

The Marginalization of Roma Children & the Importance of Arts-Based Education to
Engage Learning

By

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B.Ed., University of Victoria, 1989
M.A., Norwich University, 2000

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Abstract

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Many Roma children from the EU coming to Canada as refugees have been denied a consistent education and many suffer gaps in their learning or have not had the opportunity to receive any education at all. These circumstances are mainly due to discriminating and oppressive behaviours that have historically prevailed and exist in contemporary society. In considering the difficulty that Roma children have with education, when they arrive as refugees into Canadian schools, it is imperative that Roma children be given an opportunity to access and complete an education in an environment that is supportive, free of discrimination and sensitive to their needs as learners. My research examines the role of visual art as part of an arts-based education program as a means through which Roma children are more likely to experience success with school by participating in an educational model that is *engaging* and supportive of their cultural ways of knowing.

This paper is a case study, grounded in critical theory, into “best practices” in education that engage marginalized Roma children with learning. The study is framed around three research questions: What is distinctly problematic for Roma children in traditional school settings? How can the arts, and art education in particular engage

marginalized Roma children with learning? How can Romani arts and culture be integrated into a curriculum that works to dispel discrimination and oppression of marginalized Roma children?

The study is informed by interviews with a teacher working within a Canadian educational program for refugee children, families and board members of the Toronto Roma Community Centre, as well as my own personal observations and experiences. While I have determined that arts-based education *is* engaging for Roma children, the bigger question that has emerged is, “How can we use arts-based education to enhance the curricular lives and school success of the Roma, a culture of exclusion?” The answer lies in acknowledging that factors such as trust, personal connection with the teacher, parental involvement, First language acquisition, refugee status, cultural preservation, and integration, play a critical role in the educational success of Roma children.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“WHERE THERE IS NO VISION, THE PEOPLE PERISH...”

(Proverbs 29:18)¹



Roma Children foraging through a garbage pile in Fushë Kosovë, Kosovo. Kathleen Hall, July, 2010

I am greatly troubled by the circumstances of children of poverty, not only for the physical and emotional hardships they endure but for the denial of their basic rights to an education and involvement with artistic and cultural experiences. When poverty strips children of human dignity by leaving them illiterate, lacking in knowledge, and culturally

¹ King James Bible "Authorized Version", Cambridge Edition. *The official King James Bible online:* <http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Proverbs-29-18/>

starved, it not only affects the intellect, but it kills the spirit. Education *can* help to eradicate poverty and through education people *can* change their lives.

Art and culture are critical to the well-being of society and it is my belief that all children should have the opportunity to engage with and experience arts education and explore their own and others cultural heritages. Through involvement with the arts, children are able to understand more about who they are, recognize similarities and differences between their own and other cultures, and see beyond their immediate circumstances and know that there are other possibilities in life.

When I first decided that I would focus my research on arts-based programs for marginalized Roma children, in a discussion about my research with one of my professors, a challenging question was posed, “But what about the inevitability of circumstance?” I was completely set back by this, and after a moment’s thought, replied, “But circumstances must never be inevitable!” This was the beginning of my vision to work toward changing the educational circumstances of the marginalized Roma children of the world, and throughout my research and the writing of this dissertation, the age-old biblical quote, “Where this is no vision, the people perish” has become my mantra for changing “inevitable” circumstances into the possibility that through the attainment of an education, Roma children can have a better life.

Kosovo

My practical involvement with marginalized Roma (and other) children came from a call



Mosque at Fushë Kosovë, Kosovo, Kathleen Hall, July, 2010

for volunteers posted on the University of Victoria, graduate student's list serve. An NGO (non-governmental organization) in Kosovo that provided out of school educational support for Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian (RAE) "Gypsy" children was looking for volunteers to work in their summer program. My

background as an art educator qualified me to develop an art curriculum to be used in their program, which would be implemented by local youth volunteers. I was compelled to become involved with the summer program so that I could learn about art education in contexts very different from my own, especially under such challenging conditions of limited resources, historic and cultural differences, and the needed benefits of programs that hope to work toward educational access for marginalized and impoverished youth. This proved to be an exciting and challenging experience as I knew very little about the RAE, Kosovo, the language and background of the children involved, or the educational challenges they faced. It was indeed a life altering experience.



Abandoned Serbian Orthodox Church, Prishtina, Kosovo
Kathleen Hall, July, 2010

I arrived in Kosovo with my 15 year-old son, who bravely agreed to accompany me on this venture, with a suitcase full of art supplies, fabric and notions for making

stuffed toys, and a mixed sense of excitement and anxiety; we were about to experience life as “outsiders”. We didn’t know the language or culture, and had to rely on the goodwill of others to help us navigate through day-to-day life and make our way around. I quickly realized that the RAE children whom we had come to help were also outsiders. My first clue to this was the reluctance of a cab driver to take us to one of the centres we worked at in the Roma mahala (quarters or neighbourhood) in Plemetina, next to *Kosovo B*, an ominous and hugely polluting, coal burning power plant. As we neared the overpass that marked the beginning of the mahala, the cab driver turned around and asked, “Are you sure you want to go here?”

Through the volunteer opportunity in Kosovo, I became greatly concerned with the welfare and educational disadvantages of marginalized children, the Roma in particular, whose struggles with learning limit their access to education. Chief among these struggles is poverty where families cannot pay for books, decent clothing, and registration fees for school, nor provide the proper nutrition needed for health and energy. Other struggles include: forced expulsion from countries which do not want them, language barriers, cultural differences, negative teacher perceptions, and segregation, to name a few. These circumstances are mainly due to discriminating and oppressive behaviours that the Roma have been subjected to both historically and in contemporary society. Consequently, many Roma children have been denied a consistent education and many suffer gaps in their learning or have not had the opportunity to receive any education at all.

As an educator, I became aware of the disparities in Kosovo between how Roma children learn, and their struggles within an educational system that does not consider

their needs as learners. In observing Roma children interacting with their arts-based summer learning program, it was obvious that they were very engaged with learning. However, the traditional education system in Kosovo, like those of many East-Central European countries, does not provide many arts-based learning opportunities nor is there much concern for how to engage Roma children with learning. Through the recognition of the disparity between the lack of engagement with traditional curriculums and the positive responses of Roma children to an arts-enriched curriculum, I focused my research on arts-based learning as best practices in education for marginalized Roma children using the three research questions that framed my case study.

I am not suggesting that arts education, visual art experiences, or integrative art curricula alone are the answer to solving all the educational challenges of marginalized Roma children. However, I do argue that practices of art education within an arts-integrated curriculum are useful tools for engaging Roma children with learning when positive experiences that foster imminently necessary cultural understanding and the building of trusting relationships are also encouraged.

Further exploration of the research questions throughout the course of my study revealed that I was actually doing an interpretive inquiry into a culture of exclusion. While I have determined that arts-based education *is* engaging for Roma children, the bigger question that has emerged is, “How can we use arts-based education to enhance the curricular lives and school success of the Roma, a culture of exclusion?” In essence this study leans toward using culturally relevant education to engage Roma children with learning, and as a means through which they can find their place within the curricula, from which they have historically been absent.

Purpose of Study

My research interests lie in issues of poverty, discrimination and oppression that cause limiting situations for children and deny them the ability to reach their full potential in life through the attainment and completion of an education. In the field of multicultural art education my research interests are based on a personal philosophy that visual art, as part of an arts-based education program provides opportunities for marginalized children to access and engage with education, in order to develop to their fullest potential. The educational needs of marginalized minority children are often not met because of oppression resulting from discrimination. Trying to change the power structures of oppressive socio-political systems is difficult, but not impossible and begins with being able to recognize structures within society that limit our ability as humans to reach our fullest potential. These structures or agendas of socio-political systems are often embedded within the sign symbols (visual texts) of our culture and it is important to learn how to read and make meaning of them in order to understand how they affect our lives. Through the study of art as visual culture, not only can images be read as texts, but art can be used “...to understand the values and life conditions of [our] multicultural society” (Eisner, 2002, p. 25). Understanding and reading the cultural landscape not only allows us to recognize limiting situations, but it motivates us to challenge and change those limits. In this way, critical awareness is developed and the circumstances of marginalized lives can be changed through transformations that take place within learning.

Visual art, as part of an arts-based education program can foster the development of a creative, intuitive approach to multi-dimensional learning. An education system that provides children with arts-based opportunities allows for both cognitive and affective

modes of learning and increases student engagement particularly for marginalized students (Thomas & Arnold, 2011). The Roma children I worked with in Kosovo are representative of what many Roma children struggle with educationally.

Throughout East-Central Europe, Roma children have been denied a proper education; many of these countries segregate the Roma and put them into schools for the developmentally challenged (Greenberg, 2010; Kende & Neményi, 2006; Monaci, Trentin, Zanon, & De Lumè, 2006). Some East-Central European countries have reformed aspects of their educational models, but are yet uncertain as to how to successfully integrate the Roma in ways that will work toward overcoming the discrimination that has historically prevailed toward them, and provide them with a K - 12 education (Kyuchukov, 2007; Lük & Lukanoviè, 2009). In an effort to escape oppression and discrimination some Roma families come to Canada. However, as refugees they live with uncertain futures. Others who have attained landed immigrant status have a greater sense of the future, but must overcome the educational disadvantages of their past, disadvantages that carry forward to their new lives and make it difficult for many to engage with learning.

The Roma Situation in Europe

The Roma are the largest minority in Europe, with an estimated population between seven to fifteen million (Greenberg, 2010; Tóth, 2010). The Roma are currently “one of the most misunderstood, marginalized, and discriminated-against ethnic groups” in Europe (Tamas, 2001 in Walsh, Este, Krieg, & Giurgiu, 2011, p.1). In their briefing, *Human Rights on the Margins Roma in Europe* (2013), Amnesty International states,

On almost every indicator of human development, in almost every European country, the Roma fall far below the national average. They have lower incomes, worse health, poorer housing, lower literacy rates and higher levels of unemployment than the rest of the population. (p. 3)

In many parts of East and Central Europe, Roma suffer extreme poverty and live within mahalas in makeshift houses without water, electricity, or sewage. A brief published by the World Bank in June, 2013, stated that, “In Eastern Europe, 71% or more of Roma households live in deep poverty” (para.1). The Roma generally experience high unemployment, are denied access to adequate health care, and often their children are denied rights to public education. These conditions of poverty are a direct result of centuries of discrimination carried over into contemporary society. According to the World Bank brief, “At the root of these unequal outcomes lies a fundamentally unfair playing field, starting at birth and continuing throughout the lives of most Roma individuals. This spurs a self-perpetuating cycle of unequal opportunities, ethnic discrimination and stifled aspirations” (para.2). Amnesty International (2013) states: “...this is not simply the inevitable consequence of poverty. It is the result of widespread, often systemic, human rights violations stemming from centuries of prejudice and discrimination that have kept the great majority of Roma on the margins of European society” (p. 3). The prejudice and discrimination that has prevailed against the Roma living in East and Central Europe has been escalating in recent years as the Roma become scapegoats for the economic crisis in many EU countries,

Europe’s human rights agencies has voiced concern about discrimination and violence against Roma, sometimes called Gypsies, warning that members of the ethnic group were at an increased risk of becoming scapegoats in the current economic climate. The European Union’s Fundamental Rights Agency, the European Council’s human rights commissioner and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, said in a statement they were ‘deeply concerned (...) by the recent

escalation in hate motivated incidents and racist rhetoric reported in a number of States.’ (New Europe Online, 2009, para.1)

In a recent article titled, *The Exclusion of Roma Claimants in Canadian Refugee Policy* (2014), published in, *Patterns of Prejudice*, Cynthia Levine-Rasky, Julia Beaudoin, & Paul St. Clair, discuss the increasing violence against the Roma in EU countries stating that, “Since January 2008, anti-Roma violence in Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia has involved fire-bombing, shootings, stabbings, beatings, and other acts of violence, often targeting families and children. Extremist and openly racist groups spread hate speech in these countries and organize anti-Roma marches” (p. 7). Given these grave circumstances, many Roma children live in fear and have known the effects of prejudice and discrimination from early childhood; in many cases it has severely diminished their educational opportunities. In 2010, Jack Greenberg, the American civil rights lawyer who was instrumental in ending school segregation in the *Brown vs. Board of Education* case, published a comprehensive study in the *Columbia Law Review*, titled, *Report on Roma Education Today: From Slavery to Segregation and Beyond* (2010). In his lengthy report, Greenberg discusses how many Roma children are placed in segregated schools or special classes designated for the mentally challenged, “... school officials spuriously diagnose Roma children as having ‘light mental retardation,’ and then send them to ‘special’ or remedial schools. A disproportionate number of pupils enrolled in such schools are Roma. The result is entrenched segregation and inferior education” (p. 936). In discussing human rights violations that were litigated in the European Court of Human Rights regarding Roma children in schools, Greenberg stated that, “The court noted widespread anti-Roma discrimination in education” (p. 939).

While there are Roma children who experience success in schools, they are often from families who would be considered middle or upper class. These Roma are the exception in East-Central Europe, and they often do not identify themselves as Roma. Consequently it is difficult to access statistics on the numbers of Roma children who successfully complete K – 12, and post-secondary education (Greenberg, 2010).

The Roma in Canada

In Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, and other areas of Canada, there are many well-established and successful generations of Canadian Roma families. Their parents immigrated to Canada following waves of political unrest such as the Russian Revolution, the fall of the USSR, the dissolution of communism in Eastern Europe, the separation of Czechoslovakia, and the Kosovo War. Currently, many Roma families are coming to Canada as refugees seeking asylum not only from some of the gravest poverty imaginable, but also from the growing and rampant discrimination Roma families are subjected to in their home countries. Due to these unfortunate circumstances, Roma children who immigrate with their families to North America may face social and educational challenges; they may enter schools in Canada dispirited, manifesting low self-esteem and have little confidence in their own academic abilities. Roma children of refugee families often live in constant fear of being sent back to their countries of origin, and therefore may not feel an urgency to attend school or attend regularly. When they do attend schools, these children have cultural barriers to overcome in attaining academic success. Authors of a report on Roma refugee families in Hamilton, Ontario (Walsh et al., 2011) wrote, “The problems Roma refugees have with establishing relationships with institutional systems must be understood within the context of their long history of

racism, marginalization and social exclusion” (p. 9). With many Roma coming to Canada as refugees seeking asylum from extreme poverty and life threatening persecution, it is important for educators to gain an understanding of the Roma and be sensitive to the cultural and psychological needs of Roma children who are enrolled in schools and to provide an educational environment that will be supportive of their needs as learners.

Statement of Purpose

The intent of this research is to provide important knowledge about what works to engage Roma students with learning, students whose education has been interrupted and inconsistent due to their marginalized circumstances. Along with gaining multiple perspectives on Roma educational issues, the purpose of this study is to research the potential of a program within a Canadian school setting that models “best practices” in educating marginalized Roma (and other) children and engages them with learning. Some educational systems in Canada are developing programs in an effort to meet the needs of Roma students; the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) in particular has been addressing the educational situation of Roma children and is of specific interest to my study.

The research is also intended to provide valuable information for educational programs that can be developed both within Canadian and other countries where large numbers of Roma or other marginalized groups are struggling to overcome gaps in their learning so they might complete a K - 12, and possibly post-secondary education. It is expected that adaptations will be needed in developing programs for marginalized children from different backgrounds to address specific contexts and cultural needs.

Research Questions

My research is guided by seeking answers to the following questions:

- What is distinctly problematic for Roma children in traditional school settings?
- How can the arts, and art education in particular engage marginalized Roma children with learning?
- How can Romani arts and culture be integrated into a curriculum that works to dispel discrimination and oppression of marginalized Roma children?

The purpose of this study is to conduct a case study into “best practices” in education that engage marginalized Roma children with learning. The study is informed by the involvement of a teacher working within a Canadian educational program for refugee children (LEAP), and families and board members of the Toronto Roma Community Centre, as well as my own personal observations and experiences.

Significance

In both Canada and internationally, among Roma children and youth there is high absenteeism and early drop out as most schools force them to, “...assimilate ideas and values that are very different from [their] own experience[s] and cultural background” (Monaci et al., 2006, p. 82), and many Roma, “...view education as a means of deculturation used by the dominant society to assimilate them” (Monaci et al., 2006, p. 81). Roma children are often advanced in knowledge of their customs and traditions when they enter kindergarten and have been educated in their cultural ways by observing adults in their community and becoming actively involved with community life (Enguita, 2004; Levinson, 2005; Monaci et al, 2006; Tauber, 2004). This type of involved learning

is something that generally does not take place within traditional educational models that use a more structured approach in the delivery of the curriculum (emphasizing rote and teacher-centered learning), and the physical arrangement of classrooms; in these types of educational settings, Roma children are often not comfortable and may be viewed as behaviour problems (Monaci et al., 2006). Those children who have come to Canada as refugees or immigrants may also have experienced segregation, discrimination, and inferior educational practices (Tamas, 2001).

In considering the difficulty that Roma children have with education, it is imperative that Roma children be given an opportunity to access and complete an education in an environment that is supportive, free of discrimination and sensitive to their needs as learners. My research examines the role of visual art as part of an arts-based education program as a means through which Roma children are more likely to experience success with school by participating in an educational model that is *engaging* and supportive of their cultural ways of knowing.

Definition of Terms

Primary to the understanding of my dissertation is the use of the word “Roma.” In 1971, at the first World Romani Congress, Roma was officially adopted as the preferred name for people of the Roma Nation (Kenrick, 1971). Roma replaces the term “Gypsy” as it has become a derogatory term denoting negative stereotypes. The word Roma originally came from the word “Dom”, which is a Sanskrit word meaning “person” or “human being;” as the Roma people traveled through Persia the pronunciation changed and Dom became “Rom” and later Roma as a common plural for both males and females (Lee, 2009). However, Lee states that in the Romani language:

Roma is the plural of *Rom*, which means an adult male member of the group; a female member of the group is called a *Romni*. In English it is fine to use "Romani woman" and "Romani man", with "Roma" as the plural. Since the word Roma is already a plural, the term "Romas" should not be used in English. The proper adjective in English is Romani, so one should say "Romani music", not "Roma music"². (Lee, 1998/2005, para. 2)

The use of the word “marginalized” throughout my study refers to “...the social, economic, and political processes that restrict life chances for some groups and individuals” (UNESCO, 2010, p. 135). The Roma experience marginalization both as individuals and as members of the Roma Nation. They also experience marginalization in education, defined by the United Nations as, “A form of acute and persistent disadvantage rooted in underlying social inequalities” (UNESCO, 2010, p. 135).

To clarify and make distinct what is meant by “traditional school” and “traditional methods of teaching” in East-Central European countries I am referring to both the structure of classrooms that have rows of desks and limited student movement, accompanied by the delivery of curriculum that tends to be teacher centered and rote learning based, as well as the traditionally discriminatory views of the Roma that are held within education. In the Canadian context these terms refer to a classroom that relies on a similar structured setting and curriculum delivery, however without the discriminatory practices toward the Roma.

The use of the term, “best practices”, was originally used in business to describe a method or practice that had repeatedly shown successful results and become a benchmark technique. In this paper it is referring to a recommended course of action based on a set of guidelines that have been developed from research.

² Many Roma people I spoke with, interviewed, and quoted used the terms "Roma" and "Romani" interchangeably. Consequently both adjectives are used in this paper.

For the sake of avoiding repetition there are several interchangeable terms used for “arts-based education”. These include: “arts-based approach”, “arts-based program(s)”, “arts-based curriculum”, and education richly infused with the arts”. These variation of terms refer to curriculum that includes teaching through one or more of the arts – visual, theatre, dance, music.

Throughout the dissertation, I will be referring to an educational program called, LEAP: Learning Enrichment Academic Program; it was developed by The Toronto District School Board (TDSB) in response to the influx of immigrant and refugee children who arrive in Canada with considerable gaps in their learning. LEAP was developed for students who had limited access to education prior to arriving in Canada. Some of the contributing factors to the educational limitations of LEAP students have been due to life experiences that may have limited their access to formal education due to distance, war, migration or personal factors (Regier, Goossen, DiGiuseppe, & Campey, 2005). There are 40 elementary schools and 13 secondary schools within the TDSB that offer LEAP. The model at Grenoble Public School was specifically chosen because the educator infuses the arts into the curriculum, and Roma children attended the program. The numbers of Roma children vary from year to year; there has been as few as two and as many as six (out of twelve seats).

It is anticipated that there will be several other important terms used within my study that will need clarification for the reader; these will be addressed as they are presented within the context of the writing.

Scope and Limitations

The possibilities presented in this dissertation allow for the transfer of knowledge to be used in developing programs that can be adapted to other marginalized learners, thereby broadening its scope. It is anticipated that the outcomes of the study, guided by the specific research questions, will be applicable to marginalized children from different cultural contexts, and possibly used as a model for meeting educational needs within refugee settlement situations. However, it would be important to consider other marginalized groups on a case by case basis to determine how to adapt programs to best meet their individual circumstances and cultural backgrounds.

There are many challenges to conducting research for my dissertation, challenges that ultimately narrow the scope of the study. Given the long-standing historical persecution that the Roma have endured, it is very difficult for an outsider such as me to be trusted, especially when they want to discuss family matters and children. There is also resistance from Non Government Organizations (NGO's) involved with the Roma, as well as Roma organizations, to allow people who are not part of their organizations to become involved beyond a certain level with their work. I had originally wanted to do my research in Kosovo with the families and situations that I was involved with there, but the barriers seemed insurmountable. Fortunately, I have been able to gain the support of The Toronto Roma Community Centre (RCC) in furthering my research and the focus of my study is that of accommodation of Roma refugee children within the Canadian educational scene.

Initially, direct involvement with Roma families through the RCC was difficult; however, over time as I became increasingly involved with the RCC, a greater sense of

trust was established and I was able to engage in conversations with Roma families and other members involved with the RCC. However, a limiting factor to my research was not having direct involvement with Roma children in the LEAP program as it was not possible to establish a level of trust needed for families to grant an outsider access to their children's educational issues. Consequently, the research relies on the experiences and insights of the LEAP program teacher. Another limiting factor to the study is the physical distance, cost, and time involved which inhibited my ability to participate more fully in direct observations of classroom practices. However, it is my belief that the research conducted in this study, even with its limitations, will open up new possibilities in the advancement of knowledge about Roma education, and work toward reaching the marginalized for the betterment of humanity.

The dissertation will begin with background information provided in this chapter that sets the stage for my research inquiry into arts-based education as a means for marginalized Roma children to engage with learning. Chapter 2 will provide a literature review of articles and readings that support the acquisition of knowledge in each of the conceptual areas formed around the guiding research questions; Chapter 3 will discuss the research methodology and processes; Chapter 4 will present the case study interviews on Roma education; Chapter 5 will provide an analysis of the research data; and Chapter 6 will discuss the implications of the study and pose suggestions for further research inquiries related to arts-based education for marginalized Roma and other children.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides background knowledge and theory in areas significant to this dissertation. It provides a framework from which to understand the complexities of education for Roma children both within Canada and East-Central Europe. The literature review also brings forward studies from the fields of arts and multicultural education that support the significance of the thesis, and explains the relevance of critical pedagogy as the theoretical base in which this research study is grounded. The literature review is constructed as a qualitative study that focuses on analyzing and synthesizing outcomes from the literature that will contribute to best practices in education for Roma students, and to provide justification for the theories that guide and support my research. The goal of the review is to identify central issues within the literature and integrate these findings in support of my research. The approach to selecting articles was a purposive sample and focused on including only those articles that support the acquisition of knowledge in each of the conceptual areas formed around the guiding research questions. Arts education is a key focus for this dissertation because numerous studies show the benefits for marginalized children to successfully engage with learning (Thomas & Arnold, 2011; *Projeto Axé*. 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2010; Smithrim & Upitis, 2005). Therefore the type of literature that I reviewed is of an arts-based, cultural focus grounded in critical theory.

Who Are The Roma?

In order to begin understanding the complexities of education for Roma children, it is important to have some understanding of the Roma. They are descendents of the

Rajput (sons of kings) warriors who left India in the 11th century AD (Rishi, 1996). “Gypsy” is a term that has been applied to the Roma by outsiders. Originally, it was a shortened version of the word “Egyptian” in reference to where it was thought the Roma had migrated from. Most Roma do not like to be referred to as “Gypsy” as it represents negative stereotypes that view them as thieves, beggars, child stealers, and charlatans. The word “Roma” is an adapted word derived from “Dom”, which means “person” or human being” in Sanskrit, an original language of Northern India where the Roma originated (Lee, 2009). Following centuries of battles and invasions, marked by persecution and massacre, a “composite population” that had been taken from northern India by the Ghaznavid Empire (Afghanistan), “became a new people called Roma and spoke a common language called Romani”... “[they] drifted across the Bosphorus to Europe,” with the majority settling in the Balkans (Lee, 1998/2012). Migrating through Russia and into Eastern Europe and beyond, the Roma endured centuries of persecution and discrimination by outsiders. The gravest form of this persecution was the Roma Holocaust of World War II where along with approximately six million Jews, “possibly twenty-five percent of all European Roma perished” (Greenberg, 2010, p. 985).

The Roma language, “Romani” derived from Sanskrit, has been worked into its own and varied dialect as it was influenced in its development by languages spoken elsewhere after the Roma left India (Lee, 1998). Currently, Roma who live in Europe generally speak the language of the country they reside in as well as Romani. Although for some, the Romani language is not spoken or passed on to their children if families do not want to be identified as Roma due to stigmatization. For others, Romani is a forgotten language.

The Roma have developed a rich culture resulting from centuries of being skilled artisans, crafts persons, musicians, dancers, and storytellers. In the past, Roma children grew up knowing the arts as an integral part of their community life; visual art (traditional crafts and material culture), music, and dance were so much a part of their culture that they were almost inseparable from life. A life rich in culture still remains for some Roma families, but most in East-Central Europe live in abject poverty where arts practices, except perhaps music and dance, are a luxury out of reach. It has been difficult for Roma visual artists to emerge in contemporary society mostly due to the fact that they have not had access to professional education nor the financial means to support their art making, and therefore many Roma did not have the opportunity to develop as artists³. Given the poverty stricken lives of many East-Central Roma there is a risk that their distinctive cultural traditions are eroding. Cultural erosion also takes place within many East-Central European schools where traditional curriculum models do not demonstrate any interest in supporting Romani culture (Personal Communication, Csanyi-Robah, 2011).

What has been preserved of Romani culture is often stereotyped and misunderstood. While the romantic notion that the Roma live a carefree lifestyle travelling in colourful, horse-drawn caravans and going from town to town telling fortunes and selling horses may have some glimpses of a bygone reality, the truth is that the Roma are amongst the most persecuted and mistreated people of the world. Roma families coming to Canada as refugees are fleeing unsafe countries where they continue even in contemporary times to be subjected to dangerous, discriminatory actions.

³ <http://www.rommuz.cz/umeni/>

Rampant unemployment, substandard housing, denial of municipal and social services, inferior education, and life threatening assaults by neo-Nazi groups are common factors in the lives of many Roma living in European countries (Amnesty International, 2013; Levine-Rasky et al., 2014; Gokçen, S., 2011; Silverman, C., 1995/2010).

Roma Education in East-Central Europe

The segregation of Roma students is common in many East-Central European countries and children in these schools often receive an inferior education. Segregation typically comes in three forms. School officials discourage Roma children from enrolling in neighborhood schools where non-Roma attend; and when they do, often “white flight” occurs leaving only the Roma students in attendance (Greenberg, 2010). Another type of segregation occurs when:

...school officials spuriously diagnose Roma children as having “light mental retardation,” and then send them to “special” or remedial schools. A disproportionate number of pupils enrolled in such schools are Roma. The result is entrenched segregation and inferior education. Even though many Roma parents are aware that their children do not belong in these schools, some enroll them for the free meals, clothing, and school supplies unavailable at standard schools. (Greenberg, 2010, p. 936)

Greenberg states that a third form of segregation, “intraschool segregation” (sometimes referred to as “within-school” segregation), is where Roma are designated to special education classrooms; these types of classrooms often teach a curriculum for pupils with “mild mental disabilities” (p. 936). When Roma children are placed in “special” schools or classrooms, it is “...not because they have any mental disability, but because they come from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and confront discriminatory attitudes...assessments of Romani children fail to factor in cultural and linguistic differences” (p. 941).

The segregation of Roma children in EU schools is a serious concern as it denies them a proper education. Another problem with education that greatly worries many Roma is assimilation. Many schools in Europe force the Roma to, "...assimilate ideas and values that are very different from [their] own experience[s] and cultural background" (Monaci et al., 2006, p. 82). This creates problems not only when Roma children attend school and are unfamiliar with the expectations and rules, but it also creates a sense of fear that they will have their culture taken away from them. Consequently some Roma, "...view education as a means of de-culturation used by the dominant society to assimilate them" (Monaci et al., 2006, p. 81). Greenberg states that, "...some Roma resist full integration and assimilation: They fear that they will be expected to relinquish their 'values, language, and tradition'" (p. 979).

The issues that diminish the educational opportunities of Roma children in East-Central Europe are multi-faceted. Segregation is perhaps the most damaging of issues, as not only does it pertain to obvious instances of special classes, schools, and "white flight", but the lesser known issues that bar Roma children access to education include municipal infrastructures that have no roads from Roma settlements to schools, lack of birth certificates for registration, and no money for books, supplies or decent clothing. The Roma themselves seem to fluctuate between seeing schools a place to send their children so they can eat, to mistrusting policy makers who they believe are focused on assimilation and cultural erosion. High absenteeism and early drop out among the Roma is a result of these complicated challenges (Greenberg, 2010, Monaci et al., 2006).

Roma Education in Canada: What are the Issues?

The troubled school experiences that many Roma refugee children had to contend with in their home countries are often brought forward as Roma children try to integrate into Canadian schools. In their report on Roma refugee families in Hamilton, Ontario, Walsh et al., (2011) state that, "...Roma culture features a mistrust of institutional systems and doubts about provider compassion and competence" (Walsh et al., p. 9). In her report, *A Hidden Minority Becomes Visible: Romani Refugee Children in the Schools* (2001), Tamas states that, "Traditionally the relationship between the Roma and public schools has been problematic" (Tamas, 2001, p. 297). In order to meet the needs of Roma children as learners, it is important for educators to have an awareness of what these children have endured, to try to understand the dynamics of Roma family and community life, and to recognize the cultural norms and attitudes that affect Roma children's educational success.

Refugee Claim Status

Given the severe discriminatory circumstances they have had to endure in their home countries, many Roma children who come to North America have considerable social and educational challenges to overcome. "Romani children who come from Eastern Europe describe rampant prejudice, discrimination, and overt persecution in school systems of their home countries at all levels" (Lee, as cited in Tamas, 2001, p. 297). Often these children arrive at Canadian schools with no hope of being given a chance to learn, or the self-esteem to believe they can. As a result many Roma children "suffer feelings of inferiority and low self-esteem, and sometimes even deny their identity" (Tamas, 2001, p. 297). Many have also endured violence in their home

countries and their parents do not feel safe letting their children out of their sight. It is understandable how those Roma who are refugees in Canada live in constant fear of being sent back to their countries of origin, and because they do not feel as though they belong or will be able to stay in Canada, or have much faith in educational systems, many Roma parents do not send their children to school or show concern about attendance. The uncertain status of Roma refugee claims affects not only Roma waiting for their claims to be processed but also the Roma community at large:

In general, the high rejection of their refugee claims led the Roma to focus on short-term goals, such as saving as much money as possible, minimal attendance of ESL and other educational or upgrading opportunities. It also led to many instances of depression and neglect of future focus, which included lack of attention to their children's future. This negativity affected the whole community, including even those adults and children who already obtained refugee status. (St. Clair, 2007, p. 15)

Often Roma refugee families are so disheartened and anxious waiting for their claims to be processed that it seems futile to send their children to school where they will have to struggle with the challenges of learning in an unfamiliar language. Ronald Lee, a Roma community leader in the Toronto area has suggested that due to the uncertainty of refugee claimant processing, a teacher within a Roma-controlled school system should educate children until their immigration status was decided (Walsh et al., 2011). Under Canada's changing immigration policies that are shortening the time period for processing and now frequently rejecting Roma refugee claims, a "what's the point" attitude toward school enrollment is growing amongst Roma newcomers. The issues surrounding Roma refugee claimants in Canada have been well documented in, *The Exclusion of Roma Claimants in Canadian Refugee Policy* (2013). Levine-Rasky et al.

discuss that Jason Kenney, former Canadian immigration minister, introduced a “Designation of Countries of Origin” (DCO) list that,

...negatively impacts Roma refugee claimants from these [European] countries since they are given a shorter time span in which to prepare for their refugee hearing. It speeds up the deportation process, and ensures that a refused claimant is removed from the country before one year, giving him/her far fewer opportunities to appeal. (p. 14)

In the article it is further stated that, “Their systematic exclusion is reminiscent of the historical treatment of other groups due to institutional racism” (P. 1).

Attendance

Amongst educators in Canada who work with Roma children, it is stated that one of the biggest challenges to their educational success is attendance (Csanyi-Robah, Personal Communication, 2011; Walsh et al., 2011; Heagy, 2011; Tóth, 2010). Poor attendance is a considerable and complicated educational issue due in part to the value that parents place on education, “...Romani parents might not view education as either essential or practical...Romani people often see no direct link between educational achievement and the material well-being or security of the family” (Tamas, 2001, p. 297). Those parents whose own educational experiences were negative, or who came from countries where their children faced huge discrimination and segregation, are less likely to encourage their children to attend school. In discussing some of the issues Roma families have had with education in the Hamilton area, Paul St. Clair, one of the founders of the RCC, discussed that for many parents, the low esteem they had for education was because “they had very negative school experiences themselves”, and “since they did not benefit from attending school, they did not encourage school achievements in their children” (St. Clair, 2007, p. 15). He said many Roma parents also “...had a hard time in

communicating with teachers and could not assist their children with their homework” (p. 15).

Cultural beliefs can also have a role in attendance issues. In the case of illness, some children who fall ill do not come back to school for several weeks. Roma parents have said that “since the child got sick in school they wanted to make sure the child is strong again before they are sent back”; they saw the school as a source of illnesses... “pollution comes from the *gadje* [non-Roma] world” (St. Clair, 2007, p. 15). In addition, many Roma parents really enjoy the company of their children and like having them at home with them (Greenberg, 2010). In the report on issues with Roma children in Canadian schools, Walsh et al., (2011) stated that, “The Roma parents, especially the traditional Vlach-Roma [Romanian], were quite indulgent of their children and did not always insist that they go to school, especially when they did not feel like it” (p. 911).

Another cultural consideration that can affect attendance is the views on marriage that some Roma still maintain. Susan Heagy commented that at one time in her LEAP class she had an older Roma girl, about 13, who already had a potential husband. Due to this status within her family, the girl was allowed to smoke, and it was likely that before long, the girl would become pregnant. Heagy discussed that this was a potential concern for an elementary school, and urged officials to move her to the middle school level, even though she was still at the primary level in her learning (Heagy, Personal Communication, 2011). In her article, *Roma Children Perplex Local Educators* (2009), Louise Brown reported that, “One principal asked ... why a 14-year-old Roma girl stopped coming to school. He learned the father felt school no longer was necessary because his daughter was old enough for marriage. One Don Mills-area teacher...noted a

14-year-old Roma girl in her class is married” (para. 20). While early (and sometimes arranged) marriage is not uncommon among traditional Roma, it is less likely to occur within Roma families who recognize that this is not in the best interest of their children in contemporary society.

Family traditions and needs are very influential in the school success of Roma children. Another reason for absenteeism among Roma children can be related to their role in providing translation for their families (Walsh et al., 2011). Like many children living in more than one culture (i.e. Roma and Canadian), Roma children often act as language interpreters for their families and are needed for translations at doctor appointments, social service agency meetings, immigration processes and other language intense situations. Interpreting can frequently involve not just helping the immediate family, but extended family as well, thus increasing the length of time Roma students are away from school. Parents who themselves struggle with limited education and English skills also posed problems for Roma children in school. Educators in the Hamilton area noted that: “poor attendance, coupled with limited abilities within the family to help the Roma children, resulted in potentially dire consequences for their educational success” (Walsh et al., 2011, p. 911).

Due to educational disadvantages in their home countries, many Roma refugee children have gaps in their learning and are several grade levels behind their peer group. This is one of the greatest challenges for Canadian educators who struggle with trying to teach students who are far behind other children in their classes. Not only is it difficult to teach the curriculum to these children, but their attendance is a huge concern. In conversation with Gina Csanyi-Robah (2011), she stated that several educators within the

TDSB have approached her asking why Roma children have such high rates of absenteeism. Gina discussed that poor attendance at school by Roma children can largely be due to self-esteem issues that result from students being several grade levels behind their peers, especially at the high school level. Not only is school very difficult for these students but they are embarrassed that they appear to be at such a low level of learning. They often end up staying in ESL classes with mostly Roma students and feel segregated from their peers. Consequently their attendance at school becomes very occasional.

Educational Disadvantages in Home Countries

It is not surprising that Roma children who arrive in Canada are behind their peers in learning. “Across [European] countries, 70–80 percent of Roma populations have less than a primary school education, while very few have completed primary and secondary education. Some Roma have no education at all and less than 1 percent of Roma continue on to higher education...”(Greenberg, 2010, p. 933). Many Roma children who arrive in Canada also have a lack of early childhood education that puts them at an academic disadvantage right at the start of their learning years.

According to a 1995 study by the World Bank, only twelve percent of Roma were in preschool...Children who miss preschool miss the acculturation that comes with handling reading and writing materials and interacting in classroom settings. As a result, they lag behind classmates in academic achievement and become segregated by academic performance. (Greenberg, p. 974)

Greenberg states that attending kindergarten in East-Central European countries can be difficult for Roma children due to registration difficulties; as many Roma families live in illegally built communities, they do not have a verifiable, government recognized address and therefore cannot be officially registered in or attend school (Greenberg, 2010). Consequently many young Roma children coming to Canada may have no

previous school experience, and older children may have an inferior education that sets them apart from their age group when integrating into Canadian classrooms. In commenting on the educational set-backs of some Roma students, Irene Atkinson, a TDSB trustee stated that, "We need to develop curriculum for Roma teenagers in Grade 10 who are working at a Grade 4 to 6 level..."(as cited in Brown, 2009, para. 4).

Engagement with Learning

While attendance and being behind their peers in learning are some of the biggest challenges educators of Roma children deal with, engaging them with learning can also pose problems. In her article, *Roma Children Perplex Local Educators* (2009), Brown discusses that Canadian educators are not only concerned that Roma students have to catch up academically to grade level, they are also perplexed as to why Roma students don't seem to care about school and even appear suspicious of it. This lack of engagement, coupled with a wariness of school, is most likely due to previous negative experiences in their home countries, and possibly parental attitudes about school as well. However other factors can contribute to difficulties in engaging with learning. Many refugee children have experienced trauma in their past which can create self-esteem issues resulting in emotional and behavioural problems (Rousseau, Lacroix, Singh, Gauthier, & Benoit, 2005). These issues can be crippling in terms of learning, and considerable therapy work (often arts-based) may be necessary to help some refugee children regain a sense of self.

Poor engagement can also be attributed to cultural factors. "For centuries, the Romani family has taken care of educating and training their children" (Tamas, 2001, p. 297). Many Roma children are often advanced in knowledge of their customs and

traditions by the time they are of school age. They have been educated in their cultural ways by observing adults in their community and becoming actively involved with community life (Enguita, 2004; Levinson, 2005; Monaci, et al., 2006; Tauber, 2004). This type of involved learning is something that often does not take place within traditional educational models that use a more structured approach in the delivery of the curriculum, emphasizing rote and teacher-centered learning. Even the physical arrangement of classrooms with desks in rows is alien to Roma children. In these types of educational settings they are often uncomfortable and restless, and may be viewed as behaviour problems (Monaci, et al., 2006). Many educators have expressed concern that Roma children are disengaged and are frustrated by the perceived inability of some students to integrate into the learning environment (Csanyi-Robah, Personal Communication, 2011). Another cultural reason for lack of engagement is the perspective that, "It's street smarts, not book smarts that's been their priority, so you have to make school a place where they want to go," suggested St. Clair, [former] executive director of the Roma Community Centre (as cited in Brown, 2009, para. 18).

Language Barriers

Apart from cultural issues, difficulty in engaging with learning can often be due to language problems. Language barriers not only create problems with learning, but can also result in difficulties with "social relationships within the school setting" (Walsh et al., 2011, p. 911). Many Roma refugee children have had to learn multiple languages throughout their childhood due to previous experiences with forced migration and relocation. Some may have learned English in their home countries but many have not. It can be particularly problematic for those refugee children whose families face uncertain

futures with their refugee status. Many families fear that if their children learn English while in Canada they might lose the ability to speak the language of their home country, and upon deportation their children would be ostracized once again within schools (Walsh et al., 2011). Most Roma children who come to Canada do not speak English and can be at a complete loss when they first attend school if services are not in place to provide ESL support. School cutbacks negatively affect the integration process if language services are limited and interpreters are unavailable for newcomer children.

