

Me, My Future and the School: Gypsy Pupils' Perception of Formal Education in Hungary

Veronika Lukács

Education and International Development

Eötvös Loránd University of Sciences, Budapest, Hungary

Abstract

As in several other European countries, Hungary is faced with an apparent mismatch between formal education and Gypsy pupils. Gypsy pupils' perceived low attainment is generally labelled as 'the Gypsy problem.' Although there is abundant literature on this topic, it largely represents the host society's viewpoint. The table has rarely been turned around to ask: what is it the Gypsies themselves want to get out of school education? This paper aims to raise this question in the framework of a case study conducted over three months in a class of overwhelmingly Gypsy pupils in a primary school in Budapest, Hungary. Specifically, the paper addresses the question whether or not school represents an important source of knowledge for these pupils and their families.

Keywords: anthropology, ethnic minorities in mainstream education, Hungarian Gypsies, motivation to learn, school failure, teacher attitudes

Introduction

The aim of this study is to describe and analyse the role which Gypsy pupils and their parents perceive formal school education to play in their life. Given the considerable differences in geographical location, mother tongue, financial stability, access to information, education (Forray & Mohácsi, 2002) and ethnicity, talking about ‘the’ Gypsy child is extremely problematic, if not impossible. That is why my case study, conducted between 1 August and 30 October 2006, focused on a particular group of Gypsy children: the pupils in Year 7, E Street Primary School, Budapest, Hungary.

In Hungary, the school-Gypsy relationship had been studied and documented overwhelmingly from the point of view of the dominant society. There is an abundance of literature on Gypsy pupils’ low school attendance and attainment, and the large gaps between the levels of education of the Gypsy and Magyar¹ population. These facts have generally been attributed to cultural differences as well as a complex set of socio-economic problems faced by Gypsies, such as poverty, poor health, inferior living conditions, widespread discrimination, and weak or fragmented political representation. Some researchers and educators, emphasising the crucial effects of socio-economic factors, draw a parallel between Gypsies’ living conditions and school experience, and those of the poor, regardless of ethnicity (for instance Forray & Mohácsi, 2002; Fejes, 2005).

In general, policy papers, educational journals, educators and Gypsy

¹ The term ‘Magyar’ is the name of the dominant ethnic group in Hungary. The label ‘Hungarians’ would be misleading as it denotes both ethnicity and citizenship. Gypsies living in Hungary are also Hungarians in terms of citizenship. In this paper, therefore, ‘Magyar’ is the name of the oppositional ethnic group of Gypsies.

activists argue that unless attention is paid to all of the above problems, Gypsies' access to education and, consequently, employment opportunities will not be improved. School education is valued highly in this discourse: it is looked at as a—if not *the*—key to Gypsies' 'development,' escape from their present 'squalor' and successful integration into Hungarian society.

But do the Gypsies want to be 'integrated'? If yes, into what and to what extent? If yes, do *they* perceive school as a stepping stone towards that integration? If not, what do *they* go to school for? What do *they* want from school education? I believe that asking these questions is important. According to the Austrian social anthropologist Elisabeth Tauber (unpublished review), not every culture considers school education as a basic human right. The conviction, she continues, that the school carries universal values emanates from our own (sedentary, European) deeply-rooted ideals. Researching among the Sinti of Southern Italy, Tauber (unpublished review) came to the conclusion that—even when Gypsy children attended regularly as was compulsory—the school did not necessarily represent 'cultural values' for them or their parents, as opposed to non-Gypsy people. Yet, Gypsies viewed schools as places of learning, although what they wanted their children to learn there was very different from the school curriculum. They wanted their children to learn about the 'gajo' (non-Gypsies) and their ways of life and thinking so that they would be able to use this knowledge in later dealings with them (Tauber, unpublished review). A similar duality towards school education, being partly embraced and partly rejected, is documented by various authors, for instance in connection with Greek Gypsies by Ivi Daskalaki (2005), Irish Travellers by Máirín Kenny (1997) and in general by Jean-Pierre Liégeois (1987). This is the starting point of my study. To answer the questions I briefly outlined above, my case study centred around the following problem:

Do Gypsies consider school education as a peripheral source of knowledge (the primary source being the family and community) and, therefore, want the school to teach their children only basic numeracy and literacy, regarded as necessary tools for future prosperity in a non-Gypsy world?

Gypsies in Hungary

The various groups collectively labelled Gypsies form the largest ethnic minority group in Hungary. According to estimates, Gypsies are 6% of the total Hungarian population (Kemény & Janky, 2003: 7). As illustrated by *Table 1*, Gypsies living in Hungary belong to three major groups: the Romungró (also known as musician Gypsies or ‘Magyar Gypsies,’ *magyar cigány*), the Rom, and the Boyash (or Beash). My study focused on a predominantly Romungró class.

Table 1 Gypsy Groups in Hungary

| Group | % of total Gypsy population | Language | Arrival in Hungary | Traditional occupations |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Romungró | 70% | Hungarian | 15 th century | musicians, traders of goods |
| Rom | 20% | dialects of Romany (“Gypsy dialects”) | late 19 th – early 20 th centuries | itinerant craftsmen, horsedealers |
| Boyash (or Beash) | 10% | archaic Romanian | late 1800s | foresters, troughmakers |

Sources: Stewart (1997: 10); Furray and Mohácsi (2002: 8); Fushimi (2002: 7).

School Provision for Gypsy Pupils

Since the ‘Gypsy question’ was regarded as a purely social problem in the socialist era, educational policy and practice was aimed at sending every Gypsy child to school, in hopes of rescuing them from poverty, delinquency and discrimination in which they were perceived to exist. Tests carried out among primary school first-graders were understood to show Gypsy children’s academic and socialisation levels to be below those of Magyar children. The resulting Gypsy-dense ‘special’ classes worked with a less-demanding curriculum which provided the pupils with only a fraction of what was taught in regular classes. Originally, ‘Gypsy classes’ were planned only as temporary places to help the pupils ‘catch up’ with the mainstream, and the aim was to send them back to the mainstream once their knowledge had reached the ‘appropriate’ level (Diósi, 2002: 77). However, generally speaking this re-routing never happened and Gypsy classes became a permanent institution that guaranteed no access to further education (Diósi, 2002).

A positive result of Gypsies’ mass schooling in the era was that the percentage of those completing the 8 years of primary education rose to 77% in 1993 from 26% in 1971² (Lannert, 1997). On the other hand, the number of those having graduated from secondary school rose only minimally, and that of those completing higher education did not change (Radó, 1997). Although the majority of Gypsies now have a basic education and can read and write, the academic gap between Gypsies and non-Gypsies has continued to widen, because the expansion of secondary schools leading into tertiary education and the expansion of tertiary education itself has failed to reach Gypsy students (Radó, 1997).

² In the 25-29 year-old age group.

The 1990 Act on Local Self-Government, while acknowledging Gypsies as an ethnic group, entitles all minority groups to receive minority language and culture education but prescribes ‘supplementary’ classes only for Gypsies. Similarly, the 1993 Act on the Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities guarantees the language rights of the 13 minority communities living in Hungary and recognised by the Government. It rules that ethnic minority pupils have the right to cultivate their culture and language in school. At the same time, the Act also mentions that for Gypsy pupils supplementary classes can be set up.

