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*Original Citation:*

*Availability:*

This version is available <http://hdl.handle.net/2318/100761> since

*Publisher:*

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First published 2009  
by Routledge  
270 Madison Ave, New York, NY 10016

Simultaneously published in the UK  
by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2009.

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*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

Traveller, nomadic, and migrant education / edited by Patrick Alan Danaher, Máirín Kenny, and Judith Remy Leder.

p. cm.—(Routledge research in education)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Children of migrant laborers—Education—Cross-cultural studies. 2. Nomadic peoples—Education—Cross-cultural studies. I. Danaher, Patrick Alan, 1959—II. Kenny, Máirín. III. Leder, Judith Remy.

LC5151.T73 2009

371.826'918—dc22

2008049323

ISBN 0-203-87867-1 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN10: 0-415-96356-7 (hbk)

ISBN10: 0-203-87867-1 (ebk)

ISBN13: 978-0-415-96356-5 (hbk)

ISBN13: 978-0-203-87867-5 (ebk)

# 1 Moving Lives

## A Reflective Account of a Three Generation Travelling Attractionist Family in Italy

*Francesca Gobbo*

### INTRODUCTION

Among the many minority groups of Italy are numbered the *esercenti di attrazioni viaggianti*, literally, the proprietors of travelling attractions, or *attrazionisti viaggianti*. My reasons for studying Italian travelling attractionists<sup>1</sup> were twofold. The first was a civic urge to understand how the right to education was implemented for pupils whose travelling allowed them only a patchy learning experience. As an educator, I was puzzled by the fact that the Italian educational debate on intercultural education made no mention of the problems that attractionists' children had with school attendance. Even a discussion of Roma pupils' limited school attendance<sup>2</sup> did not lead policy-makers to view the regular classroom from a sociopolitical perspective.

My second reason for studying the attractionists was my interest in late 20th century anthropological research, which had been influenced by the demand of minority groups across Europe and North America that respect for diversity be recognised as a way to attain social and educational justice (see Berube, 1994; Gobbo, 1977). Concerned cultural anthropologists had objected to attempts to explain the 'unsuccessful' performance of minority students purely in terms of cultural deprivation. These anthropologists theorised that minority students experienced cultural discontinuity in schools in which cultural diversity received little consideration. Ethnographic research pointed out that schools are "cultural environments" (Gobbo, 2000) characterised by majority norms, rules and expectations that may well conflict with the cultural standards that minority children have learned within their own families (see also Gobbo, 2000; Gomes, 1998; Philips, 1993; Saletti Salza, 2007, 2008; Sidoti, 2007; Willis, 1977; Wolcott, 1974). Ethnographers emphasised, moreover, how failure to acknowledge diversity calls into question a nation's *de jure* responsibility to pursue social and educational justice.

From this theoretical point of view, I hypothesised that there would be a considerable degree of discontinuity between what children of attractionist families were taught at home and the national curricula that had

been established for an overwhelmingly settled school population. As my fieldwork proceeded, the theory of anthropologist John U. Ogbu appeared more fitting: a community's attitude towards education, and the students' expectations of it, are affected by the minority–majority historical relationship. Differing minority groups will manifest different levels of trust and cultural “accommodation” to schooling that will result in differing educational performance and success (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). This perspective invited me to see attractionists as “autonomous human beings who actively interpret and respond to their situation” (p. 158), and who construct their distinctive work and family environment, as far as circumstances allow. I thus aimed to understand what schooling meant for those who are defined as minorities, though they present themselves as fully fledged members of Italian society (see also Gobbo, 2003a, 2006). It is the cyclical presence of the attractionists among settled people that highlights what I would call their *separate participation* in ongoing sedentary life. Thanks to their communication skills, many attractionists are respected in each village that they visit. Still, given their peripatetic lives, attractionists do not—cannot—fit the *order* of a sedentary society.