Discrimination and Bullying

Almost all of the Roma refugees who come to Canada have experienced discrimination and persecution in their home countries. In some situations this spills over into their lives in Canada, particularly in neighborhoods where there are large multicultural populations such as in Toronto. Within these schools and communities, educators are working to create public awareness about the Roma to combat racist and discriminatory behaviours amongst students that can at times surface. Generally these behaviours are due to the fact that many youths from diverse cultures, who are often new refugees themselves, either have pre-determined assumptions about the Roma, or are totally unfamiliar with their culture and see them as threatening or dangerous. Roma youth are typically “street smart” and many have experienced violent attacks against their communities in their home countries; as a result they may become defensive especially when encountering other youths who appear aggressive.

In some Toronto communities Roma, Tibetan, Somalian, and other culturally diverse youth are all living in the same neighborhoods trying to navigate through uncertainties about people they are unfamiliar with and whom they may perceive as

potentially threatening (Csanyi-Robah, Personal Communication, 2011). Unfortunately, the fear of the unknown can often lead to violence and aggressive behaviour especially amongst at-risk youth. To address some of these problems within the Toronto area, a hate crime prevention and education project for Roma youth as well as a community building partnership was developed between the RCC and both Toronto Police Service and York Regional Police. The goals of the project were: (a) to educate Roma youth about human rights and how to prevent and report hate crime; (b) educate the police about the Roma community; (c) and build awareness through public education to shed light on the “anti-Gypsy” hate speech and violence that has targeted the Roma community: “This trust building initiative in partnership with the community and the police has been critical in facilitating the successful settlement of many Roma newcomers in the community within the Greater Toronto Area” (Csanyi-Robah, Personal communication, 2011).

Many of the issues that affect the educational success of Roma children, can also be identified amongst the struggles of other refugee groups who come to Canada. However, what is distinctly problematic for the Roma, is that they are a nation without a country that has been displaced for centuries. I believe this forced migration has created its own unique circumstances for the Romani that has perhaps resulted in their very strong sense of community, and great mistrust of outsiders. For educators, this is a challenge that requires forming authentic relationships and trust.

Learning About Roma Culture

Of great importance is to educate teachers, and both Roma and non-Roma children about Romani history, arts and culture in an effort to identify similarities and differences between, and to create connections amongst cultures in order to erase

stereotypes and discrimination. “Learning about Romani history and culture may also affect [Roma] commitment to education. . . Relevant curricular content need[s] to be developed, facilitating the ability to teach Roma children through their culture” (Walsh, 2007, p. 911-912). Learning about their culture through its strengths rather than through weak, negative stereotypes, gives children a sense of pride in who they are and where they come from. The dire poverty many Roma refugee children endured in their home countries, in many cases, stripped away their opportunities for cultural expansion and worked toward eroding their heritage. When children are provided with insights into who they are and where they come from, they are in a much stronger position to understand themselves in relation to other cultural experiences. “St. Clair urged teachers to make Roma children feel valued, possibly for the first time in their lives, by profiling their culture in class and by urging them to join after-school clubs and teams” (as cited in Brown, 2009, Para. 22).

The Roma Curriculum

The Toronto District School Board developed a special program called the *Roma Experience*; it consisted of a classroom curriculum specifically designed in anticipation of an influx of Roma students to the district. Because teachers and students were unfamiliar with the Roma and had very little knowledge of their culture and history, members of the TDSB Equity Department with the assistance of members of the Toronto Roma Community Centre, put together a curriculum that introduced both Roma and non-Roma students to the unique and often unknown heritage of the Roma Nation (TDSB, 2000). Through the use of visual art, photography, music, poetry, stories, and drama, students gained an understanding of the Roma experience. To culminate the learning, in

conjunction with a visiting Romani artist, a mural was created with students to show the children's perspectives and understandings of Roma life and history in relation to issues of human rights, which were the focus of the curriculum. In this particular model, the arts became the vehicle through which both Roma and non-Roma children learned about Romani history and culture in an effort to erase stereotypes, dispel discrimination, and reveal the common bonds that exist between cultures. Issues of racism and prejudice were brought forward to help the children understand what many Roma and other children of non-mainstream cultures endure, and to help explain why the Roma are leaving their countries of origin and coming to Canada as refugees and immigrants (TDSB, 2000). The powerful imagery presented in the curriculum was described as a very effective way to help students engage with learning both on an affective and cognitive level (Hutchinson Lee interview, 2012).

The Role of Art Education

As educators become sensitive to the many educational challenges facing the Roma, it is my hope that they will look to art education and the use of visual art as a means through which they can engage Roma students with learning, through establishing trusting relationships, and drawing upon the student's experiences and Romani culture to help these children build confidence in both themselves and their learning abilities. While I am not suggesting that arts education and visual art experiences are the answer to solving all the challenges of Roma education, through the arts, a cultural connection can be made that will help educators and non-Roma students gain a more accurate understanding of Romani culture that for too long has been overshadowed by negative stereotypes, false perceptions, and rampant discrimination. Based on my experiences

teaching art for many years in public schools, my work with Roma children in an art program in Kosovo, and what I have learned through the research conducted in this study, I am convinced that practices of art education within an arts-integrated curriculum can provide Roma students with positive learning experiences that will foster eminently necessary engagement with learning through cultural and aesthetic ways of knowing.

Jan Sajko: Slovakian Art Educator



Art teacher Jan Sajko at the exhibition - Roma Song, Sabinov, Slovak Republic (no date)
From <http://128.175.34.249/RomaArt/Photos%202004/Forms/slideshow.aspx?ViewStyle=slideshow>

In Slovakia, art teacher Jan Sajko developed a unique and exemplary art program for Roma children. The school-based program, which does not follow a traditional Slovakian curriculum, has been hugely successful and has gained international acclaim. Sajko developed his own teaching methods for the marginalized Roma children in his

community because he states that, “If we used a traditional instruction, Roma students would fail academically, become academically handicapped, and lose self-confidence and motivation for academic school learning, which often leads to a negative attitude toward an academic subject and toward school in general” (Sajko, 2000, para. 3). Sajko discusses that the Roma families in his village of Jarovnice, experience 100% unemployment, there is no sewage system, and many are malnourished and sick. He says that when the children first come to school they are not yet ready; they don’t have the “hygienic and cultural habits expected of a traditional school”, and further states that,

A traditional instruction and pedagogical practice, which is developed from and aimed at mainstream middle-class Slovak children and community, does not make sense for those Roma children. Children from socially and economically disadvantaged conditions cannot match the instruction, curricula, and pace of a traditional school. For example, I noticed that the hand muscles of many Roma first grade children are not developed enough in comparison with mainstream middle-class Slovak children so it takes more time for them to learn how write and draw. In addition to that, the Roma first graders have to process a lot of information in the Slovak language, which is not their native language. (Sajko, 2000, para. 3)

Jan Sajko developed an original teaching methodology for the Roma children in his school by encouraging the students to draw upon the experiences of their real life situations, by communicating with his students about their lives and culture, and through the use of playful activities, which encouraged the students’ creative responses to art (Europa, 2009). Sajko’s methodology helps to “... release the artistic potential of Roma children and develop their personality” (Europa, 2009, p. 2). The goals of Sajko’s art program are:

- Aesthetically cultivate the whole person of a student who comes to school from a socially and economically disadvantaged living conditions
- Deliberately work with the student’s thinking, feelings, and actions in order to transform the student’s value system

- Respect the individuality of the students and their diverse psychological, intellectual, emotional, and physiological development
- Develop a disposition to an artistic creativity in Roma students, lead them to spontaneous work in art, and promote a strong and positive self-identity (“romipen” in the Roma language meaning of proud to be a Roma)

Sajko understood that the Roma students he was working with needed more individual attention and sensitivity from teachers. He also suggested that students work from familiar themes that are meaningful such as family events and experiences and draw upon Romany culture such as songs and folk tales (Sajko, 2000). He says these themes are important because they, “ can help to develop better relationships with other people, better attitude toward the students’ artistic work, and respect for the students’ own work” (Sajko, 2000, *Instructional Themes in My Work*, para. 1). He also suggested that students should work from the concrete to the abstract. “This means that the student moves from familiar, known, and understandable to unfamiliar, unknown, and initially incomprehensible” (Sajko, 2000, *My teaching practice in different grade-level classrooms*, para. 1).

Sajko’s program is an example of a successful art program that helps Roma children build confidence in both themselves and their learning abilities by drawing upon Roma student’s experiences and culture. The program is successful not only because the students’ work gained international acclaim⁴, but also because it has helped some Roma children transform their lives. Coming from a place of deep poverty, the exposure to other cultures, including successful Roma people from another country⁵, gave a small

⁴ See awards and exhibitions: <http://ematusov.soe.udel.edu/jano/Awards.htm>

⁵ When Sajko travelled to Austria with a group of four high school boys, they met some Austrian Roma people who were financially well-off. They had good jobs, nice houses and cars, they knew about Roma history, music, and traditional songs, and were well respected by members of their Austrian community.

group of Sajko's students the opportunity to recognize that their lives as Roma could be different, and encouraged some of his students to go to high school and change the circumstances of their lives. Although Sajko's art program in Slovakia is an exception in Eastern Europe, it is proof of the great power of visual art for Roma children to experience engagement and success with learning through connections with their inner, creative selves and their rich, cultural heritage.

With the permission of Jan Sajko, I have used several examples of his students' artwork throughout my dissertation. These images were chosen for their aesthetic merit and to keep the reader mindful of the Roma children that are the focus of this dissertation.

Theoretical Framework/Grounding

Art Education and Engagement with Learning

How can experiences with art develop critical awareness and work toward engaging marginalized children with learning, helping them to overcome oppressive circumstances in order to transform their lives? In answering this, two further questions need to be considered: What is art? What can be learned from art?

What is Art?

Theories of art are numerous amongst scholarly fields such as aesthetics, cultural anthropology and visual art. And the shift from modernism to postmodernism has added further complexity to the effort to define art. Quite often the term "Art" is associated with the western tradition of fine, or high art, and the exclusion of other cultural references to art. In the field of art education, one theory of art in particular has been recognized for its

This gave the boys a different look at Roma life beyond the dismal circumstances of their own living conditions (from Sajko, 2000).

cultural inclusiveness. This theory was formulated by Ellen Dissanayake in her book, *What is Art For?* (1988). Dissanayake states that, “If we presume to talk about art, we should try to take into account the representatives of this category created by all persons, everywhere, at every time” (p. 5). Addressing art from an ethnological basis, Dissanayake sees art as a behaviour that is, characteristic of humankind and to fully understand it, “...we need to ask the question, ‘What is art for?’” (p. 6). In asking this question in light of art as, “expressions of a universal behaviour” art can be viewed as “...one of a number of manifestations [of various human groups] that have existed and do exist” (p. 8). Historically these expressions of human behaviour (art) have generally been for, “making something special” such as ceremonies or rituals (Dissanayake, 1998). I interpret this as meaning to infuse something with a sense of spirit. In contemporary society Dissanayake states that “specialness” has been replaced with a, “...’new aestheticism’ [that] is really a last-gasp attempt by individual humans to make for themselves what their society, aided by the arts, presented in earlier times to them as a birthright” (p. 192). This new aestheticism, predominant in contemporary society “...is a way of possessing sacredness and spirituality in a profane world; art in everything or everything-potentially-art is a way of imposing coherence...on selves and experiences that have fragmented” (p. 192). I suggest that this new aestheticism that refers to postmodern art also encompasses visual culture.

Dissanayake’s question, “What is Art For?” makes us aware that all cultures have meaning attached to art through the experience of creating. In many small-scale societies art is part of daily life and not even a word in their language. Many objects created for daily use take on added importance by their specialness and beauty. By learning to

extract meaning from the images, objects, and experiences that are part of people's lives, as well as the contexts within which they are made, we gain a better understanding of ourselves, of others, and the multicultural world in which we live.

If visual culture defines art in contemporary society, it is important to further explain what it is. Visual culture as defined by art educator Paul Duncum is:

...an umbrella term to incorporate all visual artefacts through which we make meaning. This includes two-dimensional and three dimensional artefacts, whether they are conventionally thought to be high or low art, fine art, popular art, indigenous or folk art...consumer culture, media culture...as well as vernacular visual practices. (Duncum, 2002, p. 16)

Duncum uses the term “visual” to sidestep the baggage that comes with the word ‘art’, defining visual as “...the wide variety of visual images, objects and experiences from which meaning is made...”; he uses the term culture, “...to focus attention on the contexts in which meaning is made” (p. 16). Visual culture allows the teaching of art to become culturally relevant to the lives of the individuals being taught, particularly when theoretical approaches are applied to extract specific types of knowledge.

Elliot Eisner, a leading authority on art education, also addresses visual culture in his book, *The Arts and the Creation of Mind* (2002). In a chapter titled, “Visions and Versions of Arts Education,” Eisner says that “...in promoting visual culture I refer to efforts to help students learn how to decode the values and ideas that are imbedded in what might be called popular culture as well as what is called the fine arts” (p. 28).

“Visual culture” is a recent manifestation of a theme that has long been present within the field of art education over the past two centuries. These themes – visions and versions – reflect “aims” or values that are “...the product of visionary minds, persuasive arguments, and social forces that reflect what is congenial to the times” (Eisner, 2002, p. 25).

I believe that using visual culture for a curriculum base in art education particularly in a multicultural setting is very relevant to our postmodern society. The field of art education has experienced many changes as movements in art shifted from modernism in the 20th century to postmodernism in the 21st century. Modernism elicited an analytical approach to the teaching of art as educators sought means to define the abstractionist works emerging in that century. However, as postmodernism began to replace modernism in the later part of the 20th century, understanding art required the viewer to delve into meaning that was/is culturally embedded rather than universal. The formalist approaches to art education were no longer sufficient when applied to postmodernism, yet the shift from analysis to meaning has not been implemented in many art education curriculums. Reconceptualising education is not a quick and easy process, but given the issues surrounding multicultural education, it seems imperative that visual culture must take a control position in the art education curriculum.

What Can Be Learned From Art?

There are many scholarly fields that theorize about art and epistemology. It is not within the scope of this dissertation to make a general summary of these; I will instead focus on what can be learned from art as defined by visual culture within a multicultural art education context.

Referring to visual culture as defined within this paper, “If art is seen as visual culture, an understanding of aesthetic experience is unavoidable because aesthetics relates specifically to the perceptual experience by which cultural experiences are at least partially known” (Duncum, 2002, p. 21). The relationship between art and epistemology shifts from knowing art to knowing aesthetics; one way of knowing aesthetics is to

experience meaning through art (Duncum). It is through personal experience with art that we come to understand it. This is not a new concept in art education with a historical base in the educational philosophy of John Dewey. In *Art as Experience*, Dewey discusses aesthetic experience as being intertwined with intellectual, practical, and emotional experience. Intellectual refers to having meaning. Practical involves interacting with events and objects that surround it. And emotional is the binding of parts to the whole (as cited in S. Cahn & A. Meskin (Eds.), 2008) In other words responding to art is a holistic experience.

Dewey explains that in fully engaging with a work of art through perception, we are summoning energy to take in the experience: "...an act of perception proceeds by waves that extend serially throughout the entire organism ...and the perceived object or scene is emotionally pervaded throughout" (as cited in Cahn & Meskin, 2008, p. 314). This is a very holistic consideration of how responding to art, when it surpasses mere recognition, involves multiple ways of knowing and the aesthetic experience is not distinct from cognitive functioning.

Graeme Chalmers, known for his work on multicultural art education, states that "...knowing art is a social study", and that, "Knowing art aesthetically, and knowing art socially are interrelated" (Chalmers, 2002, p. 97). The social aspect Chalmers is referring to is the context within which art was made and experienced. This includes different cultures, individuals, groups, time periods, and purposes such as buying, selling, displaying, and critiquing of art; Chalmers discusses that "we get closer to knowing art when we see it from these multiple perspectives"(p. 86).

Elliot Eisner agrees that knowing is a multiple state of affairs, not a singular one. “In pragmatic terms knowing is always about relationships. We need to know different things for different purposes” (Eisner, 2008, p. 5). Art educator Kerry Freedman also claims that knowing is about relationships, “...understanding art is a matter of understanding the art experiences of people and the learning that occurs in and during those experiences in the context of particular conceptual locations” (Freedman, 2001, p. 131).

Aesthetic experiences with art that develop meaning allow for advancements in knowledge to take place and are one of many forms of cognition. In his book *Art and Cognition* (2002), Arthur Efland makes the argument that the arts are intellectually demanding, and discusses aspects and philosophies of cognition, which he ties to aesthetics. According to Efland, the aesthetic is cognitive because cognition begins with the images given in perception. In his argument that aesthetics is cognitive knowing, he also draws upon the work of Frederic Jameson (1988), a Marxist literary and cultural critic, who claims that the study of contemporary artworks is the cognitive mapping of postmodern space where “...the mapping is an aesthetic process since the artwork is both experienced individually and encountered by the senses” (as cited in Efland, 2002, pp. 170-171). Efland further quotes Jameson in relation to how art helps us to know the world:

...the purpose for teaching the arts is to contribute to the understanding of the social and cultural landscape that each individual inhabits. The arts can contribute to this understanding, since the work of art mirrors this world through metaphoric elaboration. The ability to interpret the world is learned through the interpretation of the arts.... (p. 171)

Efland's research is an important contribution to understanding how learning through art is simultaneously an aesthetic experience and a cognitive function. Elliot Eisner cites the work of Ulric Neisser who coined the term "cognitive psychology", in *Cognition and Reality: Principles and Implications for Cognitive Psychology* (1976), where he as well professes that "perception is a cognitive event" (as cited in Eisner, 2002, p. xii). Too often the arts are dismissed in education as a "soft" subject because they are associated with the affective domain of feelings, emotions, and intuition. The type of knowledge that is developed through aesthetic, sensory perception involves more than one domain because through perception we are engaged in both sensory and cognitive learning. Efland further clarifies the importance of the type of learning that occurs through art, "We have multiple forms of cognition...but in my view these do not stand in opposition to each other. Rather, they emerge from the same common source, the basic level of experience originating in bodily and perceptual encounters with the environment including culture" (Efland, 2002, p. 171). In developing perception through vision and experiences, art is both about knowing, and knowing who we are.

In creating and responding to art we are engaged in experiences that provide us with personally relevant meanings of the culture in which we, and others live, making us aware of cultural conditions. When these conditions are thought about critically, the stage is set for transformative learning to occur. From a critical theory perspective, "...transformational learning occurs when the individual is taught to look critically at the world and becomes conscious of the reality that surrounds them then places their lives within the context of it" (Freire, 1982, p. 101).

Engaging in the arts opens people up to their aesthetic sensibilities, and through creative learning processes offers an exploration of different ways of perceiving and thinking critically about the self and the world. Using the arts as a vehicle through which to move through personal transformation towards social change is a realistic and verifiable process (Bradley, 2007; Clover, 2007; Naidus, 2009). In addressing issues of oppression and discrimination within multicultural education, experiences with art can build toward new ways of seeing and thinking that have the potential to create positive change in people's lives.

Multicultural Art Education

It is important to consult the research on multicultural education in considering best practices in education for marginalized Roma children. Multicultural education is an incredibly complex field. Defining the issues within it and attempting to address them is problematic as it is compounded by differing voices amongst theorists, seemingly contradictory findings in research, and shifting social and economic structures within society (Kirova, 2008).

In Canada, multicultural education is part of the curriculum in many schools and is based on the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982) and the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* (1988) which was developed in response to the rapid increase in cultural diversity that Canada was experiencing in the 1970s. Anna Kirova compiled a study that critiqued Canadian multicultural education. Kirova's paper, *Critical and Emerging Discourses in Multicultural Education Literature: A Review* (2008), involved theorists predominantly from critical pedagogy, antiracism, and critical race theory. Kirova focused mainly on the research from these theoretical perspectives as they

advanced some common criticisms of multicultural education within a field that has been defined as “troubled” because of conflicting voices and their conceptual differences (Kirova, 2008). The following summary of the five main areas of concern are extracted from Kirova’s review:

- 1) Emphasizing exoticized, knowable (other) cultures solidifies the boundaries between majority and minority cultures
- 2) By renaming the difference from racial to cultural, white dominance is reproduced
- 3) Multiculturalism's view of the self/culture relationship reiterates the cultural hegemony associated with Eurocentrism
- 4) Multiculturalism's culturalist ideology reinforces existing inequalities
- 5) Multicultural education is assimilationist in creating national citizenship and identity

These categories represent the most problematic areas within Canadian multicultural education that in some cases were actually contributing to racism, creating cultural boundaries, and inequalities. Despite these criticisms held by theorists, Kirova concluded that they all agreed multicultural education should continue as a discourse in educational theory; however, the main concepts should be rearticulated, “. . . in order to reflect their complexity and to create an education system that is inclusive of all students” (p. 12). Within the five categories, problematic areas were rearticulated. It was recommended that a move should be made away from the idea of celebrating cultural diversity (known as the ‘piñata curriculum’) and “exoticizing” culture (Kirova, 2008). The way in which some curriculums address cultural identities often creates a “white” tolerance of the “other” and further adds to stereotyping and the building of cultural boundaries, which can lead to identity confusion for visible minorities who may feel forced to live within their cultural traditions (Kirova, 2008). It was suggested that an approach more reflective of contemporary society would be to look at cultural identities

as social identities (Kirova, 2008). The review claimed that overemphasis on culture had created a shift in renaming difference from racial to cultural and that when the term “culture” replaces “race” it depoliticizes white dominance and its responsibility for educational failure and blames it on the culture of the “Other”, thereby escaping any racist sentiments (Kirova, 2008). Another concern with culture was that overemphasizing hybridity could blur identities and mask oppressive and dominant structures that were present (Kirova, 2008). In other words it would be more difficult to recognize “white-dominant” oppressive measures against *specific* cultural groups. If we fail to recognize that oppression exists, we will likely fail to make efforts toward social change. Instead, social structures should be revealed for their inequalities through educating students about social justice issues. The critics also felt that multiculturalism fosters pluralism, and that the multicultural charter in Canada promoted assimilation when the goal of multiculturalism should be to support the concept of universal citizenship that respects differences while identifying and nurturing commonalities (Kirova, 2008).

Kirova’s research has some very important findings in regard to how effective Canadian multicultural education has been in resolving issues of cultural diversity; her review is one of the only recent documents that critiques the achievements and setbacks within the field. Although the critique was specifically about Canadian multicultural education, it is relevant for considering multicultural education in general. While I have not fully addressed all issues within the review, cultural identity in particular seems to require some major consideration and for the most part should be reconceptualised. This is where art education has an important role to play in drawing upon visual culture to readdress culture and identities in a more inclusive way and tackle the underlying and

important socio-economic and political issues that need to be addressed in order to create structural change and move toward social justice.

Graeme Chalmers also addresses some of these issues in the handling of culture and other areas in discussing how he was compelled to reconsider some of his positions on multicultural (art) education in a paper titled, *Celebrating Pluralism Six Years Later: Visual Transculture/s, Education, and Critical Multiculturalism*. Chalmers presented this paper as a keynote speaker for ‘The 2002 *Studies in Art Education* Invited Lecture’ at The National Art Education Annual Convention. In the lecture, he explained the changes in his thinking and in multiculturalism itself that had occurred after he wrote *Celebrating Pluralism: Art Education and Cultural Diversity* in 1996. Such changes resulted from a group-written book review conducted by Patricia Stuhr and colleagues at Ohio State University (1999). The review questioned three aspects of Chalmers’ *Celebrating Pluralism: Art Education and Cultural Diversity*. The following summarizes their concern with Chalmers’ influential book:

- 1) The nature of multicultural education—what it is and what it isn’t—celebrating, pluralism versus celebrating differences, learning about art in a variety of cultures versus using art to make a difference
- 2) The book’s apparent support for cultural relativism and lack of a clear statement supporting some universal moral values and decrying other more offensive belief systems and cultural practices
- 3) The OSU group also felt that embracing a discipline-based approach to art education (DBAE), Chalmers made multicultural art education too tidy and too manageable by promoting “evolution” rather than “revolution.” (Chalmers, 2002, p. 294)

What they were questioning in Chalmers’ book was the notion that art should not just be about celebrating diversity, but rather it should have a critical or insurgent nature to it that becomes a tool for making a difference. The Ohio State University (OSU) group felt that Chalmers was “too soft” in his vision for multicultural art education, and

that it needed a more political, activist role, and should address issues of hybridity, transculturalism, and diasporic experiences. Chalmers agreed with many of these points, reconsidering his positions. In addition to the OSU critique he also cited three books that helped to persuade his thinking: Sneja Gunew and Fazal Rizvi's, *Culture, Difference, and the Arts* (1994); Sonia Nieto's, *Affirming Diversity* (1996); and *Contemporary Art and Multicultural Education* (1996), edited by Susan Cahan and Zoya Kocur. Chalmers discusses that the authors of these books see art education as needing to tackle big themes that focus on critical or insurgent multiculturalism.

In his rethinking of multicultural art education, Chalmers argues that his book did contain these themes, "...that can address and incorporate transcultural hybridized experience" but suggested that they were perhaps not boldly stated (Chalmers, 2002, p. 297). He also expressed concern that from this "soft" stance, teachers may end up addressing cultural diversity from a sympathetic rather than empathic viewpoint that looks at multiculturalism as a means to help others rather than aligning with their struggles; this sympathetic stance may foster the hegemonic positioning of the "white" Eurocentric with the non-white "less advantaged" (Chalmers, 2002). He expressed concern that teachers still tend to address cultural diversity in a celebratory way, using concepts of festivals and neatly packaged lessons employing cultural stereotypes to educate students about other cultures. Chalmers agreed that art educators must recognize that transcultural hybridity is a new reality of diversity, meaning that many cultures are now intermixed. This raises concern for viewing cultural diversity as singular, traditional cultures, where in fact cultures are blending and merging and creating new cultures, and

that art that is created from these transcultural hybridized identities is an important consideration for art education.

Chalmers states that we should teach about art that is contemporary because it considers the multicultural issues of identity, place, difference, power, and race – the reality of what is actually going on in the here-and-now (Chalmers, 2002). I would argue that contemporary art *and* other aspects of visual culture should be drawn upon (including religious and spiritual issues), and agree that while transcultural hybridity is very relevant to postmodern societies, traditional cultures should not be overlooked in some instances when cultural identities are of a particular concern such as with the Roma. I believe that in some situations when you are teaching art to children, it is important to begin with what they know. For example, many impoverished Roma children may not have had the opportunity to be exposed to much art at all. Beginning with contemporary art that may be abstract in nature might be confusing, whereas in the practices of an art educator such as Jan Sajko, he first introduces students to art and art making through their cultural traditions (the concrete), then teaches them about other forms of art such as cubism (to abstraction).

Critical Theory

In considering the recommendations of post-multicultural discourse within Kirova's paper, and the need for a stronger stance within multicultural art education to confront socio-economic and political issues, I suggest multicultural art education would be the best approached from the perspective of critical theory as outlined by Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1982). The intent of Freire's critical pedagogy was, "... to teach the oppressed classes to bring about social justice in capitalist societies"

(Flinders, 2009, p. 142). Freire asserted that educational change and liberation from oppression can only take place alongside political and social change; and that the role of the teacher should be to fight alongside the oppressed within the context of their reality, rather than delivering a meaningless, oppressive curriculum. Freire claimed that this was possible to achieve through a dialogue among educators and the oppressed that identified themes and revealed “limiting situations” that were possible to overcome (Freire, 1982). This dialogue involved naming their world as an act of creation through which change was possible. Essentially he was saying that one must be conscious of the reality that surrounds them before they can place their lives within the context of it. They then have the capacity to identify and discuss what it is they are faced with that needs changing, and through reciprocal discourse with a teacher these changes can be identified and become the praxis for change.

Multicultural art education can be further considered within the contemporary adaptations of Freire’s theories through the work of Peter McLaren and Critical Revolutionary Theory (McLaren, 1997). McLaren’s theory takes issue with the capitalist political systems that seem to be a growing problem for minority youth and is really about social justice:

Revolutionary critical pedagogy operates from an understanding that the basis of education is political and that spaces need to be created where students can imagine a different world outside of capitalism’s law of value (i.e., social form of labour), where alternatives to capitalism and capitalist institutions can be discussed and debated, and where dialogue can occur about why so many revolutions in past history turned into their opposite. (McLaren, 2008, p. 477)

Using a critical revolutionary model in education would imply that teachers and students work together to name their world. By this, I mean to gain a critical perspective

on their community, to dialogue about what that world looks like and how students see themselves situated in it, discuss what they would like to change about it, then actively engage in nonviolent revolutionary means through which to develop a praxis for change. I would propose that a practical application of the theory could be constructed in a curriculum of social justice through art education.

Critical Pedagogy and Art-Based Learning

Worldwide, many educational programs have been built on Freirean principles with adaptations to meet the specific needs of their region. Arts-based activities create a cultural bridge to children's lives, and allow them to engage in personally meaningful and transformative learning experiences: these programs engage, and "conscientize" learners offering them the opportunity to change themselves and their lives and go beyond the "inevitability" of their circumstances (Arney, 2007).

Projeto Axé

In a chapter entitled "Critical Pedagogy and Applied Praxis: A Freirean Interdisciplinary Project and Grassroot Social Movement," from the book *Freirean Legacy: Educating for Social Justice* (2002), Cesar A. Rossatto discusses three different educational settings for children in Brazil: (a) *The Sao Paulo Interdisciplinary School Reform*; (b) *City of Porto Alegre Participative Citizenship*, and (c) *Projeto Axé – A Street Children Schooling* (Rossatto, 2002). The programs are "directly or indirectly embedded with Freirean principles" (Rossatto, 2002, p. 155), and use the arts as an educational tool for helping children to understand their own life experiences as a knowledge base for creating critical awareness of the complexities of their circumstances. Although not all of these programs were specifically structured on the arts, *Projeto Axé* is a specifically arts-

based program that is used to work with street children in the city of Salvador, Bahia State, Brazil (Rossatto, 2002).

The name of the project, *Axé*, is derived from the Yoruba of Africa, and means “vital force” (*Projeto Axé*, 2010). The structure of *Projeto Axé* draws upon Freire’s, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (*Projeto Axé*, 2010; Rossatto, 2002). It is also based on a philosophical ‘pedagogy of desire’, derived from the theories of Lacan, Piaget, and Vygotsky (Arney, 2007; *Projeto Axé*, 2010). ‘Pedagogy of desire’ is a “...psychological-sociocultural theory of learning [developed by *Projeto Axé*] that is designed for working with youth living in a street situation” (Arney, 2007, p. 2). The street education program of *Projeto Axé* involves:

...art, aesthetics, play, and the pleasures of cultural creativity...to attract children and adolescents to the program and to provoke them to think critically about society and take actions to transform their place in it...art and culture are used not as a means to educate marginalized youth, but as education itself. (Arney, p. 81)

The programs involve a very comprehensive level of arts education that includes art aesthetics, history, theory, and museum visits. The focus is on connecting the arts with the children’s cultural background, and giving them the opportunity and insight to recognize that culture is their birthright and not just reserved for the elite.

The first phase of the program involves street educators in building a trusting relationship with street children, then inviting them to participate in an arts activity program. The children become involved in activities through their own desire and once they have completed the street program they may join in any of the other arts programs that interest them. A prerequisite for joining a program beyond the street outreach is that the children must first have a place to live. This often reunites children with their families

or at least puts them in a shelter and off the streets. This is an important first step in the success of educating street children. Once the children become involved, the programs they can access are very compelling and rich in cultural exploration; they can become involved with programs in puppetry, drawing and painting, paper maché, fashion design, music, dance, and yoga:

Through art and culture, street youth investigate their own social realities and the problems of their world and while not changing the fundamental political, economic, and social structures that produce street youth in the first place...*Projeto Axé* can make radical changes in the individual lives of children and adolescents in a street situation. (Arney, p. 4)

Many children in Sao Paulo and other parts of the world have been successful in attaining a full education after their involvement with *Projeto Axé* and it has been called, “the most influential and significant program for street kids in Latin America” (*Projeto Axé*, 2010). Cited by several organizations such as UNICEF and the Inter-American Development Bank it has been held up as “a model to be replicated” (Arney, 2007):

The program is growing and receiving worldwide recognition...private, professional, governmental, and institutional organizations, such as UNICEF Brazil, the Brazilian Government, the U.S. State Department, and prominent personalities are endorsing and supporting this program’s success. (Rossatto, 2002, p. 164)

The *Projeto Axé* model has been used not only in Brazil but also in other areas throughout the world such as Uganda to educate inner city children (*Projeto Axé*, 2010). I would assume however, that the model has been modified and adapted to meet the differing cultural needs within the diverse communities it has been introduced to. While *Projeto Axé* is specifically aimed at helping street children in poverty stricken circumstances, it could certainly be adapted to multicultural education where the arts become the framework from which learning takes place. With modification, this type of

program may be of particular benefit for minority Roma children who struggle with their cultural ways of knowing within traditional educational models.

The success of *Projeto Axé* is due to an exemplary arts-program that has been built upon critical pedagogy and Freirean principles (Rossatto, 2002). Freire's critical pedagogy has a decade's history of success and because of its relationship with creating change through social justice many arts-based educational programs are structured upon the principles of critical (revolutionary) theory. It is important to make a distinction between critical revolutionary theory, and critical theory, to clarify the position within this dissertation on critical pedagogy. Critical revolutionary educational theorists are concerned with issues of social justice related to the oppressive constraints of capitalism that limit the marginalized of society access to education; unlike (postmodern) critical theorists, critical revolutionary theorists advocate an *activist* position in creating a praxis for change based on the circumstances within which the marginalized and oppressed are situated (McLaren, 2007). I believe that an activist position is essential to move forward with change; otherwise it remains a theory. In the case of the Roma, change is imperative for their survival.

Paulo Freire emphasized activism and the importance of the practical applications of his theories. For change to happen, the oppressed must first be conscious of the reality that surrounds them before they can place their lives within the context of it. Then once this consciousness is achieved, they would be able to create further dialogue about what is problematic in their lives, and develop a praxis for change. However, Freire insisted that educators should not point out problems, but allow the students themselves to

identify problematic circumstances in their lives; Freire stressed the importance of working *with* the oppressed rather than *for* them (Freire, 1982).

Freire states that humans are not able to understand and transform the reality that encircles them when education is simply a method used to adapt people to their reality (Freire, 1982). This is one of the problems with public education that makes it difficult for children of poverty to find education meaningful to their lives; it does not work toward transforming the reality of their poverty. In recognizing this, Freire recommended a school reform, known as “problem posing,” or a problem-based approach, that substitutes a formal curriculum with an operational one that uses local knowledge as a powerful and necessary presence to create a curriculum that combines the daily operations of the school with the community’s struggle (Rossatto, 2002). In this way, children begin to understand their reality and the circumstances they live in and can then work toward making changes in their lives.

Community Arts-Based Programs

Based on critical pedagogy, many successful arts-based programs have been developed through community programs with an emphasis on accessibility and are instrumental in educating marginalized youth, providing a model for a social change that addresses poverty. These programs have been successful in helping to educate minority children of poverty because they are designed to be conscious of the circumstances in children’s lives that prevent them from going to school (Arney, 2007; Naidus, 2009; *Projeto Axé*, 2010; Rossatto, 2002). If children are to become advocates later in life for changing their circumstances, they first need to be able to access an education and then become educated in how to bring about social change. Arts-based programs provide the

opportunity to make both possible, and curriculum writers should consider the structure of these in reconceptualising multicultural education.

Throughout history, art has been involved in struggles to bring about social change through practices ranging from political activism, the creation of propaganda, involvement in grassroots community action, media subversion, and conflicts with social institutions (Bradley, 2007). The arts not only have a powerful public voice, but they also have the potential to affect the inner workings of our consciousness and bring about personal transformations. Using the arts as a vehicle to move through personal transformation towards social change is a realistic and verifiable process (Bradley, 2007; Clover, 2007; Naidus, 2009). The arts are used in therapy, psychotherapy, health sciences and nursing, group dynamics, education, and many other settings that work to help people to understand themselves, others, and the circumstances of the world in which they live. Engaging in the arts opens people up to their aesthetic sensibilities, and through creative learning processes offers an exploration of different ways of perceiving the self and the world.

“The idea of art itself has been invoked as representing, among other things, an ideal of personal liberty, a utopian condition to which society might aspire, or a common right to participate in the creation of everyday culture” (Bradley, p. 11). Although it could be argued that reaching “a utopian condition” through art is far from realistic, particularly in the circumstances of marginalized children of poverty, education through involvement with a community arts-based program could be the first step of many that may help these children envision a way to transform their lives. Either singularly or in conjunction with each other, the arts have the capacity to change lives (Aprill et al., 2006). Community

arts-based learning programs can be found in various locations throughout the world; some are concerned with bringing about social change, others are more specifically for educating children.

The Transformative Power of Community Arts

A significant example of the power of community arts-based programs in the United States comes from a study conducted by the Research Center for Leadership in Action, of the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, New York University (2006). A group of community-based arts leaders asked the question: “Can the arts change the world?” Through their engagement in a cooperative inquiry process, they were successful in documenting specific cases where the arts had made changes in the social conditions surrounding people’s lives. The group members involved in the study made the following powerful statement:

In an America torn by distrust, poverty, wars abroad, and laws that ever more support the power of corporations over people, the arts may seem beside the point. Yet we, a group of community-arts activists and others who organize locally to take on the lot of the disenfranchised, have turned aside cynicism and answered, ‘Yes, the arts can change the world’. (Aprill et al., 2006, p. 4)

In *The Transformative Power of Community Arts* (2006) study, diverse arts-based projects were conducted in various cities in the United States. The group members were able to organize community arts-based activities that were instrumental in creating positive changes amongst the participants. They listed the project profiles and documented the positive changes that occurred amongst the lives of those involved:

Through site visits and discussions during six face-to-face meetings, we saw the arts transform small worlds in Chicago, Philadelphia, Seattle, Los Angeles, Brooklyn, and Oakland, places where we organize.

Community arts – in which artists collaborate with the wider community – turned the tide on Chicago’s West Side so that policy experts from outside the community could no longer take charge in local neighborhoods and tell residents what was good for them.

Through the arts, a community transformed degraded and abandoned streets and buildings in north Philadelphia into a web of sculpture gardens and art parks, making the statement, ‘We are important, even though we are poor.’

A sanctuary for deaf, abused women in Seattle used the beauty of its facility to offer hope by showing clients that they deserved beauty as much as everyone else did.

In California welfare moms and their kids painted t-shirts to let Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger know they did not like his plan to cut cost-of-living allowances, child care, and other benefits. They won statewide media attention that actually helped prevent some of the cuts.

In Los Angeles, Mexican Americans, Japanese immigrants, Muslims and others built intercultural understanding by creating a community performance based on their families’ migration stories. They learned that their own stories were a starting point from which they could begin to hear the stories of others. And they learned that sharing their stories in a group performance wove a new cultural quilt that enlarged the boundaries of their communities. (Aprill et al., p. 4)

While these programs were not specifically for children, they involved community members, including children, generally living lives of poverty. The programs were accessible to community members, and educated them about inequalities in social systems; in raising their awareness about social issues, the programs helped community members become involved with implementing positive changes to these systems. While these were not huge steps in “changing the world”, they are significant examples of how the arts can engage people in developing an awareness of oppressive circumstances in their lives and become a tool for creating a praxis through which social change can be realized. Learning, transformation, and visible results occurred through these community arts-based programs and those involved experienced the empowerment of creating social change through the arts.

Research Studies: Support for Arts-Integrated Learning

Three recent studies, one from Canada and two from the United States discuss the benefits of learning through the arts with two revealing the significance of arts-integrated learning for marginalized students.

Learning Through the Arts: Lessons of Engagement

A study conducted in Canada, *Learning Through the Arts: Lessons of Engagement* (2005), documented the academic benefits gained by students involved in a three-year arts-integrated program. The conclusion of the study strongly indicated that involvement in the arts went hand-in-hand with engagement in learning at school (Smithrim & Upitis, 2005). The longitudinal study conducted by Katharine Smithrim and Rena Upitis determined that an arts education approach increased student engagement in school and revealed that with prolonged (at least three years) involvement with arts education students increased their skills in computation and literacy (Smithrim & Upitis, 2005). The researchers speculated that these gains may have been due to a greater sense of attention to learning that was developed through the student's experiences with arts education. They point to the fact that traditional education methods tend to focus on linguistic-logical mathematic modes of learning as opposed to the arts which engage the visual-spatial, interpersonal, and bodily-kinaesthetic forms of knowledge (Smithrim & Upitis, 2005).