The ‘Gypsy Child’ in the Family: Socialisation, Education and Schooling

By way of introduction, I borrow Forray and Mohácsi’s (2002) illustration of the mismatch between the school’s self image and expectations on the one hand and, on the other, Gypsy families’ image of the school and what they do or do not expect from it. *See Table 2.*

Researchers (e.g. Kenny, 1997; Forray, 2000; Forray & Mohácsi, 2002; Daskalaki, 2005) agree that Gypsy parents want the school to teach their children only numeracy and literacy, and a basic set of skills to help them secure their future prosperity in the host society. Beyond this point, however, all other knowledge is unnecessary and unwanted. The researchers explain this refusal with various reasons. First, the family and community being primary sources of knowledge, the school is allowed to play only a peripheral role (Forray, 2000; Daskalaki, 2005). Second, and as a consequence of the above, families do not wish to delegate educational and disciplinary roles to schools (Forray, 2000). Third, seeing prolonged school education as a threat to their traditional lifestyle and values, Gypsy parents are afraid that it will alienate

Table 2 The School's Aims and Expectations vs. Gypsies' Interpretation of the School

| School's Self-image | Gypsies' Image of the School |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Schooling and Educational Aims | |
| School function is based on a social agreement of aims, values, norms, etc. | School function is based on laws and regulations (forces, punishes and retaliates) |
| School prepares children (pupils, students) for life | Children's 'real' life is happening here and now, outside of school |
| School offers better life chances through teaching and learning | School teaches literacy and numeracy, and basic knowledge |
| School determines what to teach | Child (family) has the right to determine desired knowledge to be learned |
| School evaluates pupils through grades | School evaluates pupils through teacher's praise and scolding |
| School language is the language of the cultured society, which we all equally understand and speak | School language cannot be understood perfectly, but schools do not teach it to children, either |
| 2. School Education | |
| During term time, school must have priority | Family and community always have priority |
| Family has the duty to send the child to school prepared | School has the duty to prepare the child in the way demanded by the school |
| School takes over educational tasks from family | The task of educating a child belongs only to family and community |
| 3. 'Magyar' School and Gypsy Family | |
| Pupils/students are always 'children' in school in relation to teachers | Children are really children only during pre-puberty |
| The essence of school work has nothing to do with emotions | School is only acceptable if teachers are connected to children through personal, emotional ties |
| In school conflicts arise only between teacher and pupil and between pupil and pupil | The essence of school conflicts is that they are between Gypsies and non-Gypsies |
| During school hours parents should not be in the school | Parents (family, community) have the duty to protect the child in school also |
| Gypsy pupils are unmotivated, aggressive and destructive | Teachers and classmates are racist, hostile and full of stereotypes |

Source: Adapted from Forray and Mohácsi (2002: 20).

young people from the community (Ní Shuinéar, 1993; Forray, 1998, 2000; Kiddle, 1999). Fourth, there is no cause-and-effect relationship between success in school and success on the labour market, as far as Gypsies are concerned (Forray, 1998: 4). This, again, is attributable to various reasons: (a) skills required by traditional Gypsy occupations are not based on school-knowledge; (b) due to discrimination and growing Gypsy unemployment, the status of formal education has further decreased after the change of regime; and (c) school success does not earn prestige for the individual in Gypsy communities (Forray, 1998; Fejes, 2005).

School requirements often clash with traditional Gypsy values and the child's socialisation process within the family and community. The authors quoted above have pointed out that in the Gypsy world there is no such category as puberty. That is, the Gypsy child suddenly turns into a small adult at the age of 12-13, and is required to help the parents earn money and, often, to prepare for marriage. Unlike their non-Gypsy contemporaries, at home they are regarded as adults, yet in school their teachers will treat them as children (Forray 2000; Fejes, 2005). Another source of misunderstanding between the school and Gypsy families is a difference of priorities. For Gypsies, family comes first and only then, firmly second, comes the school. In particular, the child participates in weddings and mourning along with the rest of the family, even though it may result in missing school days. Similarly, Gypsy children, especially girls, are expected to help with housework and look after younger siblings from a relatively early age. This, again, often prevents them from going to school. In such instances, parents will expect the school to understand. The school, on the other hand, will expect parents to make sure the child attends classes regardless of what happens at home (Forray, 1998; Daskalaki, 2005).

The way Gypsy parents bring up their children is also believed to be in

stark contrast with the world of the school. At home, a child's day is not structured according to a clock: they are fed whenever they ask for food, allowed to sleep or play whenever they want (Formoso, 2000; Fejes, 2005). Consequently, Gypsy children develop neither the need nor the ability to adhere to timetables and the pre-structured work of school (Formoso, 2000). Parents generally do not restrict their children in any way but foster their independence and personal freedom, including free expression of feelings (Formoso, 2000; Zatta, 2002; Fejes, 2005). Parents do not punish or frustrate the child, either: the child learns the group's norms and values through the positive or negative reactions his or her actions and words elicit from the group (Kenny, 1997; Formoso, 2000). Thus, Gypsy children have "no self-control" (Fejes, 2005: 4), and they are not prepared to take orders from teachers, accept arbitrary rules and punishments, or control their emotions (Liégeois, 1987; Formoso, 2000; Fejes, 2005). The independence parents allow their children also involves entrusting to them the decision whether or not to go to school (Kenny, 1997; Daskalaki, 2005). Also, Gypsies live in the present, without much consideration for the future (MacAongusa in Kenny, 1997; Gustafsson in Formoso, 2000; Formoso, 2000), whereas the school operates "within a future-oriented time frame of postponed gratification" (MacAongusa in Kenny, 1997: 53).

More often than not, several generations of Gypsies live under the same roof. Stewart (1997), Formoso (2000) and others point out the necessity for communal living, since this lifestyle provides Gypsies with a strong sense of protection—financial, emotional, physical, intellectual—as a defense against pressure and hostility from the majority group. This type of living, no matter how natural and nurturing for Gypsies, is frowned upon by the school (Formoso, 2000; personal communication with E Street Primary staff). The school sees poverty and/or 'bad morals' as the underlying causes, and labels the parents as

negligent for failing to provide a quiet corner for their children to do their homework and sleep undisturbed (personal communication with teachers at E Street Primary).

Linguistic differences are also believed to aggravate Gypsy pupils' difficulties in school (Liégeois, 1987; Réger, 1990; Fejes, 2005). Although 86.9% of Gypsies speak Hungarian as their mother tongue (Kemény and Janky, 2003: 19), the variant they speak at home is thought to differ from standard Hungarian. Fejes (2005) calls attention to Derdák and Varga's argument according to which Bernstein's (1975) concept of restricted codes, typical of the speech of lower class people and suitable for the transmission of concrete, practical experiences rather than abstract concepts, is highly relevant to Gypsies' speech patterns. Derdák and Varga argue that the difficulties encountered by Gypsy pupils in school are attributable to a switch between the home environment and the conceptual structure of the school's world, rather than bilingualism (Fejes, 2005).

