriate resources.
- Share an event with a school which you know develops good practice (or contact ROMLIT to receive suggestions).
- Sharing good practice can include hosting a talk on the history and contribution of Gypsy, Roma and Travellers in the UK and Europe, promoting books and resources that celebrate Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture and history (such as those we created as part of ROMLIT and are hosted on our website), displaying materials that positively represent these communities and so on.
- Ask parents and students from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds what they think are appropriate ways of engaging with them.
- Make sure you regularly attend high quality CPD training on unconscious bias, fighting racism and stereotypes and working with Gypsy, Roma and Travellers (e.g., contact us to check if ROMLIT can offer your organisation such training).

4) Conclusion

This guide has been produced to assist early years practitioners who are supporting or will be supporting Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children's literacy development. The guide can also be used by anybody else working in these educational contexts, including parents and carers.

The guide highlights areas of good practice through ROMLIT's work with several schools in the East of England and provides practical examples which, it is hoped, will be an inspiration to educators who work with children from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds. The development of discrete case studies was deliberate; the intention being that they could act as a catalyst to support early years practitioners with the planning and implementation of literacy practices for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children within their contexts. This guide is not intended to be (nor should it aim to be) exhaustive.

Finally, the focus of the ROMLIT project is on early years literacies of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children. However, this guide can be used with other groups too. The need to develop inclusive, supportive and culturally appropriate literacy resources applies to all children and communities, wherever they are. Feel free to make this guide your own so you can best support the literacies of all those with whom you work.

Notes

- 1 Street, B. V. (1984). *Literacy in theory and practice*. Cambridge University Press.
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