Rochester Arts Impact Study 2006 – 2009

An American study funded by the US Department of Education: Arts in Education Model Development and Dissemination Program, *Rochester Arts Impact Study 2006 – 2009* (U.S. Department of Education, 2010); also documents the effects of arts-

integrated learning citing increases in academic achievement and engagement with learning. Ten elementary schools within the Rochester School District (RSD) were randomly chosen for the study and each selected one of four art forms: music, dance, theatre, or visual art that were integrated through the K-6 classrooms over a four-year period. Using a “true experimental design” (the medical model) the results of this longitudinal study, “establishes an unmistakable link between infusing arts into core curricula, with improving student achievement, in a high-poverty urban public school district, as measured by standardized tests” (U.S. Department of Education, p. 2). The results of the study show that the greatest improvement in learning and engagement occurred among younger students, those with disabilities, English language learners, and students in higher poverty (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

The A+ Schools: A New Look at Curriculum Integration

Another study titled, *The A + Schools: A New Look at Curriculum Integration* (Thomas & Arnold, 2011), has been cited in a recent United States report by “The President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities” titled, *Re-Investing in Arts Education: Winning America’s Future Through Creative Schools*. The A+ Schools model was developed in 1995 by art educators and uses “innovative interdisciplinary teaching strategies using creative projects and activities to stimulate learning” (Arnold, 1996, quoted in Thomas & Arnold, 2011, p. 96). The model draws upon Howard Gardiner’s “Multiple Intelligence Theory” and other research done by Eisner, Efland, and Duncum which supports the use of the arts in developing cognitive abilities (Thomas & Arnold, 2011). The test data for the study represents 40, A+ schools measured over a

three-year period with the arts integrated across the curriculum through an interdisciplinary approach.

While the results of the study were measured in “End of Grade” tests (EOG), the researchers felt that students may have “experienced an intangible benefit that is not immediately discernible in the EOG” (p. 102). This “intangible benefit” is the interaction between the cognitive and affective domains. The A+ School report states that though no significant results were noted in academic development there was significant aesthetic engagement experienced by children who participated in the studies, with the results showing greater significance for marginalized students (Thomas & Arnold, 2011). The researchers discussed that “greater emphasis on studio arts, contemporary arts, or design elements” could improve academic or affective results and future studies could be conducted to measure this (p. 102).

These three studies are important for supporting the use of arts-integration as a curriculum model for Roma education as Roma students are typically English language learners, experience high poverty, and have difficulty engaging with learning. The number one measurable benefit of learning through the arts in all three of the studies is the engagement with learning that students experienced. Two of the three studies support an increase in learning and engagement for marginalized students in particular (U.S. Department of Education, 2010; Thomas & Arnold, 2011) with other important factors emerging to determine the success of arts-integrated education such as the age of the children (the Rochester study suggested that younger children benefit more from learning through the arts), the length of time in arts-integrated education (three years seemed to be the length of time needed to show academic improvement), using a variety of approaches

to arts education both within the arts discipline itself and through the use of the different arts, viewing education through the arts as a holistic component to the overall educational experience of a child rather than an isolated component of learning, and the support of staff and administrators for arts education with a focus on funding and professional development. And finally, learning through the arts engages multiple intelligences and emotional learning and it is likely that greater motivation for learning in general is developed as learning in one area overlaps into other areas.

Art Education, Language, and Literacy

Traditional educational models based in rote, verbal learning for many Roma students is neither engaging nor interactive. This approach to learning is based on verbal delivery and puts many Roma children at a disadvantage as many learn by observation and therefore tend to be visual learners (Monaci et al., 2006). Researching the work of Beth Olshansky who wrote, *The Power of Pictures: Creating Pathways to Literacy Through Art* (2008), I came to learn that according to Olshansky, many researchers believe “...there is a vital link between visual thinking, creativity, and the ability to solve problems creatively” (p. 10). She explains that throughout history, many original thinkers such as Einstein, Thomas Edison, Winston Churchill and others had great difficulty with reading and writing and it was noted that these original thinkers developed their ideas in pictures first, not words. Through studying the works of some of these great innovators in history, researchers now recognize how powerful visualization and visual learning is (Olshansky).

Developments have occurred within education such as the recognition of multiple intelligences revealing that many students learn better visually and/or kinaesthetically.

However, even with these new discoveries, many approaches to education still rely heavily on verbal and written deliveries. This can be problematic for many children, particularly those who have to learn in a second language, or struggle because predominantly verbal forms of instruction are not assimilated well. According to Olshansky (2008), an emphasis on verbal learning also puts these children at risk “for a number of related social, emotional, and academic challenges” (p. 10). These children generally do not progress well academically, do poorly on tests, and suffer from poor self-esteem and often diverse learners are made to feel intellectually inferior in schools; this is typical of most right-brained, visual and kinaesthetic learners (Olshansky). She further states that these types of learners are generally neglected by policy makers in education because they themselves tend to be predominantly left-brained, verbal learners, and it is therefore not surprising that they do not understand the learning needs of right brained, visual/kinaesthetic learners.

Art is a powerful tool for educating young children. Olshansky states that young children, “...intuitively understand the meaning of pictures long before they are taught how to read and write... and unlike writing, pictures are a language that does not have to be taught” (p. 15). Generally in many North American schools using pictures as a means for engaging students with learning is initially welcomed, but as children become familiar with writing, this is often set aside. She further says that distancing children from their real first language of pictures is short sighted and puts many children, particularly those who are visual learners at a disadvantage.

Art is also a powerful communication tool and like language conveys meaning. It is not to suggest that art should replace verbal language, but its significance in providing

an effective means through which to teach children should be considered as complementing verbal learning. Pictures speak a widely accessible language, and will eventually facilitate verbal learning. Olshansky (2008) discusses the term *transmediation* as a phenomenon that translates meaning from one sign system to another. She states that written language, music, art, and drama, and mathematics, all have their own sign symbols, and the more transmediation that occurs between these sign systems, the greater the opportunity for “generative and reflective thought” (p. 33). Olshansky clarifies further saying that the rich thinking that occurs during picture making is key and can provide for improved written language skills when children are given the opportunity to use this process. This begins to address knowledge transfer – a scaffolding of symbol systems where each is called upon to make its contribution to learning.

According to Olshansky’s research, tying language to the arts engages children with learning and provides a curriculum that addresses more than just an academic/intellectual approach to learning. Art education also provides children with an aesthetic that engages the senses and encompasses different realms of consciousness, while at the same time fostering learning and creativity.

The literature review I have presented in this chapter is intended to create a framework from which I have structured my research study. Understanding the historical and educational background of the Roma through the lens of critical theory, and cultivating a broad knowledge of art education within multicultural, community, and marginalized contexts, I believe substantiates the significance of arts-based learning for marginalized Roma children.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PARTICIPANTS

Research Intent

The intent of this research is to provide important knowledge about what works educationally for Roma students whose learning has been interrupted and inconsistent due to their marginalized circumstances, and to provide valuable information for educational programs that can be developed both within Canadian and other countries where large numbers of Roma are struggling to overcome gaps in their learning to complete a full education. It is possible with adaptations, that much of the research could be transferable to developing programs for marginalized children from different cultural backgrounds, whose lives and educational opportunities have been limited by oppressive and discriminatory circumstances. For the purposes of this dissertation, the use of the word “children” refers to school age students from kindergarten through grade twelve.

Research Questions

My research is guided by seeking answers to the following questions:

- What is distinctly problematic for Roma children in traditional school settings?
- How can the arts, and art education in particular engage marginalized Roma children with learning?
- How can Romani arts and culture be integrated into a curriculum that works to dispel discrimination and oppression of marginalized Roma children?

Research Methodology: Case Study – Philosophy of Approach

The research methodology is a qualitative case study on Roma education viewed from seven individual perspectives: (a) A classroom teacher who works exclusively with children who are recent refugees to Canada: among them are Roma children; (b) a Roma musician, lecturer, and academic who has written extensively on Romani language, culture, and education; (c) the executive director of the Toronto Roma Community Centre, an activist and teacher who speaks to the community and presents information to schools on Romani history and culture, and offers an after school community program on Romani history and culture to Roma youth; (d) a Roma artist who works with Roma women and children in the community and was part of the TDSB Roma Curriculum development team; (e) a Roma musician, who grew up as the eldest son of the “King of the Gypsies” in Toronto, and who is currently the president of the Toronto Roma Community Centre; (f) a Roma high school student living in Canada and originally from Kosovo who lived in a Bosnian refugee camp for ten years; (g) and a Hungarian Roma immigrant living with his wife and two children in Canada.

Through interviews with the key informants, the collected data were analyzed and synthesized to reveal and formulate new knowledge to contribute to the development of further educational programs that can help marginalized Roma children overcome the limiting circumstances that have impeded their access to education.

A case study is a qualitative research method that is, “...exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory” (Yin, 2009, p. 4). This method is often employed when a researcher wants to make meaning of a situation where problems have resulted from issues that affect the lives of people involved. The researcher then places themselves within the

context of the situation in order to study what is happening from the participant's or an insider's point of view, "By learning the perspectives of the participants, qualitative research illuminates the inner dynamics of situations – dynamics that are often invisible to the outsider" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 32). The researcher who is placed within these situations has the role of a noninterventionist; "They try to see what would happen had they not been there" (Stake, 1995, p. 44). In studying issues within a specific setting, "...qualitative research is frequently called *naturalistic* because the researcher frequents places where the events he or she is interested in *naturally* occur" (Bogdan & Biklen, p. 3). Within the context of a situation the researcher is mainly interested in the process rather than the outcome, and from observations and data gathered, inductive analytical approaches are generally used to describe and ultimately explain or make meaning of what is going on. The intent is not to prove or disprove predetermined theories but to collect data that leads to the construction of a unified picture of the situation. In seeking to make meaning through the observation of processes within a context, qualitative researchers use different methods to focus on understanding specific issues.

Case studies are also used in research when a researcher wants to explore in depth the complexities and functioning of a unique or specific unit within a context. A "case" or unit can be a single person, class, organization or event (Stake; Yin, 2009; Bogdan & Biklen). It can also be "... a detailed examination of one setting, or a single subject, or a single depository of documents, or one particular event" (Merriam, 1998, cited in Bogdan & Biklen, p. 62). In education, the cases of interest are usually people and programs. The difference between case studies and other research studies is that the "... focus of attention is the case, not the whole population of cases" (Stake, p. 256). The researcher

studies the case, the circumstance in which the case is located, and the problems that arise for the case in this context: “A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2009, p. 18). A case study seeks to catch the complexity of a single case “...coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (Stake, 1995, p. xi). In analyzing a particular case its idiosyncrasies and complexities are understood (Stake). Case studies are used in qualitative research to consider issues within a setting and offer explanations and generalizations as to why they are there. These generalizations rely on interpretive analysis of data (Stake; Yin, 2009; Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). However, as they are analytical, rather than statistical generalizations case studies are often considered to be “soft” research methods with questionable validity particularly within scientific fields as they can be seen as, “...not following systematic procedures” (Yin, p. 21).

Some may view case studies to be vague and open ended. However they have specific structures that are flexible enough to allow for new understandings to occur within the scope of the study yet still have boundaries that define the research. The case study is, “...a study of a bounded system emphasizing the unity and wholeness of that system, but confining the attention to those aspects that are relevant to the research problem at the time” (Stake 1988, p. 258). Different types of case studies have different purposes. Stake defines three categories of case studies: (a) *intrinsic* – the case itself is of interest and the researcher wants to really look within the particular case at hand and assign worth to specific activities; (b) *instrumental* – the case actually has a secondary role; the researcher uses it to facilitate an understanding of something else; and (c)

collective studies – studying several cases within the same project that are representative of a particular issue (although these should be distinguished from being considered as samples) (Stake, 1995). Yin as well defines three types of case studies that have different research purposes. These are: (a) *explanatory or causal case studies* - used for examining relationships; (b) *descriptive case studies* - used for defining a particular situation; and (c) *exploratory case studies* - used to locate and understand issues (Yin, 2009). Bogdan & Biklen (1992) have assigned yet another set of case study categories. These are: (a) *historical/organizational* - used for looking at a particular organization over time; (b) *observational* - for examining an organization through participant observation, and (c) *life history* - extensive interviews with one person for the purpose of collecting a first person narrative (Bogdan & Biklen). In addition multi-case studies (collecting several single case studies) are used to examine a specific issue, or when the researcher wants to measure cases against other cases be they similar or rival, to validate or refute their findings (Bogdan & Biklen; Stake; Yin).

A case study is usually conducted because there is something about the case that the researcher wants to know or does not understand. Within case studies there are usually issues, themes, or problems that the study can be organized around. These issues help determine what data should be gathered. Data gathering can involve reviewing documents, observing participants, and conducting interviews. Often this will lead to new or reconsidered issues and greater understanding of the case.

Rationale for Research Strategy

The main benefit of using case study research is that it allows for very intrinsic understanding of a particular case, from multiple perspectives. Researchers are involved

with the participants and engage in interactive communication to create meaning. Ideally this meaning reveals new knowledge allowing for the understanding of things previously unknown. The strength of a case study is that it can be used to determine *why* something is happening.

There are also limitations in using case study research. The research methodology has been criticized for not being representative of other cases or generalizable. It is important to be conscious of this when considering how the research could be adapted to other marginalized groups. Another criticism of case study is that it lacks the statistical cautiousness of quantitative research (Stake, 1988).

Despite the limitations, case study seems relevant for most of my research as it provides the opportunity to really understand the cultural specific (Roma) issues of a case without making assumptions. My research represents a *collective study* with the intent to study several cases within the same project that are representative of a particular issue – Roma education (Stake, 1995); it is also an *exploratory case study* - used to locate and understand issues – different participants' perspectives on Roma education (Yin, 2009).

Data Analysis Procedures

The transcripts were analyzed through a series of steps: First, each interview was replayed and notes were taken of specific points. Second, in transcribing the audio files to text, the interviews were again reviewed. The transcripts were re-read a final time and the most significant sections of text from each of the interviews relevant to the research inquiries were grouped under the research questions. Third, using the NVivo qualitative data analysis software; QSR International Pty Ltd. Version 10, 2012, word frequencies and text summaries were extracted and a coding summary was generated providing

Nodes (groupings under research questions) from Source Reports (participant responses). These summaries were then organized for visual analysis into clusters and charts grouped under the three research questions. This method used both narrative and discourse analysis (content based) focusing on the discussion rather than words and inflections of speech, to look for commonalities amongst the interview responses in order to present new information not bound within the research questions, and to bring forward any absences of information. New information from the interviews that did not fit within the research questions was placed into a “New Findings” section. While the visual interpretations provided a specific focus on word groupings, I found they were not as useful as actual sections of texts from the transcripts as they were taken out of context.

The data were then reviewed using an interpretive analysis approach, which is a search for understanding by gaining knowledge about a particular context rather than trying to determine a truth by predication and control (Willis, 2007). As readers, immersing ourselves in the context enables us to understand the researcher’s own experiences and background; this becomes a strength to understanding others, “...the purpose [is] to offer a perspective that helps the reader understand particular phenomena studied...situated understanding, not law-like generalization is the outcome of interpretive research” (Willis, p. 190).

The Research Interviews and Participants

My original hope at the start of my research into issues affecting Roma education was to return to Kosovo where I had some contacts and work within the communities there that I was familiar with. However, for reasons unknown to me, I realized after several failed attempts at making contact that Kosovo would not be the place where I

would conduct my research. Wondering what to do, I began to search out Roma communities in Canada. I was very fortunate to make contact with Gina Csanyi-Robah, the executive director of the Toronto Roma Community Centre. Without her help this dissertation would not have been possible. Gina was very receptive to my research and invited me to come to Toronto to attend a very timely TDSB workshop on Roma Education, and to meet people who would be helpful in my research pursuits.

On my first trip to Toronto to meet with Gina Csanyi-Robah, I also met Susan Heagy, Lugzi Mustafa, Lynn Hutchinson Lee, and other members of the Roma Community Centre. These introductions helped to establish relationships within the community and gave people the opportunity to know the intent of my research and to get to know me as a person. Making contact with Roma families however was not an easy process. Due to circumstances of recent immigration, past prejudices, and fear for their future in Canada, many families did not want to be interviewed. However, thanks to Gina Csanyi-Robah's support, over time I was able to develop relationships within the Roma community and was eventually able to interview Roma family members.

In my ethics application, I emphasize the importance of several sensitive points that were necessary to address in relation to the interviews. Cultural expectations, refugee status, and research involving children all required very careful considerations.

The interviews for the study were structured as face-to-face sessions in person and consisted of five main research foci: (1) The Literacy Education Academic Program (LEAP) facilitated at Grenoble Public School by Susan Heagy under the leadership of Principal, Ted Goldring, and with permission of Superintendent Kathleen Meighan;

(2) Lynn Hutchinson Lee, Roma artist and contributor to the TDSB Roma curriculum; (3) “Lugzi Mustafa” (pseudonym), a Roma High school student; (4) Tamas Banya, a Roma family member belonging to The Toronto Roma Community Centre (RCC); and (5) Gina Csanyi-Robah, Ronald Lee, and Micheal T. Butch (please note the spelling of Micheal with the “e” and “a” switched is how Micheal chooses to spell his name), board members of the RCC and Roma cultural experts.

In interviewing Susan Heagy, the intent was to reveal the dynamics of the LEAP program that she facilitates and to discuss the various components of structure, curriculum, student attitudes and success, and the long-term effects the program may have had on the educational engagement and success of Roma children who have participated in her program. The interview with Lynn Hutchinson Lee provides the perspective of a Roma artist and information on the effects of a Roma curriculum on Roma and non-Roma students within the TDSB. “Lugzi Mustafa” is a Roma refugee and has lived with his family and attended school in Canada since 2008. His interview provides one perspective of a Roma high school student who has experienced challenges with gaining an education in Kosovo, Bosnia, Canada, and other countries he has lived in. Tamas Banya represented the Roma families who have immigrated to Canada either as refugees or landed immigrants and discusses the challenges, attitudes, and experiences Roma families have (had) both with education in Canada and their previous countries. Micheal T. Butch represents a fourth generation Canadian Roma family, and he is the president of the Toronto Roma Community Centre. His insights provide important information on his own experiences as a Roma in Canadian schools, and some of those of his own children; he also shares important information about Romani culture and customs

based on his unique perspective of having grown up as the first son of the “King of the Gypsies” or “Big Man”, in Montreal and Toronto. Gina Csanyi-Robah is a Roma activist and educator who has become an honoured, national figure for her advocacy work with the Roma. Ronald Lee, writer, musician, lecturer, and one of the founding members of the RCC provide specific insights and information on Romani culture, and the educational experiences of Canadian Roma in Canada and internationally. He has lectured extensively for colleges and universities, both in Canada and in the US.

It is important to include a section on the potential bias I may have as a “Westerner” in regard to the Roma potentially being viewed as “the other” and the implications and cautions that it may have for my research. In his book, *Orientalism* (2003), Edward Said discusses that the “other” perspective often comes from a hegemonic position of superiority and the interpretation of cultures through a Western psychology. This has typically been the case as European or Occidental societies tried to dominate the “lesser” Orientalist cultures of India and Egypt that were seen through the colonial lens as being primitive and inferior. While acknowledging that this has been an historical precedent of western culture, I would like to believe that it is not the view I hold when considering my involvement in advocating for the Roma. However, because I come from a Western culture I have tried to cultivate personal “checks” to ensure that I am not “othering” the Roma through a potentially inherent bias. While I have actively made an effort not to “other” the Roma, historically, they have been “othered” by various groups in terms of the racism and stereotypes they have faced over time.

Another consideration that many cultural ethnographers are cautious about is the notion of romanticizing the culture of their research. This is a problem to be avoided and

personally one I have tried to cultivate an awareness of as well. There is a certain level of involvement in a research study where you become entangled in the lives of the people you are working with and there is a tendency to become a subjective rather than an objective participant. However, I would argue that there is also a certain merit to this in that when you “walk a mile in another’s shoes” you more fully understand the dynamics of their world. While it has been my intention to represent an objective view of Roma education, due to my involvement with the RCC throughout my research, it has been impossible to not present some biased views of the challenges faced by Roma refugee families and children in Canada.



Happy Children, Teamwork. (no date), Jan Sajko, from: http://s191.photobucket.com/user/janosajko/media/Press%20-%20Pictures%20of%20students/DSC_0029.jpg.html?sort=6&o=12

CHAPTER 4: THE INTERVIEWS

The interview participants were selected to represent varied perspectives on Roma education in order to provide a collective set of experiences in a case study that brings forward a greater understanding of issues with Roma education. The interviews with each of the participants were for the most part lived experiences and for this reason I have chosen to present the interviews as they unfolded from conversations guided by the research questions; their answers could not be fully appreciated if presented as coded extracts to support or refute the research questions. Some of the interviews present as clear responses to specific questions while others involve greater elaboration within a conversation to allow for the interviewee's unique stories of the rich experiences that formed their perspectives.

1. Susan Heagy



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grenoble_Public_School

Susan is a Toronto District School Board teacher who has taught LEAP for several years and is considered an expert. She has also given workshops to educators on using visual art to assess student comprehension. I learned of Susan Heagy through Gina Csanyi-Robah who knew Susan by reputation as an exemplary LEAP teacher who used the arts and visual art in particular, to engage Roma (and other) students with learning.

Susan Heagy grew up in Ireland as a protestant among Catholics. Her mother was white, South African - pro-apartheid, and her father was Irish and anti-apartheid. She says this mixed upbringing helped with her current situation of understanding children from diverse backgrounds. Susan also had intermittent hearing loss as a child and says she knows what it is like to miss education, "I'm teaching what I missed myself."

Susan took over teaching LEAP at Grenoble Elementary School several years ago, noting that the teacher before her was "a pencil and paper type." Grenoble is situated within one of Toronto's poorest and most culturally diverse neighborhoods. The children attending this school come from over 200 countries with many speaking a first language other than English; several of these children are refugees – some being Roma. While LEAP was not specifically developed as an arts-integrated program, Susan often relies on the use of visual art within her program because, as she states, "without art I could not teach" (Heagy interview, 2011).

Typically in Susan's LEAP classes there will be from 12 – 18 refugee children, most having experienced discrimination, poverty, and having fled life-threatening situations. "Most of these children have endured severe trauma in their country of origin, and almost all have seen at least one of their relatives shot and killed" (Heagy interview, 2011). When they arrive in Canada they often do not speak English and have very limited

education. Many come from families whose parents are illiterate. Susan states that every year she has about two to five Roma families mainly from Hungary or the Czech Republic, however the school anticipated the arrival of several Roma families from Slovakia in the 2012/2013 school year.

Susan's interview responses are categorized under the three research questions (underlined and in bold) to extract information that leads to answering the research inquiry. For the most part the original tone of the interview was left intact with pauses and inflections to allow for a greater understanding of the nature of the conversation. Incidental editing was done to leave out repeated words or irrelevant text. The anecdotal comments provide insights into the dynamics and intricacies of a very accomplished teacher working within a complex classroom setting of diverse and specialized learners. My questions are written in bold text to make it easier to follow the interview.

What is distinctly problematic for Roma children in traditional school settings?

This question had to be reworded to be relevant to Susan's teaching situation as she was not specifically familiar with how Roma students are generally taught in East-Central Europe.

From your experiences with teaching Roma students, what do you understand to be distinguishing characteristics of Roma children as learners?

The Roma students, more than other students need to make a personal connection with a teacher. If they make a personal connection to you – with you – they will do anything. But, it is a personal connection....most children would just sit and comply, but they need to see you as a human

being, and for you to see them for who they are (beyond prejudiced stereotypes). Once you've made that personal connection, they will do anything. And even students who don't come very often to school, they will be almost in tears that they haven't seen you for a past couple days. It's that personal connection. In middle school, I expect personal connection, and in high school. But, these are up to eleven-year-olds. I sort of didn't expect that. But if they know you, and you know them, they will do anything. They'll work hard.

Susan also discussed that a distinguishing characteristic of the success Roma students have in school is directly related to what Roma children's parents believe the value of education is:

The biggest...it's what their parents believe the value of education is... Seems to be the biggest mark...If their family has just not put any value into it, the student's very unlikely to... But, also, the ones I have this year have not missed a day at schooling unless they have been to a doctor. This is due to their parents being "totally on board". The Roma families whose parents were not on board, they've actually moved on to other schools.

Are you aware of any differences in the ways in which Roma children learn and respond to school, compared to non-Roma students?

Again, it depends, whether the parents valued education. I've had some families where the parents have not valued education - and, nothing has happened. Unfortunately I've had some students who were married off too young, some at age fourteen and because they were married, they were

allowed to smoke. And then, of course, they couldn't be in school because they were smoking. This is totally unlike other students. However, in the LEAP program we get children who were very battered by war so in this way the Roma students don't stand out, maybe, as much as they would in a school that has one or two Roma students, because these refugees, they're all coming from traumatic situations. One of them just today said her grandmother was taken out and shot and she witnessed that. Skinheads took their grandmother out and shot her in front of them. But, I also have students from a country where their sibling was removed... teenage boys... killed and sold for his body parts. This was an Afghan boy. The Roma students I have this year, none of them were physically abused. The ones I had last year were. They were physically abused, by outsiders...Beaten up, arms broken... So, as I said, their story is just as bad as other students'... Except this component; you seem to need to make that connection...the engagement...personal engagement....it's very personal.

If we were to look at a Roma student in a very traditional classroom, and a Roma student coming into this situation where they are doing organic, holistic, arts and project-based learning, are you finding that the children are more engaged and successful with learning?

Susan described that in her classroom environment for example, one of the Roma children who had “spotty attendance” had moved up a year in her learning:

...last year, one child didn't turn up but she moved forward a year! Even though...[she had] less than 50% attendance. And another wanted to be 28

in the DRA⁶ by the end of the year; she made it to about 24...that's two years... that's setting a goal...and she was quite greedy about that goal...and that's with 100% comprehension, I'm not just saying decoding. I'm talking about comprehension too. I expect them to move up two years, every year. She will go places. I have no worry about her. Oh, she will push a teacher aside now to learn... You get this feeling, she will make it.

I am not doing a comparative study, but if you were to think of that particular child in a very traditional classroom with a teacher who followed the curriculum, what do you think would happen?

They would shut down...just totally shut down. It's almost what we call old-fashioned teaching, nowadays, isn't it? If you look at multiple intelligences, like, one in eight children will be a linguistic learner... And one in eight will be a mathematical learner.

In Susan's LEAP class every child has "multiple intelligence" testing and they also do individual DRA testing when they first enter the class.

Do you think then that there is a "best way" to teach Roma students in general?

If the Roma students went to a purely Caucasian school within Canada, I think it would be tough on the teacher, I think "best practices" is the best way to go. Whatever the best practices are...as long as...every child has something ...and I don't think teachers should teach children as "lumps",

⁶ The Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) measures students' reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. "The Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) is a set of individually administered criterion-referenced reading assessments for students in kindergarten through Grade 8. Modeled after an informal reading inventory, the DRA is intended to be administered, scored, and interpreted by classroom teachers". (from http://www.natalierathvon.com/images/DRA_Review-08-25-2006.pdf). Reading level chart: <http://www.riverview.wednet.edu/curric/elemlance/readingbenchmark/DRA-BookLevelChart.pdf>

teach them as individuals. If they [the teachers] just listened to the students... listened and don't lower the standards, "high standards, realistic expectations". Make your expectations realistic, don't dumb it down, clean it up, and don't put in too much information. What's important to learn, teach that...but do expect them to behave. Do expect them to show respect to other people.

When you say that, if a group of Roma students went into an all-Caucasian school it would be very hard on the teacher, why – in what ways?

There is no way a teacher from my previous school could teach, even in this school. First of all, they would be overwhelmed with the life stories and then become too “weepy” or too “mothering”, because your job is still to teach...But also... there was always like a set standard [a traditional approach where you're following the curriculum]...it just doesn't work. You have to teach that child because if you're just going from page one to page two to page three to page four...you would've lost them because it's boring...and you have to differentiate your instructions, have something that's art, something that's physical... Most homeroom teachers couldn't cope with the amount of talking that goes on. Because, they [the teacher] couldn't cope with the amount of physical activity and the laughter and the relaxation, and then all of a sudden, "Could we talk?" and then, just letting them talk, because that means you have to put the curriculum aside. When, in the end, I think education is about teaching the child. The principal calls this a "child centered school". Which means, we just look

at everything in relation to...we try and do as much as we can for them, and that's the joy of the LEAP program. I'm very lucky to be able to teach science, social studies, art, and media literacy, because they're natural links. Without the art component, I could be teaching the art as a separate subject - or the homeroom teacher could...but then it's just an add-on to the day, "Let's get out the paint, last thing Friday afternoon." And it has no value...whereas if it's done as a way of showing their knowledge and expressing things, it becomes part of the assessment package.

What are some of the positive or negative experiences you've had with Roma students?

Some students baffle me. I use the word baffle when I haven't a clue what to do, so I ask for advice, I read, I study...and try to find a way in, and as soon as you find that way in with a child...sometimes it's through humour, sometimes it's with explaining a silly story, or finding something they enjoy. But you've got to find a way in and once you find a way in, then, it's like a flower opening up. What are the negatives? Sometimes it's their life experience; it's nothing to do with the child themselves...it's what their life has dealt them. So the positive view is that there's always potential...and then the negative would be: their background, how it interferes with their learning.

Would you say compared to other refugee children that due to their life experiences the Roma are more shut off from learning?

I've got to a stage where I see them almost as individuals... but... the first group of Roma we had what I'd call the Travellers, a couple years ago, were quite a different group than what we have now... This may have been their tenth school in grade three. These people were from all over the place, and they were all Muslim, which was very different. They were from Albania, Serbia, and some from Bulgaria... and... their behaviour... the boys were excessively violent... we had to change them... they would kneel on somebody and just keep punching them in the face... but, there again, thinking what they've experienced just a few weeks before... one could understand... it [their behaviour] had to be changed. I was sad with one of these students two years ago who graduated and went to another school. He reverted back to the violence. I wish he could have stayed here where he was with a unit that he understood, but he graduated out of LEAP. He made it, he didn't need any help anywhere, but the school phoned and said, you know, "What's going on here?"

How can the arts, and art education in particular engage marginalized Roma children with learning?

Do you feel that, when Roma children are involved with an arts-based approach to learning that they are more engaged?

At this age every child needs a balance. Unfortunately, the higher you get, it becomes more academic. And the teachers become more language-based, whereas teachers in this age would know more about multiple

intelligences. I tend to think grades one to three are the most important years of education. I believe in finding out what works for them.

Unfortunately, most students admire reading, writing, and math. They admire it. This is where they want to be. But, it's not necessarily what they're good at. I find Roma students want to learn to read and write. The child I was talking to today, I said, "My job is to be the best teacher I can be for you, and your job is to be the best student." And she said, "I will be." I said, "What do you want to do?" She said, "I want to read." I said, "Then that's what we'll do." So, I know her goal, and that is to read...and she will do it...because that's what she wants to do.

When asked where she would start with the children, Susan replied:

I actually start with Dr. Seuss...because of the age group, and I really like "Green Eggs and Ham", because there are only 50 different words, and they can read it, and I like to start a little lower than what their readability is. And, so that they can get flow, and get confidence.

Those books are very visual; do you feel that that helps?

I actually find at this age, non-fiction books with photographs are more functional. They really like picture dictionaries, and the talking dictionary is a very good Hungarian one. Visuals enhance their understanding of something beyond what the language can explain...such as the boy in the photograph I showed you. He was special education, but he was the kindest person out. I use his visual for my talk about how to use art to assess a child's understanding of a concept. That's what my talk's going to

be. He did a picture, and he had no English, he'd been here only five weeks, and he did this drawing and you could see that he knew what a pulley was and what a gear was. And he did the design, from visual memory. So, he totally understood the concept. He had no other way of communicating with me, but he got it.

In your opinion, do you think that engagement with the arts is advantageous to Roma children specifically in experiencing success with learning?

Yes but I also think that is essential for every child...because it's part of a multiple intelligence... it's that differentiated instruction. It's the 'cornerstone'...it's right in the middle of everything you do. Are they learning through the arts? Yes. If they don't know the word in their home language or in English, they'll do a little drawing...without the arts, I couldn't teach...because we have to teach using differentiated instructions...and that means everything you can think of: acting, dancing, drama, performing, singing, writing, reading...working by yourself, working in groups, talking about your culture, talking about your sub culture, talking in your own language...it's just the entire picture.

You can see the students here...you just have got to do all of the arts. I always start with [visual] art, though. I start with the primary and secondary colours...and we colour the Canadian leaf. And that's the first thing we do. There's also a very good book called "Alphabet and the Environment"; they see Alphabet and the Environment, and then we find it in the class, like, there's an H on the ceiling and an L in the chair...and

then they, inside this, they write their own name, and then do "doodle art" around it. So, they're actually learning real terms appropriate to their age, without me saying, like you do in kindergarten, "This is my purple book." I am also looking at whether they're willing to persevere to make it look good and sometimes I have to teach them how to draw, and how to handle the tools correctly...but I do it privately, just one on one.

Do you think that Roma children usually have involvement with art, music, drama, and dance within their family lives and community?

I think they do...because of what I've seen...but, I don't know whether they value it...they don't realize what it is...they may not realize that all the songs and... what their families do together is of value, and can be transferred...as a learning thing, that we can build on. We don't have any Romas at the moment who dress, what I would call...the "stereotypical" gypsy...we have had many...with the earrings and the bracelets, and...the ones we have [now] are very Caucasian looking...very European looking at the moment...and...one sometimes wonders why. We have children of many cultures, they'll say something, and somebody will say, "Oh, well we do that too!" and then they keep sharing, and they find connections and similarities.

What is the most successful aspect of LEAP in terms of Roma students' success and engagement with learning?

I think it's the blending of the curriculum; it sort of becomes seamless... they're not suddenly having to close their book, shut their mind off something and open their mind to something else. It's child-centered...I

will say, of the students who have not been designated "special education"...they have made it. They have managed to assimilate without support, by grade six, if they've been with me for two years. It may be how I teach and what my beliefs are...but actually, it is the program; if everything is taught through literacy, and literacy is not just something you stick in for an hour a day. Leveled reading becomes part of your science, and part of your social studies. The children read every day, they write every day. It's not just about writing a journal; the term is "authentic learning." It has to grow out of what it is. The homeroom teachers were teaching language, and they teach detail. Then the following week, they will teach prediction, and the following week they will teach inference. I teach all three together...because they actually make sense together. You don't waste that ten minutes between each class switching off and switching on, you just keep going and it's just organic. I know their levels of reading, so I run to a literacy room, and if it's rocks and minerals we are studying, I find whatever books I can, then they go into groups and make projects that show they know the concepts out of the reading, so again they're developing their reading, their listening, their comprehension, they're developing their understanding of social studies or science.

What are the typical ages of Roma students in your LEAP class?

We are one of the few schools in Toronto that has LEAP for grades four/five. LEAP usually starts in grade six, but, because of our needs, they

made it grade four/five here (The students' ages usually range from 10 – 12).

How did you come to decide upon your present approach within this LEAP classroom?

It's according to the students' needs. The curriculum gives me the track; how I get there is according to how they're learning; every year is totally different. I teach grade four/five concurrently and what I've taught this year in science is rocks and minerals. It will be taught two years, but it won't be taught the same way because I've still got some of the same students. I'll take a different approach to it, but it will be according to how the children are learning.

What is a typical day like in your LEAP class? Is there a typical day?

No! I like to have something upon which everything hangs; it is according to how they're learning, or it could be a curriculum subject. I allow for every child to have realistic goals, even the student who has only been here two months. There is a spelling test every week, and if they can just do one of the words on the list of twenty, which we have played with all week, if they get that word right, that's perfect. Some children will do ten. There must always be something in a workbook that a child can do. That could be a word search. It could be something that they can be doing while they're waiting to become, what I call the "tutor" part of the class. I create a workbook every week and it hangs onto science, social studies, or art terminology. I create it every week. For example you can

make three sentences about a specific word. Two nonsensical, and one was that is logical. For an ESL child to actually know the difference means they've come a long way. A Roma student who'd only been here six weeks, said, "My father is baby." She made up her own silly sentence. She understood what I was saying and I knew she got it. In fact, the rest of the class went, "Yeah!" And they all just clapped! Last year, I couldn't have even read those sentences. This year, they write their own groups of three sentences around every word because they love doing it.

The LEAP program does something called "Burns Roe"; what is that?

I actually don't like the Burns Roe⁷ because it's done by grade instead of ability; if you just do the Burns Roe, you don't see any change because you've got ten levels. In DRA you've got 44 different levels. So I actually like to see what's working and what isn't working. I also do a computation math test but that just tells me one thing about where they're at. I prefer to see math as a thinking activity rather than computation. Parents do like computation papers though.

If you're looking at a group of grade three and grade four students and you expect everybody to be at DRA level 38, and you get this child who has been a year in Canada, who is DRA at B, which is before level one, and has little attendance, a teacher may not see them for who they are. They see them as a problem, rather than being baffled. To me, that means I've got to ask somebody for help, because I've pulled out everything that's

⁷ Burns Roe is a reading assessment inventory:
www.learnalberta.ca/content/ieptLibrary/documents/RATI_burns_and_roe.pdf

within me. Quite often a child will say, "Could you help me do this?" And then, another child will come up and say, "You know, I found it easier when we did it this way." I'm thinking, "I haven't thought of showing it that way." A lot of teachers are very frightened of letting students teach each other; to them it may be like losing control, but it's not losing control it's losing authority. I perfectly admit to them, I make mistakes.

We're moving on a very fast track going forward; I have six sciences and six social studies to cover in a year. I do what's called enduring understandings: what they need to do. You can't do every expectation that's in the curriculum, but some expectations you can do wonderfully. I can't teach everything, but what I teach, I aim to teach well. With this group there is no stopping them at all. I have a saying, "I'm not in competition with a computer." They can get detail from the computer.

They can get the heart of a subject from me. These students are fearless... They're absolutely fearless. A child has to be allowed to fail because they have to experience failure. But, they mustn't be afraid of failure. It's not to be ridiculed, and in many cultures, if they make mistakes they're ridiculed.

I mean if you listen to how these students were disciplined it's unbelievable. In my class they feel safe and that is the main thing.

Another thing that I do is read stories into the tape, so when the students first listen to a tape, they hear my voice. They are used to my cadence and how I say things; it saves that confusion. It takes hours at home to talk into a microphone and not goof but sometimes I will say, "Oh! I made a

mistake, I better read that again." And I'm doing it in the tape, because it's that "Think Aloud, Read Aloud." I think it just gives them courage. One of the Roma students who was only in my class the second day, hadn't spoken and then she read for me. She just read the whole question.

How can Romani arts and culture be integrated into a curriculum that works to dispel discrimination and oppression of marginalized Roma children?

How could learning about Romani arts and culture teach children to respect each other and not discriminate?

It builds up empathy. The students have to get to the place where they say "I don't understand that person, but they're worth knowing; I might find it difficult, but I'm going to try." This class is very protective of each other; you'll see a new child come into school and the whole class will be warm. They'll find somebody who speaks their first language, and they'll hold their hand and say, "This is the washroom, don't worry." It's like that for every student, even the grade fives.

What do you think children learn from gaining an understanding of their own, and others' arts and culture?

At this age, I don't know, other than being curious and being excited about learning. I think older children may learn how similar we are. Especially when it comes to jewellery, and they notice the henna'd hands and the multi-coloured clothing. All the bangles and coloured clothes they wear in a lot of cultures are similar. I don't know whether the rumour about the Roma coming from India is true or not, but the Pakistani, Afghan, and all those countries seem to have all those colourful bracelets, and the students

notice that between each other. Jewellery is a commonality. At this age most prejudice is from fear and lack of understanding. When we talk about each other's culture, they will say things like, "Tell me all about 'eat'," and I'd talk about Christmas; then they talk about how Muslims can put up Christmas trees and things like that. I didn't know how many branches of Muslims there were. But the delight of being a teacher is you learn every day such as a child explaining that their religion was partly Christian, and partly Muslim...it's just fascinating... it's some branch of the Muslim religion, but it's nearly a Christian...and, they discuss this. Today we were talking about what fighting for a just cause meant, and what was a 'just cause?' In a lot of their families, their mothers' had to wear the burqa before they came. I said, "I don't care if you wear a burqa," and some of them said, "Oh you don't?" But I said, "it must be your choice." So, you say, you can wear a burqa or not, but you must be able to choose. One of the students said, "Oh, if we didn't wear the burqa, we were taken out and shot." These children are true victims of war. And the Roma are true victims of prejudice and it's not right. As I said, you've got to be careful not to be the mother, and you've got to still be the teacher, but have an open heart. One year, I had a lot of Roma who'd been through Hell, absolute Hell. Starvation, no food, no water, hungry...not being allowed to stay anywhere...and I was in tears. One of them, just talking about holding his cousin, who every year got a bit thinner and thinner and finally died in their arms. So you do show your emotion, but it's rough

because they come here, and they're full of life and energy and love...and trust...but it's the trust factor, and it's the Roma. They have to trust you. Then all of a sudden what happens once they trust you is they'll start leaning against you when they're talking, or they'll rub your arm. Which I'm not used to and you say, "Fine. You're with me, and we're going to work together," but... it's that open heart. I have found them to be very joyous! We have a lot of Roma families here now and they're the poorest of the poor. They're from Albania. I saw one of the mothers selling her own clothes last year at the side of the road opposite the school. I got settlement workers in fast...just so she could have some money to feed them. But her children come to school every day with a lunch, and dressed.