E Street Primary and Year 7

The Scene: E Street Primary

Budapest's Magdolna Quarter, in which E Street Primary is situated, is described by the capital's rehabilitation plan as follows: "One of the poorest parts ... where slums are robustly beginning to appear. The environmental conditions have greatly deteriorated, the buildings are ... of an exceedingly bad quality, and the proportion of small flats lacking comforts (such as electricity or bathroom) is large. The rate of disadvantaged families and the Roma³

³ E.g. Gypsy.

population is high. The Magdolna Quarter exhibits the highest unemployment rate ... and lags furthest behind in terms of schooling, which signals social problems. Due to the continuous deterioration of the physical environment and the persisting downward movement of the social spiral, the Magdolna Quarter is increasingly falling behind the rest...”⁴ (Rév8 Rt, 2005: 41). Many of the families living in the schools’ neighbourhood belong to the poorest segments of society “struggling to make ends meet on a daily basis” (E Street Primary, undated: 1). Since most Gypsy adults lack vocational training, they are gravely affected by unemployment. They tend to engage in seasonal work and receive welfare (E Street Primary, undated).

E Street Primary, with 95% of its 160 pupils being Gypsies, is what is called a ‘spontaneously segregated’ school. That is, demographic changes in the neighbourhood and parents’ free choice of schools have resulted in its becoming a Gypsy-dense school. Those parents who end up sending their children to E Street Primary are mostly unemployed, the lowest educated, and the least able to speak up for their rights (interview with the Principal). These phenomena explain why, although the total number of pupils is on the decrease, the percentage of endangered (“underprivileged in multiple ways” (E Street Primary, Undated: 1)) children has climbed to 80% (E Street Primary, Undated: 1). Approximately 90% of the children in E Street Primary are from Magyar Gypsy (Romungró) families, and the rest are Rom, Boyash or Magyar (personal communication with the Principal).

The school’s Analysis of the Present State and Pedagogical Programme outlines its aims and objectives. The document (undated: 1) states that most pupils “come from families where the values communicated by the parents and extended family do not strengthen the desire to study” and that these families

⁴ My translation.

“do not respect books, including textbooks” and only a fraction of the parents attend regular parent-teacher meetings. The document (undated: 1) says that about 30-40% of the pupils “face difficulties in adapting to the school environment, have behavioural problems and learning difficulties.” Therefore, the school’s “accentuated” aims include the “reduction, and if possible, the complete elimination of the disadvantages stemming from lack of good breeding and learning difficulties resulting from the composition of the socio-cultural background,” “securing the acquiring of up-to-date basic culture,” as well as teaching the children “to develop the right value system” and “the right attitude to work” (undated: 5-6). E Street Primary strives to “aid the social rise and integration of the Romany [Gypsy] population” and to establish and preserve the children’s self-identity, and teach and “cherish the values of Romany culture.” A couple of lines below, however, another sentence ‘clarifies’ this statement by saying that the school will aid “the preservation of the *positive* values of the Romany culture”⁵ (E Street Primary, undated: 10).

Introducing Year 7

Out of the 14 children, 7 were boys and 7 girls. Although the typical age for a year 7 pupil is 13, the majority of the students were over-age. Some began Year 1 later than their cohort, while several others were repeaters due to bad marks or a constant change of residence and, therefore, schools. During my research, with the exception of two, all children lived in the school’s neighbourhood. Virtually all children had been moving houses and schools several times, with some families still on the move and, consequently, without a registered address. *Table 3* indicates some ethnic and socio-economic data of the class.

⁵ My italics.

Table 3 Year 7 Pupils' Backgrounds⁶

| Child's name & gender | Ethnicity | Guardian | Broken family | Parent's/ guardian's educ. level | Parent's/ guardian's job | No. of children ⁷ | No. of rooms | No. of schools before E Street |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|----------|---------------|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------|--------------------------------|
| Ildi (f) | Mixed: Romungró & Rom | - | - | primary | M: unskilled worker F: bricklayer | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| Zsuzsa (f) | Romungró | SF | - | ... | M: selling goods | 3 | ... | ... |
| Tibi (m) | Romungró | - | - | ... | ... | 5 | ... | ... |
| Karcsi (m) | Romungró | - | F died | ... | ... | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Eszter (f) | Magyar | ... | ... | M: primary | M: cook in restaurant | 4 | 2 | 2 |
| Mária (f) | Romungró | - | - | ... | M: matern. leave F: on/off work | 4 | 1 | ... |
| Tamás (m) | Romungró | - | M only | ... | M: prostitute | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| Márk (m) | Rom | - | - | M: lower than primary F: primary | M: selling goods | 5 | 1 | 1 |
| Kriszti (f) | Romungró | - | - | primary | ... | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Bori (f) | Romungró | G, C | - | primary | G: unskilled worker C: matern. leave | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| Csabi (m) | Magyar | - | M only | vocational training school | disability pension, (skilled worker) | 3 | 1 | 0 |
| Márió (m) | Romungró | - | - | ... | M: cleaner F: construct. industry | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| Pisti (m) | Mixed: Romungró & Magyar | SM | - | SM: vocational school | skilled worker, later prostitute | 4 | 1 | 0 |
| Szinti (f) | Mixed: Romungró & Rom | - | - | M: attending evening school (secondary) | M: matern. leave, odd jobs F: communal work | 6 | 2 | 1 |

⁶ Key: M: mother; F: father; G: grandmother; C: cousin; SM: stepmother; SF: stepfather; - : not applicable; ... : unknown/uncertain; matern. Leave: maternity leave

⁷ Generally, but not always, all children live with the family.

Case Study

Mood

One of the most conspicuous characteristics of Year 7 pupils' attitude to learning was their mood to do or not to do work or cooperate with the teacher in class. Mood had several characteristics. First, it could be expressed verbally or actively. Children actively expressed their interest in learning through class work and cooperation with the teacher. They could do—or reinforce—the same through statements such as “I like Maths” or “I enjoy writing.” On the other hand, pupils' active expression of lack of mood was, in fact, passivity: they were resting their heads on the desks, throwing letters at or talking with each other, playing with their mobile phones, and so forth. Verbally, they expressed the ‘no-go mood mode’ through utterances such as those below. Secondly, an anti-learning mood could rapidly escalate into the obstruction of class work. And third, all pupils demonstrated mood swings, although in different patterns, frequency and duration. Some pupils were hardly ever in the mood to work in class, whereas other pupils' moods shifted: in some classes, they were in the mood to cooperate, in others, they would not. Or, from one minute to the next, they would lose motivation and mood.

This behaviour was congruent with that of the Irish Traveller children at St Donat's, described by Kenny (1997: 173) as “the puzzling phenomenon of sudden swings.” She (1997: 173) points out that the children did not have “an a priori oppositional relationship with schools or teachers” but they were “opportunistic.” Those who often acted in a disruptive manner were just as likely actively to seek work as those who did not usually get into major trouble, especially when prizes were distributed (Kenny, 1997: 173-74). Kenny (1997:

173) attributes this kind of behaviour to the “entrepreneurial character” of Traveller economy.