Finally, I wondered what ethnographic research might offer to educational theory. My fieldwork<sup>3</sup> indicated that the process of enculturation could explain only partly the relatively gratifying schooling experience among children of attractionist families. A nuanced interpretation was needed that would take into account the travelling families' sophisticated knowledge of the sedentary population's habits and values<sup>4</sup>, and the schools' inability to acknowledge the attractionist cultural experience in any fashion (see also Gobbo, 2007b).

## SCHOOLING THE CHILDREN OF TRAVELLING ATTRACTIONISTS

Because attractionists<sup>5</sup> move from fair to fair during most of the school year, their children change schools almost weekly<sup>6</sup>. Still, because families tend to plan their circuit to cover the same fairs every year, their children return to the same schools, often becoming a familiar presence for teachers and peers in particular classrooms. The attractionist families whom I interviewed all recognised the importance of schooling, but saw no alternative to limited and fragmented school attendance, unless sedentary relatives took care of the children for the whole school year (see also Gobbo, 2003a, 2006, 2007a, 2007b). For their part, teachers sounded as frustrated as the attractionist families and children (Gobbo, 2007a, 2007b). Teachers claimed that the booklet (*quadernino*) in which attendance is certified, and in which teachers are encouraged to give a detailed description of each student's performance, rarely bears enough content to help the next instructor to draw up an effective instructional plan. Teachers felt helpless and discouraged because they did not have enough time “to follow” those children and fill their “gaps”.

I must add that the teachers' accounts of their experience with attractionist pupils helped me realise that contemporary educational theory could paradoxically raise an unexpected barrier for Travellers. Intercultural education emphasises the importance of familiarity with the cultural differences present in most societies. Unfortunately, an abstract understanding of cultural diversity can lead even well-meaning teachers to interpret the *dialectics* of students' cultural identities as a fixed cultural *distance* between mobile and sedentary lifestyles (Gobbo, 2007c; Piasere, 2007). The teachers whom I interviewed warmly praised the attractionist children's good school behaviour, and expressed deep regret for their own inability to help them effectively. However, they saw the mobile life of attractionist families as something that had always been distant from theirs, separated by a symbolic border that the teachers portrayed as hardly crossable (Gobbo, 2007a, 2007b).

### Theoretical Background

Literature on occupational migrants shows that there are many subgroups (for example, Travellers, Roma and circus and show people [ECOTEC Research and Consulting Limited (ECOTEC), 2008]), and there is growing research attention to them and to the cultural and educational differences among the groups. Researchers repeatedly express concern for the learning problems and social barriers that Traveller children face in school (for example, Danaher, 1999, 2000; Danaher, Hallinan & Moriarty, 1999; Danaher, Moriarty & Hallinan, 2000; European Commission, 1994; Jordan, 1997, 2000, 2001a, 2001b; Kiddle, 1999; Liégeois, 1992). The most recent, ECOTEC's *The School Education of Children of Occupational Travellers in the European Union* (2008), also stresses the great diversity among these groups. With regard to schooling, "they all share problems related to access, support and continuity" (ECOTEC, 2008). ECOTEC's findings confirm that the lives of mobile workers and their children's educational experiences warrant educators' and researchers' consideration.

Early studies were sensitive to Travellers' and Gypsies' difficulties with formal education, and were deeply aware that cultural discontinuity, not simple economic disadvantage, explained exclusion. The sedentary majority was seen as 'entrenched' in its educational beliefs, unable or unwilling to question its own attitudes, expectations and actions towards pupils perceived as different from the others (see Liégeois, 1992). The 1994 European Commission Report recognised that school success and the equality of educational opportunities had so far been negatively related to diversity. Both these studies acknowledged the different reasons that attractionists have for choosing a mobile lifestyle, and how much more positive their approach to schooling<sup>7</sup> is than that of the Roma or the bargees. Travellers were seen not only as "part of the European heritage" but also as representing "an important element in the socio-cultural fabric of Europe, as it is demonstrated by their contribution to the functioning of the economies and the cultural role they play

during the festive days of the people of Europe” (European Commission, 1994, p. 16). Yet, as other research documented, sharing the European heritage has not always guaranteed Traveller families and their children an effective education. Teachers, frustrated by the irregular, though predictably cyclical, school attendance of attractionists’ children, have not succeeded:

- in finding ways to evaluate the children’s learning;
- in communicating to the next teacher what the children have been taught;
- in giving the families accurate accounts of their children’s educational progress;
- or in making useful suggestions about how to help the children.

The ECOTEC (2008) study confirms the families’ positive attitude towards schooling, and the efforts that they make to provide their children with a good education. It also details the persistent prejudices of the sedentary populations and schools, stemming from a total lack of recognition of the Travellers’ distinct culture. A number of possible reasons for this situation are proffered—the small number of occupational travellers; their rather fleeting presence in national and regional territories; and their accommodation to sedentary ways—which makes them less ‘visible’ than other minority groups. At school, this cultural ‘invisibility’ allows teachers to ignore or devalue the children’s strong work ethic and the “high degree of decision-making, independence and responsibility from an early age” that are assigned to children who are fully “integrated into the family business and upkeep of the family home” (ECOTEC, 2008, p. 36). The need to overcome the teachers’ and policy-makers’ poor understandings of the Travellers’ cultural background is reiterated by ECOTEC (2008): it urges teachers to seek out information on these minorities’ specific needs, recommends that the “one-size-fits-all approach to their education” (p. 60) be avoided, suggests that the curriculum make room for cultural diversity and encourages teachers to coordinate efforts across schools serving these children. Ultimately, ECOTEC recognises that, although “there are no simple solutions”, efforts should be directed towards

. . . customisation and experimentation, as well as flexibility in provision. A move towards individual, tailored learning pathways, with a focus on ‘learning outcomes’ rather than attendance at school, seems to present the most suitable approach towards developing provision for occupational traveller children. (p. vii)

In sum, ECOTEC favours a shift “from the idea of equality of *opportunities* to equality of *outcomes*” (emphasis in original).

Past research about occupational travellers aimed to identify “good [educational] practices”<sup>8</sup>, as they are called today, which can effectively answer

the needs of this internally varied group's children. With specific regard to initiatives implemented in Italy to meet the educational problems of attractionist children, their inclusion in school and the reduction of unsatisfactory results were promoted by the 2004 project (Fondazione Migrantes, MIUR, Regione Toscana, 2004) launched by the Tuscany Region, the Ministry of Education and University, and the Catholic Foundation "Migrantes". Following European Union recommendations, the Tuscany agreement established a network of 35 schools, provided families with a more detailed enrolment form and encouraged teachers to keep precise notes in the newly prepared "*foglio notizie*". The overall good results of the initiative have been attributed to its bottom up approach to the educational goals, and a "follow-up of show children's schooling and progress, as well as their educational competencies and skills" (ECOTEC, 2008, p. 63) has been planned to strengthen what has been achieved so far<sup>9</sup>, while the original project has been extended to schools and families in other Italian regions<sup>10</sup>.

### THREE GENERATIONS OF A TRAVELLING ATTRACTIONIST FAMILY

In this section, I offer a narrative of three generations of an attractionist family which gives invaluable insight into the cultural complexity of the lives of attractionists. This ethnographic account is a substantial contribution to the European and international research outlined above, and to efforts to handle the difficulties of the children of Italian attractionists. To this purpose, "narrative language"—which Scheffler (1991) identifies as one of the "four languages of education"<sup>11</sup>—has been particularly relevant as it allows us to gain access to how people understand themselves, to listen to them "when they speak in their own voice" (p. 121) and to disclose "how a problem looks to the person whose problem it is" (p. 122). In this sense, I present the narratives of the attractionist family members whom I interviewed as a way of developing the educator's and reader's 'multilingualism'.