One day we were registering some people at the front office and they happened to be Roma. I had them fill out the permission for ESL forms. The man looked at me and said, "European?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Irish?" I said, "Irish," and we gasped because Romas are accepted in Ireland. That link on a personal level made him friendly. He was actually kind of rude to the secretary who was filling up the forms, but all of a sudden when I said I was Irish, everything changed. One Roma parent got very cross here, and lifted up his shirt, and he had stab wounds all over. One of my grade four Roma students before he came to Canada, was running through the streets in Albania...he's from Albania...was being shot at! He had bullets firing at him and he could actually describe it as a

click, rather than a bang. The people were just trying to kill him because they're Roma.

Thornccliffe, as you know has a much larger Roma population. It's the largest elementary school in the world. They had the same percentage of ESL children as we do. At Grenoble we have students from all over the world. I think our website says we have 75 first languages. The children can be assessed in their first language. They're also given re-done computers; the children get free computers at home, if they need them and the Internet has been provided. The police in this area redid a whole pile of bicycles and the children are getting free bicycles. This area is called Flemingdon Park. If you ask people about Flemingdon Park, they will raise their eyebrow because all they hear about is the violence in the evening. The children come to school, quite often, with blood...there's blood in the elevators with fights...gangs...there's a lot of...culture wars...a lot of disenfranchised youth...the Roma don't seem to have any prejudice against any other culture... I haven't seen that, they just seem to be different within themselves.

Susan works within prescribed grade level curriculums with defined learning outcomes, but often differentiates her teaching with arts-based approaches. While it may appear that her classroom has aspects of a traditional educational model, her method of teaching is not. In her years as a LEAP teacher, Susan has come to know that one method of delivering the curriculum will not work for all children. Therefore she adapts her delivery of the curriculum to the various needs of the children within her group. This

is a daily and continual process requiring an intense amount of energy, insight, and awareness to understand the individual, and unique needs of each student. The arts offer a way for Susan to connect with students' inner thoughts and feelings and to know if they truly understand what is being taught.

~End of Interview~



A Joy, Lucia Kalejova. Jan Sajko (no date), from:
<http://s191.photobucket.com/user/janosajko/media/Press%20-%20Pictures%20of%20students/cf5e.jpg.html?sort=6&o=109>

2. Lugzi Mustafa



Illustration of Roma Song, Daniel Gina, Jan Sajko (no date), from:
http://s191.photobucket.com/user/janosajko/media/Press%20-%20Pictures%20of%20students/DSC_0010.jpg.html?sort=6&o=3

Lugzi is a Roma high school student. I met him in Toronto after an introduction by Gina Csanyi-Robah of the Toronto Roma Community Centre (RCC). He was born in Kosovo and lived there for one year then moved to Montenegro for five months. After that his family moved to Bosnia living in Sarajevo and Mostar, where Lugzi's family spent four years living in "broken" houses (usually without proper windows, doors, plumbing, and electricity). Eventually they ended up in a refugee camp after his grandparents contacted the family to let them know that they should come there because, "it was a good and helpful place." Lugzi and his family lived in the Bosnian refugee camp for 11 years. He speaks Roma, but he admits, "My Roma is mixed with Albanian, Bosnia, Croatian...all mixed up." He is Muslim but has said he was Christian in some

circumstances when he was afraid to let it be known he was Muslim. Eventually Lugzi's family was sponsored to come to Canada as Convention refugees⁸. They first lived in Newfoundland then Toronto. They have now settled in a small, rural area in the St. Catherine, Ontario area. My interview with Lugzi took place about a year after I met him, and he had settled into his new home with his family.

The structure of Lugzi's interview had to be delivered as a conversation, rather than a set of interview questions. I used this approach with Lugzi as it seemed to be the best way for him to understand what I was asking. I have categorized his responses under the research questions but in some instances they loosely fit.

When I met Lugzi he was living with his family in the east end of Toronto near Scarborough. His family had been in the Toronto area for just over two years and were living in housing provided for Convention refugees. At the time of our first introduction, Lugzi's mother had just given birth to twins; there were now ten children in the family. The whole family lived in a two-bedroom apartment; it was a difficult situation and according to Lugzi he couldn't get much sleep with the new babies crying all the time and so many people cramped in the apartment. He also discussed how his older brothers who were not in school, couldn't get any work so they had nothing to do all day except wander around.

⁸ A Convention refugee is a person who meets the refugee definition in the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. This definition is used in Canadian law and is widely accepted internationally. To meet the definition, a person must be outside their country of origin and have a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. From <http://ccrweb.ca/en/glossary>

What is distinctly problematic for Roma children in traditional school settings?

At our first meeting a year earlier Lugzi was in a LEAP class in a Toronto high school. Although this particular LEAP class did not use an arts-integrated approach, his teacher took the time to encourage Lugzi's interest in T-shirt designing which he found very engaging. Later when his family moved to the St. Catherine's area, there was no such program in place and he attended classes without any specific help for ESL students or other programs to address learning gaps. In the school he is currently attending, Lugzi describes what it is like to be "the only brown person" in the school, "Yeah! Like, you see 25 white people, and one brown, and you say, Wow! They look really brown. Where you come from, Mexico?" I say, "No, I'm from Bosnia! But every single day I need to tell them...and it's really confusing." Lugzi is frequently asked where he's from by students, teachers, and the principal. He says the teachers and principal *know* where he is from and still ask, "They know everything, and they have all the records and stuff. I told them that. Oh man." Consequently Lugzi feels that some of the teachers don't want to help him:

I got it, you're a teacher, there's like 30 students in the class... I know you need to teach everyone and help everyone, but you need to be careful, what you're saying and stuff. Some of them seem racist and just don't get it. They never help you. When you go there, they ask you lots of questions and you have to fill out a test, and nobody helps you really. The teachers say to me, "You do really well to speak, you don't need help." I say, "Yeah, I know how to speak, but trying to read or spell, I don't know."

He says though that some of the grade 12 students are helpful and he was surprised,

I couldn't believe! I was thinking around grade 12 they would be really annoying, but no they're good and they try to help me and stuff, I have some grade 12 classes and they really help me. They see you when you're new and stuff, they try to show you around.

Lugzi said that in Newfoundland and Toronto, "...you had a lot more help, you had a lot more English training, better programs, people were more open, you could talk more about being Roma and they were less racist." He said he told one of his former teachers in Toronto about the school he now attends and was asked, "What kind of school is that? They shouldn't do that. I've been in lots of cities and lots of places, but I've never heard a teacher be racist."

How can the arts, and art education in particular engage marginalized Roma children with learning?

Lugzi's school experience in Newfoundland was memorable and seems to have had many arts-based components to it. When I asked him what he thought about music, art, and theater in school he said:

That's really good, because when I was in Newfoundland, every week, we did read a book, a kindergarten book, and we'd do a play too. Every week we'd do a play and everybody would donate a dollar or two and we'd buy new books and new plays. That's how I learned more to speak. I didn't have to worry about the teacher after school, reading it to me. I'd just read it how I remember the play.

In Toronto, Lugzi was in a LEAP class where he says, "...they help you really good, like, every five seconds, there are almost 25 students there, but they're good at moving around and helping the students and reading for them, and they're there after school to ask for help." When asked if they showed him pictures of things when he couldn't understand the language, Lugzi replied that, "They will, most of them draw them, or show them on YouTube or Google. If somebody talked about Elvis The King, and somebody doesn't know him, they will show songs, and sometimes the country he's in and cities." When asked what he would do if he was trying to explain things and others couldn't understand he said, "I would try to draw it, I'm not very good, but I would try." Lugzi also feels that kids should have more hands-on experiences, "...like, doing things, and explaining them, like inches and math...like engines to work on...they show you the parts."

When asked about what school was like in Bosnia, Lugzi said that he attended a regular classroom and did not go to a special class. He said, "Sometimes the teachers were really good to me. When they'd see some dirty clothes on me, they'd bring me clean ones." He also said that, "The kids, some of them treated me really well, but some of them were just yelling things like, 'You're a stupid kid.' They just yell and move away and run. Sometimes I didn't even go to the classroom, I'd just sit in the hall, just thinking and crying."

The school had art, music, and drama but Lugzi didn't often attend because, "...sometimes we just wanted to get out...we just said we were sick, and they would send us home." He said he was mostly in gym and soccer, he conceded however, that the arts classes were really good. He especially liked the musical instruments and costumes. He

said though that his attendance at school was not very good. “If I went for a day, I would not go for a week.” When asked why, he answered, “Because, I would just try to work, I was looking for metals and stuff; I would go into the garbage to look for food...really sad.” He said mostly he didn't go because he was too poor and had to spend time finding food and other necessities. Things changed though prior to his move to Canada, he went to grade 8, attending the whole year. “I got the papers to come to Canada, and my dad started to work with metal and stuff, and after school I'd help him with separating them, and that year I went the whole year. Even the teachers were really surprised at that.”

How can Romani arts and culture be integrated into a curriculum that works to dispel discrimination and oppression of marginalized children?

I asked Lugzi if his family taught him about Romani arts, culture and history when he was growing up and he said that sometimes his grandpa would teach him, but he died 5 years ago:

... my grandma or my parents, on Roma days or anything, we'd do really big festivals. Even the Canadians, sometimes when they see, they say, "Oh, can we have a coffee or something?" We say, "Sure, come on." We have some neighbors...on May 6, we had a celebration⁹ and they saw us cooking a roast, and they came to say, 'Can we have some?' We say, "Yeah, come at dinner time."

⁹ The celebration was in honour of Saint George, or "...*djurdjevdan(herdelezi)*, It is one of the most important holidays for the Roma in the Southern Balkans area. It is one of the rare holidays to be celebrated by both Muslim and Christian Orthodox Roma.
(from <http://romani.uni-graz.at/rombase/cgi-in/art.cgi?src=data/ethn/celeb/george.en.xml>)

Lugzi did not talk much about his knowledge of Romani arts and culture, but did say that he would like others to know about Romani culture, "...from A-Z, everything. Holidays, costumes, songs...I really would like them to learn everything, and know everything." When asked if they [non-Roma] were to learn about Romani culture would they understand it better? Would this make them more respectful and less prejudiced? He agreed that non-Roma know very little about the Roma:

Yeah, because the Roma don't have their own country or their own city.

Everybody needs to know who the Roma are and what it's all about.

Lugzi believes that unlike teachers he had in other areas of Canada, the teachers where he lives now are not interested in knowing about Romani culture:

...but in Toronto and Newfoundland they really want to know. I had a teacher in St. John's, Newfoundland who had 200 of her own Roma students. When I first met her she asked me if I was Roma but I didn't know if it was safe to tell her so I just said I'm from Bosnia. After a few months I trusted her and told her my story. I told her I am Roma and she said that she could see it.

At the secondary school in Toronto, they wanted to know about Roma a lot. They had an after school group with the principal and the teachers and they would listen to the music and how they sing, and it was really good. My cousins, they told me, "Why did you tell them you're Roma?" I just told them I have trust. That's how I am. I don't like to lie to people. I don't have fear. I'm telling them the truth. They're telling me I shouldn't, and I said, "Just take care of yourself; I can take care of myself and my future."

I told my teacher all about my Roma stuff...some kids really don't want to tell them but they're shy and scared.

Lugzi said he just told the teachers not the students about his Romani culture, but when he had “some classes that were just Roma, then I shared. I shared in Toronto and St. John's, but not here...they're already racist.” He said that when he did tell other Canadian students they wanted to know more and “they'd search the computer, and every second say they'd ask questions of how it was.”

When asked what his personal experience as a Roma high school student living in Canada was like he summed it up as saying:

I think it's all about the future; [before coming to Canada] we live really poor, and we never wash our clothes, and sleep in the rain, wake up in the snow, and that. But since we came here, to Canada we have our own houses, and our own room, bathrooms, and shower every day and night, and it's all about the future and the health.

Lugzi says that he is really happy here and wants to help other Roma who are living in poverty:

I want to be the Prime Minister or somebody [influential], so people will look at me and know me. That's what I really want. This is not the first time I'm saying this. I've told you and my family, and I told everyone, I'm really helpful and strong, and I ask a lot of questions and talk a lot. I really want to help out...not just my family, I really want to help, like...I know some kids in Bosnia, they sleep in the grass and the police come find them, and take them for a night to jail, or just pour cold water on

them...really sad...just unbelievable...that's what I'm trying to do right now, 'cause I see myself with a really good future, and I want to share it.

Lugzi is a young man with an amazing spirit and a very positive outlook. His challenged background has not curbed his enthusiasm for life and as he says. “Why should I let that bother? I am just happy to be living and thinking about the future...I want to be Prime Minister one day.”

~End of Interview~



Roma People, David Cervenak. Jan Sajko (no date), from:
<http://s191.photobucket.com/user/janosajko/media/Press%20-%20Pictures%20of%20students/P1240001.jpg.html?sort=6&o=13>

3. Lynn Hutchinson Lee



Lynn Hutchinson Lee, Artist. 2013, Chad Evans Wyatt, / romarisingCA 2013

Lynn is a Romani artist living in Toronto and member of the RCC. Lynn has worked on community arts projects for quite a number of years involving other professional artists in her projects and working to high artistic standards with media that might be considered new to a lot of the community participants. She has been actively involved with visual arts projects with Roma refugee women and children; many of them were newly arrived in the Toronto area. Her project, *Canada Without Shadows: I am a Romani Woman*, is an inspiring collection of writings and art from the stories five Hungarian Roma women had to tell of their traumatic experiences in their home country. Lynn worked on another community arts project *Shukar Lulugi* (Beautiful Flower), with *Sojourn House* of Toronto. This resulted in a book of art, photography, and writing put together from the stories of women and children refugees and their hope for the future in their new life in Canada.

Lynn had an integral role in the development of the TDSB Roma curriculum. Drawing upon her knowledge of Romani art and history she worked with the children to create a mural depicting events in Romani history and highlighting human rights concerns. In my interview with Lynn, it ended up becoming a multilayered conversation about many topics related to Romani arts and culture, Canadian politics, Eastern European educational and political concerns, cultural assimilation and pluralism, eradication of culture due to poverty, and other pertinent issues of relevance to the education of marginalized Roma children.

Tell me about your background

My parents were both artists and...I'm not talking about the arts as an intellectual practice, but as part of a community practice. I guess my

father came by being an artist because, when he was growing up in England, they were entertainers and they made puppets. They lived in a caravan, and my father's stepfather carved the horses for the carousels and did sign painting. Those kinds of skills can translate themselves into different kinds of arts practice. When my dad came to Canada, he made the leap from sign painting and house building to going to night school and becoming a print maker. When my dad's family came to Canada they started picking tobacco and they were unbelievably poor. He was driven. I think that's what separated him from the rest of his family; he needed to go beyond survival and to find some kind of place where he could express himself. Having said that, he also turned his back on his family and really divorced himself from any kind of Roma identity at all.

Was your dad full Roma?

We don't know whether he was full Roma or half Romani. His mother was Romani, but we don't know about his father, there's no record. But he was brought up in that culture and turned his back on it as an adult in Canada for a couple of reasons. A lot of Roma who've come here will not identify as Romani because of their experiences in their countries of origin and they want to be recognized as nationals of that country. I think that was one factor for my dad. The other one was that perhaps he was motivated by feelings of shame about his ethnic origins, or how the family was perceived, or how Roma were perceived in England. His strategy for dealing with that was to reject it all. He also wanted to be recognized in

the arts establishment, which he was in the 1930s in Hamilton. I think he was really motivated by the desire to become somebody recognized by Canadian-White society, and he more or less achieved that.

What is distinctly problematic for Roma children in traditional school settings?

What I am looking at in my research is trying to determine best practices in education for Roma children. One of the reasons why this is an important aspect to focus on within education is that, from my own observations of Roma children in Kosovo, they seem to respond really well to arts-based programs and were very engaged with learning. The research I have read on traditional educational models - with rote learning, desks in rows, and teacher-driven instruction seems to be quite difficult in general for Roma children. Do you have comments on that from what you've observed?

There is a recent study done in the UK involving Czech-Roma children who have come with their families as refugees to England. These children are excelling in school. I think there's perhaps a bit of a myth that Roma children can't study in a school setting. I think this myth really has been used to their disadvantage because when you look at the opportunities – if they are given opportunities to excel in a school setting they will. But there has to be the groundwork laid there for them, and particularly, supporting the parents. The parents often do not trust the school system - I'm talking more about Europe than Canada. They don't trust the teachers; their children and indeed the entire communities in any given area have

never been well served by the school system. And because there is essentially an apartheid system in the schools, the children are relegated to classes for developmentally challenged children, even the Romani children that may be quite bright. There are excuses given for relegating them to these kinds of classes. The parents have never really been welcomed, or shown support in many of these schools, so they naturally are very hesitant to send their kids to school here.

What has happened, at least in Toronto at Queen Victoria School, is they have some programs that involve the parents. They held an international Romani day celebration a couple of years ago involving the entire school and the parents. I think they understand that there is a place where children can do academic learning if it's a welcoming environment. Because a lot of Roma traditionally were left out of the educational system – another reason for them to distrust it – there is still this myth that Romani children are not good learners. Given the opportunities, yes they are good learners. They excel like every other kid. I think if we look at children who have been disenfranchised, marginalized, pushed to the edges, whose basic human rights were not respected, you'll see the same kind of school difficulties in the Roma population and any other population. I don't think it's specific to Roma.

You had said there were a couple of things that needed to be in place first to help with academic learning. One of them you said was parental involvement. Is there anything else?

I'm not a teacher so I don't really know, I'm just talking about my experience of working on community arts projects, and just from my conversations with teachers, but definitely parental inclusion in the school environment is key because Romani families are traditionally very close-knit. If the parents feel excluded, they're not inclined to feel comfortable having their children involved. I guess there is also the question of cultural sensitivity. I would say teachers shouldn't have to take a crash course in every cultural group whose children might be represented in their classroom, but it's still really important to understand some basic things about the culture. For instance, the myths and stereotypes do not speak the truth about the Romani ethnicity. Teachers need to understand that it is an ethnicity and not a lifestyle; that Roma travelled because of forced migration, not because they have a "free spirit." This is something that a lot of people have not really understood because the Roma have been invisible. It is simply an ethnic group that has specific practices like any other ethnic group and teachers need to be sensitive to that.

I think anti-racism education is really important because you'll find amongst school children – maybe a lot of expression of attitudes of their parents. Roma seem to be the last frontier of allowable racism...about Roma and towards Roma.

I was writing a grant in the fall, around Halloween, and the Roma list-serve that I'm part of was sending out a lot of information from websites saying, "Dress like a Gypsy for Halloween." There are all these really

pernicious attitudes about Roma that people carry, even educated, progressive people. Friends of mine! It's really hard to erase this kind of attitude. I think as long as the community remains invisible, the stereotypes can persist because there's nobody there to show that it's not the case.

How can the arts, and art education in particular engage marginalized Roma children with learning?

Going back to educational programs and directions, a lot of the research I'm looking at is targeted for marginalized children in general, and how an arts-based approach will begin to engage children.

I think engagement is the key word here, in that children who have lived lives of trauma, who have endured all kinds of discrimination and setbacks in their home country, and even in Canada...but more so we're talking about kids who come here as refugees. I think that beyond the ability to establish a sense of trust is finding ways of engagement where kids are not just immediately placed in a classroom where the language of instruction is another barrier to their learning.

When I was speaking to Ronald Lee yesterday, he said, "If you want to reach Roma, it is music." While not trying to stereotype, is it true that it's a heartfelt approach to begin with, where Roma and non-Roma are engaged on a different level?

If an arts-based curriculum is at the core of a good program, it'll attract Roma and non-Roma marginalized children. For instance, the world of

visual art and creating literacy through symbolism and pictorial representation is something I think is really strong.

You've worked a lot in the visual art world, could you speak to that in terms of your observations of the children who were involved in the Roma curriculum that you did with the TDSB?

A lot of those kids weren't Roma in fact I would say there might've been just a couple of Roma students in that class. That was just before the larger influx of Hungarian Roma refugees to Parkdale...having said that, most of the children in those classes were from refugee families themselves. They had a great deal of sensitivity to the things that were happening to Roma before they came to Canada and the circumstances that led to them coming to Canada.

What brought about the establishment of the Roma curriculum within the TDSB?

The whole curriculum was initiated by the Equity Studies Department at the TDSB. They wanted a general curriculum that could be integrated with visual and other arts. The teachers included much of the subject matter of the small murals that we painted (we did 11 murals) into the curriculum. For example, things that were particularly relevant or had formed part of a social studies curriculum were themes that we looked at in two murals: the difference between living in their country of origin, and living in Canada...this sort of thing. Visually, they were adapted to the particular components of the curriculum, yet the work could stand on its own.

A more recent project I worked on (independent of the TDSB) was *Loki Gili - Song of Sorrow, Song of Hope*. I was working mainly with refugee women and a photographer was working with their kids. However, I think my experience with the women could be applied to the children as well. When people come here and they don't have a very good grasp of the language and they can't express themselves verbally. They may still feel very traumatized by what happened to them over there, and they don't even want to talk about it. The visual arts practice is a perfect way for them to access their experiences and their feelings. You keep things on the surface and you can go as deep as you want, or just remain on the surface if you want. For instance, if you are painting your traditional life, and then painting images from your life that led you to have to flee to Canada, you perhaps wouldn't have the verbal language for that, but you would have the visual and the emotional language for it. So, in working with people, I never encouraged them to go deep down into their experience. That's really up to them to portray as much of their experience and their feelings as they want. This is interesting, because some people do go very deep and some don't.

There was one kid in the project *Loki Gili*, he was 12 years old at the time and he participated in the photography component of the project; his portraits of family members and friends at community picnics, and also his photographs of the deportation of one family that was sent back to Hungary...they're just so powerful. They are amazing pieces of work. I

have no idea what the kid is doing now because his family too was sent back to Hungary. I didn't meet him all that much because I wasn't working with him, but he was game for anything, he participated because he enjoyed it. He had an insight that you would rarely find amongst adult photographers, perhaps because of the experiences he must've gone through in Hungary, or because he just was an artist with the soul of an artist. He could express things in visual arts, photography, that he might not have expressed verbally. Writing can be challenging because a lot of people might have feelings about something and they may not want to get too deep to access them in terms of writing them down, because it's just too painful.

With visual art, it can be tempered somewhat in terms of how deep that person could go, or not?

You play with a medium; you've never done printmaking before or painting before and you say, "Wow, I love this colour, wow I love this shape." And that allows you to express multi-layered ideas and thoughts and experiences because you can do something that's really lovely and fun on the one hand, and you can also go into a whole different place. Maria, who participated in that project, and she worked on the murals, had never painted before. She told me afterwards she was terrified because she thought, "What if I do something wrong?" She was always told in school (in Hungary) that she had no talent for painting or drawing. After the project was over she started painting really beautiful light-hearted figures

and people. I have a couple of her paintings upstairs. She also painted two pictures that really were very, very, profoundly moving and distressing, and one was called *Roma Slaughter Game*. Her imagery has a "naive" aspect to it...you know, the perspective is up and down and fairly flat, and the figures are beautifully rendered but in a very simple way. What she portrays with her particular kind of work – her brush strokes and her colour, and the way she composes on the canvas – it looks very beautiful, but the subject matter of some of these paintings is tragic.

So, I think, given the tools, people can express themselves. I'm not differentiating between adults or children. They all might take the same approach to art, like, "I don't know, I've never done this before, but maybe I'll try, and it'll be terrible, and maybe it won't, but...I'll do it for fun and not take it too seriously." Then they find that, once they've learned a few skills, (how to carve a block, pull a print, draw a dog or their friend, how to photograph somebody in their family, how to paint a bowl of fruit or something) that is a path into something else, and they can take it as far as they want. I guess there are certain ways you deal with that with children and certain ways you deal with that with adults, but with children, their ability to concentrate is much less I think, so you don't do long drawn out projects with them. They will find a visual language, and they will enter that place and they will play around in there, and they will do everything within their passion and their capability. And we never say to them, "You cannot do X, Y, or Z." We always say to them, "You can do what you

learn to do and what you want to do. You can say what you want to say in these projects."

The other thing that seems to me, and, without trying to be stereotypical, but when I was in Kosovo I noticed that it appeared to be very natural for the Roma kids there to be really expressive through art, music and dance, it came very naturally. When I look at that, I think that educationally, in Eastern Europe, in a lot of the old villages and the structured post-communist schools, the students just get the three R's and that's it. Along with the segregation and the demeaning attitudes that have prevailed there towards the Roma kids, I think that the whole structure itself is not really good for them to begin with. To me it seemed even more damaging to people of a culture who are particularly passionate and expressive. It did seem so natural for the kids I worked with in Kosovo to be very expressive in their art, singing, drama, and music.

A lot of it has to do with accessibility to the arts, I think. If you have any culture that has a strong sense of itself, that's expressed through music, it's going to be perpetuated through the children. And again, we have to look at all cultures that are like that. I was just in Havana a couple of weeks ago and you see it there. I remember seeing a little street parade and children were dancing in the street. You wouldn't necessarily see that in Toronto. People who have access to their culture are going to participate in that culture...whether it's a visual culture or if they're stronger in dance or storytelling, this kind of thing. I don't think it is just Roma. There are certain cultural practices where people will get together and read poetry.

When children are exposed to that, they will practice that in their own particular way. Roma also carry with them influences from their country of birth. The English Roma do not do what we think of as traditional Romani dancing; and they don't do what we think of as traditional Romani music. It's very much about things that they would have picked from English cultural practices. Like English...folk songs...they would've been much more relevant for them. Certainly that was the case for my dad.

It seems that educational systems are leaving the arts behind with their cutbacks. I was also reading how a lot of Roma children have not had the opportunity to become visual artists because they've not had the exposure to art. They also can't carry on any traditions that might have existed within their families because a) the families don't have the time because they're desperately trying to survive, or b) there's just no money for anything. There's a whole generation of children that are missing out on what may have been a cultural heritage,

I think it's true. My own dad's family, when they came to Canada they started picking tobacco and they were unbelievably poor.

How can Romani arts and culture be integrated into a curriculum that works to dispel discrimination and oppression of marginalized Roma children?

For children, Roma or otherwise, who have experienced racial/ethnic discrimination, and then come to Canada, I think gaining a new perspective about their own and other's cultures might be good to start opening up and not having racist opinions of others.

I'm not really a great admirer of cultural nationalism...you know, you don't take the music and the food and think that's what the culture is...culture is always much greater than that. Nevertheless, it's really wonderful to have this kind of thing in Toronto because then you have the restaurants and so forth, but you also have film and book festivals and the arts councils that really pay attention to artists working culturally on diverse projects. Dance festivals, you name it. So a lot comes out, not just the manifestations of a culture but the soul of a culture has an opportunity to thrive; which is really quite amazing.

We've never really been able to get that far with the Romani culture in Toronto as we have with other cultures, other groups of people that have immigrated here or come here as refugees. I think it's partly because so many people get sent back, but they don't have a chance to put down roots or see their kids go through school. Usually it's the second generation that starts this thing off. It seems like the second generation is always the one to sort of sit back, and assess the situation. It has a foot in both camps, and sort of makes a bridge between the "so-called" Canadian culture, whatever that is, and their own culture of origin.

Can you tell me why the TDSB introduced the Roma Curriculum with that particular group?

Well, that school is such a leader in looking at how to bring children into society, how to educate them, how to make them feel as if they are active...have their own cultural agency rather than have something

[imposed] upon them. I think they decided to do it anyway because [they previously had] Roma kids in the school, some kids were a little bit older. The massive influx hadn't started at that point in that particular school. I couldn't really say how it affected the relationship between Roma and non-Romani students.

I was just curious if the Roma Curriculum was developed in response to something.

It seems, then, that it was in anticipation of a Roma influx...

I don't know...I think it's an amazing school and they really believe in fairness for students. Because they'd had Romani students and the Equity Studies Center was looking for schools to participate in this new curriculum, they just came forward. Other schools that had more Romani students [could have taken the opportunity] but they didn't. And others may have come forward that had no Romani students or didn't even know what the project was about, but they didn't. This was the school that came forward.

I was talking to Gina Csanyi-Robah a while ago, she asked members of the police department to help solve problems involving Roma youth. I wonder if the problems were a result of racial tensions that were starting to develop with so many Roma students coming into the schools.

I didn't hear about this involvement with the police but what I did hear about was the Tibetan students and the Roma students were really becoming very hostile towards one another. I think she developed a soccer

team where there were Tibetan and Romani students on the same team...

She could tell you this. I don't remember.

The Tibetan of all groups, wow!

People who come as refugees have [many] difficulties and challenges we may not know about. I think when you're so full of despair and anything crosses your path, maybe you become a lot more volatile in responding to it.

So potentially the Roma curriculum...I see it as needing to have a place, again, in terms of children – Roma and non-Roma – recognizing their own and others' culture. And again, through visual, pictorial history lines, and photography, and the visual arts projects that you Roma leaders did with the kids, I think it would be great to get that started again.

These kids come here without literary skills - perhaps they have really not learned to read and write in the language of their country, and they very well may not have learned much of their own native language. They're having trouble reading and writing in English and that's very confusing to them. That's another reason why arts-based curriculum cuts through all of those impediments, like huge rocks in their way, and the arts will cut right through that. There will be a universal language. If you have 20 different kids in a class and they can't understand each other, one thing they can understand is, [a drama performance], or music, visual art...and that's why it's so important to be able to get to them. In fact, it facilitates academic teaching.

I absolutely believe that. There's quite a bit of research on it, in terms of the literacy that comes out of art – it is a universal language. Art allows children to express themselves without words or language. I found that in Kosovo, some kids were fluent in Albanian, while other kids, because of their background grew up having to learn three or four different languages. They just didn't have a clue what language to use and they hadn't really developed fluency in any.

It may in some cases be deliberate, and in other cases not deliberate, but it really is a genocidal project. [If you take] peoples' language away from them, or you take any form of making a living away from them, or any form of education away from them, and you separate them, [making] them feel they're less than human, and you go on and on through generations of doing that, essentially, you've just got people who don't know who they are, or where they're from. [They become a people] who are poor and disenfranchised, without a culture! [But] as long as you have a culture, you can somehow survive and manage.

~End of Interview~



Roma Woman, (artist not identified). Jan Sajko, (no date), from: <http://s191.photobucket.com/user/janosajko/media/Press%20-%20Pictures%20of%20students/b676.jpg.html?sort=6&o=155>

4. Tamas Bany



Music Band, Jozef Cervenak. Jan Sajko, (no date), from: http://s191.photobucket.com/user/janosajko/media/Press%20-%20Pictures%20of%20students/DSC_0004.jpg.html?sort=6&o=5

Tamas is a Hungarian Roma of about 40 years old. He immigrated to Canada in 2008 with his wife and two children. His English is fairly proficient and we were able to understand each other. However, the setting for the interview posed some difficulties. We had to meet in a public place and I wanted Tamas to choose a location that he was comfortable with. We met at a Tim Horton's restaurant in his Toronto neighborhood, however it was very noisy and I struggled to follow his discourse at times.

The interview is similar in format to Lugzi's. As the interview commenced, I found it awkward to try to impose the rigidity of my research questions into the conversation. I found that Tamas had an important story to tell and it seemed essential to allow it to unfold for the most part unguided. Aspects of the Roma situation and educational issues were revealed that otherwise may not have come forward if I had to keep to the structure of the research questions. However for the sake of organization, I have used the research questions as subtitles in the interview with questions/responses

being somewhat in alignment with them while trying to keep with the flow of the conversation.

The interview reveals some of the grave difficulties many Roma face in East-Central Europe, and provides a lived experience that demonstrates the great passion and importance of music to the Roma culture. It begins with Tamas discussing the widespread curiosity about Romani culture.

What is distinctly problematic for Roma children in traditional school settings?

Many people in many countries want to know about the Roma culture. Everybody knows about five years ago, the big problem with the Roma people, with Roma families, basically in Central Europe, probably nine million Roma. Those countries, want to push back the Roma ethnics. They don't want Roma people to learn, high school or university. They don't care about Roma. Sometimes they say, "I hate Gypsy people." I worked one place for Proctor and Gamble in Hungary. My boss was Jewish. In 2005, he told me, "I know you're Roma." So I asked if it was a problem, and he said no. "I just want to tell you something, you have to do with your children, learn about university."

In 2005, the ministry and the first people in Hungary have a big meeting. And they are thinking about what will be in the future, 20 years. And they are thinking, because Hungarians don't want more children, just one or two. But the Roma people, everybody sees the basic as 4 or 5 children. And we are thinking ahead. In 20 years, there will be more

Roma in Hungary than Hungarian people. They don't want this way. That's why I have to push my children to learn, learn, learn. Because if in 10-15 years, they have a university, and many education, they have to do something, they have to be in parliament or ministry or something. In 2005, they found out, okay, we can do in parliament, anything, but in the underground, we have to do something legal.

And the political party in power is the "Jobbik?"

"Jobbik¹⁰." But, you have to understand this. When my parents and my brother came here in the end of 1999, that time was bad in Hungary... skinheads. We are thinking, we have to do something. We have to learn, we have to do big education. That was a big plan. We have to learn, we have to have contact with interesting people, and the parliament people, and many people. Bad things are happening to the Roma because the Hungarian guards kill many, many, people...kill many Roma families. They are push, push, push, and demonstrations in the Roma village. The plan is to push the Roma ethnic, because we want Roma people to think, Okay finish I have to go [leave the country]. Roma people have to go because if they want any kind of plans, they need to make their children safe. So for example, I am 40 years old, but I want better lives and choices for my children; that's why we go outside of Hungary. It's not just a problem for Hungary: Czech Republic, Slovakia, Kosovo, Yugoslavia, a lot in central Europe and Eastern Europe. We are here now, and my

¹⁰ The Jobbik is a neo-Nazi political party in Hungary with a history of persecution against the Roma. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/10/25/us-hungary-jobbik-idUSBRE8900AN20121025>

family has a normal life, and this time, probably two years ago, I thought I want to do music. I never look at the future because it creates big problems. That's hard for Roma parents because they are just thinking about today. Do you have a choice to be a musician? Do you have a choice to learn about university? They can look at the future and that's not easy.

How can the arts, and art education in particular engage marginalized Roma children with learning?

What I see, too, is when culture is driven to such poverty, the music, the tradition... everything goes, because you can't do it. You have no time or money or guitars or paint, you are trying to eat and live.

Probably two generations back, there was nothing for a job. There was nothing for the children, good school. There was nothing art. That's what the third generation thinks about, because, example: his father and grandfather thinking they're nothing. The children or teenagers will hear this and they will grow up to think this. Everyone thinks we're stupid and bad... too many bad things are in the brains...and [they] don't care anything. Example, if anyone says I'm stupid or bad or terrible, at one point in everyone's life, if they don't care about my life, I don't care about their life. If they don't care about my people, I don't care about their people. This generation, who are now teenagers, here or anywhere, they are thinking, I don't care anything about anybody. I don't care if I learn; I

don't care if I'm doing good things. That's why they are gonna be the other bad way. I don't steal, I don't do drugs. I am not gonna do street things.

These are the bad things.

So what you are saying is that when culture is taken away by poverty, people become apathetic and negative.

Yes, and that was the huge bad thing. Here in Canada, we have probably 70-80 [Hungarian] people professional musicians. They don't care [about their music]. In my band, and I started my band here, I was the only Roma. My bass player was Canadian, but from the Ukraine, the singer definitely Hungarian, but born here. My first violinist was definitely Canadian woman, and she was Jewish. My drummer is from Ghana...Canadian, his parents from East India. We are playing traditional Roma music. But I'm the only Roma. When I start my new band, I took many, many, Hungarian Roma people here. You are a good singer, you are a good guitar player, you are a good mandolin player, you are a good bass player; however they didn't want to play music so I have other non-Roma musicians¹¹.

We are doing something good, being new traditional Gypsy band, because we don't have this kind of Gypsy band in [Canada]. We are the first. We are playing definitely traditional. We are playing Roma Gypsy music...but with electric, acoustical, and original instrument...original

¹¹ What Tamas is saying here is that the Roma musicians he knows seem to have lost their enthusiasm for playing music due to cultural erosion, and the abandoning of their Roma heritage in an attempt to assimilate into Canadian culture.

singing style...In Canada [there are] thousands of ethnicities. We are here from all over the world. Everybody, example, Pakistan, India, Spain, Afghanistan... from Europe, Polish and French and German, everybody wants to save a little bit of their culture, not all things, but a little bit... I think everybody thinks, in the dance and the music everybody save the culture. If a little bit of language forgot, okay, but the bands and the music, this is the best arts to any kind of people. It can show off who we are, where we're from. That's why I think, okay, nobody [other Hungarian Roma musicians] don't show off where we're from, okay, I will.

My son is six, my daughter is fifteen...but she's doing traditional Roma dancing. Four years ago I tried her singing, and she wanted to do this, but she's too shy. Maybe, I don't know, I don't want to push her, I say maybe later, if she wants. And if she can sing better, she can come in my band, and my wife dancing in my band. And my son, this is the start. My son and the instrument...I don't know yet.

The Roma situation in Hungary is not good, but more people know what's going on now.

Yes, but this is why I tell you, this is hard. They are just a couple of people [who know about the problems of racism and discrimination]. This is long plan...we have to do [a] program [to educate people and help the Roma]...Gina, any kind of community center...that kind of program. We are here in Canada. Many people don't know where we are...open your eyes. Do you have many choices, or just one choice? This is the hard

thing [for Roma people to realize]. Wake up and open your eyes because here in Canada, you are people. You are a person. You can do anything. First time have to change the parents. Parents can do and can lead that kind of life, and show the example to the children. And, after children change the brain and the thinking, Okay, I am here, and I can do anything. Here in Canada, the people, [don't] care if you're Roma.

This is the most multicultural center in the world...Toronto...everyone from everywhere. So, what I was thinking... the Roma children here...they need to know about their art, their culture, their music, their history...

They need to know. That's why I have a band. That's why Gina do it [her advocacy work] what she do it, many, many things.

How can Romani arts and culture be integrated into a curriculum that works to dispel discrimination and oppression of marginalized Roma children?

What would you think if there were a program for Roma and non-Roma kids to learn music and dance and art after school, and the older kids help the little kids, and it builds an identity?

Yeah, that's why have to do more community, because Roma people don't have a trust. In Hungary, you can't trust anybody. They can't believe when they come here, I can trust. I can trust you. This is the problem.

For me as an educator, I see how important it is to have this [arts education] for children and in my experiences I saw how beautiful the Roma children were in their art and singing and music, and it would be a shame to lose that.

When people think “Gypsy” we are two choice, to do it the best, good thing...music, dance...because we are for example in music we have millions of songs. Roma music is something everyone can enjoy. For example, *Kočani* was the first Gypsy band in all of Europe. In other countries, everybody liked this music. That was a surprise, for them, because they were in China. I was here in Canada, and it was anywhere in Europe. There was that kind of big concert that was a surprise for them. Everybody likes this? Because they are good music, and it reach. Because in traditional Gypsy music...traditional Gypsy songs coming from the heart [but people don't know who write them].

The songs are just passed on?

Yes. This song; who write this song? We haven't an idea. For example, this song 500 years sung...Who knows that maybe he was a bad feeling, and coming out in a song, the heart. This is life. This is life's song. That's why I told many Roma people here, we are reach [others] in a Gypsy music, in a Gypsy dance.

You want to keep your music pure [traditional] to pass it on?

Everybody come to me and say, “Oh, this is so good!” That kind of reach Gypsy music, because in Gypsy music, have many, many colours. The teenager, and the younger children, for them, my music new...because in ten years, they are not into this type of music, because of the techno. Gypsy¹² music “Oh, this is good!” Somebody, for example, 8 years old, listened to this music first time in life, and

¹² What Tamas is saying is that because the young kids have only heard techno Gypsy, his traditional Gypsy style is new to them.

this is the future, because maybe, in the future, somebody from them [the young children], will continue in this style of music. Because, the first time I heard this music, I was ten years old. When I first listened, I thought, what is this? And I love it. Even if ten person, maybe, have a choice if they are listen my band music, can thinking the same, I want to do this, in the future. Then the next generation have another band.