Although the main troublemakers at Year 7, E Street Primary: Tibi, Márk, Csabi and, to a much lesser extent, Ildi, did exhibit sudden mood swings, their active engagement in school work did not seem to be particularly boosted by desired prizes or good grades. Mostly, the children maintained that their moods simply ‘existed.’

Kriszti If I’m happy, like now that we’ve got the stereo and all, I don’t want to study at all ... Only to be listening to music.

Veronika You’ve said before that sometimes you’re in the mood to do things, but not at other times. What does it depend on?

Bori Well, really, there are times that tires people, and so... we’re tired and aren’t in the mood, that’s why...

Kriszti and Márió, however, later suggested a link between their moods and the teacher’s personality, teaching style and attitude.

Kriszti (Mood) depends on many things. For example, it partly depends on the teacher, because if she’s already tense when she comes in and wants to take it out on us ... (t)hen me, often I’m like, don’t feel like learning. I’ll annoy her even more. But only because she’ll come in and won’t have a nice word for me. Instead, she’ll take it out on me, cos she herself is tense ... And also, if a teacher comes in, like, say Arts & Crafts, Miss Flower, then with her we’ll behave totally differently than we would with Mr Bronze in History. ‘Coz the class is, like, afraid of Mr Bronze, but of others ... Frankly, we aren’t scared of any other

teacher. None. But neither of Mr Bronze, really, only that ... still, more so than of the rest.

Márió

... there are teachers, they get all wrought up and that's how they come to class, that's the attitude they show towards things. That's quite bad ... If the teacher's nice, I won't be dissing him ... It's got nothing to do with the subject, the way I'll reply to a teacher. If I don't like the teacher very much, I won't be in the mood for that subject, either.

Learning: How, What and What for

Writing vs. Copying

The contrast between pupils' attitude to creative writing and copying also mirrored their attitudes to learning in general. Often, pupils objected to free writing (such as working in their exercise books, writing sample sentences or reports), and had developed ways of avoiding it. These ranged from complaining or begging the teacher not to write:

Szinti For how long do we keep writin'?!

Pisti Can't we just stop writin'!

Szinti [impatiently] Aaaargh!* [Hungarian]

Through excuses:

Tibi My exercise book just won't open!

Teacher It's because you're trying to open it the wrong side.

Tibi Oh! [minutes later] Can I check where the wind's blowing from? ... I just can't write, Miss! See how I write!* [Hungarian]

* From my Field Notes.

Márió ... as you've seen: if we're in the mood, we'll do it, we'll write.

Copying was yet another form of writing, generally the most agreeable to Year 7. The pupils, particularly the girls, were usually in the mood for copying material from the blackboard or from their textbooks.

Kriszti I like copying ... Because I don't have to learn while I copy. I copy, then rest* ... If I write things down, time in class will go quicker ... Then I'm not bored.

Bori Well... so that we write it down and then... if she (the teacher) asks, so we'll know.

Eszter It's (copying) good because we aren't bossed about... OK, I can't say that, because the teachers teach, but... er... ... On our own we understand better and... they (the teachers) just keep talking and explaining, and so we progress very slowly... But this way, we just write it down, take it to the teacher's desk, and that's it, done.

As the interview excerpts show, the aims of copying were passing time in class, and having copied things acknowledged (by teacher and pupil alike) as 'learnt,' even though the process of copying itself might or might not be viewed as learning. (Contrast Eszter's "On our own we understand better" and Kriszti's "I don't have to learn while I copy.")

Accumulation and Learning

To view the outcome of copying as 'things learnt' and ask the teacher for things to copy comes close to what Kenny (1997) observed among St Donat's Traveller children. There, the pupils enjoyed doing tasks which they felt competent in and confident about, such as transcription, simple maths exercises, cookery and woodwork. They equated such "accumulated evidence of learning

with learning” (Kenny, 1997: 157, 162). In Year 7 at E Street Primary, recording and copying were only two of several accumulative practices. In Maths, the pupils frequently asked for multiplication exercises (multiplication is introduced in Year 2), asking for 5’s⁸ and extra points for simple tasks and one-off answers.

On the other hand, contrary to St Donat’s, avoidance of or resistance to challenging exercises was not typical of Year 7. Kenny (1997: 157-58) notes that children at St Donat’s frequently expressed “frustration of having to tackle new skills applications in crafts, or comprehension work ... or ... puzzle out a math ‘problem.’” Although Year 7 pupils often asked for easy-to-do tasks, the majority—provided they were in the ‘right’ mood—enjoyed doing challenging exercises, absorbing new information and attaining new skills. Their frequent and genuine interest in lesson topics manifested itself in relevant, logical and often thoughtful questions, class performance and strict peer-discipline. The questions of Márk and Tibi, two of the most academically talented, and Csabi, a rather diligent Magyar pupil, are good examples.

| | |
|-----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Tibi | Why didn’t they ask the Spanish for help? |
| Mr Bronze | Who ruled Spain at that time? |
| Somebody | The Habsburgs. |
| Mr Bronze | There you go. |
| Csabi | And why didn’t they ask the English? |
| Mr Bronze | Because they were too far. [then immediately] Wow! That’s a very good question!* [History] |

Apart from these three boys, two other academically able pupils: Tamás and

⁸ 5 is the best grade in the 1-5 evaluative scale used in Hungarian schools, the equivalent of A in UK schools.

Judit, as well as Ildi, Zsuzsa and Mária were the ones who regularly cooperated with the teacher and actively engaged with class work. Cooperation, however, is to be understood as dependent on mood and, consequently, punctuated by episodes of passivity (writing letters, playing with phones, chatting), sighs of boredom or outcries of complaint. Nevertheless, relative to the rest, these pupils exhibited an interest in class work compelling enough to engage with it actively for considerable periods of time.

Active engagement with class work was collective in nature. The pupils rarely worked on exercises individually, even if thus instructed: those sitting close to each other would form ad hoc groups, and whoever had the answer to the teacher's question would speak up, irrespective of whose turn it was, and without raising a hand as is customary in primary schools. Thus, lessons tended to take on a highly interactive character:

When it comes to individual work, the pupils are working but with a constant background noise, speaking out of turn and thinking aloud....*
[Hungarian]

Peer discipline

Peer discipline was yet another pattern of behaviour that demonstrated pupils' interest in the materials taught, or at least attending school (Oki, 2001). Either way, certain pupils—particularly Csabi, Tamás, Ildi and Márk—frequently and sternly reprimanded their classmates for overly noisy and rowdy behaviour, and for speaking out of turn. Peer discipline was generally verbal (often with plenty of swearwords) but Tamás sometimes resorted to physical retaliation and beat up the culprit, especially if it was a girl.

Tamás [to Ildi] You'd said you wouldn't speak, then don't speak!
[later] Ildi, shut up, will you! [later, hitting Szinti's
head] Stop talking!* [Music]

Márk's stance exemplifies how the pupils themselves interpreted the purpose of peer discipline:

Veronika I've noticed that you and some other people discipline the rest of the class, like "Be quiet!" or "Shut up!"...