Towards the end of fieldwork that I undertook between fall 1999 and the summer of 2001, Mr Pulliero, then secretary of a travelling attractionists' association<sup>12</sup>, introduced me to Mr Gappi<sup>13</sup>, who, because of his failing health, asked me to come to his house, a modest, countryside building on the road from Padua to the nearby Hills<sup>14</sup>. His manner was stately, and he arranged that I meet his daughter and granddaughters, and his younger son. Mr Gappi was then in his early 70s; during the 50 years that he'd spent as an attractionist, he'd been a keen observer of the Travellers living in the province of Padua. Now, living a comfortable, settled life, economically well-supported by the income of a toy train attraction parked all year round in a nearby town's public gardens, Mr Gappi recalled how he came to choose a travelling life for himself and his family. Born in the village where he later built his home, he would probably have followed in

his parents' steps, growing fruits and vegetables and selling them at the local market, had it not been for a travelling attractionist family that spent its winter stop near his home. The two families became friendly, and Mr Gappi reported that as a child he "was almost always around the [attractions]; I was almost a son for that family"<sup>15</sup>.

After his father's death during World War II, the relationship between the Gappi boy and the attractionist family grew closer; as soon as he could, the young man decided join the attractionists or, as he put it, "to move his life". He travelled with that family for about five years as an *operaio* (worker), doing a labourer's chores and tending the *mestiere*<sup>16</sup>, though he was always on the lookout for new models of attractions that he would then promote among other attractionists. To further his mobility project, he decided to move to Bergantino<sup>17</sup>, where an *operaio* not only was better paid than in Padua but also had a place at the master's table. In Bergantino, Mr Gappi worked as a truck driver for a local attractionist family until his employer died in a road accident. Shortly afterwards, the widow sold her *mestiere* to a Southern Italian man who bought it on condition that young Mr Gappi would work for him and manage it.

At about that time, Mr Gappi married a "still" (that is, settled) woman from his home area, and his personal dream of success was reinforced by the determination to show his wife's family that he was a trustworthy, reliable person. The young couple moved to Caserta, near Naples, and travelled around that area for two years. Now an experienced *operaio*, Mr Gappi passed on his knowledge to other local attractionists. He taught them to take good care of "the craft", to tackle problems quickly and to restore and repaint the attractions every year during the winter stop. He evoked fragments of the informal education that he had received when working as an *operaio*: in the evenings, for instance, his employer would sternly advise the young men against going out to enjoy themselves after a day's work. Instead, they should save money for the winter, when the craft could not provide any income. Thrift, hard work and self-control were Bergantino's values, Mr Gappi claimed, and he always valued and practised them.

Throughout his narrative, Mr Gappi constructed a positive image of himself and testified to his inner drive. Eventually his family and he returned home to the Hills, and Mr Gappi was finally able to realise his own *mobility* project. He drove a truck and tended the roller coaster of his new employer, who persuaded him to invest not in the ferris wheel of his dreams but instead in a smaller attraction, and who even loaned young Mr Gappi the money to buy it. In recollecting his first steps as the owner of an attraction, Mr Gappi proudly stated:

I still keep the first coins I gained. My craft was popular with the customers, and both my wife and I worked as much as we could. The couch? I did not have much use for it! I worked very hard; I pushed myself to the limits.



Mr Gappi's narrative illustrates how his dream of success and a comfortable life were supported by his ability to learn from others, as well as to safeguard his work and personal identity. He expressed his sincere admiration for the Bergantino attractionists because they "brought the winds of novelty, and we followed them". After remarking that "they have a different attitude towards the world", he added that he believed that he was "a bit like them"<sup>18</sup>.