~End of Interview~



*Roma Song, TeamWork. Jan Sajko (no date), from:
http://s191.photobucket.com/user/janosajko/media/Press%20-%20Pictures%20of%20students/DSC_0006.jpg.html?sort=6&o=4*

5. Gina Csanyi-Robah



Gina Csanyi-Robah, Executive Director of the Toronto Roma Community Centre. Chad Evans Wyatt / romarisingCA, 2013

Gina Csanyi-Robah is a remarkable woman. She is Canadian born and educated; her mother is a Roma of Hungarian background who was born in Canada, and her father an ethnic Hungarian. Gina has actively taken the reins of the RCC and steered it towards becoming a well-known centre and Roma advocacy group within the multicultural Toronto landscape as well as on a national and international level. In 2012 Gina was awarded the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal in recognition of her service to the Roma community in Canada.

My first introduction to Gina came about when I contacted her regarding research on Roma education. She was very welcoming and eager to help me with my work and after a long telephone conversation, we agreed on a time to meet in Toronto. This meeting coincided with a conference on Roma education that the TDSB was hosting. I was very delighted to be part of this conference and to gain further insights into diversity issues within the TDSB, and the work that was being done to help teachers to better support their Roma students.

What is distinctly problematic for Roma children in traditional school settings?

From your own experiences and research, what do you understand to be

distinguishing characteristics of Roma children as learners?

I've noticed that Roma children can be engaged with the right curriculum, and I've found this certainly, in the past. I've seen that any opportunity to bring their culture in through the work, through the curriculum, is a big plus. Certainly drawing, anything artistic, dancing, singing, being able to move about a little bit, are all things that really make a difference in their

learning. I find that some of the students – their attention span is not as long, if they don't find what they're working on is really meaningful to them.

Would you say that it is more engaging if they have the opportunity to experience learning with an arts approach rather than a traditional method?

Absolutely yes it makes a difference. The students that I'm primarily looking at are the newcomer students to Canada. If we're talking about Roma that are here, and have been here, I mean...they come from a different set of circumstances, you know. So, when we're talking about Roma children in traditional school settings, sometimes that question changes a little bit if we're talking about Canadian Roma children in traditional school settings.

Even though the Roma children that are here as Canadian citizens have different backgrounds, do you see some kind of commonality? What I'm getting at is – if they had the opportunity even if they were Roma children born and raised in Canada, would they prefer to have something a little more lively and arts-based as opposed to a traditional approach as well?

For sure – absolutely; people in my own family have always been more interested in something that has a little bit of an artistic base to it. I think that's true. A lot of Roma don't traditionally have a number of educated people in generations previous to them. So, school hasn't been looked at, or valued through the same lens. For example, my family; no one prior to me had been able to finish high school, and prior to that I don't think

anyone ever had finished grade school. So, there was never this, Oh, you have to make it to college, or, you have to make it to university in my family. So I think that the way we're brought up is different than in a traditional North American setting. When you go to school, it's like learning again, almost, about a new culture because our culture that we're brought up with is completely different than a North American culture, and sometimes it's often quite different than a number of European...but more similar.

Individuality is so valued in North American culture...that's not so valued in Roma culture. So sometimes, people have looked at education as a way to lose your Roma-ness...if you will, because it teaches you to be more like the majority of people in society...that has often been averse to Roma culture and life. So for myself even, going to school and being so interested in school was different than people in my family and sometimes they didn't even realize what was so important for me to want to continue going to school because they didn't see; you don't know what you don't know, unless you've gone there to learn it, right?

So, I would say that on a whole, Roma families have a way of looking to the present, more than being able to look forward into the future; often in this kind of realm of survival all the time...and a job where you could go to work every day and bring home money is more valuable than going to school...and who knows when you're going to get the payoff from going to school if there will ever be one. Now, we know in Canada that...we can

have trust and faith that there will be one, but in Europe they don't have that same incentive, that there'll ever be any kind of correlating outcomes to a level of education achieved. So it's really like a huge privilege to be able to continue in your education.

So, yes I would say in traditional school settings, school is a lot more strict often than Roma families. There would be a lot more structure than what is in Roma families, which is a much looser structure. So, like I was saying...when you go to school it's like learning a new culture, learning a new way of doing things, so it's...everything is quite new all over again.

One of the things that I come across in some of my readings is how a lot of Roma children, by the age of five, are so much more ready for school in terms of learned experiences than their North American counterparts, say, children who grew up in Canada and North American families because the Roma families are more likely to engage with their children; in most things that they do...the children are involved, they see the life, the death, the ups, the downs.

That's right.

They participate, and parents are constantly and always with them, and sort of modeling what life is about, and children are very astute by the time they begin school, because they have been immersed in a culture that...doesn't shelter children from the realities of existence, so to speak.

That's very true.

Are you aware then of any differences in the ways in which Roma children learn and respond to school compared to non-Roma students?

I find on a whole Roma children are not much different than regular students, in terms of just needing engaging material to get them to buy in to school, and to education. I think that the teacher is going to make a massive difference, and the ways that that teacher will build a relationship with those students. One thing – is if there's any opportunity for mothers to sit in on a class once in a while, which makes a big difference as well. A mediator from the community – it helps to make the students to feel safe in their new environment. It's like a bridge and that's what I've had to do in teaching a class for [newcomer] Roma children is always make sure the door is open for their mothers or for family, someone in the family line to be able to come and sit in on the class.

What are some of the positive or negative experiences you have had with Roma students?

I think one of the positives ones is that when you're able to build some trust with them, they're just so open and inviting and loving, in a very beautiful way. They have a lot of talents, a lot more than what they're given credit for. I've seen a number of them who are very good with math and science... that's even a little bit more outside of the arts. I mean people discredit actually how much education they do have sometimes. Just because they've moved around a lot doesn't mean they don't have... a base of education at times.

I think that the negative experiences are more towards... a lot of fighting in the community and amongst families that sometimes plays out with the

children, especially in school...and the children will fight with each other a lot, there's a lot of yelling and screaming and name calling, and a little bit of aggressive behaviour at times...between the kids, whether their families know each other...the families all know each other often in one way or another, such as they'll all be living on the same floor in the same building in Parkdale, for example...you know, it's...everything's intertwined... that's what it is.

Do you think there is a "best way" to teach Roma students?

I do. I think anytime you can bring any form of them bringing their own personal lives into the classroom, it'll keep them most engaged in coming back again.

Do you think that the sharing of their personal lives is something that, again, might take some time to bring out within the students, based upon the classroom they're in, and the teacher?

Yes! Certainly, but I think that they love conversation more than just being handed work sheets. So if you could sit there and talk with them or get them to show you stuff on the computer, they'll go nuts over it. They'll show you all their favourite singers...they'll be happy to show you stuff that they like and that they know. They often didn't get this...any kind of positive education back in Eastern Europe so when they have an educator seeming really interested in them and wanting to see them thrive and care and grow...you know, they're responding really positively to it.

Like I said, I've seen a lot of really, really good stuff at the elementary school level, it kind of gets lost by the time they get to high school over here...they're having more positive experiences in the younger schools because they get to have more integration with other students that are non-Roma, whereas in the high school, they don't have any of those shared classes with non-Roma students usually. They're all in the LEAP classes, and all of them are filling up all of the LEAP classes. Maybe once in a while they'll have a student from here or a student from there...so they'll have fifteen kids in the class and maybe two of them will be non-Roma. But it's not enough to make an impact...So, the ones that are coming from grade eight, though, if they've only been here for a couple of years, they are speaking English well ...they're doing much better. I think they're breaking down a lot of the stereotypes.

In your opinion what do you believe is problematic for Roma children in traditional school settings?

I look at Roma children the same way that I often look at children that come from lower socio-economic levels in Toronto that are caught up in the cycle of poverty...families that often haven't had access to much education, and a lot are at risk kids. As an educator I look at Roma children with the same lens as at risk children, and feel they should be dealt with as such. I think that going to traditional classes and sitting there for an hour and fifteen minutes is very difficult for a number of other students that are non-Roma as well. Traditional school settings don't work

for a lot of students, and I think that alternative school settings would probably even be a better opportunity for Roma, if they're able to access them, but they can't at the ESL level. They have to be beyond that. There is a lot of really good stuff happening at a lot of good alternative schools in Toronto... really, really good experimental learning that, have really positive outcomes, but the Roma students can't get access to that because they're in the ESL program.

When you say experimental learning, what would a snapshot of it look like?

Getting to choose more classes that might be of more interest, such as arts-based approaches. They have schools like that now. They have ones that classes are shorter; they have stuff that [involve] customizing your education in some of these alternative programs. It's not the regular traditional setting that you are used to, and...I think they work well for a number of Roma children.

How can the arts, and art education in particular, engage marginalized Roma children with learning?

Do you think that Roma children usually have involvement with art, music, drama, or dance within their family lives and community?

Always; every single one of them has that. It's part of the culture in Roma communities. I mean, all the kids are either singing, dancing, playing an instrument...this is what families do in the evening times, you know, after dinner. The kids do dance performances for their families.

It's a part of the culture! It's not just Roma families, other families do it too, but especially in Roma families you'll find that...they come from generations depending on what tribe¹³ they are, of musicians to begin with...the culture is actually accessed through music and art. That's why arts-based approaches will work specifically with Roma children, because, it's through art, as I'm saying, that you access the culture...it's not a culture that's been written in books a lot but you could find paintings and [other art forms] that they've been doing for a lot longer than putting the Roma language into books or the history of Roma into books. You know, the oral language that's been going on like these, like...books over here are of children's tales.

You've been aware of Roma students' involvement with the arts outside of school; do you see this involvement continuing on some level within the school setting?

Of course...all the time; if you go to any of these schools, you're going to see the kids singing and dancing in the classroom. The teachers will tell you that they're doing that there, and they thrive in music class, art class. You'll find that a lot of the kids are performing outside school. A lot of them do performances already, in some way or another.

In your opinion, do you think that engagement in the arts is advantageous to Roma children, specifically in experiencing success with learning?

¹³ A Romani tribe (clan is actually the correct term according to Ron Lee) means a sub-group of Roma such as the Kalderash who were originally metalsmiths. Clans are associated with occupations and family connections rather than blood ties. (Personal Communication, Ron Lee, 2012).

Yes, of course - absolutely. This is what's going to be able to help them...hopefully this will...to be able to stay in school to finish high school, to keep them engaged in school long enough to want to continue their education further. I absolutely believe that it's crucial.

Given that there is such a high dropout level of Roma high school students, it should probably help to eradicate that.

Of course it will! I think this is the biggest thing that it could actually make a meaningful change in. And in engaging them long enough to want to continue to stay in school, to give them incentive to stay in school because they're enjoying what they're learning, and it's meaningful to them, it's culturally relevant, it's culturally responsive, it's all of the things that educators could value in providing a meaningful education for the students that they're working with.

How can Romani arts and culture be integrated into a curriculum that works to dispel discrimination and oppression of marginalized Roma children?

What do you think children learn from gaining an understanding of their own and others' arts and culture?

I think that...we could teach them history through art, you know, part of the Roma curriculum is teaching Roma history through images. So...it can't be contained, how much they could learn about their own selves through art and culture, through song, all of our songs already...I mean, our national anthem tells our history...and contains our culture. All of

these children folk tales that are in these books over here, they all also contain elements of the culture, the oral tradition and things through history that have been passed down since the Diaspora began a thousand years ago. It's part of the people, the singing, the dancing, the art...it's very rare to find a Roma person that's not doing something artistically inclined somehow with writing, drawing, photography, music, singing... Every single person is doing something; using art to express themselves in some way.

So if they have a good understanding of their own culture, then they can share back and forth with others.

I think that kids take pride in sharing their culture and their background with other students. "Look at me! This is who I am." They find their identity, often, through being able to do this. Even when I was teaching the *English Can Be Fun* course at the Toronto Public Library...one of the first things I do is get students to bring me a picture of where they're from: draw me things from your homeland that you want me to know about and...they're excited to show you this stuff. While they're showing it to you, they're teaching all the other students about it as well... it is just an ongoing circle of learning if they could do that. I could show you examples of what they've brought...drawing pictures of their flag or...doing kind of a comic book almost of their life...a picture book.

So definitely it instils pride in them, and then, respect for themselves and for others, and again as you have noticed and we all have seen how it does dispel stereotypes and discrimination...because people see commonalities.

It has to be...for example, if they could start working...if the history of Roma during the Holocaust could ever be included in curriculum somewhere...it will, for example, teach Roma about their own history, which, they often don't know enough about the Holocaust themselves because, [such a large percentage] of the population was...just destroyed at that time. And the pain that the community continues to carry...they don't talk about these stories, they don't talk about these things. We're teaching them, still, about...the role of the Holocaust in our lives, and if we could teach other students that [the Roma were also] victimized and racially targeted during the Holocaust, and...in our Social Studies classes talking about racism and discrimination, if there could be anything in the curriculum there that even mentions Roma as the largest minority in Europe that's faced these centuries of exclusion and systemic discrimination, it would really make a big difference in building awareness about the existence of the Roma people. It will help Roma in a number of ways if other people realize that they exist and that they have a history and they are not invisible. I'm still educating people today that hold post-secondary educations...that there are people named Roma that they've been unaware of through their whole education. It speaks volumes to the fact of how excluded we've been from the history books.

Do you think it is important for both Roma and non-Roma children to know about Roma arts and culture, and do you think they should also learn about Roma history, language, and spirituality?

Well, I don't see how Roma spirituality is any different than any other group of spirituality in some ways. You know, Roma, depending on where they've settled, are often Christians, or Catholics, or Muslims, or Jews. The vast majority are certainly following Christianity, but there's significant numbers that are Jewish, or Muslim. So, I don't think that there's any specific thing about Roma spirituality that's different than other people. Maybe the way we handle some special occasions, like maybe in funerals or passing, how more traditional groups of Roma, you know, handle things?

I read a few things about how some of the original persecution began with the Church having a fear of the Roma. What is your view on this?

That's right. Yeah, it's true. Well, Roma didn't live a traditional Christian lifestyle. You know, the fact that... we were dark, first of all, we were a lot darker back then, before so much racial mixing happened in Europe... and when you meet some of the families here, I mean, I'm sure you saw in Kosovo too, you could tell who hasn't been mixed. There are some people that are very dark still.

It is actually a worldwide phenomenon, even with African Canadians too. It seems the darker your skin, the more fear of the person by the, you know the Eurocentric. So I can see how that started with the Church.

I think that what happened is that some of the most traditional groups of Roma have been the most marginalized outside of mainstream society, and haven't had many opportunities for integration, and have remained true to the culture more than groups who are often lighter, and able to access the mainstream culture a little bit more...Like, specifically speaking, the "Romungro"¹⁴ Roma, that are mainly from Hungary, who through aggressive assimilation and integration policies that were in Hungary for over a hundred years of, you know, outlawing Roma culture, the practicing of it, the language...to forcibly taking children away from their families and placing them with Hungarian farmers and... that racial mixture that ended up emerging from Hungarians and Roma mixing, becoming the "Romungro". Which is Roma Hungarians, really...and those became more favourable to have around for say the nobility; they were brought as entertainers to the aristocrats, and...nobility in for example Budapest. So they got to live inside the palace gates on the castle in Budapest.

Because they were whiter?

Because they were lighter! Yes, and they learned not to value Roma language, they stopped speaking that, they only started speaking Hungarian...It was a total assimilation, but you will find that they are still discriminated against now as long as they have any connection, or identifying factors about them that is Romani, then, they receive the same...the thing with Romungros: they're not accepted either by real

¹⁴ Gina is referring to Romungro as an ethnic mix of Hungarian and Roma.

traditional Roma groups or by the Hungarians, they're really in the middle ground...and plus, they've lost their culture...and their language, so they've actually...been left without anything much.

What do you think is the best way to teach Roma children about their own arts and culture?

It is certainly done in the family. Culture is definitely something that's...done within the community and I think that could just be cultivated more in schools. You know, as a means for...further engagement.

How can learning about Romani arts and culture teach children to respect each other and not discriminate against them?

It builds empathy, among different groups of students, in getting to know who they are and their backgrounds...you know, and that's straight across the spectrum from students anywhere, from anywhere in the world.

What are your personal experiences with Roma students and teaching a Roma curriculum? You had an after school program that you were teaching.

I had the TDSB class last year for the *International Elementary Languages* program. It was the first ever class for Roma in Canada, at the elementary level like that. It was nice, we were teaching them on Wednesday. I was teaching from 3:30-6:00 and basically that's what I did. I taught them first about our flag and had them drawing pictures of our flag, and teaching them what all the different symbolism is in the flag, and the history behind it. Teaching them the national anthem, letting them

practice singing it in class. Teaching them about their history using a movie named *Latcho Drom* too, and stopping at various parts in the movie to teach them about the Diaspora...you know, and the route that we've taken along history and where we've stopped off for a significant numbers of years, and how that's impacted our culture in different ways, and how we've picked up the words, the different elements of people's cultures along the way to become this very new kind of unique culture in a way, because we're not who we were when we left, and it's taken a long way to get to who and where we are now.

How did this knowledge affect the kids?

They loved it...they just really enjoyed it, but you know, again, they only can sit for so long so our agreement was after they do their work in the earlier part of the class then they have a break and we come back for just a short while... then they get to dance. They wanted to, that's what it was, it was dancing. They wanted to hear music and they wanted to dance...so that was our negotiation. They do work, and then they get to dance and that's what they wanted to do...and I wanted to work with that, I didn't have any problem with that.

Do you think that this class really helped to instil a greater sense of self-esteem and pride in the kids?

Oh yes absolutely! They felt very, very proud about it. You know if they could celebrate their own culture, I mean, that's not something I ever was able to do as a Canadian-born Roma. Growing up with no knowledge or

information around me at all that connected us to even being a real group of people. You know...and the stereotypes that existed...and the ones coming...and the families and children coming from Europe. They've had even less access to, or value of who they are than we did, even. I mean, they've never had an opportunity to learn about their histories; nothing about them has ever been valued, the Romanesque language is not recognized in any valuable way, or included as a second language anywhere in Europe even though there's 15 million Roma in Europe. There's never any value for anything Roma. I mean the way that they were treated in the school. Multiculturalism is not something that was ever, you know...valued.

Do you have any other comments or questions?

I just wanted to tell you something. I did a very extensive study with the students that were at Parkdale Collegiate, and I have to tell you that their level of English and math and...answering questions was a lot higher than what any of the teachers had expected, or even I had expected. So, in fact, there's a big problem with systematic streaming of Roma children into special needs schools in Europe, and it's proven time and time again...what a tragedy it is. Because those same kids are coming here and they're being placed in regular classes, and the TDSB are writing letters [to the parents] saying, "No, your kids don't belong in the school for mentally handicapped."

What do the parents think? This must be a revelation for them! What does it do to them?

Yeah, it is! They cry about how happy they are that their children are having this opportunity to go to school here, but then they also cry knowing that they might just have to turn around and put them right back into those racist, negative, just completely humiliating environments that they've been accustomed to. I've been told by children that they had to sit at the back of the class...told by children they've been spit on, they've been name-called so many times you can't even count it...told that, you know, when they're placed into segregated education, that, you know, they take the worst teachers in the country and place them in these schools...and they can't tell you how many teachers they've had that are just outright alcoholics...completely unable, or incapable of teaching, and the kids will be in school for...a long period of time and never emerge with any life of literacy, or skills. It's just...it's crazy.

In the Roma community they call what's happening, this systematic streaming of students in these special needs schools, somewhere between 65 and 70% is what the range has been of the students in these schools are Roma. And they make up no more than 10% of the population in these respective countries. The national government in Hungary or the Czech Republic funnels money to these regions for the creation of these schools, if the region says, "We need one." And it's a way for them to get more money into the region by either creating special needs schools, or

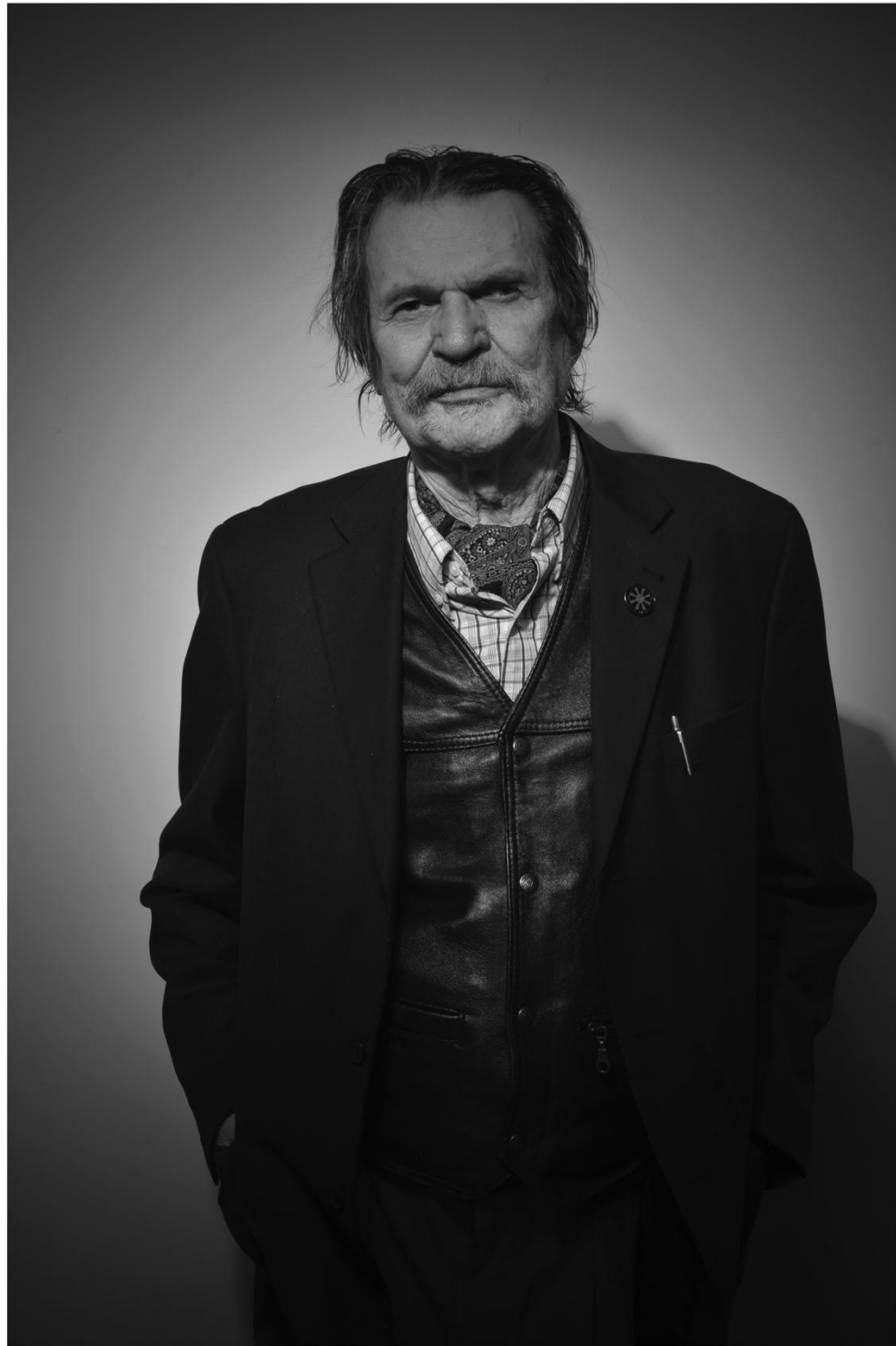
else...saying that they're desegregating the schools, but only allow the students in to one part of the school, [or a segregated classroom where Roma children must sit on the floor]. And that's one of the problems that happening here too, is that, the students don't realize that...they're supposed to move up out of LEAP and ESL classes quickly, they're not supposed to be staying there for years...and that's what's happening here. They're in the same class for years without making any progress and they're feeling segregated, alienated and targeted in the same way they did in Hungary.

~End of Interview~



Portrait (inspired by Modigliani), Lucia Kalejova. Jan Sajko (no date), from: <http://s191.photobucket.com/user/janosajko/media/Press%20-%20Pictures%20of%20students/P2160024.jpg.html?sort=6&o=9>

6. Ronald Lee



Ron Lee, Musician/Writer. Chad Evans Wyatt / romarisingCA, 2013

Ronald Lee is a highly respected, founding member of the Toronto Roma Community Center. He has lectured at colleges and universities, both in Canada and in the United States and has written several newspaper and magazine articles about the Roma in Canada, and about the recent Romani refugee situation in Canada. He has taught a course on *The Romani Diaspora in Canada*, at the University of Toronto and written scholarly articles in academic publications. He also has published two books: *Goddam Gypsy* (1971, reprinted in 1990 as *The Living Fire*¹⁵), a semi-autobiographical novel about Romani life in Montreal and Canada in the 1960s, and *Learn Romani* (2005), an 18-lesson self-study course of Kalderash Romani. As well he has published a Romani Dictionary: English – Kalderash. His current manuscript, *The Gypsy Invasion: Romani Refugees in Canada 1997-2006* (unpublished), is based on his experience in Toronto, working with Romani refugees. Ron has also been involved with consulting on and assisting with the integration of Romani students in Toronto and Hamilton public schools.

During the interview with Ron, it was important to allow his story to flow uninterrupted. In the Roma tradition, he was passing on an oral history of his experiences as a Canadian-born Romani author, journalist, lecturer and folk musician. This is a story that I feel very fortunate to have experienced; not only did the interview provide expert information on the international situation of the Romani people, but it offered rare insights into the living history of the Roma in Canada. The interview spans 27 (single-spaced) pages and due to the length cannot be used in its entirety. The following excerpts provide information that is related to the research questions.

¹⁵ Lee, Ronald (1990). *E Zhivindi Yag – The Living Fire*. Toronto: Magoria Books.

What is distinctly problematic for Roma children in traditional school settings?

Ronald Lee's insights on traditional school models in Europe:

The thing is, that school to the average Romani child in Europe, whether under communism or later, is a place of fear. Although the law may have said it was illegal to persecute minorities, it didn't stop kids from being bullied in the schoolyard...the other kids ganging up on the Roma, pulling the girls' hair or beating up the boys. Teachers weren't much better. They made the Roma sit in their own area. A lot of them have told me "I didn't want to go to school, I was afraid, I was beaten up, I had to run home before the other boys beat me." It was a place of horror. So, it ended up that a lot of them just didn't attend. Now, it's even worse. The teachers, in order to deal with the squabbling and bullying and the fights between Roma and non-Roma, they simply send the kids to school for the mentally challenged. They end up just drawing pictures and whatnot until they graduate, get married, have more kids, they end up there, and it just goes on forever. So, Canada is the example of what they can become if there is no discrimination. Once they are here they can go anywhere, do anything, work anywhere...this is what I keep telling these people from Europe when I lecture.

What do you see happening around here in Hamilton with the schools and the Roma children?

The schools are doing their best to integrate the children. They've been working with a Roma, Anna Polokova, who was one of the directors of

Radio Romski, in the Czech Republic, and is now a refugee in Hamilton. She and her son have been working with the schools here. I've done a lot for the schools here, I've lectured a lot. I've lectured for the people running refugee shelters. It's not so much the schools; they're doing their best. We're trying to provide them with translators and music teachers and whatever they need...Gina is doing a magnificent job.

How can the arts, and art education in particular engage marginalized Roma children with learning?

I agree very strongly with the concept of creating more opportunity for the kids to learn through the arts. Not just music, but visual art, drama and dance, too; to be able to recognize who they are, to be expressive, to feel a sense of confidence in the creativity.

This is one thing missing... Roma children are taught nothing of their history and culture – who they are. What they are getting is negative input. There is some understanding that Roma originally came from India; but it was so long ago that Roma are European now.

A woman in Grenoble Public School in Flemington Park, Susan Heagy, has a LEAP class there, and she has refugee children...usually 12, now I think she's up to 18, and she's had Roma kids through there. She uses often uses an arts-based approach to her teaching – a lot of visual art. She tries to get the kids to express things in their own language, and then she takes things from there and tries to teach to their learning styles, and to who they are. As a teacher she is just trying to connect with

these children, and, of course, she says, “You don't even try to teach them until the kids have connected with you and they see who you are.” And then she said you can start.

The thing is, it's a matter of trust. When the Czech Roma first came here, they were in shelters. I was invited to come from Kingston to appear on the morning show, and I was on the show with this Czech Romani girl who spoke fluent English, Catalina Baromova...one of the few that spoke English. She'd been going to Charles University in Prague. After the show, she took me to this shelter where she was living with some other Czech Roma. They had a communal kitchen there for all the refugees from everywhere. Of all the shelters in Toronto, this was one of the better ones, *The Red Door*; it was set up for refugees. Each refugee family had its own room, but then there was this communal kitchen, living room, TV, and everything. Anyway, the Czech Roma are pooling their daily allowance for food and cooking communally...all the women would cook together and then they would all eat together. I appeared with Catalina as they were finishing their meal, and I had my guitar with me, and the best way to reach Roma is music. So, I met them there but I noticed the kids were all afraid of me at first. They were watching me, and they looked like they didn't trust somebody they don't know; I don't see this with North American Romani kids, they're very inquisitive. I could see the early newcomers...the children were so afraid of everybody. The Roma themselves were afraid of police, and anyone in authority. For children,

school was a place of fear. When they were sent to a Canadian school, they expected the same thing that happened over there, to happen. It took them a while to be able to trust the teachers.

The other thing was the police. Things were happening, hate crimes were happening to some of the Roma; they didn't want to report them to the police. In 1998 skinheads demonstrated outside a motel in Scarborough where there were Czech Roma. The police showed up and made it clear that as long as they were peaceful, just marching around, they weren't really doing anything to be arrested. But one of them had a sign that said 'Honk if you hate Gypsies', and another said, 'Canada is not a trash can, Gypsies go home,' or something. Two weeks later, a coalition of various Toronto organizations got together and threw a picnic for the Roma in a park and served food and demonstrators were holding signs that said, 'Honk if you hate skinheads'. This would never happen in the Czech Republic, but it happened here.

Education is a double-edged sword. The old Roma who grew up in a culture where they were proud to be Roma, they had skills that they could earn a living with...they're much different than the modern Roma. They took pride in who they were, and they passed on wisdom. They weren't educated, but they had wisdom. But the only way we can bring them all together is music. Now, in the outreach, where we teach music, for instance, we are working with Slovak Roma students. In Parkdale in the schools we're working with Czech Roma, Hungarian Roma.

How can Romani arts and culture be integrated into a curriculum that works to dispel discrimination and oppression of marginalized Roma children?

What was your involvement in putting together the Roma Curriculum?

Lynn and I did that. She was the art director and I was the lecturer.

That was a great place, but it went nowhere! It was supposed to be a pilot project in a project to combat racism in the school system and it would be a model that would fit for all other groups; it just went into limbo, the artwork got destroyed...

I have the curriculum at home and I've looked through it, and I thought, okay, well there is music and art, and everything...

There's everything, I played folk music with my guitar, and told Romani stories and legends.

You were also involved with a project sponsored by the Toronto Police to combat racism.

That's the project I'm translating, *Hate Can Kill*. How do you recognize a hate crime, what can you do about it, who's targeted? This is what I'm writing about. It's difficult to write this kind of stuff in Romani, because Romani was an oral language until fairly recently. We are communicating in Romani over the Internet, but only at the educated level. It hasn't reached the mass. The mass of the Roma either think Romani can't be written, which is idiotic, any language can be given a phonetic alphabet... or, they try to use the language...of the country [of origin]. They try to

write Romani with that alphabet; it doesn't work. It's like trying to write it with an English alphabet.

~End of Interview~



Fairy Tale, TeamWork, Jan Sajko's pupils, (no date) from:
<http://s191.photobucket.com/user/janosajko/media/Press%20-%20Pictures%20of%20students/P2160016.jpg.html?sort=6&o=6>

7. Micheal T. Butch



Micheal T. Butch, President of the Toronto Roma Community Centre. Chad Evans Wyatt / romarisingCA, 2013

Micheal T. Butch is a fourth generation Canadian Roma. His family originally came from Russia in 1908 and belong to the Kalderash Romani. Micheal is fluent in this dialect of the Romani language. His father was “King of the Gypsies” also known as the “Big Man” in Toronto and was responsible for legalizing all the fortune telling parlours in the city. On his father’s passing, Micheal was to assume the role of the Roma leader. However, Micheal contributes his father’s early death to the stress involved with the role and after a while decided that he did not want the responsibility of it. Instead, he focused on his music career. Ironically, as a member of the Toronto Roma Community Center, Micheal was voted in as the President, where his knowledge of Romani culture, customs, and language provides valuable support for newcomers and other Roma in Toronto.

Can you tell me about the music you play, your traditional Roma music and your own music you've developed as a Canadian?

Back in the day when my mother and father and grandparents would have traditional parties, whether it was Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving, or even get-togethers on a hot summer day, we would be playing music, and as a child of ten years old, my father came home with a mandolin, and he taught me a few chords. He used to play guitar and mandolin as well. My grandfather was a very good guitar player, musician, and a lot of Roma in North America - knew of him. His name was Ephrem Butch. Ephrem is, from what I was told, a biblical name. He would be playing a lot of these old songs, traditional music, like, the old standard Gypsy songs. He also [enjoyed the music of] Louis Armstrong, having seen him live, as he told

me. He enjoyed Chet Atkins and Les Paul. He would play also modern music at that time, and jazz, which was the thing to do as well as these old traditional songs.

I remember when we used to go to cottages [in northern Ontario], we would be by the campfire and they would go like the old days and enjoy playing and singing these songs that I'd never heard before, and it became a custom... playing when my mother would be singing, and dancing would be happening. Gypsy parties would be going on beyond 3, 4 o'clock in the morning.

Then I took it to myself as [my grandfather] got older, and I started doing it, and [carried] the torch of playing guitar with my cousins; I just did it for fun. However, without realizing it, it was like going to music school, my father taught me the chords, but my mother taught me the rhythm. I remember a lot of times when I would be playing, she'd be clapping if I was off beat. She'd let me listen to her clapping, and she'd be moving her hips, like, I would look at her body movements to know if I was doing the right thing. I would follow her like a metronome. She knew music, and was a tremendous singer. I remember her telling me that when she was 14, she used to sing in a big band in Montreal. Her father used to take her to the clubs there for practice, and just sit there [because] she was only 14 [and he wanted to] make sure that everything was good. There was a 16 piece orchestra, and she would be singing. She used to laugh because everybody was always buying her drinks and she'd give them to the band

members. She was a real professional. She helped me a lot, especially with the old traditional music. I remember, on *Gypsy Reggae* [a song Micheal wrote and recorded], as I changed it to reggae, she'd give me the words because sometimes when you're playing music for another vocalist, you really don't pay attention to the words, you just stay in your bubble to make sure the music is proper.

So your development into becoming a professional musician occurred because you thought it was time that you had your music out there?

Well, that's not how it happened. I would do those Gypsy party traditional songs, if there was somebody that had a party, "Micheal, come on down, bring your guitar, we want to have a good time." I would be playing the guitar and my sister would be singing. It continued on, but it was more of a passion of just having a good time, basically, of doing music. If somebody told me seven years ago that I'd be playing music professionally, I'd say they're crazy. I really didn't [see it as a career] until things happened. I went through a divorce, then my mom was very sick and I lived with her. I found myself playing music again. Then a band came along, and I wanted to do it just for fun. The next thing I know, people were really enjoying the music I produced. They said, "Hey, you should do this, you should put out a CD, you should be doing festivals." And I was working at clubs in between. It just became a wave [and one thing led to another].

So, basically then your musical influence came from your family and your original heritage. Your grandparents...

Yes, it was like that.

And in your lineage, you were saying that back in Russia, your family used to play for the Czar.

Well, my uncle, who just passed away, told me that my great, great, grandfather and great, great, grandmother used to be entertainers for the Czar.

So there's a long family history of music that's been passed down, along with your traditional music, which I have heard you play, which has also been fused with more of your individuality to create a secondary kind of Gypsy-influenced music.

Yes. And the reason I did that was because I was performing Gypsy music, and through the natural format of Gypsy music, it's either fast or slow. It would sound basically the same. It is beautiful, however in working in the club, you could lose the audience, because, number one: you're singing a language they're not familiar with; and number two: it's almost the same format – whether it's fast or slow. Not everybody could dance to Eastern European, or Gypsy music in the club, so I came up with an idea being the fact that I was brought up in the [Kensington] market. I lived there from [age] 14 to 45, and I would jam once in a while with different musicians. A lot of them would be Jamaican, influenced to reggae, which I enjoyed Bob Marley back in the day. I was also influenced by blues musicians, and by some jazz musicians. That's why I

[named] my CD *Between Worlds*...because it's world music, and influenced by other kinds of culture's music: Funk, African, Reggae, Jamaican, and on and on.

What is distinctly problematic for Roma children in traditional school settings?

What do you notice, or what have you heard about the challenges of education with the Roma as refugees coming into the schools? What are the children and parents experiencing?

The language barrier is number one. This is something I've been really concerned about. Let's say a child comes from Hungary or Slovakia, or Romania. Those are basically the biggest refugee [groups] that we have here in the Roma community.

And the Czech Republic too right?

Right. That's your top three-four. And, what I find is, that the language barrier is the biggest problem. Here's my concern. Let's say a child of 9 or 10 years old comes to [Canada], and by the time they learn English, they're already two years behind. They're then [going to] be playing catch up, and they'll be intimidated because the grade 7 children are at their level, and they're in the grade 4 level. Now going to school is not going to be a pleasure for them, because children can be extremely rude. It really can mark that child when they feel like they're on the outside.

Do you find, then, that when they do come here and they get some ESL education in the schools, does it seem to be helping, or not helping?

Well, again...even if they're getting ESL, and learning; there's still a communication gap between the teacher teaching them English...because they can't really find out what the kid is really feeling.

Now, I want to go back to one of the phrases I've heard you say, and that has to do with music being a universal language. It is universal communication. So, let's say, trying to get the kids to learn English...what if they had the opportunity to involve music, and maybe some visual art in terms of expressing what they're trying to say without using words?

Like I said before, music to me is the number one international language. It can take somebody from China, Poland, the Ukraine, Russia, Italy, France...and I have seen this when I went to Europe. We're all there, and we all know the difference between an A minor and a D minor, and we know exactly the bars without even speaking. We can play the music together. And it becomes beautiful and passionate, because we all can relate to it. Now we go to art. Every picture tells a story. You can see the sun; you know it's the sun. You can see the silhouettes; you know what it is. It's a picture. The picture has more words in an international language than anything. Seeing the moon, the stars, you know what it is.

In helping kids to learn a language through music, and art...there's a lot of different ways it can be structured. For example, a scary sounding song that has a tone and a feel to it, and the kids feel this is a scary song about a warning and then the students try to describe it in their language first...they already know from the feeling what

it's about, and then you attach an English word, so that they get the connection. The word matches to the feeling...you remember the word better...

Which I totally agree, because...see not every child could be taught the same. You have to reach that child. I remember when I was also a choir director in Gypsy Roma church...I once had a girl I thought [was] tone deaf. So I took that high note that she had, and I brought six of the other choir members to sing in different ways to her tone, and made her as the high octave and made the other ones low, and it sounded great. Then I also had a girl that was deaf on the right side of the ear. So I then moved the choir on her left side, to her good ear, and she sang perfectly. So every child is different...whether it's music, or a learning ability.

I can remember not being interested in school. Going to school was like going to a job or doing time at a [prison] sentence. That's how I felt, until I met a teacher, his name was Mr. Arts, when I went in Gladstone. It was a two year program. Because I had a bad attendance record, I was behind; as were all children that were there. Mr. Arts had [his own] way of teaching us. He took us on field trips a lot. He took us to High Park, to the Bruce Trail. He'd stop us every 5 minutes of walking and say, "This is a pine tree. Look at the way the pine grows like this, and that...alright, good, wonderful." Then he'd stop at the next tree. "This is a maple tree. Did you see the way the leaves are, this and that?" Then he would stop at all these stupid trees, and give an explanation: "This is a spruce tree." This would go on for a week, and next thing you know, we've got this test to

do, and we've got to pass it. It was about the trees, and we knew right away, because he told us, "This is a pine tree...this is..." and he was amazing!

On the test, did he have a picture of the tree and you had to identify what it was?

Yeah.

So, he taught you how to see. He was teaching you using visual art.

The man was amazing.

So, here's my point then...you learned well through this approach, as opposed to being in school previously, which you said was like a jail sentence or whatever...and you had to sit there and you would have had to learn about trees from a book which had no relevance to anything. It was not interesting to you, but as soon as you were brought out into nature and allowed to experience it firsthand and to visually absorb your surroundings, when you saw that tree, you could perfectly identify it, because of that firsthand experience. If your elementary and school life prior to the experience with this teacher had been like that, do you think you would have been more successful in school at an earlier age?

Yes, totally. Ironically, his name was Mr. Arts; he had a great impact on me.

You guys would have been considered a marginalized group because you were on the edge...you were the tough kids. You were not going to learn from anybody.

We were like the sweat hogs of *Welcome Back Kotter*¹⁶. We were characters. Mr. Arts took us and made us want to go to school. I was

¹⁶ A TV show popular in the 70's about a compassionate teacher and a group of trouble making kids in an inner city school.

looking forward to waking up in the morning and going to school to see what Mr. Arts had for us this time.