Márk Yes.

Veronika When there's a lot of noise in class, does it bother you?

Márk [confidently] Of course it bothers me! That's bad... and the teachers... there's some teachers that can't put things in order ... Then, how is it possible to learn if someone's screaming, the other's dancing on the top of the desk? This is really very bad.

Teacher Personalities, Attitudes and Teaching Styles

A Class of Little Adults

E Street Primary, on an institutional level, tended to treat its pupils as children with its chalk-and-talk teaching and strict and inflexible daily timetables. Similarly, the majority of the teachers teaching Year 7 subscribed to the conviction that in school the child was to behave as told by the teacher. There were only very few teachers who realised that Year 7 was, in fact, a class of little adults. However, torn between this realisation and school requirements, even these few teachers could not—or would not—always acknowledge and treat the pupils as young adults (e.g. demanding respect and order in class; strict supervision of class attendance and the existence of textbooks, stationery, and sportswear for PE).

Mr Bronze Really, Márk, are you married yet?

Márk Nay, not yet.

Mr Bronze And has she (the bride-to-be) been chosen yet?

Márk Yes, but I don't fancy her.

Mr Bronze How come?

Mr Bronze acknowledged the fact that Márk was an adult, faced with a typically adult choice. Although not to the same degree, a small number of other teachers also acknowledged the children as adults. For instance, Ms Graph, the Maths teacher, accepted as normal that the 15-year-old Karsci went to Gypsy music clubs with his older male relatives late at night. Ms Graph was convinced that it was only from our (non-Gypsy) perspective that these patterns appeared 'bad'. These teachers also accepted the pupils' cultural and linguistic background, rather than ridiculing or 'remedying' it. The teacher either enabled it as when Ms Rhyme⁹ allowed the pupils to negotiate the conditions of a test:

Csabi Can we cheat?

Ms Rhyme There's no point, the test's very easy.

Csabi So we don't need to cheat.

Tamás And if you don't notice, can we cheat?

Ms Rhyme Sure, but I mustn't see it. [applause, preparation]*
[Hungarian]

Or, the teacher could accept and work with a pupil's answer in his or her linguistic code if the content was correct, and drew the pupil's attention to another code more acceptable in school and host society:

Mr Bronze ... Why is it better to be a bourgeois?

Tibi Because I won't be messed around with?

Mr Bronze Uhm, yes, but that's only your way of putting it.*
[History]

⁹ She is also of Gypsy origin.

sentence (in fact, her original Hungarian sentence was grammatically correct but pronounced in a way commonly regarded as ‘substandard’), and Tibi openly challenged the teacher, inviting further retaliation.

Exchange

Willis (1978: 64) argues that the idea of teaching as an exchange, primarily “of knowledge for respect, of guidance for control,” facilitated by successive exchanges, such as of knowledge for employment, of employment for payment, enables teachers to exert legitimate control over the pupils. However, the teacher’s authority must be “won and maintained on moral not coercive grounds” (Willis, 1978: 64). That is, the taught must consent to the idea and actual practice of teaching (Willis, 1978: 64). Among those teaching Year 7, only few had realised the necessity of delegating some authority to the class in the teaching-learning process in order to achieve a more or less functioning exchange, beneficial to both parties. Again, these tended to be the teachers who were willing to treat the pupils as adults, and respected their cultural, linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds. Delegation of authority happens when the teacher allows pupils to take control over, or at least negotiate, either the whole or part of the teaching-learning process, such as a lesson. In Year 7, such exchange generally took place during Hungarian (see the test-and-cheating example above), History, Maths and Gypsy Studies:

Instead of studying, they (Ms Graph and the class) are discussing the excursion this coming Friday in great detail. However, the teacher and the pupils have agreed that they will do 20 minutes of Maths on Tuesday afternoon after their last lesson, instead of today.* (Maths)

Sometimes Ms Song, too, struck a deal with the children: if the class worked actively during the Music lesson, in the last five minutes they were allowed to listen to their own CDs together. However, the rest of the lessons were

generally dominated by the teachers giving instructions and expecting the pupils to comply. Mr Bronze, Ms Rhyme and Ms Graph also gave plenty of instructions and often curtailed the freedom of the class, but it is the balance of delegation and keeping of authority that concerns us here—and the pupils in making conscious or unconscious decisions of compliance and resistance.

Besides delegation of authority in the teaching-learning process, these teachers—but, typically, not the rest—had also realised the importance of two other techniques of making the class interested in the exchange: bringing the subject matter closer to the pupils, and avoiding humiliation and ridicule.

Making the Topic Approachable

Bringing the subject matter closer to the pupils and thus making it easier for them to understand primarily happened in the following ways:

- through language;
- by including personal references to the pupils or the teacher, and
- by making the abstract concrete.

Mr Bronze is a good example for manipulating language in order to kindle and maintain the pupils' interests in his History and Gypsy Studies lessons. He frequently used slang ('that bird' —a Queen) and vivid descriptions ("... the Countess straightened her middle finger and said, 'I'm very well without your pardon, thank you'") to bring the topics closer to his class. Usually he succeeded, as the pupils laughed at his amusing presentation and engaged with it. Both Mr Bronze and Ms Graph often used personal references to hold the class's attention:

Ms Graph [to class] Then, if Mum has problems changing between units of measurement while cooking, you'll be able to help her.

towards someone who is disapproving of or condescending towards our person is a rather universal human characteristic, not an ethnic one. However, as illustrated by *Table 2*, Gypsy children and their families place particular emphasis, value and trust on emotional ties between teacher and pupil.

With this I have arrived at the tools of humiliation and ridicule. Mr Bronze, Ms Graph and Ms Rhyme did not resort to either—they either did not need it to engage the class, or consciously used other, less alienating, methods of engaging attention. On the contrary, Ms Flower (the Arts & Crafts teacher), Ms Species (the Biology and Geography teacher), Ms Stanza (who substituted for Ms Rhyme for a while), and Mr Treaty (in charge of two afternoon study sessions a week) frequently humiliated and ridiculed the pupils in attempts to discipline and make them work, and emphasise the teacher's superiority. The pupils, however, stiffened in resistance to the arbitrary rules imposed on them by a person they had not entered into a legitimate exchange with.

She (Ms Flower) twice says to Ildi, 'you're a yob' ... and once, 'My girl, I'm giving up on you. You can't be that stupid!' ... Then the teacher comes to sit with me and ... not bothered that the children are within hearing distance, begins to say things like the children are pitiful; their intelligence quotient zero and the school is glad to raise them to whatever low levels; they can't speak quietly because at home, too, they are used to shouting and using dirty words; they can hardly concentrate....* [Arts & Crafts]

Ms Stanza speaks to the class very rudely when someone is playing up or chatting: 'I'll knock your head off,' 'I'll smack you in the mouth,' 'a bunch of yobs,' etc. ... Ms Stanza doesn't hit him (Tibi), but is shouting with him very badly, e.g. calling him an asshole ... she tells him, 'Get lost!'* [Hungarian]

certain level of discipline in order to be able to learn in class (although what this level was and by whom it was to be established was somewhat ambiguous). They criticised—in various ways ranging from verbal disapproval and ridicule to open challenge and resistance—those teachers who were unable or uninterested to establish and maintain that delicate balance of order in class.