Like other attractionists, Mr Gappi was upset by the fact that education is still a problem for travelling families. He himself had to make a decision that families do not usually make easily<sup>19</sup>: because he could not chauffeur his older son to school, he placed him in a boarding school to complete his compulsory schooling. Regular school attendance still represents a challenge to many travelling families<sup>20</sup>, who become somewhat resigned to their children's patchy learning or to teachers' inability to help. Mrs Capari, Mr Gappi's daughter, said that she had become aware that children's intermittent school attendance seemed to justify what she called the "I don't give a damn" attitude that many teachers show—an attitude that seemingly allows educators to 'unload' on the family or the next school the task of presenting missed lessons to Traveller children. Mrs Capari hastened to add, however, that there *are* teachers who really care (see also Gobbo, 2007a, 2007b) and give of their own time to tutor children.

Mr Gappi deplored the indifference of some attractionists towards their children's education. Still, he sounded gratified by the fact that his older son chose to skip secondary school when he learned that there were plans to have him join the family enterprise. Mr Gappi then began to be his teacher, taking him along whenever he went to discuss his present or future entitlement to a *piazza*. Mr Gappi knew that practical training would teach his son how to handle negotiations to secure a *piazza* for his own attraction (see Gobbo, 2003a, for additional examples of this kind of practical and communicative knowledge). Following his father into various town administrators' offices represented a new kind of curriculum for the boy. Mr Gappi taught him that "an amusement park is a type of cultural work" and that attractionists are "cultured people" in that they have to know their work rights and make the local administrators respect them.

Interestingly, the issue of the relevance of schooling to the work sector was brought up twice by Mr Gappi's daughter, but her target was the self-centred attitude of many of her colleagues. Mrs Capari is an articulate and intelligent woman who stood up for the attractionists' right to be respected and valued at the 2000 Catholic Jubilee, but she is not blind to the prejudices existing within her own community towards the rest of society. However, she attributed these prejudices to "ignorance", specifying that this kind of ignorance did not result from a lack of schooling but rather from the difficulty that attractionists have with establishing social relations outside a close circle of relatives, friends and work colleagues. In a tone that reminded me of one of her father's bursts of impatience, she stated that those complaining about limited contacts with outsiders should blame themselves for

their own shyness and ineptitude! Later in our conversation, she diagnosed “ignorance” as the primary cause of an unpleasant squabble that she had had with another attractionist who had lost out to her in a bid for a new *piazza*: this colleague who had heatedly opposed her was an “ignorant” person driven by bad judgment rooted in envy and jealousy. Thus, in contrast with her much more positive attitude earlier in our conversation, Mrs Capari had to admit that, much as she loved her work, trust and friendship among attractionists had deteriorated of late. She associated the changes with shifts in wider society today, recognising that she idealised the past:

Some years ago I really loved this work and the human contact it provided. Once there was sincerity, human contact; now one sees more competition and less solidarity. We no longer feel we are all on par, regardless of the income each makes. Now if one makes 100 and another 10, they can seldom be friends.

For Mr Gappi, being an attractionist is a free choice; if work prospects look bad, another job should be found. Families have a great educational responsibility. As he said, “When one is correct, and has been taught to behave correctly by the family, then— . . . But correctness should be learned at home, otherwise— . . .”. Mr Gappi’s belief that education in the family is crucial for future attractionists also acknowledges that a youth’s apprenticeship must be supported by deep respect for the rights of attractionists and of the society at large. Later in our conversation, his daughter endorsed this perspective: her family had taught her to make herself always available to others, even at the risk of being metaphorically “beaten up” by unkind and selfish people. Deeply believing in family and friendship, she confessed: “I cannot live thinking only about myself. I might say so, but when it is necessary, then I am ready to help”, because she “had been taught to act that way”.