Did he involve music in your class at all; do you remember that?

We actually sang. We were going crazy with the Bruce Trail with a whole bunch of songs, and we would sing. He was from Holland.

Do you remember what he was trying to teach you with that? Was it just for fun?

I would say it was just for fun, just to go through it, but he also taught us all to play chess, he taught us about life, and the rent and the bills we've got to pay...he was setting us up for life itself. He had a way. I only wish that the Roma children would have had a Mr. Arts. He was just a great soul.

In thinking about the Roma kids that you worked with in the class over at Parkdale, the music class... when you went into the class they didn't really have respect until they got to know you a little bit, and then you started to play some music with them. They started to come around a bit. If you had that class, if you had those kids, and they were your kids to teach...what would you do with them?

I would want to get to their level...by getting to their level to communicate with them...to get in their pack, their circle; to see what's the problem. To try to do the thing that Mr. Arts did. Hopefully it would work...to communicate more with them, and try to put it in their heads to take advantage of this. It's a good thing. Try to let them know that they are their own teacher, they can make it or break it in life. I would steal the pages off of Mr. Arts.

Did some of those kids in there have language problems as well?

They definitely did. There was a time they couldn't speak Roma, some of them. I think one used some words, but there was ...a communication gap. A lot of them didn't know English. To me, again, without communication, it's very hard to educate. Today, from...my understanding now is the school systems have changed. It's like, here it is, this is the paper, this is black and white, or on the computer...this is it. You've got to learn it, and if you don't learn it, you're behind. If you can't keep up with the class, then you're left behind. There's nobody no more like the shepherd going back to the lost sheep. To me, I'm going to use the teacher as the shepherd. When Jesus was a shepherd, he was a teacher of the 12 disciples. If any got lost, he'd go after them. I'm going to say that the shepherd has the sheep, and if the sheep can't keep up, then the shepherd goes and he brings them from behind to keep up with the [flock].

Drawing upon what would hopefully be left of their cultural pride might be a way to bring up their esteem, to make them feel like they're part of something, to share with others who they are and what they can do and their dance and music.

Well, you said the words "self-esteem", something that these kids are probably good at, and we use their power and their strength, of something that they're good at.

Let's say traditionally music and the arts are still kept in Roma families who are critically poor and who come here as refugees from Eastern Europe. Hopefully, they

are still hanging onto their culture, and hopefully that's still something that is a talent that can be shared with others and recognized. If the kids were able to share what's good about their arts and culture with other kids, do you think that would build up their own self-esteem and have other kids kind of recognize that they have some talents, and that they should gain more respect for each other? Or at least stop some of the discrimination?

Well, it works for me, and I'm not a kid. It works for me as an adult.

When I start playing out my Gypsy music, I would have the finest musicians say, "Hey, what is that?" You know what I mean? And then they'd say...it's like, "Oh, that's great." So, why wouldn't it work for children? They can show their strengths through music, and like you said about self-esteem, using their strengths, they will feel like they're not limited to what they could do, and then they could realize when other kids can't do this...it gives them confidence...and other kids look up to them...they feel that they could do other things, then, that it gives them the confidence...to fit in.

With the increasing poverty of the Roma, particularly in East-Central Europe, do you think it's affecting the carrying on of cultural traditions, because there's no time for that when you're trying to survive and just live?

It's very hard to sing and dance when you're going through that kind of a thing. Right now I'm going through some personal family problems, and I find it hard to pick up the guitar, or to sing, or to focus on my show. So...and, I'm still living in a beautiful house, eating, having everything I

want. Life is good, other than this little problem. So, if I had my children and had to run around and, you know, worry about their lives, the harmony of life is gone. So, how could these people have the time, or the feeling in their heart, to dance and sing and play?

This could be part of the problem with these kids now, coming here, is that they haven't had that cultural exposure, and it's fading away, and they're feeling completely lost.

Well, we're hiding their talent. Well, we're taking away their strength.

With visual art...materials are costly...you need paint, you need paintbrushes, you need paper. Well, these kids obviously don't have that. So, to me, it's almost even more critical for these refugee kids when they come here because a lot of them, as Gina was saying, don't even know about their Roma culture and history.

I imagine that some of them actually hide the fact that they're Roma, because of where they are, because it's dangerous.

How can the arts, and art education in particular engage marginalized Roma children with learning?

As a child in elementary school or high school in Canada, did you have any music or different types of art classes at all?

I really didn't participate in music in school. The only thing I could tell you, was that in grade five, I had a teacher named Mrs. Glacier, and God bless her, because everybody was signing up for the choir, and she listened to everybody, and she goes, "What about you? Can you sing?"

And I said, "I guess, I don't know"...and I sang a little bit. I didn't even finish the song, and she said, "You're on!" I strongly believe that music...it's in the blood, it's in the genes. Yes, there are some people that don't have family that play music, but they went to school and studied it and they're good! And they did what they wanted to do. But then there's this other secret talent. There's this magical thing that...and actually it's...everybody that I know that is a great musician, whether they're Jewish or African...you always hear that they have an aunt or an uncle or a grandfather that was a musician. It's in the bloodline. Those are the extremely talented ones.

The other thing that I noticed, and this is an observation – when I was in Kosovo, and working with kids in the different centers there, the Roma kids collectively as a group... I think almost every one of those kids had what I would consider to be an amazing singing ability. I'd be sitting there doing some art project with the kids and somebody would be behind me belting out this song at the top of their lungs, and it was good! And this happened a lot. One of my thoughts was that it almost seems like it's inherent to the Roma people. This ability for music and singing...that there's an edge there...it's like an inborn cultural gift.

My theory is like this: There's a time when Gypsies all get together - I'm going to say the word "Gypsies" because I'm not offended by saying I'm a Gypsy – there's a time that we get together, it doesn't have to be that holiday or special day, and we get together and have a barbeque and start singing...everybody had to either sing or dance, and they had to show the

other people. There would be like a musical war, but in a good way. From this person coming out of this family to sing, we would get together and join forces and, without us realizing this it was our music school.

What I realized, was that I [had been] to school. I went to a different school: [not a school] of naming the notes [or counting] bars, but feeling the notes and feeling the bars and feeling the rhythm. Like those children in Kosovo, I'm more than sure that their grandparents and parents did the same thing that was done here for my sister and I.

Traditionally, it seems that Gypsy/ Roma people, children, seem very inclined to learn through the arts, it would seem like a natural fit that they would have this opportunity in school, and it would be more engaging for kids if school offered more of these kinds of opportunities.

Well, first of all, I totally agree that it would be more engaging...and again, it's a comfort zone for the children, especially the Roma, because they are...you've got to understand, again, their inheritance, most likely. Listen, there's every girl...either they sing, or they dance. It's something that has to be done in the Roma. Whether it's in Kosovo, America, Canada, Poland, Russia, Ukraine, Germany... it's either they have to sing, or dance. When the Gypsies get together, especially in the holidays, one of the big traditions is to bring in the music. There would be like twenty girls, it's either you put them to sing or dance, or they would prepare the food, and this would go on. They would start at like 9 o'clock and it could end up at 3 o'clock in the morning. Same with the guys; they would either

sing or dance, or play an instrument: violins in the old countries, guitar, accordion, mandolin; but mostly the women, the children, the young girls... It was either sing or dance. Music was a big part of their lives, and again, throughout my knowledge, there wasn't a Gypsy tribe that didn't have that ability of singing or dancing.

When they [your kids] were in school, do you recall if in their education there were opportunities for them to have music and dance and art?

Well, my daughter, when she was 7 or 8 years old, I took her into ballerina lessons. My mother would teach Tiffany how to dance Romany - the Gypsy folk dance. As well, Tiffany was also telling fortunes. My mother taught her as well, and her mother. Singing...we tried with Tiffany, she didn't have the greatest voice, but she dances. As a matter of fact, she dances with a band that I once played with, called *The Gypsy Flames*. She dances and tells fortunes there. My son David, however... does none of the above. He doesn't dance...he does sing. He was in the Gypsy choir. He does have a good ear, he knows how to sing the notes...but he doesn't play any instrument.

So, for your children, most of their arts education was done outside of school, then?

I would have to say so.

Do you recall if the opportunities were there at school? Or if they just weren't interested in it, and were more interested in what was offered in the Roma community?

At this time, I would have to say that my daughter and my son were not interested [in what was offered at school]. They never once told me, “Hey, I could join the choir, or learn to play an instrument in school.” Because I would have been more than happy if they did.

How can Romani arts and culture be integrated into a curriculum that works to dispel discrimination and oppression of marginalized Roma children?

Do you think that learning about Roma arts and culture will teach children to respect themselves and each other and to break down those barriers of discrimination?

Well, like everybody in the world, we all have this thing. I remember as a child, I really didn't know what the Jamaican culture was, so, I was like, away from them...separated in school. I stood away. Until I became friends with one, and then when I understood their culture, it was almost similar to my own. The thing we [Roma] do if somebody passes away...we have the wakes. I remember going to a wake for his [the Jamaican friend's] uncle. The Afghanistans...there was Palestinians. I didn't know much about them. Then I found out that they also do the wakes just like we do, with the frankincense, and everything. Like the Irish, and the Jewish people! They had the red ribbon when the baby was born like we did. So, discrimination is something of a lack of education. When you don't know somebody you get scared of them.

So, people that don't know what really is a Roma, they hear through the wives tales, that they steal children, and they go and beg on the streets and pick pocket...that's all they know...only the bad things. But, then when they see a family that's trying to make a living, doing whatever they got to do on the street...selling products...health products, or fortune telling..."Oh, they're Gypsies." But they don't know them. And, I have many people...I remember, when I boxed, there was a Croatian boxer named Maga, and when he said to me, "I lived in the village where the Gypsies were, they were my best friends. Once a Gypsy is a friend, you have a friend for life." That's the problem. Canada and America don't know too much, they [only] know the bad things. The media really publishes it, pushes it out and they [Roma] don't understand why.

I think if you take any nation, and put them in poverty, put them in a camp far away from a city where they can't make a living, or there's no food or the land can't produce anything, and then a woman or a man sees their children hungry, they have limited choices. Even if the choices are bad, they have to do what they have to do to survive for their children. That goes not only for Roma that goes for [people of all races and ethnicities]. You put anybody in poverty, as a result, criminality. So, it's surviving mode. If you see Roma that are educated, [living] in North America, [they're] like everybody else, they'll have a latte at Starbucks, they'll sit down and enjoy the weather. The other day I was walking around the market, and I saw [some of my relatives] that are Canadian born Roma; [I

said] to the lady I was with, “There, those are North American Roma, that's fifth generation. They're like everybody else in society.” We were sitting there waiting at a table for them to finish, and they said, “Oh, don't worry, we're finished, you can have this table.” They were polite, respectable, and looked like every average Canadian that was there at the market.

I would say then from our conversation here, that a few things have come forward. First of all, poverty erodes culture, and human dignity, of course, and self-esteem. Culture helps with identity and getting kids to know who they are, and a sense of belonging, and pride and dignity and in sharing that, you learn about each other and it dispels discrimination, because you get to know that there are similarities. And kids who are marginalized and on the edge, maybe like your group with Mr. Arts, will learn best when given the opportunity to engage with learning through something that reaches them aesthetically, through the senses...as opposed to just book learning.

I agree that [change is needed; starting with the problem of English language facility]. I really believe that [the arts provide other modes of knowing and communicating]: through the picture tells a story, through the music is an international language...or, the dance of the body movement. I believe that you have to experience life. Life itself is a learning thing. You could have a [university], graduate, and have the opportunity of living a great life in a [high paying job]. [But if you] put them in the world without that money, and without all [those other

advantages] they'll be lost. And then you could have somebody with less education that lived on the streets, knowing different personalities, people...and if you put them in the same room, and you have to survive on the street, who would you want to be with? I believe through their poverty, through the hard times and the hard ships that these people from Kosovo, Czech Republic, Slovakia, and all over... if you give them the opportunity, they [would prove themselves to be] born survivors, where a lot of people couldn't survive through that.

I would like to see somebody that's not Roma live in these countries as a Roma for a day, and see how fast they want to get out of there. And if the Roma survive under very difficult conditions; just imagine how beautiful it would be if they had an education, and how many different opportunities would be open to them.

~End of Interview~



Love, Michal Kaleja: Illustration of Roma Song from the CD – *Gipsy Soul*, by Harry Stojka. Jan Sajko, (no date) from: <http://s191.photobucket.com/user/janosajko/media/Press%20-%20Pictures%20of%20students/P2160001.jpg.html?sort=6&o=8>

Chapter 4 Summary and Chapter 5 Preview

The diverse backgrounds of the participants involved in the case study provide a multi-faceted set of experiences and insights involving newcomer Roma, artists, cultural and educational experts, and those who are directly involved with Roma educational and other issues in Canada (and in some cases internationally). This chapter has presented the interview results for the research questions:

- What is distinctly problematic for Roma children in traditional school settings?
- How can the arts, and art education in particular engage marginalized Roma children with learning?
- How can Romani arts and culture be integrated into a curriculum that works to dispel discrimination and oppression of marginalized Roma children?

Rather than summarizing the results after each interview, I have chosen to put their responses together under the headings of the research questions, and “New Findings” section in the next chapter.

In chapter 5 the methods used to sort the interview data are discussed as well as the use of an interpretive analysis approach to examining the interview responses. The findings from Chapters 4 are considered in the context of the literature review developing a critical interpretation of arts-based education as a means to engage marginalized Roma children with learning.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Chapter four presented findings from the interviews that identified and described the participants' responses to the research questions. This chapter extends these findings through interpretive discussion and connects them with the literature review. The first section explores the findings specific to the study's three research questions; the second extends the discussion by presenting several new findings that were brought forward from this case study that are important considerations for the educational success of Roma students.

From a critical theorist perspective, the intent is to analyze the research from an emancipatory position of wanting to change the circumstances that negatively affect the education of Roma children, and to find solutions to overcome the power structures that have placed roadblocks in their path to learning. From both an interpretive and critical perspective, contextual understanding and multiple perspectives require the researcher to examine the influence that the social context has upon the actions under study by seeking out and documenting multiple viewpoints along with the reasons for them. "The analysis of reasons may include seeking to understand conflicts related to power, economics or values" (from Ricoeur's 1974 work, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, as cited in Willis, 2007, p. 193-194).

Interpretivism and critical theory are paradigms that have different epistemological viewpoints. "The interpretivist paradigm emphasizes the need for multiple perspectives... and holds that human beings have social agency and act on their own initiative, and that social phenomena are best studied by scrutinizing one situation in a particular context"...and "Critical theorists assert that there are universal aspects of the

human world, such as the domination of the disempowered by the powerful” (Willis, 2007, p. 193). As a qualitative researcher, I borrow from both: I view my case study as a means to gain knowledge by studying a situation in a particular context (an interpretive goal) that will advocate for the emancipation of Roma children (critical theory).

As a qualitative researcher, it was important to remain open to the prospect that new findings could emerge as the research study became more richly layered with the perspectives of various participants. Consequently in analyzing and reflecting upon the research, new findings did come forward that were not known to me at the beginning of my study that I will discuss in this chapter. “Qualitative research is not based on pre-specified methods and detailed hypotheses that will rigidly guide the scholar throughout the study...change is encouraged because qualitative researchers assume you will change as you come to know and understand the research context better” (Willis, p. 197).

Reporting the Findings

The interview transcripts were analyzed through a series of steps that involved note taking, transcription of audio to text, and data analysis software that allowed for visual groupings under the research questions. Commonalities were then identified using content-based, narrative and discourse analysis. The use of these methods identified groupings of responses that supported the research inquiry and brought forward new issues not bound within the research questions. This chapter first reports the findings from the individual participants that connect to the three research questions, then identifies new findings and groups them under specific headings.

Research Question # 1: What is distinctly problematic for Roma children in traditional school settings?

Susan Heagy. Due to her unique teaching assignment, Susan has a great understanding of how the limitations of traditional educational models can make learning difficult for marginalized children. Having taught several Roma students over the years, she has a keen awareness of their particular needs as learners.

Susan's main concern with the traditional educational model is that this "old fashioned" way of teaching causes children to shut down. She says it does not allow for teaching children who learn in different ways: visual, linguistic, tactile, auditory types and so on as defined by Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983). Susan describes how traditional methods of delivering the curriculum can be boring for children yet, it persists in many classrooms; some teachers don't want to differentiate their curriculum because children tend to be more animated and less orderly. In differentiating instruction, the curriculum can be delivered through visual art, music, physical activity, and drama; it is an engaging, child-centered approach that can be quite different from a quiet, orderly classroom typical of traditional models.

Susan states that the "paper-based instruction" (text-based) that happens a lot in traditional classrooms is very difficult for non-English speaking learners as they can't read it or write it, and is therefore unproductive for language challenged students. She emphasizes that teaching to the individual child rather than the approach in traditional schools where the curriculum is delivered to the students as a group, is a "best practice."

Susan is also concerned that the low standards set in special schools for the Roma in some European countries limits the ability of Roma children to learn. She says that

schools reliant upon traditional models of curriculum delivery such as rote learning and "paper and pencil" approaches provide a very low level of education, resulting in limited learning opportunities for students.

Lugzi Mustafa. Lugzi experienced various educational contexts both in East-Central Europe and Canada. Some schools had traditional settings and curriculums while others offered a diversity of programs that included arts-based learning. For Lugzi, as a Roma student, traditional school settings were not necessarily problematic, rather it was the attitudes of teachers and students within schools that were. Lugzi discussed that in both European and Canadian schools there were good programs, and teachers that were nice to him, but also situations where school was not very interesting, and he felt that some teachers and students were racist toward him.

Tamas Banyá. As a Roma child growing up in Hungary, Tamas experienced prejudice and limitations within schools, and there was no opportunity to learn through the arts. He has seen how traditional educational models actually lower Roma children's self-esteem and limits their prospects. He has children of his own who are now in Canadian schools, but he says that due to the long term effects of discrimination toward the Roma, most Roma teenagers have developed negative attitudes and don't care whether they are learning in school. He is disturbed about this attitude that he says is the result of the Roma people hearing for years that they can't do things, and that most teachers think they are "stupid and bad." He says young people don't care about their lives or the Roma culture they belong to, and in his opinion, ten years of marginalization of his people in Hungary has created this attitude in the current generation of Roma teenagers both living in Hungary and as newcomers to Canada. He

also describes how the hateful discrimination toward Roma people has had negative effects on their learning and that it is based in those in power not wanting the Roma people to learn, complete high school, or go on to university. These negative attitudes remain in traditional education structures found in many EU countries, and have prevailed in the history of Roma people who have attended school there.

Gina Csanyi-Robah. Gina emphasized that a main point to consider in evaluating the problems Roma children face in traditional school settings is to make the distinction between newcomer children and those who are Canadian born. This is important due to the different set of circumstances they experience. Refugee, and recently immigrated children will have been exposed to a whole other set of influences that could have dramatically affected their educational opportunities, whereas Canadian born Roma students may experience prejudice and discrimination but most likely not to the degree of those who recently arrived in Canada. Their parents as well would have likely had markedly different perspectives on education that would influence their children's educational experience. Those coming to Canada as newcomers may possibly bring forward negative attitudes created by the rampant discrimination of some EU schools, while Canadian born Roma parents are more likely to have had positive educational experiences.

Gina discusses that there are definite cultural differences that affect the way Roma children respond to school. Presumably these cultural differences would be more evident in Roma families that maintain traditional cultural practices. Gina says the cultural differences are very distinct. When some Roma first go to school in Canada there is a culture shock; the culture that many Roma are brought up with is completely different

from a North American culture. In traditional school settings, school is often a lot more strict and structured than children experience within their Roma families. When Roma children go to school here it is like learning a new culture, learning a new way of doing things.

Cultural differences are evident not only in how children are raised, but in the values they are taught, such as perspectives on what is important in life. Gina says that for many Roma, education is looked at as a way to lose your “Roma-ness” because it teaches you to be more like the majority of people in society. A defining feature of Roma culture is that on a whole, Roma families have a way of looking to the present, more than looking forward to the future. Gina contributes this perspective to existing within a survival realm of reality much of the time. In this realm, a job where you could go to work every day and bring home money is more valuable than going to school, which in itself does not seem to have much of a pay off. Gina claims that living in Canada we can all have trust that education will be beneficial but, in Europe they don't have that same incentive.

Gina believes that an engaging curriculum in school is important for Roma children just like it is for North American children. The traditional model of sitting still through lengthy classes is difficult for both Roma and non-Roma students. In her view, alternative school settings would probably provide better opportunity for Roma students. One such model would provide more choices of elective classes that might be of more interest. Another model would be a school using an arts-based approach. She says the approach of customizing education as is done in some alternative programs would work well for a number of Roma Children.

Another problem Gina points out for Roma students within traditional schools is that the Roma language and culture have not been valued. Roma children have not had an opportunity to learn about their histories; nor has the Romanesque language been recognized as having value, or included as a second language even though in Europe there are 15 million Roma. Gina concludes schooling fails to value anything Roma, based on everything from the treatment Roma students receive to the lack of Roma culture being part of the hard or soft curriculum.

Gina describes that in some schools in the Toronto area, Roma children are being subjected to the same sort of non-progressive segregation that they experienced in traditional European schools. She says Roma parents are happy their children have the opportunity to go to school here but the system could do better. Roma students are supposed to move up out of LEAP and ESL classes quickly, but instead they are kept there for years without little observable progress and they are feeling segregated, alienated and even targeted in the same way they were in Hungary and other EU schools.

Summarizing the main points of Gina's interview responses to research question number one, the analysis indicates that a distinction needs to be made between newcomer and Canadian born Roma children. It is also important to know that Roma people have specific cultural ways of determining what is important in life and how they raise their children, and this can make it difficult for Roma children to fit into the structure of traditional schools. Roma language and culture should be valued from a multicultural perspective within schools. Further analysis revealed that Roma children are similar to North American children in their need for engaging material in school. And alternative educational models, especially arts-based ones should be made available to Roma

children. A major obstacle to this is the restriction that being placed within ESL classes limits their ability to participate in these types of programs. Schools that do not advance Roma children through LEAP and ESL programs are perpetuating the same sort of segregation Roma children experience in some traditional European schools.

Lynn Hutchinson Lee. Lynn also makes the distinction between newcomer and Canadian born Roma in their perspectives on school. Traditional models of education found in many EU education systems have never served Roma communities well. Lynn says there is essentially an apartheid system where Roma children are relegated to classes for “developmentally challenged” children and receive an inferior education even though they may be quite bright. Roma parents have never really been welcomed or shown support in many of these schools, so naturally they are very hesitant when coming to Canada about sending their kids to school here. Roma parents often do not trust the school system or the teachers; Lynn emphasized that the ground work needs to be laid for supporting the parents by welcoming them into Canadian schools and involving them in their children’s education.

Micheal T. Butch. Micheal also identified issues within schools for newcomer Roma children. His issues have mainly to do with language and the ways schools typically deal with non-English speaking students. He believes that the structure of most ESL classes is inadequate to help students learn English; in his opinion students should first learn in their mother tongue, then in English. There is of course a communication gap between the student and the teacher when they speak different languages; but more than just knowledge is lost - the teacher is not able to understand what the student is *feeling* because the students lack the skills to express that in English.

In Micheal's opinion it would be helpful to have children first learn how to express themselves in their mother tongue, then have someone who understands that language and English, help them with making the connections. Children who face language barriers fall behind their peers at school and this leads to negative school experiences. The children feel left out, they are painfully aware of their inability to understand the curriculum, and face social challenges as a result.

Micheal's own school experiences as a Canadian Roma reveal a struggle with traditional education. He grew up in a family that maintained very traditional Roma customs, and attendance at school was not as important as other aspects of life. Micheal struggled in a traditional classroom setting, along with other "rebellious or outsider" students, he was placed in a special class. A very unique teacher ran the class using a non-traditional approach to education that really engaged Micheal (and the others) with learning. The class was designed to be a two-year program that engaged the students by frequently taking them out of the classroom on field trips into nature and other settings. He said they would hike and sing and learn about species of trees and other things. I would speculate that for this spirited group of students, the opportunity to move around, rather than being confined to a chair/desk in a classroom all day was hugely responsible for them being able to engage with learning. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, this progressive teacher's philosophical approach allowed him to reach students who were otherwise considered "numb" to traditional teaching methods. Micheal *wanted* to go to school.

In reflecting on what he sees as happening in schools today, Micheal feels the current system is one where you either embrace and succeed as it is taught, or you don't

and you are left behind. He feels the school system has changed, becoming very paper based and reliant on computers. Not everyone can succeed under these circumstances.

In analyzing Micheal's interview responses on issues with traditional educational models that affect Roma students, he believes the main concerns are centered on the many challenges non-English speaking children face. Falling behind and not being engaged because they do not understand what is being said is a problem that needs to be addressed in ways that are relevant to Roma children. Teachers need to recognize what the children are experiencing and feeling, and find non-traditional ways to encourage and engage them with learning.

Ronald Lee. Through his work with newcomer Roma families, Ron has heard many stories of the experiences these families and their children had with schools. Many of the traditional schools that Roma children attend in European countries are places of fear and discrimination. Children were and are often segregated into classes for the mentally challenged and are given very little opportunity to learn. For families that experienced this type of education prior to coming to Canada, it is difficult for them to trust that schools here will not be the same. Discrimination, bullying, and segregation are real fears that permeate their perspective of education systems. These are important factors to consider in being sensitive to Roma children within the schools. While many Canadian schools do their best to eliminate such obstacles to learning, practices that segregate Roma children such as prolonged stays in ESL classes, or grouping Roma children together in special classes should be discouraged as they may mirror some of the negative educational approaches Roma children experienced in their home countries. It is also important for teachers to build trusting relationships with Roma children and to

ensure that the tone in the classroom is one of acceptance of all children. Ron believes that schools need to be able to see beyond the traditional model of education as the delivery of curriculum, and into what will connect a child with learning. He states that establishing trust and honouring the history and culture of the Roma are essential for the success of Roma students; schools that incorporate this into their educational models will have more success in engaging Roma students with learning.

Connecting to the Research

The main points brought up in the interviews as to "What is distinctly problematic for Roma children in traditional school settings" can be summed up as follows: The low levels of education including segregation and discrimination in their home countries greatly affects their standing in Canadian schools and harms their self esteem and desire to engage with school. Traditional teacher-centered rote-learning methods rarely work with Roma children. They should have their individual learning needs met and be offered differentiated learning opportunities that acknowledge various learning styles and develop the whole child. They should also be able to access information on their cultural heritage and history, as many Roma students have not had the opportunity to learn about this in their home countries. This can be best accessed through arts-based programs that are naturally engaging to Roma students. Teachers need to be aware of the cultural perspectives held by the Roma so they can understand how to interpret their behaviour. Roma students do not perform well in an atmosphere of high structure that is "hands off." Culturally, they are used to being included in "grown up" activities and being able to participate in the community rather than being sheltered "as children." Traditional ways of dealing with language issues in ESL classes that again segregate the Roma and "lump"

them together is not effective. And finally, trust and acceptance are hugely important so that teachers can develop a rapport with Roma students. This is typically not found in highly structured and authoritarian classrooms of traditional education models.

While there is some progress being made to provide a more inclusive and accepting approach to Roma children in East-Central European schools, for the most part it is only being done as the watchful eyes of organizations such as *Save the Children*, *Amnesty International*, and *Human Rights Watch* investigate, report, and pressure political systems within EU countries to correct the violation of human rights that is so pervasive in the treatment of Roma children in many education systems. Sadly, most of the seemingly positive changes being made appear to be due to current political pressure and not to a genuine interest in improving conditions for these marginalized children. In 2005, the European Parliament adopted a resolution “call[ing] for steps to be taken to combat anti-Gypsyism or Romaphobia in all forms at all levels” (Tóth, 2010, p. 22). However in schools, many Roma children still face severe prejudice that greatly limits their ability to receive a proper education. At the forefront of targeting the discriminatory practices of segregating, and offering a lower level of education to Roma children in EU countries, is the work of Jack Greenberg that I discuss in the literature review. He is the American lawyer responsible for the changes made to the US education system that saw the desegregation of African American students in the 1960s. Greenberg states that as a condition of admission to the European Union, in 2000, “...the Eastern European Nations pledged to eliminate racial discrimination, including widespread segregation of Roma school children” (Greenberg, 2010, p. 926). Greenberg and others state that in many traditional EU schools, Roma children are often segregated and placed in “special”

schools for the mentally disabled, suffer discrimination from teachers and peers, face language challenges from continual displacement, endure educational systems that do not respect their needs as learners, and in some circumstances children are not sent to school by their parents because of cultural disparities or prejudices they fear their children will endure (Greenberg, 2010; Kende & Neményi, 2006; Monaci et al., 2006). High absenteeism and early drop out among the Roma is a result of these complicated challenges (Monaci et al.).

When Roma refugee students come to Canada, they often carry forward negative educational experiences from their home countries and this makes it difficult for them to integrate into Canadian schools. “Traditionally the relationship between the Roma and public schools has been problematic” (Tamas, 2001, p. 297). In their report on Roma refugee families in Hamilton, Ontario, Este et al state that, “The problems Roma refugees have with establishing relationships with institutional systems must be understood within the context of their long history of racism, marginalization, and social exclusion...” (Walsh et al., 2011, p. 9).

In addition to the educational disadvantages in their home countries, engagement with learning has been affected by: poor attendance, language barriers, different cultural perspectives on education, lack of trust, the tenuous conditions of refugee claim status, and feelings of hopelessness that affect self esteem. Jack Greenberg states: “The Roma must achieve parity with non-Roma in employment, housing, health, and civil rights generally. But education is the most important of these, particularly because it can lead to the others” (Greenberg, p. 999).

Once the Roma are admitted to our Canadian schools, educators must be aware of several considerations. The responses from the interviews reveal that traditional teacher centered, rote learning methods are largely ineffective with Roma children; they should have their individual learning needs met including the offer of differentiated learning opportunities. This also ties in with what has been brought forward from the case study in regard to the cultural differences that affect the way children learn. As stated in the literature review, poor engagement with learning amongst Roma students can be attributed to traditional educational models that rely on teacher centered instruction and rote learning methods that differ markedly from cultural ways in which Roma children typically learn. “For centuries, the Romani family has taken care of educating and training their children” (Tamas, p. 297). They have been educated in their cultural ways by observing adults in their community and becoming actively involved with community life (Enguita, 2004; Levinson, 2005; Monaci, et al, 2006; Tauber, 2004). Many Roma children often possess a well developed understanding of their customs and traditions by the time they are of school age.

Another consideration regarding traditional education models is that typically the individual learning needs of Roma students are not met; students need to be offered differentiated learning opportunities. In the literature review I cited the study done by Smithrim & Upitis (2005), *Learning Through the Arts: Lessons of Engagement*. They point to the fact that traditional education methods tend to focus on linguistic-logical mathematic modes of learning as opposed to the arts that engage the visual-spatial, interpersonal, and bodily-kinaesthetic forms of knowledge (Smithrim & Upitis). Also cited was a study by Thomas & Arnold (2011) and their work with the *A+ Schools*. The

A+ Schools model was developed in 1995 by art educators and uses “innovative interdisciplinary teaching strategies using creative projects and activities to stimulate learning” (Arnold, 1996, quoted in Thomas & Arnold (2011), p. 96). The model draws upon Howard Gardiner’s, *Multiple Intelligence Theory*, and other research done by Eisner, Efland, and Duncum which supports the use of the arts in developing cognitive abilities (Thomas & Arnold). While the third study reporting on the benefits of arts education did not specifically address multiple intelligences, it did provide support for the effectiveness of the arts to engage children with learning who are English language learners and marginalized due to poverty. Roma students are typically English language learners; they experience high poverty and also have difficulty engaging with learning. The arts provide the opportunity to learn in ways that engage multiple intelligences. Curriculum models infused with arts education (typically non-traditional education models) should be more effective in meeting the needs of Roma learners.

The case study also revealed that it is important for Roma students to have the opportunity to learn about their history and culture, content that is rarely addressed within traditional education models. The Roma Curriculum model is one way of addressing this and will be discussed at greater length under the responses to the third research question, "How can Romani arts and culture be integrated into a curriculum that works to dispel discrimination and oppression of marginalized Roma children?"

Another revealing discovery brought forward in the case study was the way in which ESL classes delivered to Roma students in Canadian schools run the danger of paralleling some of the segregation issues Roma students encounter in traditional EU schools. In his review on segregation of Roma students in EU education systems,

Greenburg (2010) states that, a form of segregation, “intraschool segregation” (sometimes referred to as “within-school” segregation) is where Roma children are designated to special education classrooms (p. 936). Greenberg suggests that Roma students are placed in these classes because they offer a curriculum for pupils with “light mental retardation” (p. 936). Like Greenberg, I take exception with this assertion. It is clearly not an informed diagnosis of these children, nor is it the mandate of Canadian ESL classes to provide educational services to children mentally disabled, mild or severe. If Roma students remain in ESL classes for too long, not only do they run the risk of not advancing forward with new learning, but they are segregated from other students especially in the situation where there is a large number of Roma students together in ESL classes. In her interview Gina emphasized that schools that do not advance Roma children through LEAP and ESL programs are practicing the same sort of segregation Roma children experience in some traditional European schools. Micheal also believes that the structure of most ESL classes is inadequate to help students learn the language; instead they should learn in their mother tongue rather than in English.

Issues of trust and rapport are also important aspects of connecting Roma children with learning that often do not occur in teacher-driven curriculum models. Again, this was a new finding brought forward in the case study and was not specifically addressed in the literature review. I would agree with Lynn Hutchinson Lee in describing her involvement in art making processes with Roma refugee women and children: she found that through visual art practices you can connect to students on a personal level. Refugee children may still feel very traumatized by what happened to them in traditional EU schools and may not want to open up and express themselves, however visual arts

practices are a non-threatening opportunity for them to access their experiences and express their feelings. This provides a means for sensitive teachers to reach students and build a trusting rapport when they have a way to connect with them. In a recent study by Rousseau et al., (2005), *Creative Expression Workshops in Schools: Prevention Programs for Immigrant and Refugee Children*, the authors note that many refugee children have difficulty engaging with learning due to previous trauma that can create esteem issues resulting in emotional and behavioural problems (Rousseau et al.). This program uses the arts as a means to develop positive relationships with traumatized refugee children and to help engage them with learning.

Research Question # 2: How can the arts, and art education in particular engage marginalized Roma children with learning?

Gina Csanyi-Robah. Gina makes a very strong case for using the arts to engage Roma children with learning. She explains that it is through the arts that you can access Roma culture, and that is why arts-based approaches are so effective with Roma children. She feels the arts are critical for keeping Roma children engaged with school so they can successfully complete a full K-12 education and possibly continue on to college or university. Any opportunity to bring their culture into the curriculum is a big plus. Certainly drawing, anything artistic, dancing, singing, being able to move about a little bit, all these things really make a difference. It makes learning meaningful to them. This is something she has noticed in her own family.

Gina asserts that the arts in Roma communities are a significant aspect of the culture. "Most children sing, dance, and play an instrument. It is what families do in the

evening times. In Roma families you'll find that they come from generations of musicians depending on what tribe¹⁷ they are. The culture is actually accessed through music and art and that's why arts-based approaches will work specifically with Roma children."

Gina says that Roma children generally learn about their own arts and culture from the family, but it should be supported or reinforced in schools. Engagement in the arts is the key to success for Roma children with learning: she says many teachers will tell you that Roma children thrive in music and art class and consequently this positive experience will help them stay in school to finish high school. She absolutely believes that the arts are crucial to Roma children successfully remaining in school.

Gina also believes that engagement with the arts will help with attendance and reduce the high dropout level of Roma high school students. Learning through the arts will give Roma students an incentive to stay in school because they're enjoying what they're learning, and it's meaningful to them. "It's culturally relevant, it's culturally responsive; it's all of the things that educators could value in providing a meaningful education for the students that they're working with."

Lugzi Mustafa. Lugzi is a Roma youth currently enrolled in a Canadian high school. His statement about his experience with the arts in schools was a mixed review. When he went to school in Bosnia, they offered art, music, and drama classes but he did not go a lot because he did not like the way the classes were presented as discrete subject areas. He was more interested in sports at the time. The school in Newfoundland where he first learned English used an arts-based approach to teaching that certainly left an impact on Lugzi. He said that every week his class would do a play and that is how he

¹⁷ The use of the word "tribe" is referring to clan distinctions such as Kalderash.

learned to speak English and read. When his family moved to Toronto, Lugzi was in a LEAP program where he says the teachers were very helpful and that music and art were used for language learning.

Lugzi makes an interesting distinction about the way the arts are used in education. He seems to have responded well to learning English through an arts-based approach, but the arts taught as a subject, rather than being infused within the curriculum, had less appeal for him. Lugzi's age and shifting personal interests at the time are variables to consider in this case and could provide a topic for further research that focuses specifically on the approach taken to arts education for Roma students.

Lynn Hutchinson Lee. Lynn has worked with both newcomer refugee adults and children. Her experiences provide relevant insights into what many Roma children struggle with when they arrive in Canada. Language barriers, trust issues, and previous traumatizing and discriminatory experiences all create huge obstacles that impede their ability to learn. Lynn believes that the arts provide a means for cutting through barriers to learning and engaging marginalized learners in a non-verbal and therefore non-limiting approach to communicating and understanding, thereby allowing for learning to take place. Many Roma refugee children attending Canadian schools feel very traumatized by what happened to them in their home countries and they don't want to talk about it. The visual arts practice is therefore an effective way for them to access their experiences and their feelings.

Lynn discusses that if an arts-based curriculum is at the core of a good program, it will attract marginalized Roma children. For instance, the world of visual art can support literacy through the use of symbolism and pictorial representation; an example of this

would be the reading and creating of graphic novels or comic strips. This will be a way to engage language-challenged learners who don't have a very good grasp of the language and can't express themselves verbally. Lynn explains that many Roma children come here without literary skills and may not have learned to read and write in the language of their country. In fact they may not have learned much of their own native language. Not surprisingly then, they are having trouble reading and writing in English and that's very confusing to them. That's another reason why arts-based curriculum cuts through all of those impediments because they are just like huge rocks in their way. The arts can cut right through that, being a universal language. "If you have 20 different kids in a class and they can't understand each other, they can at least understand a pantomime, music, or visual art and that is why it is so important to be able to use the arts to reach and to teach across the curriculum."

Micheal T. Butch. Micheal's perspective on how the arts engage Roma children with learning focuses on the strong cultural heritage that is deeply connected to the arts and remains such a huge part of "Gypsy" life. His insights provide candid accounts of some educational experiences through the generations of a Roma family in Canada – his own family.

Micheal was raised very traditionally and his family followed the rules of Gypsy life. Micheal is a fourth generation Canadian. His father being 'King of the Gypsies' in Toronto, was expected to uphold and practice Roma traditions and these were greatly impressed upon his children. One aspect of Roma culture is that of marrying at a young age. Micheal was married at age 14. This certainly had an effect on his education and he struggled to fit into a traditional classroom. His own children were sent to a Catholic

school, where his daughter surprised the nuns at a young age by becoming interested in researching the tarot. At a parent conference, he admitted that was a natural thing for her to do as she was actually a Gypsy and not Italian as he had claimed on the application form. He explained to the nuns that his wife and her mother were both fortune-tellers so it was very natural for his daughter to follow this path of interest. Fortunately for his daughter, the nuns did not have a problem with this and were in fact relieved that Micheal encouraged her study of the tarot. Without graduating from high school, Micheal's daughter currently operates a very successful fortune telling practice in the Toronto area.

Micheal's son recently graduated from high school; he did not experience any difficult times and was not involved with any arts programs although he has an interest in music and sings well. Micheal's grandchildren both attend public school and enjoy arts experiences but are not involved in any specific arts programs either in or out of school. They do however enjoy singing along with their grandfather and dancing to his music. Micheal's children and grandchildren's participation in the arts is informal rather than structured learning.

What is interesting about Micheal's family and their experiences with education is that we are given a look into what may happen generationally for Roma families as they become more assimilated into mainstream Canadian society. The choice to hold to cultural traditions seems to be a personal one, where some customs are maintained and others are let go. This can have an effect on education as it did in Micheal's case where Roma traditions of early marriage impacted school life. Micheal in turn did not follow tradition as strictly as his father, and his children had their own varying responses to

cultural expectations. It would seem that the more cultural traditions are maintained, the more it can affect other areas of life such as how education is viewed.

Micheal states that the arts are what give many Roma children a sense of self-esteem and strength in being who they are. He says it gives them confidence and other kids look up to them. Success and self-esteem give Roma kids the sense that they could do other things – that they can fit in. He also believes that through the arts, people can express themselves in different ways without the impediment of language. Language barriers can be overcome through different educational approaches such as art where “the picture tells a story,” and through instrumental music, or the body movement of dance.