Veronika Is it good that he (Mr Bronze) is like that (strict)?

Kriszti Of course! Of course it's good, cos, like, if we're very bad, then it's good that he holds us back like, cos we mustn't carry it to the extremes.

The pupils' attitude to and expectation of teacher discipline and strictness were similar to what their parents/guardians expected from the school:

Szinti's mother ... Mr Bronze (is) trying to make them get their acts together. I hope that by Year 8 they'll have got to a level, an average, which is needed for them to go on to study somewhere.

Ildi's mother And it also depends a lot on the teacher, whether or not he can maintain discipline; if someone is playing in class, whether he tells her to stop, or lets her carry on ... I myself have told Mr Bronze that if he happens to catch Ildi smoking, just shout her head off, and let me know also. So I've given him my phone number.

Although acknowledging the need for discipline in class, Pisti's stepmother found Mr Bronze's attitude and methods unjustifiably stern, and resented them:

Pisti's stepmother ... and he (Mr Bronze) said he was going to... teach Pisti's class sternly. Fine, I agree with him on this one, but that he'd punish him and the like, no ... And I told him I don't even allow... his father to (hit) Pisti, I say, never mind a stranger. Because, I say, I'll happen to

kick you where it's extremely painful, let's put it that way.

Parents, therefore, demanded the teacher to maintain classroom discipline for two main reasons: to teach the children 'good behaviour', and to enable learning, thus ensuring future progress and acquisition of qualifications. This double expectation also manifested itself in the way the pupils expressed their discontentment with low quality lessons, teaching and time spent in the school verbally or through disruptive behaviour:

As Mr Nuremberg writes the conjugation answers on the blackboard, everyone is doing something else and there's a lot of noise. The teacher makes a weak and futile attempt to keep order. The following are happening simultaneously:

- Tamás and Márk carry on planning the afternoon programme... ;
- Kriszti is laughing loudly with Eszter;
- Tamás and Csabi hit Szinti and pull her hair from time to time;
- Szinti and Mária are throwing letters to each other over Tamás's desk;
- Pisti takes something from Ildi, making her complain loudly;
- Márk is shouting with Kriszti, Eszter and Tibi loudly and angrily, as he thinks they're making fun of him; the accused retaliate in a similar manner.* [German]

Between Gypsies

I asked the pupils if they preferred Gypsy teachers over non-Gypsy ones, and asked them to explain their preferences. Most of them said that the teacher should be fair and just, with a sense of humour, but none of them mentioned that Gypsy descent was important. When asked explicitly, they gave mixed responses:

Veronika Does it matter if a teacher is Gypsy? For example, Mr Bronze?

...

Kriszti Oh, but the rest are also Gypsies. But Mr Bronze is the same as us. I like Ms Rhyme and Ms Trampoline (the PE teacher), but not Mr Nuremberg, not at all. We also like Ms Graph, because she's fair, although we can't always tell what she wants¹⁰.*

Szinti Mr Bronze talks to us like we do. The rest of the teachers don't give a damn about us. They're only...[searching for a word]

Veronika Teaching?

Szinti Yes.

Veronika What about Ms Graph?

Szinti No, not like that, either.

Veronika Is this because Mr Bronze is Gypsy?

Szinti Yes.

Veronika But what about the rest of the teachers? Ms Stanza and Mr Nuremberg? You guys don't joke with them, do you?

Szinti With Mr Nuremberg we do!

Veronika Really? But he never smiles in class.

Szinti He understands the jokes....*

¹⁰ Mr Bronze, Ms Rhyme and Mr Nuremberg are Gypsies, the others are Magyars.

Comparisons

The school as a place to learn

Contrary to several researchers (Ní Shuinéar, 1993; Kenny, 1997; Igarashi, 1999; Forray, 2000; Forray & Mohácsi, 2002; Fejes, 2005; Daskalaki, 2005 and others), I have found that—for both parents and children—school functions as a primary source of a certain kind of knowledge. This knowledge, which goes well beyond basic literacy and numeracy, has a twofold aim: one is, indeed, to secure one's prosperity within the host society by providing the individual with essential knowledge on the gajo, or non-Gypsies (Tauber, unpublished review). The second aim follows from the first: to enable Gypsies to be “better Gypsies” (Williams, 2000: 258). Expanding on Tauber's idea, knowledge on the gajo also involves awareness of the importance of formal education and qualifications in the host society. However, neither the children nor their parents could articulate why school education would be beneficial for them. Although they had only stereotypical notions of the outcomes of schooling, they were convinced that school education was advantageous, and often saw it as a way out of poverty.

Veronika Why do you come to school?

Kriszti [laughing] Why do I come? Cos Mum and Dad send me here! ...
So that I can read and all, cos I don't want to like...
Then if, when I grow up like, then I'll want to work,
you know, for that I'll need everything: I can read,
write, speak properly. I want to learn all that, and at the
same time I don't. [laughs]

Veronika Is it important for you to come to school?

Tamás [after short Yes.

pause, confidently]

Veronika What do you want to get out of school?

Tamás Erm, that I learn. And... so that I won't be poor, and things like that. And... here at school it's good. At home, when I'm home, (when I'm) ill, I'm bored.

Veronika Why do you come to school?

Márió [laughing] Why do I come to school?! Well, it's part of life. It's necessary.

...

Veronika Why is it necessary?

Márió Erm, so I can progress from step five to step six. And then I'll go to work, have a vocation.

Veronika Why do you come to school?

Márk [after short pause, confidently] To learn! [Pause]

Veronika Is that important?

Márk Important.

Veronika Why is it important?

Márk Well, it's important so I can go on studying or dunno. [Pause] Of course it's important ... Well, my parents are like, sort of poorer... and now like this... but I'd like to be in a way, so I'm better educated, and so... I'll have things.

Veronika What things?

Márk Well, things like... a large flat, a car. Dunno.

- Veronika Is it important for you for Bori to go to school?
- Bori's grandmother [after short pause, confidently] Important, of course. No doubt about that. She'll even have to go on learning ... Let them (the children in general) learn. [Short pause] That's how they'll earn their bread, so they won't have to (worry): fine, who'll employ me? Like me. Fine, I've been working here for the Salami (factory) four years and a half, but now that I'm ill¹¹....
- Veronika Until what age do you want your children to learn?
- Szinti's mother Well, as long as they want to. Don't know, let them have as many vocations, so that they can make ends meet. In other words, so that they won't have problems like I used to have, building everything from scratch, fighting and toiling for everything....
- Veronika So then the better educated have it easier, they can live an easier life?
- Szinti's mother They can live an easier life and they can interpret things better. They can find their places easier, no matter where. They have a better life, they're more acknowledged. Not like, I don't know, a person with only primary school education.