Mr Gappi’s narrative clearly presents the family enterprise as a true learning environment where parents are living examples of hard-working, law-abiding citizen entrepreneurs (see Gobbo, 2007b). His daughter deeply shared this ethic: she stressed that taking good care of her attraction was important to her, and claimed proudly that she had never missed a day’s work since she started helping her father in her teenage years. The goal of solving problems without calling for a mechanic or electrician made her willingly learn the lessons taught by her husband and parents-in-law<sup>21</sup>. “Do it yourself” saves money; it is also an opportunity to reaffirm independence (see Gobbo, 2003a).

Mrs Capari stressed that she had been happy to leave school on the completion of compulsory education and become an active partner in the family enterprise. She remembered how she eagerly started to work at her father’s side as soon as she was allowed:

[This] is a job I love, I always loved it, because one is in touch with different people, one *moves*. As a child, I would always be around my father,

helping him as much as I could, and I made up my mind that I would work in this sector. We learned to work outside and inside the home.

At 9 or 10 years of age she was already assigned some simple tasks:

As a young child you cannot do more than collecting tickets, but when you grow up you can stay at the cashier desk. It is always a school for life. My [younger] daughter sits there with me and learns to talk with other people, to have a dialogue with them, and some customers marvel that persons so young can deal with money and tickets in a professional way.

She could have chosen differently (see Gobbo, 2003a): her school grades were good and she had a warm and gratifying relationship with her teachers. Furthermore, having been born after her father had bought the toy train attraction (mentioned above), she had been able to attend school regularly. Once the first five years in a state school had been successfully completed, she was enrolled in a parochial school for the last three years. She said that she'd been "lucky" because her school attendance was not interrupted by the scheduled moves of the fair. She also guessed that her sedentary status, and the fact that she was a familiar figure to the other town residents, had effectively protected her from prejudice. She also emphasised the importance of the "wonderful" teachers whom she had had, particularly one in primary school:

I still have her in my heart; she was able to understand the problems of every one of us pupils. A wonderful experience. And the same was true in junior high [school]; the relationship with my classmates was very, very good and the same was true with the teachers and the nuns who ran the school.

Her positive school experience convinced her that her two daughters should have the same opportunity, even though this has required that they live with her husband's parents in Bergantino<sup>22</sup>, and join her and their father only for weekends and summer vacations.

For all her social and educational optimism, Mrs Capari continues to be aware of the pervasive prejudice towards attractionists, and she has developed relational strategies to prevent unpleasant situations. She informally taught her daughters about the negative reactions that Travellers can evoke in settled people and about ways to counteract these. When it was time to enrol her children in primary school, she did not overlook the fact that school personnel often do not distinguish between travelling attractionists and Gypsies<sup>23</sup>. One of her strategies to prevent teachers' "confusion" about her family was to invite them to visit her home "so they could see the reality of our world, learn about our work, our life, to learn, for instance, that we *do* have a bathroom . . .".

Her daughters, like their mother, love school, although they complained that regular attendance requires that they see their parents less often, and spend only weekends with them gathering the tickets for the ferris wheel or sitting with their mother at the cashier desk. Neither girl intends to work in the family enterprise. At the time of the interview, the older daughter planned to work in the arts, and the younger said that her love for animals will make the Faculty of Veterinary Science a perfect future choice for her<sup>24</sup>. Notwithstanding their career goals, the two daughters have learned a lot about attractionists' work and skills: "You learn how to speak [kindly] to people [since] you cannot be arrogant; you must instead be nice to customers who complain about the price of tickets. You learn to give them a reasonable explanation". The parents have been their teachers, instilling good manners, pride in belonging to a family of attractionists and the communication skills that are important for maintaining good relations with those around them. Both daughters said that they appreciated the fact that their father knows how to relate to all who come by the family attraction and that he usually persuades them to board the *mestiere*. Having been keen observers of their father's manners, they claim to be capable of using the appropriate communication skills:

For instance, if the child passing by has pigtails, you call her with a diminutive, like 'little, cute pigtails'. Your goal is to engage [young] people passing by. [After they have boarded the "wheel"], when their seat comes in front of you, you might hold the microphone in front of them or of their parents, and invite them to speak.