Micheal described how “Gypsies” get together many times – not just for birthdays and weddings, but just to have a party. Everybody sings or dances and it often ends up being a fun “musical war.” He says that in a sense it was like music school – people would learn from each other and try to cultivate their talents. He said it was a different school of not naming notes and counting bars but feeling them and feeling the rhythm. To his knowledge, “there wasn't a Gypsy tribe that didn't have that ability of singing or dancing.”

Micheal says the arts are a “comfort zone” for Roma children and giving the opportunity within school to participate in learning through the arts would be engaging for them. He says it is their inheritance; most Roma children are involved with some type of artistic practice, usually music or dance. It is a big part of Roma life. Micheal believes that you have to experience life, and the arts allow you the opportunity to embody the experience of life – life itself is a learning thing.

Ronald Lee. Ron has been involved with the integration of newcomer Roma families to Toronto for many years. His advocacy work and lecturing have brought much attention to the Roma situation in Canada, and he has first-hand knowledge of the great difficulties Roma children experience trying to adjust to Canadian schools. In working with Roma children, Ron has found that music is a very effective way to connect them with learning. He says that it helps to build trust and a common link. In his experience newcomer children are often very fearful and music helps to reach them.

Ron recognizes a difference between modern and traditional Roma, and advises that education changes what is valued in one's culture. A change in one's value system affects identity, and education can be a double-edged sword. The old Roma grew up in a culture where they were proud to be Roma, having skills that they could apply to earning a living. Ron says they are much different than the modern Roma. The old Roma took pride in who they were. Though lacking formal education they possessed and passed on wisdom. He feels that many of the modern Roma who have been exposed to negative and discriminatory educational experiences do not have this same sense of culture and are struggling with identity. He feels that music is a common denominator, bringing traditional and contemporary Roma together.

Susan Heagy. Susan describes the need for using the arts as a means to differentiate instruction and to engage children with learning. She says that a traditional approach to education is boring for Roma children and "loses" them. She feels fortunate that in her LEAP program she is able to teach science, social studies, art, and media literacy together because "they're natural links." Her approach integrates art into daily learning activities rather than teaching it as a separate subject or an add-on at the end of

the day. Susan confessed that: “without art she could not teach.” Visuals enhance student understanding of something beyond what language can explain. Susan says when students use art as a way of showing their knowledge and expressing ideas, it becomes part of the assessment package. Susan will often evaluate a student’s grasp of a concept through their ability to illustrate it. For example, a young Roma boy who had only been in Canada for five weeks and had no understanding of English created a picture to explain how gears and pulleys work, “He did this drawing and you could see that he knew what a pulley was and what a gear was. He totally understood the concept. He had no way of communicating with me, but he got it.”

Susan believes that engagement with the arts is advantageous to Roma children because it allows them to experience success with learning, “...it's a part of multiple intelligence, differentiated instruction, and the 'cornerstone' of learning." Susan believes that it is totally non-productive just doing paperwork because most of the children she works with can't read it and they can't write it:

If they don't know the word in their home language or in English, they'll do a little picture...so, it gradually develops...but, without the arts, I couldn't teach...because we have to teach using differentiated instructions...and that means everything you can think of: acting, dancing, drama, performing, singing, writing, reading...working by yourself, working in groups, talking about your culture, talking about your sub culture, talking in your own language...it's just the entire picture.

Susan identifies the most successful aspect of LEAP in terms of Roma students' success and engagement with learning as the blending of the curriculum. She terms it "authentic learning" and describes it as organic. Using the arts is a very natural and powerful way to engage with authentic learning. It is learning that builds on concepts from across disciplines rather than teaching subjects separately and focusing on the

details. Learning connections are made when children understand the relationships between things.

Tamas Banyá. Tamas has a deep appreciation for the power of music. He is concerned that the hardships the Roma have faced historically are having a negative effect on the attitude of Roma teenagers, and that they are losing their connection to Roma culture and becoming disenchanted with life. He feels that dance and music will save culture for these youth, but he feels it is up to the parents to retain and practice the culture. He says that Gypsy music and dance show the colour and history of the people and that young people need to be proud of this and show the world who they are. He believes that music and dance will engage Roma youth with life.

Connecting to the Research

When I was first introduced to working with Roma children in Kosovo as a volunteer designing and implementing a summer art program for RAE children, what stood out for me as truly special about them was their incredible voices. Almost every child at the centers loved to sing and did so incredibly well and with great gusto! In one of the weekly arts programs, the children had been taught the song, *We Are the World*, and it was clearly a favourite! Later, after I learned of the hardships Roma children endure in schools, I could not help but think how profound this song was. These and other Roma children if given the opportunity of a quality education can work toward changing the marginalized circumstances of their lives. These beautiful, talented children living in such poverty had a profound effect on me and I knew right then that I wanted to help them have better lives and somehow, I was convinced that through music and the arts this could happen.

Having completed my research I am strongly convinced that through an education that is richly infused with the arts, Roma children will have the opportunity to engage with learning that is authentic, accessible, and culturally relevant. Jan Sajko's art program for Roma children in Slovakia is a testimony to this type of learning. His goals for the children are to cultivate the whole child by working with their "...thinking, feelings, and actions in order to transform the students' value systems," and to, "...promote a strong and positive self-identity ('romipen' in the Roma language meaning proud to be a Roma)" (Sajko, 2000, *Goals of art curriculum*). This is also transformative education that could potentially be a pathway for Jan Sajko's impoverished Roma students to understand the social justice issues that determine their circumstances.

Historically, the Roma have had a rich culture where the arts were an inseparable part of their lives. Along with music and dance, art (traditional crafts such as costume, brightly painted carts, and other material culture) was an integral part of life. While this may not be so much a part of contemporary Roma life, it is still part of the Roma heritage. As stated in my literature review, according to Ellen Dissanayake, art is behaviour, an expression that attaches meaning to the making of something special (Dissanayake, 1988). In contemporary society this specialness has been replaced with a new aestheticism where people, "... seek to make for themselves, what their society, aided by the arts, presented in earlier times to them as a birthright" (p. 192). If making art and involvement in the arts is a natural human behaviour as Dissanayake asserts that for many small-scale societies is inseparable from life, then engaging with this behaviour would certainly be important for Roma children. Traditional crafts and material culture are

experiencing a diminishing role in contemporary consumer society, where globalization and mass culture has crept into homes and communities everywhere.

Today, visual culture, "...the wide variety of visual images, objects, and experiences [in the context] from which meaning is made" has come to prominence in contemporary society (Duncum, 2002, p. 16). With this comes an important further development in art education and opens an important new front for the role education in the arts can play in educating Roma students. It promises to keep pace with changing identities and it further points to a role in arts education for addressing themes as urgent as social justice. Elliot Eisner states that promoting visual culture, "...helps students learn how to decode the values and ideas that are imbedded in what might be called popular culture as well as in what is called the fine arts" (Eisner, 2002, p. 28). Decoding values and ideas are what critical theorists, and Paulo Freire suggest are imperative for the oppressed to be able to do in naming the circumstances that marginalize their lives. This is authentic and meaningful learning that encompasses social justice issues. Elliot Eisner acknowledges that personal experience with art enables us to understand, "...the social forces that are congenial to the time" (Eisner, p.25).

Responding to art is holistic in that it involves multiple ways of knowing including cognitive functioning as well as an understanding of social structures and relationships. "Understanding art is a matter of understanding the art experiences of people and the learning that occurs in and during those experiences" (Freedman, 2001, p.131). Art helps us to know the world, "...it contributes to the social and cultural landscape that each individual inhabits...The ability to interpret the world is learned through the interpretation of the arts" (Efland, p.171). Art is both knowing and knowing

who we are. In creating and responding to art where students are encouraged to think critically about the world and place their lives in the context of it, meaningful and transformative learning experiences take place. Within education, addressing issues of oppression and discrimination through experiences with art can build toward new ways of seeing and thinking that have the potential to create positive change in people's lives. This is the goal of education in both critical theory, and multiculturalism that supports universal citizenship.

In her review on multicultural education in Canada, Anna Kirova (2008) suggested that this is an approach more reflective of contemporary society. In Toronto where there are such diverse ethnicities blending and merging to create new cultures; to use Graeme Chalmers phrase, "transcultural hybridity is the new reality of diversity" (Chalmers, 2002). Being able to recognize that cultural ties influence but do not necessarily shape their lives in contemporary society will allow children to know that they can move beyond cultural pluralism into understanding that we all have a heritage that we are connected with, but we are all also part of a larger social construct.

In her culturally diverse LEAP class, Susan Heagy draws upon the arts to address multicultural education by using the arts to identify and acknowledge the various cultural groups and to show the commonalities that exist amongst the students. For Roma refugee children in Canadian schools, arts-based education is an accessible way for them to connect learning to culture without the struggles of cultural pluralism. They can begin to recognize that their Roma culture is distinct yet similar to other cultures in many ways and is one aspect of the diverse social environment of the class that is reflective of the community, and our globalized world. Learning through the arts provides students with

the opportunity to understand who they are and what other people experience in the world; they can begin to recognize cultural identity as social identity.

One aspect of learning through the arts that is particularly relevant for Roma children is the power of music to make a connection with them. Micheal Butch and Ron Lee stressed this in their interviews, and my own experience in Kosovo also affirms this. Without culturally stereotyping, as a whole the Roma people are very musical. Historically, their music has influenced many genres including Flamenco, Jazz, and contemporary fusion. Roma musicians are known for their great passion and there is no question about how Roma music excites and delights audiences. Many will describe it as stirring their soul and inspiring one to dance and embrace the intensities of life. An education program that provides musical experiences for Roma students can be very engaging, particularly for younger children. Susan Heagy frequently uses music in her LEAP class to inspire, motivate, and educate the children. She also often has classical music quietly playing in the background to set a pleasant tone in the classroom.

An important issue that was brought forward in the research is how the arts cut through barriers to learning. One such barrier cited by almost all of the interview participants is that language issues pose significant problems to the education of Roma refugee children. Since many do not have much knowledge of English, or even their mother tongue, language difficulties create a serious impediment to learning. In the literature review, I discussed the work of Beth Olshansky, author of, *The Power of Pictures; Creating Pathways to Literacy through Art* (2008). She states that the heavy reliance on verbal and written delivery of the curriculum is problematic to those children who struggle to learn in a second (or third) language. An emphasis on verbal learning

puts these children "...at risk for a number of related social, emotional, and academic challenges" (p. 10). It leads to self-esteem issues and feelings of inferiority.

Consequently, children are less likely to engage with learning. Olshansky states that young children "...intuitively understand the meaning of pictures long before they are taught how to read and write..." (p.15). Pictures speak a widely accessible language and will eventually facilitate verbal learning. She further claims that written language, music, art, drama, and mathematics all have their own sign symbols and that transmediation, or the translation of meaning from one symbol system to another, takes place.

Transmediation encourages knowledge transfer from a scaffolding of symbol systems where each is called upon to make its contribution to learning.

Susan Heagy relies heavily on the use of art for her language challenged students. At the start of the school year she will often recognize that a large portion of students in the class do not have English as their first language. The use of art in the curriculum has made a significant contribution to encouraging the academic development of students in her class. Susan also relies heavily upon art as a means to assess learning. Rather than having students write a test, she will ask them to draw their understanding of what they know about a concept.

The three studies on arts integrated learning discussed in the literature review provide further support for the findings in my research. All three point to the arts as a means to engage marginalized children in particular with learning. The studies reveal that learning through the arts employs and develops the full capacities of mind (multiple intelligences) along with affect and it is likely that greater motivation for learning in general is developed as learning in one area overlaps with another. This aligns with

Olshansky's concept of transmediation that occurs through the overlap of sign symbols in different disciplines.

What is important to note in the three research studies in arts education, is that the length of time in arts-integrated programs makes a difference. It is suggested that at least three years in this type of program is needed to show academic improvement.

Admittedly, there has been some controversy over the measurement of academic achievement that can be attributed to arts-based learning. I am not suggesting that the arts can be wholly credited for a significant improvement in children's academic progress; however, the effects of transmediation are worth considering. The fact that children like active/experiential learning as is common in arts education and transfer these positive feelings to a general increase in good feelings about school is a compelling reason to move further down this path of educational reform. My research provides further evidence to support the benefits of arts-based learning programs.

Research Question # 3: How can Romani arts and culture be integrated into a curriculum that works to dispel discrimination and oppression of marginalized Roma children?

Gina Csanyi-Robah. Gina believes that it is important for Roma youth to be integrated with other students as much as possible so that the Roma culture can be shared with and known by others in order to break down stereotypes and dispel discriminatory attitudes. She says Roma youth take pride in sharing their culture and it helps them to find their identity. It instils pride in them and respect for themselves and others. Sharing their culture also helps them to learn more about their culture and to learn

of other cultures through dialogue. It builds empathy as different groups of students get to know who they are and their backgrounds. She says that at the elementary level, many teachers in Canada are doing an excellent job to create positive, non-discriminatory learning experiences for children and to integrate cultural learning; however she says that these practices tend to get lost by the time they get to high school. Many Roma students are grouped together as a cultural group in the LEAP classes. She says in a class of fifteen, there may be only two non-Roma students; Gina feels that it is not enough to make an impact and that more integration is needed. When integration happens it breaks down stereotypes, especially when students can take pride in sharing their culture and their background with other students. Students often find their cultural identity through being able to do this.

Gina describes her experience with teaching a course for newcomer children at the Toronto Public Library called, *English Can Be Fun*. One of the first things she did was to have students bring to class a photograph of where they were from and to also do a drawing of something from their homeland they wanted her to see. Gina described that activity – the children were excited and eager to show her their photos and drawings, and while they were showing them they were teaching all the other students about their homeland as well. Gina describes it as an ongoing circle of learning that definitely instils pride; they gain respect for themselves and for others, and it works to dispel stereotypes and discrimination because people see commonalities.

Gina speculated that if the Roma genocide during the Holocaust were included in the school curriculum, Roma students would learn about their own history and gain a deeper understanding of the pain that the community continues to carry. It would also

help non-Roma students develop an awareness of the Roma and recognize the historical fact of the Roma victimization, that they were racially targeted during the Holocaust. Gina suggests that the social studies curriculum in schools should not overlook the Roma but instead acknowledge them as the largest minority in Europe that has faced centuries of exclusion and systemic discrimination. Bearing witness to such realities in courses and textbooks could make a big difference in building awareness about the existence of the Roma people. At present, the Roma are virtually invisible in school curricula. She expressed frustration in having to educate people, even those with university degrees that there are people named Roma. “It speaks volumes to the fact of how excluded we've been historically from the history books.”

Gina has found that educating Roma students about their culture instils a greater sense of self-esteem and pride in them. Celebrating their culture is important. She said that it was not something she was ever able to do as a Canadian born Roma. Growing up in Canada, she missed opportunities to appreciate how special it is to be Roma. She regrets having grown up without knowledge or information that would have connected her to a distinct group of people. All she knew were the pervasive stereotypes about ‘Gypsies’ that existed. Surprisingly she says that the Roma families and children coming from Europe have had even less access to, or value of who they are than she did as a Canadian born Roma. Recent Roma immigrants and refugees have never had an opportunity to learn about their histories; nothing about them has ever been valued. The Romanesque language is not recognized as having value, or included as a second language anywhere in Europe even though there are 15 million Roma in Europe. Roma

children are mistreated in some European schools, and there is little to no mention of their existence in school curricula

Gina feels that learning about Romani arts and culture could teach children to respect others and not discriminate. An effective cultural education, as she imagines it, would build empathy among different groups of students through getting to know who they are and their backgrounds. Roma history might begin with teaching about the Roma Diaspora, and the geographic route the Roma have taken; where they stopped off for a significant number of years, and how that impacted their culture in different ways. Following those same routes it becomes possible to understand how the language developed, as Roma language and culture evolved, influencing and being influenced by cultures they encountered. Gina concludes: "...we are not who we were when we left (Northern India), and it's taken a long way to get to who and where we are now."

Lugzi Mustafa. Lugzi has experienced a considerable number of school settings in his life. Much of the frustration he experiences at his current school is due to the fact that most people do not know his cultural background. When others do not know your culture, the result can be racism. He says that understanding someone's culture helps people to not be afraid of them. Lugzi feels that when others want to know more about his culture and who he is, he is happy to share this with them. His attitude is one of pride and negative feelings leave. When people in the community find out that Lugzi is Roma, they are curious and want to learn about his culture. He says his family often invites the neighbours to special days they celebrate and this helps people to understand more about who the Roma are. This demonstrates how important knowledge of another's culture is in dispelling discrimination; it takes away the fear factor, which is often the root cause.

Lynn Hutchinson Lee. Lynn believes that it is important for teachers to be culturally sensitive, but concedes that it is impossible for them to know about all the different cultural backgrounds of children in their classroom, especially in a city as diverse as Toronto. However, she says it is still really important to understand some basic things about cultures. For example, the myths and stereotypes about the Roma have no basis in truth about the Roma. Lynn says that people need to understand that it is an ethnicity and not a lifestyle. Roma have travelled because of forced migration, not because they have a "free spirit"; she feels this is something a lot of people have not really understood. The Roma are an ethnic group that has specific practices like any other ethnic group, and teachers need to be sensitive to that. Lynn also states that anti-racism education is really important because you will find among some school children an expression of their parents' racist attitudes. She also observes that in the case of the Roma, this seems to be the last frontier of allowable racism; being more evident in Europe than Canada. Lynn is troubled by pernicious attitudes about Roma that even educated, otherwise progressive people carry. It is really hard to erase this kind of attitude. There are many stereotypes. Lynn states that as long as the Roma community remains invisible, stereotypes can persist because there's nobody there to show that it is not the case.

When I asked Lynn about her observations of the impact of the TDSB Roma Curriculum on dispelling racism, she said that a lot of the children involved were not Roma. She said though, that most of the children in those classes were from refugee families themselves and had a great deal of sensitivity to the things that were happening to Roma before they came to Canada. She explains that the curriculum was introduced

just before a large influx of Hungarian Roma refugees to Toronto; it was the Equity Studies department at the TDSB that initiated the curriculum and felt it was important to augment this with visual arts-based studies. The themes considered were housing, safety, history, and the difference between living in their country of origin and living in Canada. These were things that were particularly relevant or had formed part of a social studies curriculum. They were also addressed from a social justice position focusing on *The Rights of the Child*. The teachers included much of the curriculum subject matter into the eleven small murals the children painted with Lynn as a culmination to the project.

Lynn describes Queen Victoria School in Toronto (where the Roma Curriculum was piloted), as “...a leader in looking at how to bring children into society, how to educate them, and how to make them feel active in their own sense of cultural agency rather than having something perpetrated upon them.” However, in describing the impact of the curriculum on the students she could not really say how it affected the relationship between Roma and non-Roma students because there was no follow up to the program, and unfortunately the Roma Curriculum has not been used since its initial implementation.

One of my questions to Lynn about the inspiration for the Roma curriculum had to do with whether it was implemented because of existing discrimination within the school or community toward the Roma. Lynn was not quite sure if things were getting worse, or if there was a problem developing with racism and discrimination due to there being many more Roma students coming into the schools. She did say though that there had been some problems between Tibetan and Roma students and they were becoming very hostile towards one another. Lynn attributes the difficulties between the Tibetan and

Romani youth to the fact that they were both refugee groups. She explained that people who come as refugees have difficulties and challenges that we may not know about. Lynn described that when you are a refugee, you tend to be so full of despair that when anything crosses your path that seems conflicting, you become a lot more volatile in responding to it.

Lynn believes that as long as you have a culture, you can somehow survive and manage. However, when the cultural layers start peeling away and traditional practices are lost, then a culture erodes and people no longer have an understanding of who they are or where they have come from. Lynn discussed that when culture is absent, difficulties are the unfortunate result:

When you take peoples' language away from them, or you take any form of making a living away from them, or any form of education away from them, and you separate them, and you make them feel they're less than human, and you go on and on through generations of doing that, essentially you've just got people who don't know who they are, where they're from, who are poor and disenfranchised, without a culture.

Micheal T. Butch. I asked Micheal what he thought about how culture might promote self-esteem in youth. He replied that using something they are good at (music and dance) shows their power and strength and creates a curiosity amongst others about who they are. This worked for him as an adult and he assumes that it would work for children. Having acknowledged skills and talents would give Roma children confidence as other kids would look up to them.

Micheal also acknowledged that many of the newcomer Roma children seem to lack knowledge of their culture. This is part of the problem with the Roma refugee children coming to Canada, "Many of them have not had exposure to their Roma culture and their culture is fading away." The result is these children are feeling completely lost

and hiding their talent. They are losing their individual strength. Micheal says it is even more critical for these refugee kids, when they come here, to learn about their Romani culture and history. He sees a link between poverty and lack of cultural identity. He says that the poorest children in particular have had no cultural exposure and only know the negative stereotypes so they hide the fact that they're Roma. Where they come from, it is dangerous to be Roma.

When I asked Micheal if he thought learning about Romani arts and culture would teach children to respect themselves and each other, breaking down barriers of discrimination, he said that discrimination is a result of a lack of education. Often when people don't know about another's culture they become afraid of them. "People that don't know about the Roma hear the wives' tales that they steal children and they go and beg on the streets and pick pocket. That's all they know...only the bad things." Micheal says people don't understand sometimes that a family is just trying to make a living doing whatever they have to do on the street, "...selling products or fortune telling," and they assume a negative attitude thinking, "Oh, they're Gypsies." But he says this is because people don't know them. "Once a Gypsy is a friend, you have a friend for life." He says misconceptions and cultural stereotypes are a problem. Canadians and Americans know almost nothing about the Roma; they know only of the bad things they hear from the media. Micheal explains that this bad press is the result of not understanding the circumstances of what has happened to the lives of many Roma:

If you take any nation and put them in poverty where they have to live in a camp far away from a city where they can't make a living, or there's no food or the land can't produce anything, and then a woman or a man sees their children hungry, they have limited choices. Even if the choices are bad, they have to do what they have to do to survive for their children. That goes not only for Roma that goes for black, yellow, red, and white.

You put anybody in poverty and often the result is criminality; it is surviving mode. If you see Gypsies, or, quote, "Roma" people, that are educated, have schooling – they live like everybody else.

Ronald Lee. Ron has had several years experience at the front line of helping newcomer Roma refugees to Canada. As a founding and current member of the Toronto Roma Community Centre, he is directly involved with both national and international political and social issues affecting the Romani people. Ron discusses how the discriminatory educational background of Romani children from European countries is rooted in a fear that they bring forward with them as newcomers to Canada. He explains that considerable efforts are being made within schools to help these children and educators adjust, but explains that trust needs to be developed to help them overcome their fears. The best way to establish trust and reach the Roma, Ron asserts, is through music. Like other Roma cultural experts and educators, Ron also laments the fact that many Roma children do not have knowledge of their history and only know the negative stereotypes that have been generated about their culture. It would therefore be important to teach Roma children about their history and culture so they can first dispel discriminatory attitudes that are projected upon them and then they will be in a better position to share their culture with others from a position of pride and self-esteem

In his opinion, Ron says the schools in the Hamilton area are doing their best to integrate Roma children. Anna Polokova, a Roma refugee now living in Hamilton, who was one of the directors of "Radio Romski" in the Czech Republic, along with her son have been working with Ron in the schools as translators and music teachers to help Roma children with their transition into Canadian education.

Susan Heagy. In Susan's multicultural classroom, Roma students face many of the same difficulties as other refugee children who have come from challenged educational backgrounds. Many have come from war-torn countries and endured unimaginable situations of discrimination and persecution. Placed together in a classroom, and coming from very diverse cultures, the dynamics amongst the students can present challenges not only to teaching, but also with regards to students interacting with each other. Susan relies on her knowledge of cultural identities and their similarities to help the students gain an understanding of each other and to see that they are more alike than different. She must also address some negative stereotyped attitudes toward other cultures that some of her students have adopted from their parents. These types of cultural negotiations take place in an ongoing dialogue within the classroom when situations arise.

When I asked Susan how learning about Romani arts and culture could be used to teach children to respect each other and not discriminate, she discussed how children build a sense of empathy when they recognize commonalities. She says they adopt the attitude of, "I don't understand that person but they're worth knowing." She has come to see that the class is very protective of each other and when a new child comes into school the whole class will be warm and welcoming. They will find somebody who speaks the first language of that new student, hold their hand and offer words of comfort.

When further asked what she thought children can learn from gaining an understanding of their own, and others' arts and culture, Susan explained that what children wear, such as jewellery and henna designs on their hands gave rise to feelings of connection. They notice these similarities. Believing that prejudices are rooted in fear,

Susan has found that when children see how much they are alike through learning about each other's culture and traditions, then prejudices begin to disappear and students start to value people for who they are as human beings. They think to themselves: "Do I like you as a person?" Susan reads to her students about how we are all alike and once that is established they are able to discuss ways in which they differ. They talk about each other's culture, and traditions such as whether or not they celebrate Christmas. Students are not afraid to discuss religious traditions and learn interesting things such as: some Muslims put up Christmas trees and that there are different branches of Muslims. Susan says it delights her as a teacher to be able to learn every day. Imagine hearing, for example, that a student's religion is partly Christian, and partly Muslim. In classroom discussions they are able to talk about things such as "what does it mean to fight for a just cause?" and what is a "just cause?" They also discuss aspects of culture such as wearing the burqa. Susan approaches controversial topics non-judgementally but expresses mainstream Canadian values through opinions such as, "I don't care if you wear a burqa but it must be your choice." Susan explained that the children are very clear about what their cultural expectations are in some situations. One child responded, "Oh, if we didn't wear the burqa, we were taken out and shot." These candid discussions address pressing issues for these children; Susan does not avoid such topics as taboo. These types of conversations create empathy and understanding within the classroom. In Susan's class, in particular, many of the children are victims of war; others like the Roma are victims of prejudice that at times is expressed through threats and physical abuse.

Susan made an interesting comment on what she viewed as Roma children having a general lack of prejudice toward other cultures. The children who attend the school live

in a district called Flemingdon Park, an area with a reputation for violence, especially at night. It isn't uncommon for children to come to school with blood on them, "...there's blood in the elevators with fights...gangs...there's a lot of...culture wars; it's a lot of disenfranchised youth...but they [the Roma] don't seem to have any prejudice against any other culture...I haven't seen that, ever...they just seem to be different within themselves." By this last point, Susan means that the only ill will Roma students seem to show is amongst different groups of Roma such as between the Czech Roma, the Hungarian Roma, or the Slovak Roma [this has also been acknowledged by some of the Roma people I interviewed]. However, as we learned earlier, the Tibetans may be an exception.

Tamas Banyá. While Tamas does not specifically discuss learning Roma arts and culture in schools as a way to dispel discrimination, he offered two statements that reflect discrimination, and the need for sharing culture. The first sets the stage for the negative attitudes that many European Roma are subjected to, and the second talks about how dance and music reach out to people and celebrate the wonderful "Gypsy" culture:

Those countries [East-Central Europe], want to push back the Roma ethnics. They don't want Roma people to be smart. They don't want Roma people to learn, high school or university. They don't care about Roma. They don't care about any kind of Gypsy people, or Gypsy population; sometimes they say they hate Gypsy people.

Dance and music saves the culture. If a little bit of language is forgotten that's okay, but the bands and the music are the best arts to show people who we are, and where we're from. Gypsy music reaches many people and it has many different colours.

Tamas is passionate about music and has seen first-hand how it brings people together and reflects the magnificence of a culture. While he does not outright state that involvement with the arts will dispel discrimination and oppression, he does indicate that

through music and dance, you can reach people and show the positive aspects of who you are.

Connecting to the Research

In order to consider how to integrate Roma arts and culture into a curriculum, it is important to recognize the need for educating Romani children about their heritage, to consult the research cited on multicultural [art] education, and to look to community arts models as well as other formats for connecting children to their culture. The interview participants were unanimous in their urgency for the need to dispel the discriminatory attitudes and misconceptions that prevail toward the Romani people. They also stressed the importance for Roma children to have knowledge of their history and culture, and for this to be shared with others so we can all have a greater understanding of who the Roma are, dispelling negative stereotypes that seem so pervasive.

The Roma Curriculum was a successful project about Romani history and culture that both Roma and non-Roma students studied in Toronto. It was delivered from a social justice standpoint that focused on *The Rights of the Child*, rights that have been and continue to be denied for the Roma. A photographic timeline was used to illustrate many of these aspects; Ron Lee Romani presented music, stories, and folktales, while Lynn Hutchinson Lee worked with children and teachers on art projects and murals, enabling children to show what they had learned. In my opinion, the Roma Curriculum represents ‘best practice’ in arts-based, multicultural education. Drawing upon Roma artists and cultural experts, the social justice emphasis of the curriculum was both empowering for Roma students, and enlightening for non-Roma students and educators. The Toronto District School Board should be commended for developing and implementing such an

exemplary curriculum. However, it is unfortunate that after such time and effort was put into the development of this curriculum, it now sits in a closet. I am not sure why this is, as it was promoted at TDSB conference on Roma education that I attended in March 2011; Gina urges teachers to consider using it in their classrooms. Sadly, the murals have also been destroyed.

According to Anna Kirova in her report on multicultural education, a social justice position is the optional focus for multicultural education. In Graeme Chalmers' reassessment of his position on multicultural education in response to the criticism from the Ohio State University group, he agreed that educators should be taking a more serious look at issues such as how different cultures are managing in the face of hegemonic tendencies of dominant cultures rather than addressing multiculturalism in a celebratory, or 'piñata curriculum' approach that just highlights the more pleasing aspects of a culture such as celebrations and the arts, that tend to view different cultures as the "other." According to Edward Said, when culture is looked at as the "other," it creates a tone of seeing that culture as being inferior. I believe this is even more specific to a culture that is a socially marginalized group. According to critical theorists, we should be looking to work *with* or alongside oppressed cultures to help change the circumstances that created their oppressive situation. In the case of the Roma, creating an awareness of the human rights violations they have suffered should inspire all people to work toward changing those tragic conditions. A social justice position does not promote the allure of Gypsy romanticism and cultural exoticizing.

School districts often lack the funds or resources to fully address the needs of the diverse cultural groups within their jurisdiction. This is where community arts programs

can help and they are often developed in response to the needs of a particular area that has a strong cultural component such as in the Parkdale, and Flemingdon Park areas of Toronto that together possibly have the largest Roma refugee population in Canada.

The effects of community arts programs in making transformational changes both within individuals and communities have been well documented. In the study cited in the literature review on *The Transformative Power of Community Arts* (2006), the research states that positive changes do occur when people have the opportunity to access their culture. Projects from across the United States were evaluated and the positive changes that occurred in the lives of those involved were documented. These projects involved community members generally living in poverty. The programs were accessible and they served to educate community members about inequalities in social systems: raising awareness about social issues and helping the community to become involved in implementing positive changes to these systems. While most of these projects were not specifically for children, they were involved in the programs. For Roma children, where resources for accessing their culture cannot be provided by school districts, it would be ideal to have arts-based community programs in which they could participate. Gina had a small program operating in the Parkdale area of Toronto that was very successful. Several children attended the program and their parents often accompanied them and helped out.

Another project model that could be adapted within the community or possibly schools to help Roma students to access their history and culture is *Projeto Axé*. This program described in the literature review was highly successful in working with street children in Brazil, and is now being implemented in other countries such as Uganda that are struggling to raise children out of abject poverty. The focus of this program is

education through the arts (*Projeto Axé*, 2010). The success of *Projeto Axé* is due to an exemplary arts-program that has been built upon critical pedagogy and Freirean principles (Rossatto, 2002). The street education program of *Projeto Axé* involves:

[A]rt, aesthetics, play, and the pleasures of cultural creativity...to attract children and adolescents to the program and to provoke them to think critically about society and take actions to transform their place in it...art and culture are used not as a means to educate marginalized youth, but as education itself. (Arney, 2007, p. 81)

The focus is on connecting the arts with the children's cultural background, and giving them the opportunity and insight to recognize that culture is their birthright and not just reserved for the elite.

Jan Sajko's art program for Romani children in Jarovnice, Slovakia is another testimony of how the arts can transform lives. By connecting Romani children with the music, stories, and insights into their own culture, as well as drawing upon their own life experiences, it allowed them to explore and express their creative potentials. While only a few Roma children in his community were able to go beyond the circumstances that marginalized their lives, several did benefit personally by gaining confidence and self-esteem, and feeling a sense of pride in their art and culture.

New Findings

In this section, I have brought forward important information about the education of Roma children that was not specifically addressed in the research questions. This new knowledge provides significant insights into best practices for engaging Roma children with learning. While some of the information tied in with the interview questions, and may seem to be common understandings within education, they are distinctly relevant for Romani children in the schools. The most significant findings extracted from the research

are, (a) the importance of developing a personal connection with the teacher, (b) establishing a sense of trust, (c) the need for parental involvement in the child's education, (d) first language acquisition, (e) the effects of refugee status on education, (f) the importance of cultural preservation, (g) and the need for integration. It is important to note that while these "new findings" emerged from the case study, with the exception of (a), these issues are not unique to Roma students. Most if not all refugee and immigrant communities in Canada and elsewhere express many of these issues (Kaprielian-Churchill, 1996; McBrien, 2005; Nabavi, 2011; Yoshani, 2013).

Personal Connection with the Teacher

Susan Heagy discussed how the Roma students, more than others she works with, seem to need to make a personal connection with a teacher. She says that if they make a personal connection with you they will work hard for you. She says most children would just sit and comply, but Roma students appear to have a greater motivation to see you as a human being. Once you've made that personal connection, they tend to be very willing to engage with learning. Even Roma students with absentee issues will be almost in tears that they haven't seen you for a couple of days. Susan explains that it is very important for her and presumably for other teachers to find a way to connect with Roma students on a personal level. Once you establish that connection, "it's like a flower opening up." She says that this can be difficult sometimes if their life experiences have given them cause to greatly mistrust people, especially teachers.

Gina also believes that a personal connection with the teacher is essential for Roma students to engage with learning. She says that the teacher is going to make a massive difference in the child's perspective of school; the way a teacher builds a

relationship with those students is hugely important. "When Roma students have an educator who is genuinely interested in them and wanting to see them thrive and care and grow they will respond really positively to it." She explains that when a teacher can encourage Roma students to connect their own personal lives with the classroom it will be what keeps them engaged with learning and coming back to class. She also says that Roma children love conversation more than just being handed work sheets. They really enjoy talking about their interests such as their favourite singers and bands. Most Roma students often did not get any kind of positive education like this in European schools.

Micheal revealed that if he were an educator, he would want to get to his students' level so he could communicate with them and understand what is going on in their heads. He said that is what his favourite teacher did with him and it helped him to want to connect with learning. It may even help Roma children understand that they can take charge of their own learning.

Trust

Ron emphasizes that trust is essential for Roma students to engage with learning. If they feel the same sort of fear and mistrust with education they had in Europe they will be afraid to participate. Trusting the teacher will help them to overcome this and help them enjoy their school experience, enabling them to open up and learn. Gina also stated that when a teacher is able to build some trust with Roma students they become open and inviting and loving, in a very beautiful way. Similarly, Susan said she had a lot of Roma students that had been through very difficult and traumatizing situations in their lives yet if they can come to trust you as their teacher they will become full of life and energy and love. She regards this as essential in their willingness to open their heart, and

experiencing happiness about being in your class and learning. Lastly, Tamas stated that Roma children are often quite surprised when they come to Canada and learn they can trust their teachers. They are so happy.

Parental Involvement

One of the most important factors contributing to the educational success of Roma students is the involvement of their parents. Most Roma families are very community oriented. It is a strong cultural trait and when they feel a sense of belonging they often become actively involved and supportive of their children's participation in school. Gina says that if there is any opportunity for mothers to sit in on a class once in a while, it could make a big difference. She says it is like a bridge. What she has done in teaching a class for newcomer Roma children is always make sure the door is open for their mothers or other family members to come and observe the class.

Susan sees a direct correlation between Roma students' engagement with learning and their parents' involvement with and attitude toward education. "The Roma students I have now are significantly better than previous students and it's because of their parents' attitudes... this is a much more engaged group and it has to do with their parents." She says that parents' belief in the value of education seems to be the biggest factor in their children's success with school. She also noted that her current Roma students have not missed a day at school unless they have been to a doctor. Susan attributes this exemplary attendance to their parents being "totally on board".

Lynn claims that parental inclusion in the school environment is key because Romani families are traditionally very close-knit, and if the parents feel excluded, they're not inclined to feel comfortable having their children involved. She says that in Europe,

parents are generally not welcomed or shown support. When they come to Canada they naturally are very hesitant about sending their kids to school here. Lynn says that in some TDSB schools there are programs that directly involve the parents. One TDSB school even held an international Romani day celebration involving the entire school and the parents. She explains that with these types of programs and events, parents are beginning to understand that there is a place where their children can do academic learning in a welcoming environment. Because a lot of Roma have been traditionally excluded from the educational system, there is a myth that Romani children are not good learners. “Given the opportunities, yes they are good learners and excel like every other kid.” Lynn points out that there has to be groundwork laid for supporting parents.

Tamas’ view is that you first have to change the parents. Many refugee parents experienced discrimination in their own education or schools their children attended prior to coming to Canada; they need to think differently about Canadian schools and let their children know that they can do anything here because people in Canada “don’t care if you’re Roma.” The level of prejudice they experienced in European countries does not exist toward them in Canada and Roma students won’t be held back in their education because they are Roma. He says parents set the example for their children.

First Language Acquisition

First language acquisition is an important factor in being able to learn in a second language. There is a serious problem when children do not even know their own language; they will naturally have great difficulty expressing themselves in a verbal or written manner in any language. Lynn states that many newcomer Roma children arrive in Canada without literacy skills. She says that they have not learned to read and write in

the language of their country, and they very well may not have learned much of their own native language.

Micheal believes that the language barrier is significant and it concerns him. The large groups of Roma refugees coming here from Hungary, Slovakia, and Romania find the language barrier to be the biggest problem. Micheal explains that when a child of 9 or 10 years old comes to Canada, by the time they learn English, they're already two years behind in school. He says they are going to be playing catch up, and will suffer feelings of embarrassment and inferiority rather than being at the same educational level as their peers who are say in grade seven, they will be learning with children at the grade four level. He also says that even though they may be in ESL classes and learning the language, it still creates a communication gap with the teacher who is teaching them in English.

Susan constantly works with children who do not know English, and many do not even know their mother tongue. Some children have been so displaced that they have only learned bits and pieces of several languages and are not proficient in one specific language. Other children in her class are fluent in several languages having learned on their own from listening to others or watching television shows in the language of different countries in which they lived. Susan finds that children who lack proficiency in one particular language, generally their mother tongue, have the most difficulty with self-expression. It is a very challenging situation for a teacher when a class is comprised of children who speak several different languages, especially beginning in September, with limited or no English. Susan tries to work around language issues by using art to communicate with children. She says this is the only way she can teach.

Refugee Status

Staying in the country is an issue that greatly affects the educational success of Romani children. Much stress and uncertainty surrounds a tenuous refugee claim, particularly for those children who have had to live in retention centres, or are subjected to the stringent political measures against Roma refugees that are now being implemented by the Canadian immigration system that fails to acknowledge the grave dangers many Roma face if forced to return to their home countries (Levine-Rasky et al., 2014). This creates an incredible amount of stress, feelings of hopelessness, and a sense of non-attachment which results in many Roma children not being able to establish any connection with or commitment to school. Gina has been at the forefront of issues surrounding Roma refugees in Canada and has seen first-hand how the uncertain status of Roma refugee claims negatively impacts their ability to engage with school. Consequently much of her advocacy work involves addressing political situations both on a national and international level that affect the ability of Romani people to enter and remain in Canada.

In his capacity as President of the RCC, Micheal works extensively to help newcomer Roma families sift through the mounds of complicated paperwork involved in refugee claims. He has told me that the RCC does their best with the help of volunteer lawyers and translators in helping families to fill out their claims properly and understand the immigration process. As the laws change and become more stringent the stress on families is intensified and this inevitably impacts the children attending school. Roma who are refugees in Canada live in constant fear of being sent back to their countries of origin. Because they do not feel as though they belong or will be able to stay

in Canada, or have much faith in educational systems, many Roma parents do not see the point in sending their children to school. The uncertain status of Roma refugee claims affects not only those Roma waiting for their claims to be processed, but the Roma community at large. In his paper, *Migration of Hungarian Roma to Canada (and back)*, Paul St. Clair states,

In general, the high rejection of their refugee claims led the Roma to focus on short-term goals, such as saving as much money as possible, minimal attendance of ESL and other educational or upgrading opportunities. It also led to many instances of depression and neglect of future focus, which included lack of attention to their children's future. This negativity affected the whole community, including even those adults and children who already obtained refugee status. (St. Clair, 2007, p. 15)

Ron Lee (along with Paul St. Clair) was one of the original founders of the Toronto Roma Community Centre. He has dealt with refugee claims for years and is well aware of the damaging effects the refugee process can have on the well being of families, and consequently their children's education. Ron has gone so far as to recommend that due to the uncertainty of refugee claimant processing, a teacher within a Roma-controlled school system should be appointed to educate children until their immigration status has been decided (Walsh et al., 2011). Former Immigration Minister Jason Kenny's changing immigration policies have resulted in a shortened time period for processing and now frequently rejecting Roma refugee claims. It is easy to understand the resulting "what's the point" attitude toward school enrolment that is growing amongst Roma newcomers.