Consequently, unlike the Greek Gypsies described by Daskalaki (2005), these parents did not entrust to their children the decision whether or not to go to school: for all those interviewed, school attendance was important. Even though some parents let their children decide whether or not to do homework (Bori's grandmother, Ildi's mother, Kriszti's mother), parents and guardians helped with homework at home if needed (Pisti's stepmother, Tamás's elder brother,

¹¹ She had to leave and now is having problems finding another job.

Márk's father, Szinti's mother, Ildi's father). To me, this ambiguity is due to parents' conviction that it is the school's responsibility to prepare pupils the way it wants them to be prepared for class (*see Table 2*), and their simultaneous recognition that schooling children is an investment important enough for the family to support and engage with to some extent.

Williams' argument that the ultimate aim underlying Gypsies' wish to send their children to school is for the children to become better Gypsies through school knowledge is originally related to literacy skills. Williams (2000) argues that having mastered reading and writing, Gypsies have also mastered the culture behind these, and thus are able to control and use these skills to their own advantage. This idea, again, may be broadened to include all 'gajo knowledge,' which, once learned, can be manipulated for the Gypsies' own benefit. Indeed, Year 7 pupils exhibited no intention of becoming 'gajos.' On the contrary, they seemed to want to continue living the same way they were living now, only, as some pupils mentioned, under better financial conditions. They wanted school knowledge and qualifications to get the jobs they wanted (e.g. manicurist, hair stylist, fashion designer, car mechanic, policeman), in order to be able to have a large flat or house and a car, to go partying (Zsuzsa: "every Friday to disco, for walks or messing around"), and maintain regular, tight links with their kin (Márk: "I like it when they [relatives] come" [to visit us]; Márió, gladly-proudly: "My brother's family is with us every day"; Bori: "Can't wait to go to the relatives' in the country [for a wedding]").

Although those children (Bori, Szinti, Kriszti, Márk) with whom I discussed this topic wanted to marry a Gypsy, they did not want to get married as early as their parents had done (in their late teens, mostly), because "When you've got a child, your life's over" (Bori, Szinti). Instead, they would like to go on studying, typically in vocational schools, and also use that time for

partying and enjoying life, and eventually to establish a family in their twenties. Márk's ideal wife-to-be was pretty 'but also a bit smart' and 'civilised.'

Knowledge for Its Own Sake

Daskalaki (2005) points out that in the Greek Gypsy community she observed, school knowledge is valuable and attractive for children between the ages 4 and 12, but young people above 12 become dismissive and completely indifferent about the usefulness of school as a source of knowledge. Contrary to this, besides aiming at a qualification, several Year 7 pupils showed considerable interest in various school subjects. As shown by their class performance, logical questions and peer discipline, Márk, Tamás, Ildi, Pisti, Márió, Tibi and Csabi were driven by a thirst for knowledge even in areas that had no direct links to their everyday lives or future plans. Ildi explicitly explained her enjoyment of attending school: "We can learn a lot of things we've never known before."*

With some pupils, this interest in knowledge for its own sake seemed to be tied to the teacher's personality. Though not dissimilar to their mood changes, interest in a school subject was more constant, and might change from subject to subject, but not typically from one lesson to another of the same subject. For instance, Márk was active in Mr Bronze's History and Ms Graph's Math classes, but tended to be silent and inattentive in Biology, Geography and German. The majority of the above-mentioned pupils, on the other hand, seemed to share a general interest in learning for learning's sake, punctuated only with episodes of mood-loss.

Several researchers (Forray, 2000; Forray & Mohácsi, 2002; Fejes, 2005) have emphasised the importance of nurturing emotional ties between the teacher and the pupil. Forray (2000: 48) argues that positive teacher attitude is often "rewarded" through cooperative pupil behaviour, whereas "lack of

emotions” and overly rational teaching is “punished” by the pupil refusing cooperation in class. In Year 7, I did not find such an obvious cause and effect relationship between pupils’ intrinsic interest to learn and their attachment to individual teachers. For instance, several pupils liked Mr Bronze, Ms Graph or Ms Rhyme, yet they were not particularly keen on learning the subjects they were teaching. Rather, those pupils who were already interested in a given subject were further motivated by a positive emotional link between them and the teacher. Or, those pupils who were interested in learning *per se*, developed an interest in a given subject due to the teacher’s personality or teaching style. This behaviour, however, is rather typical of children of whatever ethnicity. What may make it more salient in Gypsy people, is its degree of intensity or the priority assigned to it among other factors. Therefore, those Year 7 teachers that were aware of the significance of building emotional ties with the pupils were more successful in getting them motivated to learn and sustain their motivation in the long run. This was quite different from mood: mood was a fleeting state that could suddenly turn an otherwise interested pupil into an inactive and uncooperative one, and then back again, without fundamentally jeopardising the pupil’s interest in learning and the subject matter at hand.

Educational and Disciplinary Functions

Contrary to the argument shared by Forray (2000), Forray and Mohácsi (2002), Fejes (2005) and others that Gypsy parents resent the school’s attempt to educate and discipline their children, Year 7 parents explicitly wished the school and the Form Master not only to teach but also to maintain discipline in class. My findings concur with Bereményi’s (forthcoming), who points out in his ethnographic study on Spanish Gypsies that some parents explicitly demand the school’s positive moral-ethical education and influence on their children.

As mentioned in Section 3, researchers agree that, for Gypsies, family enjoys priority over the school, whereas the school tends to resent pupils' absences due to weddings, mourning or helping at home, activities the parents find completely justified and reasonable. My research in Year 7 has validated this argument to a large extent, although only with certain pupils. Two girls (Zsuzsa and Ildi) sometimes stayed at home to baby-sit their younger siblings; pupils were absent from class for days due to mourning (Karcsi), or did not come to class due to family outings or other engagements (Bori). The school—including the teachers of Gypsy descent—were more unsympathetic and impatient than accepting in these cases: admonishing pupils, negotiating with parents, strict monitoring of absences was part of the daily routine in Year 7.

Defiance of Authority

Researchers (Kenny, 1997; Igarashi, 1999; Formoso, 2000; Forray, 2000; Forray & Mohácsi, 2002; Daskalaki, 2005 and others) argue that Gypsy life revolves around the family, “the basic unit of social organisation, the economic unit and educational unit” (Liégeois, 1987: 55). In stark contrast to the school and classes based on formally created year groups, the family is an informal, emotional unit. Year 7 pupils tried to control the learning process, “with the aid of the resources of their own culture” (Willis, 1978: 53) for instance, by asking for easy tasks to be accumulated and acknowledged as learning, negotiating test conditions, and using their own form of language in class. When the majority were not in the mood to learn, the class made (frequently successful) attempts at controlling the lessons. Therefore, for the educational exchange to work—apart from the teacher's personality and attitude, which I expand on below—pupils would have had to realise the importance of this exchange as a

springboard for consequent exchanges characterising the labour market and our society in general (Willis, 1978: 64, 68). A significant component of the educational exchange, thus, is the maintenance of discipline: because of Gypsies' aversion to formal structures, discipline and punishment will not be meted out for wrongdoings, but applied in order to maintain the "institutional axis, of reproducing the social relationships of the school in general" (Willis, 1978: 66). However, although Willis (1978: 64) maintains that "it is the *idea* of the teacher, not the individual, which is legitimised and commands obedience," at Year 7, this seemed not to be the case. On the contrary, the teacher's personality is very much linked with pupils' willingness to enter into the teaching-learning exchange. This is not surprising, given the direct link between teacher personality and pupil mood, as explored earlier.