They emphasised how having a microphone to engage customers is something special: not every attractionist has one, and the two daughters were proud to point out the bonus that it represents for the family enterprise.

The girls respected their parents for their "passion" for work; the older daughter emphasised, for instance, how her father "likes what he does", pointing out that he is "proud of it and makes us understand [the reasons for his pride]". She acknowledged how the travelling life was valuable to her and her sister, and how she had learned the importance of a way of doing things that is based on the belief that "united we win". Their mother's language skills are a good example of the attention that attractionists pay to details when interacting with customers. Mrs Capari always starts an interaction by speaking Italian; if it becomes clear that the other person is more comfortable with the local dialect, she switches to it, so as to avoid making the other feel awkward. "I am the one who adapts to [the customers]. . . . These are little things, details, but— . . .". While "making the other feel comfortable" undoubtedly contributes to the success of the family enterprise, it also indicates that the family's behaviour is finely nuanced and culturally complex. Acknowledging such cultural and entrepreneurial sophistication might change the simplistic and negative attitudes of sedentary teachers and administrators with whom attractionists must deal.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter, in addition to reviewing the available research on this topic, I presented a narrative account of a three generation attractionist family, an account that I collected during my ethnographic fieldwork. My aim has been to underline the dynamic nature of minority cultures and the different learning processes that they use—provided that symbolic and material barriers do not undermine them. Awareness of this can positively influence teachers' understandings of diversity.

The Gappi family narratives recount how identification with the traveling lifestyle is progressively achieved, how it is maintained thanks to the values and education within the family and how it might not be chosen by the younger generation, whose cultural framework can accommodate both cultural orientations. Schooling remains a complicated matter even for a successful family such as the Gappis, either because it brings the experience of sedentary people's prejudices or because it requires that children and parents be separated during the school year. In spite of all the national efforts to implement customised programs to ease the structural conditions in which attractionists live, the schools' inability to accommodate the cultural richness of their lives within their sedentary cultural perspective is inevitably a source of discrimination (see ECOTEC, 2008, p. 112).

Most importantly, the Gappis' account of themselves does not support an image of cultural diversity as a self-sufficient, neatly bounded reality. An abstract understanding of cultural diversity can contribute to the misperception of seeing attractionists as (reassuringly) 'the other', an error which has been rightly identified by researchers who work with stigmatised ethnic groups such as Roma and Sinti (Piasere, 2007; Saletti Salza, 2007, 2008). With immigrant and minority groups, there is always the risk of effacing the singularity of persons, and turning them into one-dimensional figures (Galloni, 2007a, 2007b; Troman, 2003) or of muffling the voices that in their vivid accounts reveal the complexity of life (Gobbo, 2003b). Culture, after all, is a concept "*constructed* out of people's actions, and . . . the ethnographer's close attention to what people do . . . will make the non-linear and creative dimension of . . . teaching and learning . . . come into appropriate relief" (Gobbo, 2008a; emphasis in original).

One reformulation of this concept (Goodenough, 1976) stresses:

. . . the unique *version* that each person develops . . . of the various cultures he or she experiences or recognizes as distinct. 'Cultures' of this order are not the neat ones revealed in anthropological writing; they are implicit, personally defined, and experience based. (Wolcott, 1994, p. 1726; emphasis in original)

In the end, personal accounts like those of the Gappi family invite teachers to *see* a way of life distinct from school cultures in its tradition of specific behaviours, values, procedural knowledge and communication styles, and

in its complex appraisal of economic and professional prospects. Presenting lives ‘different’ from the prevailing standard, lives that are sometimes the result of individual decisions to cross over to an alternative culture, invites teachers to take into consideration the role of imagination, self-reliance and self-efficacy in promoting social affiliation outside an individual’s ‘scripted’ membership (see Appiah, 1996; Gobbo, 2003b). It also invites teachers to look for cultural and structural reasons for direct and indirect discrimination. Getting teachers to learn about different minority populations is certainly necessary, but it is insufficient unless accompanied by the disposition to learn that their own beliefs and values are also culturally situated. From this perspective, teachers would benefit from looking at ethnographies as effective educational resources that can help educate them to avoid “cultural blindness, especially when research is carried out within the researcher’s own social environment” (Gobbo, 2008b).