Often Roma refugee families are so disheartened and anxiously waiting for their claims to be processed that it seems futile to bother sending their children to school where they will have to struggle with the challenges of learning in an unfamiliar language.

Lugzi's experiences as a Roma refugee in both Bosnia and Canada reveal how it affected his education. Lugzi is a (Geneva) Convention refugee, supported to come to Canada from a refugee camp in war torn Bosnia. He is not subjected to the same sort of anxiety as other refugees who come to the country unsponsored, but it has meant that he has had to move several times. He was first settled in Newfoundland, then Toronto, and finally the family was moved to a rural area near St. Catharine's. While refugees are common in Newfoundland and Toronto, they are not in the rural area where he currently lives and consequently he does not have access to educational programs such as LEAP or ESL classes; Lugzi is really struggling with learning and has attendance issues. At times he also feels the negative effects of a school and community unfamiliar with "outsiders".

Susan described how the traumatic situations most refugees come from interfere with their learning. She said many are dealing with horrific events that happened in their lives and many are struggling with self-esteem issues, emotional trauma, and possibly an extended state of post-traumatic shock. Lynn also says that refugee children have other difficulties and challenges that we may not know about. When you are so full of despair, as these children are, anything that may cause fear can potentially result in a volatile reaction. She also describes how the legalities of coming to Canada as a refugee pose issues. If they are able to legally and medically document their claims and their reasons for coming here, and they are fortunate to get expert legal representation, it means their children have more of a chance of making a home here. But many refugees do not have enough English skills to understand the refugee system and find it increasingly difficult to navigate that complex system. Currently, the Canadian government is targeting Roma refugees as suspect claimants and the unsettling effect is exacting an emotional toll on the

well being of Roma families. It is reminiscent of the persecution and discrimination they faced in Europe. “Roma parents and service providers asserted that the stress associated with their uncertain status in Canada affected their children and contributed to difficulties they experienced within the educational system” (Walsh et al., 2011, p. 605).

Until recently, the history of Roma immigration to Canada, for the most part, has been marked by acceptance and fairness. As the economic situation in Europe worsens, the Roma are increasingly targeted as contributing to the financial problems of some countries and many Roma are now facing the drastic measures of economic reform resulting in increased expulsion, forced migration, violation of human rights, and greater persecution (Gocken, 2011; New Europe Online, 2009). Many European countries are no longer safe places for the Roma and those fortunate enough to gather sufficient resources to flee are doing so in increasing numbers and with greater urgency. Unfortunately, Jason Kenny, who was the Canadian Minister for Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism from October 30, 2008, until July 15, 2013, failed to acknowledge the gravity of the situation for the Roma and their reasons for fleeing to Canada. Kenny believed that most Roma refugee claims were “bogus” (Balaban, 2012; Levine-Rasky et al., 2014).

It appears as though Bill C-31 (2012) that Kenny urgently pushed through parliament is linked to negative attitudes against the Roma within the Ministry of Immigration (Boesveld, 2012; Levine-Rasky et al.). Due to the proposed new changes in Canadian immigration laws, many Roma families who are in Canada waiting for their claims to be processed feel it is unlikely that they will be allowed to remain in the country. This uncertainty is having a detrimental effect on the educational opportunities

of Roma refugee children in Canada. A recent newspaper article, *Parkdale Schools Mourn the Loss of Deported Roma Students*, confirms that many Roma families have been sent back to their home countries. “Over the past 18 months, especially since Canada tightened up its refugee rules last December, hundreds of Toronto’s Roma families have been deported or given up and gone back” (Brown, 2013, para. 17).

Cultural Preservation

Having a sense of one’s cultural heritage is important for the development of self-esteem and identity. Many Roma children from East-Central Europe have lived in situations of such dire poverty that they have not been able to participate in any cultural experiences, nor have they been taught about the rich history of the Roma. The resulting cultural erosion seems to exacerbate a sense of hopelessness and disengagement with life.

As an educator, Gina says that she looks at Roma children the same way she looks at other children from lower socio-economic levels in Toronto that are also caught up in a cycle of poverty. Children from families that have limited access to educational and cultural opportunities are often children at risk. Gina points out that many of the Roma families and children coming from Europe have been denied an opportunity to learn about their histories. In Canadian schools where students take pride in sharing their culture and their background with other students, they find their identity,

Lynn also compares the situation for newcomer Roma children in Canada with at risk students. She says:

...if we look at children who have been disenfranchised, marginalized, pushed to the edges, whose basic human rights were not respected, you'll see the same kind of school difficulties in the Roma population and any other population. I don't think it's specific to Roma. People who have access to their culture are going to participate in that culture.

Lynn gives an example of how aboriginal children in Canada gain a stronger sense of identity if they have had exposure to their own culture and participated in its cultural practices. She adds, if you take peoples' language away from them, or you deny them access to jobs and careers, or withhold quality educational opportunities, they are separated from participating in society. You cause them to feel they're less than human. And if this systematic isolation continues from generation to generation, essentially you've just got people who don't know who they are or where they're from. They are poor, disenfranchised, and without a culture. She believes that as long as you have a culture, you can somehow survive and manage. Likewise, Micheal also believes that lack of exposure to their own culture is part of the problem with newcomer Roma children coming to Canada. As culture fades away, they are feeling completely lost. All they know about their culture are the negative stereotypes the media presents.

Ron concurs. Roma children today are taught nothing of their history and who they are. All they receive is negative input about the Roma. Previous generations grew up in a culture where they were proud to be Roma, they had skills that enabled them to earn a living; they took pride in being Roma, and they passed on wisdom. He says this is very different from modern Roma.

Integration

Integration is essential for communication with others. Sharing ones culture and being in a situation where you can interact with, and understand people from cultures other than your own, helps to dispel stereotypes and negative, often inaccurate preconceived notions. Students get to know each other and can begin to identify with the similarities they share. Without integration, the same sort of problems as those found in

EU schools where Roma are segregated will be perpetuated. In her work with Romani students within the Toronto School District, Gina has noticed that students in refugee families who belonged to traditional groups of Roma in EU countries have been the most marginalized from mainstream society. They have not had many opportunities for integration. Integration means exposure to modern society, diverse cultures, and interactions with other children within the schools. Gina states that lack of integration within the schools can be a problem in Canada as well when children remain as a cultural group in an ESL or LEAP class. She says many Roma students are in the same class for years without making any progress and they're feeling isolated and segregated. Gina says they are having more positive experiences in the TDSB schools with younger children because they have more integration with other students that are non-Roma, whereas in the high school, they often don't have any of those shared classes with non-Roma students. Gina stated that some Roma students in integrated classes have only been here for a couple of years, and are speaking English well. Those students appear to do much better than those who have been segregated. She thinks those integrated students are breaking down a lot of the stereotypes about Roma as opposed to the kids that remain in ESL and LEAP classes who are feeling segregated, alienated and targeted as they were in some EU schools.

The new findings brought forward in the research are very important considerations for best practices in education for Roma refugee children in Canada, and Roma children internationally. While some of these findings such as developing a personal connection with the teacher, the effects of refugee status on education, the importance of cultural preservation, and the need for integration, are addressed within the

research and the case study questions, other aspects such as establishing a sense of trust, the need for parental involvement in the child's education, and first language acquisition, warrant further research.

As I come to the completion of chapter five and the interpretive analysis of the case study interviews, there are many considerations that I would like to discuss as I wrap up nearly four years of work and study into my concluding chapter. Chapter six is therefore a reflection on my research study, contributing what I believe is important information significant to the field of multicultural education.



Mummy, Alexandra Kalejova. Jan Sajko, (no date). From: <http://s191.photobucket.com/user/janosajko/media/Press%20-%20Pictures%20of%20students/P1230050.jpg.html?sort=6&o=17>

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The Roma children referred to in much of this study are those children from European Union countries coming to Canada with their families to flee the marginalizing circumstances that limit their educational and other opportunities in life. The purpose of this study was twofold: first to access and generate important data providing insights into issues that affect the educational opportunities for marginalized Roma children, and second, to analyze and interpret this data in an effort to point toward arts-based programs as best practices in education for these children to access and engage with learning. In pursuit of this purpose, the research questions were introduced in Chapter 1, a review of the relevant literature framed the study's significance in Chapter 2, Chapter 3 described the methods for data collection and analysis, Chapter 4 presented the interviews, and Chapter 5 provided an interpretive discussion of the findings. This chapter presents a) a summary of the conclusions drawn from the research findings, b) a review of the limitations of the study, c) implications for educators, d) how this study contributes to new knowledge in the field of education, and e) suggestions on directions for future research.

Summary of the Research

What is distinctly problematic for Roma children in traditional school settings?

For many Roma children, the difficulty with traditional school settings is often due to the structured, authoritarian practices, and the inherent discrimination that has been common in many European Union schools. Culturally, Roma children are generally involved with and share in all aspects of community life. The structured settings that

restrict movement and expression are difficult for many Roma students. Within these confining situations they can be viewed as having behaviour problems. Many Roma students do not perform well in an atmosphere of high structure that is "hands off." Culturally, they are used to being included in "grown up" activities and being able to participate in the community rather than being protected "as children." Traditional teacher-centered rote learning methods do not work with most Roma children; they fare much better when provided with differentiated learning opportunities that address multiple intelligences. Further, they should also be able to access information on their cultural heritage and history, which can be best accessed through arts-based programs that are naturally engaging to many Roma students. Being allowed to learn in their first language is also really important but the majority of Roma children do not have this opportunity. In the EU and Canada, Roma children are often expected/required to learn the language of the nation often before they even have knowledge of their mother tongue.

In some Canadian schools, traditional ways of dealing with language issues by placing Roma refugee children together in ESL classes can actually become another form of segregation and be reflective of what happened to them in EU schools. If Roma students remain in ESL classes too long, not only do they run the risk of not advancing with new learning, but they are segregated from other students especially in the situation where there is a large number of Roma students together in ESL classes. It is important that Roma refugee children be given the opportunity to learn alongside their peers, and to be carefully monitored for language acquisition in situations that are challenging, yet supporting of language development; however it is important that they learn first in their

mother tongue, then in English. Arts-based practices are an engaging way for Roma children to learn a second language.

Many Roma children have also been exposed to severe discriminatory situations within schools where segregation and labelling of learning disabilities is common practice. Roma refugee children who come to Canada may feel traumatized by what happened to them in traditional EU schools, and may shut down as a result. Therefore, issues of trust and rapport are important aspects of connecting Roma children with learning, helping them to open up and feel more confident about self-expression. Visual arts practices along with other arts-based learning practices are ways for these children to access their experiences and feelings; these may be negative experiences and feelings from their past or new ones from their present situation. However, if they have a means to express them, it offers teachers a way to connect with Roma students and build a trusting rapport.

How can the arts and art education in particular engage marginalized Roma children with learning?

An education that is richly infused with the arts will give Roma children the opportunity to engage with learning that is authentic, accessible, and culturally relevant. Arts and culture can teach the positive things about a culture and can focus on social justice issues, countering the negative stereotypes often promoted through the media. As stated in the literature review, practices of art education that focus on the understanding of visual culture helps students learn how to decode the values and ideas that are imbedded in popular culture. Decoding these messages, critical theorists such as Paulo

Freire suggest, is imperative for the oppressed to be able to name the circumstances that marginalize their lives.

Art helps us to know the world and ourselves. Viewing and responding to art is holistic in that it involves multiple ways of knowing, starting with perception and leading to critical analysis that draws upon ones' knowledge of the world. Through direct encounters with art, students can begin to understand the social forces that affect their lives. From a critical theory perspective, in responding to, as well as creating art, students are encouraged to think critically about the world and understand their lives in the context of it; through this engagement, meaningful and transformative learning experiences can take place. Within education, addressing issues of oppression and discrimination through experiences with art can build toward new ways of seeing and thinking that have the potential to create positive change in people's lives. This is the goal of education in both critical theory and multiculturalism that supports global citizenship.

For Roma refugee children in Canadian schools, arts-based education is an accessible way for them to connect learning with their cultural ways of knowing without the struggles of cultural pluralism. Learning through the arts provides students with the opportunity to understand who they are and how other people experience the world; they can begin to recognize cultural identity as social identity. Being able to recognize that cultural ties influence, but do not necessarily define or limit their lives in contemporary society, will teach children that they can move beyond cultural pluralism and the complexity of a dual identity: Roma-Canadian, into understanding that we all have a heritage that we are connected with, but we are all also part of a larger social society.

Another aspect of learning through the arts that is particularly relevant for Roma children is the power of music to make a connection with them. An education program that provides musical experiences for Roma children will likely be very engaging, particularly for younger children and help them to feel more open and less fearful of learning. Music is its own “language,” one that is highly valued in Roma communities.

Visual art, drama, music and other arts practices help cut through barriers to learning. One such barrier cited by almost all of the interview participants is that language issues pose significant problems to the education of Roma refugee children. As many have a limited knowledge of English, or even their mother tongue, language difficulties create a serious impediment to learning. A heavy reliance on verbal and written delivery of the curriculum is problematic to those children who struggle to learn in a second (or third) language. An over-emphasis on verbal learning puts these children at risk; it leads to self-esteem issues and feelings of inferiority. Consequently, children are less likely to embrace traditional modes of instruction. Learning through the arts engages multiple intelligences and affect; engaging one’s aesthetic sensibilities and pleasurable emotions provides greater motivation for learning in general. As stated in the literature review, learning through the arts can also promote transmediation which occurs through transfers that take place amongst the sign symbols of written language, music, art, drama, and mathematics. Such an example would be a graphic novel where pictures and words support each other to advance a dramatic storyline.

How can Romani arts and culture be integrated into a curriculum that works to dispel discrimination and oppression of marginalized Roma children?

The interview participants were unanimous in their urgent call to dispel the discriminatory attitudes and misconceptions that prevail toward the Romani people. They also stressed the importance of Roma children gaining knowledge of their history, culture, and language and for this to be shared with others so that they can have a greater understanding and appreciation of the Roma. In order to consider how to integrate Roma arts and culture into a curriculum, it is important to recognize the need for educating Romani children about their heritage, to address research findings on best practices in multicultural education, and to look to community arts models as well as other formats for connecting children to their culture.

The Roma Curriculum in the Toronto Public School system was a successful project about Roma history and culture, taught to both Roma and non-Roma students. It was delivered from a social justice standpoint that focused on the rights of the child, rights that historically have been and continue to be violated. In my opinion, the Roma Curriculum represents best practices in arts-based, multicultural education. Drawing upon Roma artists and cultural experts, the social justice stance of the curriculum was both empowering for Roma students, and enlightening for non-Roma students and educators. In the case of the Roma, creating an awareness of the human rights violations they have suffered should inspire all people to work toward changing those situations. Coming from this position, it bypasses the allure of Gypsy romanticism and cultural exoticizing.

School districts often do not have the funds or resources to fully address the needs of the diverse cultural groups within their jurisdiction, though they should address areas

of greatest need. Community arts programs can help fill the gap. Community arts programs can work towards transformational changes for individuals and for communities. Positive changes occur when people have the opportunity to access their culture, particularly those living in poverty. If programs are accessible and work to educate community members about inequalities in social systems, raising their awareness about injustices, citizens with a social conscience can become involved in implementing positive changes to these systems. A project model that could be adapted within the community or possibly schools to help Roma students access their history and culture, is *Projeto Axé*, which has helped to lift children from poverty through education accessed through the arts. The success of *Projeto Axé* is due to an exemplary arts program built upon critical pedagogy and Freirean principles that encourage marginalized children to think critically about society and take action to transform their place in it. The focus is on connecting the arts with the children's cultural backgrounds, and giving them the opportunity to recognize that culture is their birthright.

Jan Sajko's art program for Roma children in Jarovnice, Slovakia is also another example of how the arts, and visual art specifically, can help to transform the lives of marginalized children. Giving children the opportunity to explore their culture and creative potentials through art making, and providing them with the experience of exhibiting their work internationally, instilled a great sense of confidence and self-esteem in many of his students. It also exposed them to other cultures and allowed them insights into other ways of living for both Roma and non-Roma.

Limitations of the Study

I am grateful for the incredible help provided by Gina Csanyi-Robah, of the Toronto Roma Community Centre in facilitating my research study. Without her support it would have been impossible to carry out this specific research study. While initially I thought it would have been ideal to do my research in Kosovo where I was first introduced to some of the educational issues for Roma children, in retrospect, conducting my research within Canada provided a broader scope as it involved both international and national insights.

The members of the RCC who agreed to be interviewed were very gracious in offering their time and sharing their perspectives on Roma education. These perspectives were based on personal experiences, knowledge, and an understanding of Roma culture that could only be provided by an insider. I have deep gratitude for the trust that the interview participants placed in me as they shared their stories. This trust however, required establishing relationships of mutual respect, and in doing so, also created a bond of friendship with several participants. It also places a great responsibility on my shoulders in that I cannot simply finish my study, write my dissertation, and close the book on this experience. I now have an obligation to follow through with taking the knowledge I have gained and using this to better the lives of Roma children so they in turn can work towards overturning the prejudices and persecution that have long prevailed against the Roma.

In reflecting back on the interviews, as someone new to conducting this type of research, I can see where my inexperience posed limitations on my study. A consequence of my inexperience was maintaining a strong focus on the research questions. There were

times that I became so engrossed in aspects of the interviewees' experiences, that I was side-tracked and veered away from the research questions.

Another limitation due to inexperience was making assumptions that bordered on cultural stereotyping. I expected that the interview participants would all agree that arts-based programs would constitute best practice for all Roma children; I should have remained more open to comments that suggested otherwise. For example, Lugzi indicated he was more interested in sports programs. Following this as another component to engaging Roma children with learning may have provided valuable insights that were overlooked.

Another factor to consider is the artistic backgrounds of the interview participants. Of the four participants, three of them are practicing musicians, and one is an established visual artist. This may have created some bias towards arts-based learning, however it could also be reflective of the great influence the arts have in the lives of Roma people. Additionally, a consideration initially overlooked in the interview questions was a failure to make a distinction between refugee Roma children who are newcomers to Canada, and those who are generational Canadian citizens. There is a difference in the experiences and backgrounds of these two groups; the way culture is experienced, the approach to traditional values and customs, the types of discrimination and poverty, and lifestyles can be entirely different when comparing newcomer and Canadian born Roma families. The purpose of this study was to look at the educational issues that affect Roma children such as those in Kosovo, or those who are new to Canada that have experienced setbacks to their learning due to marginalization brought on by prejudice, discrimination, and poverty.

A further limitation to the study was that I only involved one classroom teacher who works with Romani children. While case studies often provide a representative sample of the field, studying a number of classrooms having Roma students could have provided greater scope to my study. Nevertheless, the particular class chosen was regarded by Gina Csanyi-Robah of the Roma Community Centre as exemplary. The limitation of not being able to directly observe children in the classroom could also be seen as problematic, however the Roma children in Susan's classroom were all newcomer refugees, and the vast knowledge and expertise provided by Susan Heagy's reflections offered important insights that few could replicate. I am truly grateful to Susan for her time and ongoing support of my research study.

Another consideration that limits my research is the fact that I am not Roma. While I am empathetic to the great injustices the Roma have suffered, and am passionate about wanting to bring about positive change, it is not my culture and I am considered an outsider. A limitation can at times be a benefit; in this case it afforded me the advantage of a level of objectivity. Also, interviewing mostly Romani people for this case study, the intent was to allow for their voices and stories to be heard. Within the Roma community, there is growing resentment towards people who study their culture, take up issues, write papers, earn a degree, and then walk away without looking back. To me this is a hegemonic act that further contributes to the oppression of the Roma and creates resentment toward outsiders and mistrust of their intentions. Being sensitive to this, the intent of my research has been to use the knowledge I have gained to better the lives of Roma children, and therefore I have a personal obligation to continue my work with Roma education beyond the writing of this dissertation. While I am not Roma and cannot

speak for them, I can encourage an education that offers Roma children the ability to speak for themselves; to learn about who they are – their history and Diaspora; and also to use this knowledge for personal transformation. An empowering educational experience can prepare these students for adolescent and adult roles of social activism that is so needed in order for the voices of the Romani people to be powerful and persuasive, overcoming the inevitability of their circumstances. The education offered to Roma and other children in Susan Heagy's class is laying the groundwork for social justice. This is the type of non-traditional, arts-integrated learning that engages Roma children, enabling them to experience success with education, build self-confidence and possibly become tomorrow's Romani leaders.

Implications for Educators

The findings in this study not only indicate that arts-based approaches to learning would help make education accessible and engaging for Roma children, but would also help Roma and non-Roma attain greater levels of acceptance and appreciation for one another's cultural experiences. The hope is to bring about the kind of environment within the school (and ultimately in communities beyond the school) that would lead Roma children to experience success in school and more harmonious interactions within mainstream society. It is very important to recognize aspects of the research study that reveal the integral support necessary for implementing effective arts education and integrative-arts approaches. These aspects take into account the special factors that are needed to engage marginalized Roma children: they involve the way teachers present arts education, the content of the lessons, and general conditions within which instruction takes place, the involvement of parents, the building of trust and authentic relationships

between teachers and students, and the integration of Roma with non-Roma students. To be clear, I am not suggesting that arts education, visual art experiences, or integrative art curricula alone are the answer to solving all the educational challenges of marginalized Roma children. However, I do argue that practices of art education within an arts-integrated curriculum are useful tools for engaging children with learning when positive experiences that foster imminently necessary cultural understanding and the building of trusting relationships are also encouraged.

Roma children have been subjected to rampant discrimination, negative stereotypes, and false perceptions. Many of these children come from situations of extreme prejudice and so are misunderstood, stereotyped and excluded from the opportunities in the societies (countries) where they currently reside. When a classroom teacher models respect and treats children with respect, they set the tone for a culturally sensitive classroom. Presenting art education through lesson content that engages children with the art of other cultures, through the making and sharing of personally expressive art, and through creating art in collaborative contexts, helps to develop attitudes of tolerance and more than that – appreciation for one’s own and other’s cultures. “Given the challenges of a diverse global civilization, the opportunities provided by art education to expand students’ cultural horizons can help to bridge a cultural or generational divide, deepen their comprehension of world history and events, and foster empathy and communication amongst diverse groups” (Thomas & Arnold, 2011, p. 103).

The teaching strategies that Susan Heagy uses with her students embody building trust and mutual respect through personal communication and sensitivity to students’ cultural backgrounds. Her approach is not a celebration of “the other” rather it is an

acknowledgment that students have diverse ways of learning, influenced by personal life experiences and cultural backgrounds. This differs from the “dance, dress, and dish” approach to multicultural education in that it is not a “display” of culture, rather it encourages an empathic understanding of each others’ cultural lives. The affective strategies of modeling and treating children with respect, along with effective arts-integration programs collectively help bring appreciation for cultural difference. The real benefits of both the LEAP and Roma Experience curricula were not narrowly measured by the academic success of those enrolled in the program, but also by the learning of tolerance among the non-Roma and among the Roma, and the learning of self-respect and confidence. Academic success is a by-product; children who feel valued are more likely to succeed academically than those who do not. Children without hope of a future see no point in investing in the future through education.

In order to develop a tone of understanding and acceptance within the classroom, it is important for educators to understand aspects of Romani culture. There were many cultural issues that came forward from the research. Gina stated that for many Roma children, attending school is like learning another culture. Roma children are so much a part of their community; they learn by being involved in a very hands-on way and are greatly involved in all aspects of daily life. They are not sheltered as *children* and told they cannot participate with the adults. When they get to school it is a totally different way they have to learn and they are unaccustomed to hearing “you can’t do that.”

Another cultural trait that can affect the education of Roma children is the sense of community that they experience. Parents are greatly involved in their children’s lives and it is critically important that they be able to feel welcome and accepted in schools.

This acceptance contributes to building a family support system as parents recognize that educators truly want to help their children. Often the parents have only their own negative experiences and cultural perspectives on education to rely on; they are often overjoyed to learn that schools can be a good place for their children. Many Roma families have lived such unsettled lives that they have difficulty looking to the future and planning; they are just trying to survive for today. This has an effect on education in that Roma parents and children are less likely to value something that does not contribute to their well being in the present moment. Education is a long-term commitment and the benefits are not always immediately apparent, particularly in terms of economics. These days a grade twelve education, while certainly worthwhile to attain, does not necessarily mean the graduate will get a job and earn money. Not even a four-year university degree assures a job with good pay. What must be emphasized for Roma and other marginalized children are the intrinsic benefits of an education. Being able to read and write are essential for everyday functioning, but it is also important to learn about the social, political, historical, economic, and cultural factors that shape the world in which we live. This is knowledge that gives people the opportunity to find their place in the world and create a vision for themselves of what is important to their lives within their communities. Attaining an education may provide hope for the future and bring about positive attitudes.

Another aspect of concern that emerges from the research is “cultural erosion”. This fear leads to a sense of hopelessness and disengagement with life and it is a direct result of poverty. Many Roma families, particularly in the EU are so incredibly poor that their daily lives consist of merely trying to survive. In his interview, Lugzi described his

experience prior to coming to Canada as a refugee. Like many impoverished Roma in the EU, Lugzi had to salvage through garbage and scrap heaps to find things to sell to earn money for food. When daily living is at such a primal stage of existence, there is no time, money, or energy to enjoy even simple cultural activities such as music and dance. Poverty greatly affects children's educational opportunities as well. Families cannot register their children for school because they do not have birth certificates due to having given birth at home; hospital births are expensive and therefore inaccessible. Many Roma families cannot buy basic school supplies, shoes, or decent clothes. Even in Canada refugee children struggle with the social stigma of hand me down clothing and living in run down, overcrowded homes. Cultural erosion also affects language. When children do not even know their own language they have difficulty understanding basic concepts and have even greater difficulty trying to translate learning from one unfamiliar language to another. They have great difficulty expressing themselves in a verbal or written manner, and this can set them far behind their peers in learning.

For Roma refugee children living in Canada, staying in the country is an issue that greatly affects education and cultural development. Tamas's interview revealed what it is like to be a Roma in Hungary and why Hungarian Roma would want to emigrate in search of a better life in Canada. Tamas also provided insights into how cultural erosion is creating a sense of apathy or a "so what" attitude in general among disenfranchised, newcomer Roma youth.

It is imperative that children who have suffered the effects of cultural erosion poverty, language setbacks, and discriminatory situations be given the opportunity to develop confidence not only in their ability to learn, but even more basically, confidence

in their worth and their abilities. Educational programs and settings that help students develop confidence by experiencing successes in their learning through ways that work for them are critical. Differentiated learning opportunities that address multiple intelligences are commonly accessed through arts-based programs. The LEAP and Roma curriculum programs are good examples of ways in which educational programs that include arts-integration, can benefit marginalized children and meet their needs as learners. However, these children also need to be able to know and tell teachers what is working for them educationally, rather than being told how they should learn, as is generally the structure in traditional learning models. Marginalized children such as the Roma need to be able to set goals and recognize that these goals are attainable. As Susan Heagy commented, teachers need to set the bar high for learning and not lower their expectations for these children. Marginalized children also need to know that it is okay to experience failure without being ridiculed or judged harshly for it. Teachers need to be aware of their own personal assumptions and biases towards students and acknowledge any conscious or deeply held prejudices they may be holding. This would be particularly relevant for teachers in EU countries where there is considerable prejudice against the Roma. However, in Canada just as in Europe, prejudices can impede the learning of Roma children through fear, mistrust, and discrimination.

Contributions to New Knowledge in the Field of Education

New and emerging research in the field of education is looking at the connection between socio-emotional and culturally responsive education (Daniels, Lauder, & Porter, 2009; Harrington & Pavel, 2013). The role of the arts in this emerging field is significant. I would suggest that the findings from my study contribute to this as a qualitative, case study

that draws upon authentic voice in educational research. The findings that were brought forward in the research identify important considerations for best practices in education for Roma refugee children in Canada and Roma children internationally. There are implications as well for other marginalized groups such as First Nations children. Some of the most significant findings extracted from the research are: (a) the importance of developing a personal connection with the teacher, (b) establishing a sense of trust, (c) the need for parental involvement in the child's education, (d) first language acquisition, (e) the effects of refugee status on education, (f) the importance of cultural knowledge, (g) and the need for integration. However, I think the most significant finding of this study points to what may not necessarily be new knowledge, but an affirmation of what needs to happen in education to make it accessible, meaningful, and relevant to children's lives – in teaching we need to not only engage the mind, but the heart as well.

The Dali Lama Centre for Peace and Education located in Vancouver, BC, is committed to educating the heart. The Dali Lama Centre is focused on "...providing a learning environment that cultivates mindfulness: the integration of mind, body, and spirit. It will encourage heightened awareness within our inner potential through diverse practices of art".¹⁸ The mission of the Dali Lama Centre is to educate the heart. Through such practices as *Mindfulness Education*, and *Social Emotional Intelligence and Learning*, the Centre is focused on fostering skills that develop compassion, acceptance, and tolerance in children in order to bring peace into the world. By teaching these skills that educate the heart, it is hoped that the conditions are set where children feel connected to others and have positive relations with them. This involves not only educators, but the community as a whole.

¹⁸ <http://dalailamacenter.org/about/mission>

In my own research, one of the findings pointed to the importance of relationships to the success of children's involvement with school. These relationships include building trust between Roma children and their teachers, Roma parents and the school, and Roma children with non-Roma children. Providing opportunities that foster the building of these important relationships is critical to the successful learning engagement of Roma children. The Romani people tend to be very community oriented. Involving families and creating a space where children and parents feel accepted and welcomed is essential. However, it is also essential to model and teach compassion, acceptance, and tolerance of others. To educate people about their own and others cultures, and to let children know that involvement with the arts and culture is their heritage. Experiences with the arts engage the heart and the mind, providing opportunities for children to discover their inner being – their personal creative selves. In knowing the self, self-awareness and self-esteem develops. This leads to social awareness. When children become confident in who they are and in their abilities, they are likely to become successful in school and transform their lives.

The information gathered in this case study into Roma education, should provide educators with tools that will help not only newcomer Roma children but other groups of refugee children or students as well who are considered marginalized. Currently, the education system in British Columbia and other provinces across Canada is undergoing some serious challenges as policy makers struggle to face the changing demands of an out-dated system that no longer meets the needs of students in this age of globalization. In 2010, Ken Robinson introduced a video on the *Changing Paradigms of Education*.¹⁹ This caught the attention of many educators and provoked discussion and question as to why schools are still using the factory model of educating children. Robinson suggested

¹⁹ http://www.ted.com/talks/ken_robinson_changing_education_paradigms.html

that instead, we should be teaching to the individual and educating the heart as well as the mind through arts education that is both cognitive and affective, thereby engaging children with learning.

At the Ministry level in the province of British Columbia there is a movement to reform education, changing the way we teach children. At the core of this new plan is “personalized learning” as a means to make learning relevant to children. This is a step towards offering students the opportunity to have their individual needs as learners met, an approach similar to the differentiated learning and teaching to multiple intelligences employed by Susan Heagy with her LEAP students. Marginalized children and other students as well, need the opportunity to connect with learning, not just with their minds but also with their senses. It is logical to expect that children would be bored learning from out-dated textbooks and curriculum delivery models that fail to engage the imagination, especially when children compare this with exciting media such as YouTube videos, video games, and phone apps that offer a plethora of entertaining devices. This type of information delivery is not only image-intensive, but much of it appeals to the emotions, and provides a virtual reality that may be far more interesting than what a traditional classroom can provide.

We live in a visual culture powered by ever changing technology. The messages that bombard us are overwhelming and access to information has never before been as available as at this time in history. Allowing for creative experiences that encourage personal expression and individuality provides students with tools to explore who they are in this changing world. From a critical theorist perspective, self-empowerment happens when a person is able to name their world and see where they are positioned

within it. With this knowledge, as they grow and learn, marginalized students can begin to identify the power structures that create oppressive circumstances. And from a social justice position, steps can be made toward that needed change.

As an educator, I feel we have a responsibility to our students to provide them with the best skills possible for facing the challenges the world presents; perhaps the most important tool we can give our students to begin the work of changing the world is confidence. Through building trusting relationships and providing authentic learning opportunities that foster personal growth through creative expression, self-identity will come to the forefront and give students the confidence to know that they, like others, are entitled to a fulfilling life, free of oppression and not bound by inevitable circumstances.

Directions for Future Research

It is my belief that as communities become more globalized, and educators search for imaginative and contemporary methods to make education interesting and meaningful for all students, we will need to look at expanding research in the areas of arts education, indigenous education, and culturally relevant education. Within these areas of education, it is important to consider the role of the teacher in building a rapport with students based on trust, to recognize the role of parental involvement in developing family and community relationships, and to acknowledge the significance of first language learning in improving student engagement and educational success. The needs of all learners are changing and this calls for educational programs that are relevant for the 21st century. Recent research offers one promising shift in emphasis, pointing towards the arts as a means to engage children with learning. It is an approach that goes beyond cognition to include affect and human relationships. Children need to learn how to look inward and

discover their own personal being, to look outward and learn the arts and history of their culture. They must also learn to read the sign symbols of society and interpret the meanings of those coded messages. Students must also come to recognize hegemonic systems of oppression and the role they play as complicit or oppressed within it. The world is a global community made of people from all cultures; children need to know that we all have a right to succeed and experience a full life, but above all to know that circumstances are not inevitable, and with vision, people do not need to perish.

As I write this final chapter, it is encouraging for me to read new information on how some schools are now recognizing the importance of the arts for engaging students with learning. Over the past few years many school districts across the United States, including Los Angeles, experienced severe cuts to arts funding. These cuts mostly affected low-income schools in poor neighbourhoods. In an online article written July 15, 2013, journalist Vanessa Romos discusses how The Los Angeles Unified School District is now investing money into arts education. She states that the case for funding the arts in education came from three US research studies: *The Council on Foreign Relations*, *The Department of Education*, and *The National Endowment for the Arts*. The persuading research from these studies showed that, "...students who participate in arts education have higher GPA and SAT scores; they demonstrate increased creativity, and higher rates of college enrolment and graduation as well as higher aspirations and civic engagement. All three studies have found these benefits are particularly pronounced in high-poverty, low-performing schools" (Romos, 2013, p. 1). This information, "...led the Obama Administration's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities last year to launch the *Turnaround Arts* initiative, a two-year pilot program aiming to improve eight of the

nation's lowest-performing schools through arts education” (p.1) Megan Chernin, chief executive of the Los Angeles Fund for Public Education, which provided the Los Angeles Unified School District with funding for arts-education programs stated that, "This powerful method of instruction helps students engage in their studies, retain more and become the creative problem-solvers needed in our global economy” (as cited in Romos, p. 1).

Another article published in the Summer/Fall 2013 issue of *Learn: The Magazine of BC Education*, describes the current research by Sir Ken Robinson that points to the benefits of arts education. John McMahon, principal of George Pringle Elementary School in West Kelowna wrote the article. McMahon said his school is participating in a three year, “Arts in Education” program supported by *ArtStarts*²⁰. He reported that while serving as principal at another elementary school in West Kelowna, students were involved in an arts education program, “...to move away from the traditional confines of the classroom”, and that, “Our academic achievement went up significantly” (McMahon, 2013, p. 20). He also stated that the most important aspect of the program was, “...students’ feelings about school changed. They were excited to be there and they didn’t want to go home at the end of the day...” (p. 20).

The new and emerging research on the benefits of arts education, provides further support for my research study, and gives me hope that this will not be just a trend in education, but the future direction for best practices that will not only engage children with learning, but improve their cognitive and affective development.

²⁰ <http://artstarts.com/>

Concluding Thoughts

"WHERE THERE IS NO VISION, THE PEOPLE PERISH"

In the introduction to my dissertation, I commented on how the above quote was to be my mantra in the writing of this dissertation. Throughout my research, I have held onto a vision. It is a picture of laughing Roma children at school: they have shoes on their feet, food in their tummies, smiles on their faces, and joy in their hearts. They walk with pride and self-assurance and are the new generation of Roma youth who will grow up to become strong leaders in their communities, and for the Roma Nation. With mounting concern, I am watching the political and educational issues surrounding the Romani people both in Canada and the European Union, and while not losing sight of my vision, I am fuelled with a sense of urgency to advocate for greater global awareness so that more people can challenge the forces that try to silence the voice of the Roma and condemn them to the inevitability of circumstances that they cannot rise above.

In changing what may be seen as “inevitable” circumstances, it is important to understand social systems that exacerbate conditions of poverty. In Sajko’s community of Jarovnice, Slovakia, like many other disadvantaged settings in the world, the state welfare system, while providing some financial support, in reality is responsible for creating larger social problems for the Roma. Sajko states that the welfare system creates a cycle of “imposing idleness, helplessness, self-destruction, handicap, and hopelessness”, and suggests that state policies should change and instead be “promoting new workplaces demanding people’s industry, creativity, and initiative” (Sajko, 2000, *Tasks for the art teacher; Message for my colleagues and not only for them*). Sajko has seen first-hand how this affects the Roma children in his community and discusses that

unless you change the structure of social conditions (i.e. the welfare system) you end up with the ongoing situation of poverty where even if a student is extremely talented and skillful, he or she does not have a chance to get a high school education or change the conditions of his or her life because they are trapped in a cycle where "...children are victims of their parents, and parents are victims of a very discriminative social and political system and depressed economic conditions" (Sajko, 2000, *Tasks for the art teacher; Message for my colleagues and not only for them*).

The world over, poverty is responsible for denying children their basic human right to a meaningful education. Not only does a lack of education prohibit children from developing to their full potential, but "...restricted opportunity in education is one of the most powerful mechanisms for transmitting poverty across generations." (UNESCO, 2010, p. 8) Education provides not only knowledge, but develops citizens who become contributing members of society. Without being able to access an education, children will most likely not be able to lift themselves out of poverty as adults, which in turn will burden further generations with poverty. Clearly, this is a cycle that needs to end. Poverty will not be resolved when millions of children are not able to access an education. It is imperative then, that education becomes part of children's lives, and the education of young children is of particular importance. There are significant studies on how education makes a difference in the lives of marginalized children, especially younger children. According to the UNICEF report titled, *Early Childhood Development (2006)*:

What happens – or doesn't happen – to children in the earliest years of their lives is of critical importance, both to their immediate well-being and to their future . . . and indeed the future of their communities, nations and the whole world depends on it²¹.

²¹ http://www.unicef.org/earlychildhood/index_3870.html

The above statement from UNICEF on early childhood and education, along with the statistics provided by the UNESCO (2010) report on the relationship between child poverty and education, should pose some serious concerns for educators. It is imperative that schools develop accessible programs to attract and engage marginalized children with education early in life, in order to increase the potential for these children to break the cycle of poverty:

Early childhood can create the foundations for a life of expanded opportunity – or it can lock children into a future of deprivation and marginalization...education provides vulnerable and disadvantaged children with a chance to escape poverty, build a more secure future, and realize their potential. (UNESCO, p. 42)

As it is particularly important that young children become involved with school (UNESCO; UNICEF), school administrators should consider implementing arts-based programs at the pre-school and primary level, and hopefully continue arts-based programs throughout all grade levels. Arts-based programs not only attract young learners, but there are strong indicators that, "...involvement in the arts [goes] hand in hand with engagement with learning in schools" (Smithrim & Upitis, 2005, p. 120). *Projeto Axé* and other such types of community arts-based programs have convincingly argued that they are able to meet the needs of marginalized children of poverty, by first allowing education to be accessible, then providing a personally relevant and meaningful route through which to engage children in learning. The arts are a major force in creating personal and social transformation (Arney, 2007; Naidus, 2009; Projeto Axé, 2010; Rossatto, 2002). For marginalized children of poverty the opportunity to access an education is the first step in their ability to transform themselves and their lives, and dispel the hopeless notion of the inevitability of circumstance.

Endnote

Throughout the course of my research study, I have watched the situation for Roma refugees in Canada undergo some serious changes. It saddens me to know that under strict new refugee laws leaning toward discrimination of the Roma in Canada, many have been forced to return to the very dire situations they were fleeing in East-Central European countries. The following statement by reporter Louise Brown sums up my own sentiments:

They came in waves; sudden, boisterous, defiant, exuberant waves of children from an almost mythic culture who filled the schools of Parkdale with a challenge beyond any they had faced before. Who knew this wave of Roma students would reverse just four years later, emptying classrooms, laying off teachers and leaving a community heartsick at the loss? It's a rare case of Canadian schools working hard to embrace newcomers who couldn't stay. (Brown, 2013, para. 1)



Parkdale Collegiate Institute in Toronto, taken by [SimonP](#)
From: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parkdale_Collegiate_Institute

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