As mentioned in Section 5, three particular teacher qualities played a key role in curbing the mood swings of the class and channelling their energies into cooperation. These were the teacher's ability and willingness to:

- treat pupils as young adults, rather than children;
- share decision making and the teaching-learning process with the pupils, and
- find and maintain a delicate degree of discipline in class that enabled pupils to meet their own learning needs but did not impose—in the pupils' eyes—unsanctioned and unfair authority on them.

These teacher qualities are relevant because, as discussed in Section 3, children are not subjected to arbitrary or frustrating rules, punishments and orders at home, while, at the same time, their freedom of movement and expression of feelings have been encouraged since early childhood. My interviews with Year 7 pupils and their parents/guardians have revealed that children are not required to do a lot of household chores, and their freedom of movement is, although to

varying degrees, guaranteed at home.

Veronika Are your parents strict with you and ask you to do household chores?

Márió No, no.

Veronika Do you have to do anything like that?

Márió Erm, very little ... For example, when Mum goes grocery shopping... and forgets to buy something, then I'll go back to the shops. But otherwise they won't ask me things like that.

Veronika I've asked before and you've said that your parents let you go out at night....

Kriszti Yes.

Veronika Do you have to help at home? Are they strict on that? For example, "Kriszti, you'll do the washing up every day"?

Kriszti No way, nothing like that. If I want to, then I'll do it, I'll help. But at times Mum asks me to. She won't say, "Now do this," she'll say, "Please do the washing up," and I'll do it.

Veronika And if you aren't in the mood for it, you won't?

Kriszti Then I'll say, "No, Mum" and have a lie down. [We laugh.]

Veronika That's it?

Kriszti Sometimes that's it, at other times she'll get mad....

Citing various studies, the social anthropologist Tauber argues that a 'good teacher' does not necessarily share his or her pupil's ethnic background. The existence of an "interactive style and behaviour between teachers and pupils" is

far more important (Gomes in Tauber, unpublished review). Although the pupils in Year 7 gave me ambiguous messages as to whether or not they got on better with a Gypsy teacher, they explicitly mentioned that fairness, kindness and a good sense of humour were qualities a ‘good teacher’ had to have. Fairness would maintain the ‘delicate balance’ of discipline and autonomy in class, kind teachers would wish to interact with the pupils and not only ‘teach them,’ and teachers with a good sense of humour would be able to understand and engage with the pupils’ sense of humour. Therefore, what Year 7 pupils require of teachers comes rather close to Gomes’s description.

When, on the contrary, the teacher fails to invite the pupils to a functioning teaching-learning exchange, knowledge becomes “devalued” and “worthless,” “authority stripped of its educational justifications,” and will appear “very harsh and naked” (Willis, 1978: 77). In Year 7, this was when individuals or the class mostly tended to refuse cooperation, or openly challenge the teacher and ridicule the material being taught. This was when children openly engaged in what St Donat’s children called “blaggarding” (Kenny, 1997). This behaviour incorporated verbal components (insolence, humour, challenge, negation) and physical components (fighting, destruction, passivity, aimless walking about or engagement in non-related activities). These activities seemed to be aimed not only to get rid of unwanted tasks (Kenny, 1997) or to break free from “symbolic” and “physical” (Willis, 1978: 26) institutional manifestations, but also to express disdain of the teacher’s personality and attitude, and withdraw or deny consent to educational exchanges with them.

Endnotes

Against the backdrop of a national discourse propagating formal education as a key factor in Gypsies' 'integration' into mainstream society, my study aimed at exploring Gypsy pupils' and their parents' perception of and attitude to school education, and the role it played in their lives, and whether their attitudes had similarities with those of poor Magyars. Through a case study research in Year 7, E Street Primary, Budapest, I found that for the pupils and their parents school was a very important source of a certain kind of knowledge: how to live as Gypsies in a gajo world (Tauber, see Introduction), how to use gajo knowledge (e.g. literacy and numeracy) and ways (e.g. obtaining qualifications, living in more spacious homes, marrying at a later age) to be able to maintain their own way of living (Williams, see Introduction). The pupils enjoyed being Gypsies: having fun in the company of other Gypsies, listening and dancing to Gypsy music, visiting relatives and welcoming guests at home, bargaining and negotiating, being on the move and so on. At the same time, however, their active cooperation in class, logical questions and peer discipline indicated that several pupils did enjoy *what* they were learning. These pupils, therefore, were not only interested in attending school, but also in learning for its own sake.

The fact that I have found an answer to my research question validates my choice of an ethnographic case study as a research strategy. I believe that no other method—survey, interviews or document review on their own—could have yielded such rich and complex data. Apart from this, through immersing myself in the pupils' world, I have come to notice and realise phenomena I had not thought of or registered before, such as the irrelevance of much of the primary school curriculum, the impoliteness and rudeness of some teachers towards the pupils, the rich and nourishing home environments of many of these pupils, the extreme poverty in which several families live in Budapest, and the eloquence of Gypsy speakers: pupils, parents and teachers alike.

My encounter with the Year 7 pupils and their parents has generated further questions. First, where is the fine line between desired and undesired class discipline that enables learning yet does not suppress pupils' autonomy; how and by whom is this discipline created and maintained? Second, how would my findings be different, had I chosen a class of pupils from a different Gypsy group, geographical area or economic background? Third, if it is true that these Gypsy pupils wanted schooling in order to become better Gypsies through it, how would officialdom react to such a wish? Would school education still be encouraged? And fourth, if Gypsies' agenda is so different from the official goal of integrating Gypsies into society, are integrationist ways of education generally desirable?

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我、我的未來與學校——匈牙利吉普賽學童 對正規教育之認知

Veronika Lukács

匈牙利布達佩斯羅蘭大學教育與國際學系

摘 要

匈牙利和其他幾個歐洲國家一樣，籠罩在正規教育和吉普賽學童之間的明顯不相容之中，吉普賽學童所認知到的低成就通常都被貼上「吉普賽問題」的標籤。儘管已有大量文獻探討此議題，所呈現的卻仍是主流社會的觀點。很少有人從另外一面來思考：吉普賽人自己希望從學校教育外得到什麼？本篇目的即在於此，透過在匈牙利首都布達佩斯的一所小學，針對一個幾乎都是吉普賽學童的班級進行為時 3 個月的個案分析，並於此架構中提出上述的問題。值得注意的是，本篇也滿足了一個問題：無論如何，學校對這些吉普賽學童和家庭來說，總是扮演一個重要知識來源的角色。

關鍵字：人類學、主流教育中的少數民族、匈牙利的吉普賽人、學習動機、學習挫敗、教師態度