## NOTES

1. Since the possible translations for *attrazionisti*—fairground people or showmen—are less than precise, I coined the English word attractionist to capture some of the complexity of the meaning.
2. Roma and Sinti children are categorised as nomadic pupils although most live in settled encampments.
3. Mine, the first ethnographic research conducted in Italy among attractionists, remains the only study, except for a *tesi di laurea* on the families and children travelling in an area of the Emilia Romagna region written by a student of mine (Canesi, 2001).
4. Taking Ogbu’s comparative perspective (Ogbu & Simons, 1998), Veneto attractionists could be said to have developed a cultural framework able to accommodate many cultural features shared by sedentary families and children together with those of their nomadic lifestyle.
5. A number of attractionist families are now entitled to places in so called “entertainment parks”, located on popular beach resorts, where they stay throughout the summer.
6. Children stay in each school only as long as each fair lasts, unless the parents are willing to drive to the same school from the next fair.
7. cf. Gobbo (2003a).
8. The Annex to the ECOTEC (2008) study collected a series of projects implemented in the Member States.
9. S. Natteroni and I. Tabarella (2008). *Progetto “Lo spettacolo viaggiante”: Regione toscana, anno 2008–2009*. Personal written communication, 29 October 2008.
10. Personal communication by Mrs Capari.
11. The four languages of education are the technical, the narrative, the evaluative and the pedagogical (Scheffler, 1988).
12. *Sindacato Nazionale Attrazionisti Viaggianti*, the National Trade Union of Travelling Attractionists, was part of the much larger leftist *Confederazione Generale Italiana Lavoratori* (Italian General Federation of Workers).
13. All names, with the exception of Mr Pulliero’s, are fictional to preserve the persons’ privacy.
14. The *Colli Euganei* (Euganean Hills), locally known as “the Hills”.

15. Early in my fieldwork, I had heard poignant stories from other attractionists about poor local children joining attractionist families through a sort of informal inclusion. Probably after World War I, a number of children were 'adopted' by attractionist families who could at least offer them food and some future prospects. The celebrated movie *La Strada* can be seen as illustrating how young people could be a resource for poor families that Federico Fellini elaborated in a poetic, but not unrealistic, way.
16. In Veneto attractionists' jargon, an attraction is called *mestiere* (literally "craft" or "job") or *giostra*, from which the everyday word for attractionists (*giostrai*) stems.
17. For a valuable account of Bergantino and its connection to attractionists, see Silvestrini (2000).
18. It must be acknowledged that he also remarked how "a fixed residence is useful, because the *carabinieri* may come around [it] once, but seldom any more. Instead, if one lives in a mobile home, they come more often".
19. For examples, see Gobbo (2003a).
20. This seemed especially true for the Veneto families (as I learned during fieldwork) since the boarding school where many of the children had been enrolled closed down (see Gobbo, 2003a).
21. Because of the characteristics of her father's attraction, the toy train, she never had to face the difficulties that a "ferris wheel" can provoke.
22. The grandparents are a good example of those Bergantino attractionists admired by Mr Gappi. They let their son manage the family craft with his wife when they stepped down from the fair circuit to take care of the granddaughters' education; and they continued to help the younger couple during weekends.
23. For more on the distinction between attractionists and Gypsies, see Vita and Rossati (1997) and Zaghini (2001).
24. The older daughter did not pass the university entrance test. The younger one is now attending the second year of technical high school. The option of veterinary science is still open to her.

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Gobbo 02.04.2012  
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