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Educational Experiences of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities and How Educational Psychologists Engage With the Communities

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This paper applies theoretical models towards the understanding of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller's (GRT) educational experiences, whilst highlighting the frameworks that guide the way that educational psychologists (EPs) engage with GRT communities. The ecological systems theoretical framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and the bio-ecological theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) encourage EPs to consider the interacting and ever-changing systems around GRT communities, whilst the constructionist model of informed, reasoned action (Gameson et al., 2003) provides guidance for EPs to consider their language and existing constructs when enabling dialogue with GRT communities. A scoping review highlighted the impact of GRTs' cultural norms, relationships with school and school experiences on the communities' engagement with education. This paper also highlights the skills and reflexivity of EPs and how they can use the social GGRRAAACCEEESSS framework (Burnham, 2012) to consider their own personal and social identity, whilst remaining culturally and ethically sensitive when supporting diverse groups within their competence. Meanwhile, EPs should adopt a critical community psychology lens that enables them to focus on understanding communities within their context, whilst Bourdieu's theory of capital encourages EPs to consider their power and position within their role. EPs should promote participation and inclusion for GRT communities by developing a better understanding of the GRT communities' intersectionality. This will hopefully enable EPs to embed anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory principles into their practice.

Keywords: Gypsy, Roma, Traveller, educational psychologist, engagement, education, experiences

Engagement with GRT communities is important within the role of EPs as GRT communities are a diverse group who are rarely considered within Government policies and strategies (House of Commons [HoC], 2019). The term "GRT" is used throughout this paper, as policymakers and researchers within the United Kingdom commonly use this term to represent Romany Gypsies, Travellers from Ireland, Scotland and Wales, New travellers, Showmen and Roma. The GRT group will be referred to as a "communities" rather than "community", as the term "GRT" represents different ethnicities' communities as they are not a homogenous group (Parekh, 2000). Although there are differences within the various individual communities within the GRT group, such as their origins, history and culture, they still have some common characteristics and values, such as their travelling lifestyle (Hamilton-Perry, 2019), living arrangements, education and employment (Hyland, 1993). It is important to highlight that within the 2011 Census (Office for National Statistics, 2011), it was reported that "76 per cent of Gypsies and Irish Travellers in England and Wales lived in bricks-and-mortar accommodation, and 24 per cent lived in a caravan or other mobile or temporary structure" (HoC, 2019, p. 5), as it is a common misconception that Gypsy families travelled throughout the year (Tracada et al., 2014).

There is a national shift towards a better understanding and recognition of diversity and cultural differences within GRT communities. Only as recently as the 2011 Census, Gypsies and Irish Travellers were able to record their ethnicity (HoC, 2019). It is positive that in the 2021 Census, Roma will be provided as an option under the "Ethnic group" category (Office for National Statistics, 2018). The Equality Act (2010) considers Roma as an ethnic group, whilst Gypsy and Travellers are considered a race, therefore these groups are legally protected from discrimination. The Department for Education (DfE) (2014) has also provided advice aimed at schools, governing bodies and local authorities to ensure that individuals are protected against discrimination.

GRT communities have been identified as the focus in this paper, as, nationally, GRT communities are considered to have the worst outcomes when compared to other ethnic groups across a range of factors such as education and health (HoC, 2019). The Cabinet Office (2018) reported that

GRT children have the lowest attainment of all ethnic groups across all school years. Within the local authority (LA) that I work in, GRT communities are noted to be over-represented within the children who were missing education. The LA indicated that "Travellers represent 14 per cent of children missing education" within the borough. It is positive that "improve access to education" is one of the key areas that the LA has highlighted in order to support GRT communities. Children have a right to an education (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989), and it is important that GRT communities are supported and aware of educational opportunities.

This paper outlines the scoping review that was carried out in order to understand EPs' engagement with GRT communities and how EPs can promote participation and inclusion for GRT communities. Next, the paper explores the values and frameworks that underpin EP practice and how EPs have the appropriate skill set and ability to position themselves in order to engage with GRT communities. Considerations are made around enhancing GRT communities' education opportunities and how EPs are positioned to address oppression and discrimination. Finally, reflections from two EPs within my LA and myself will be shared, as I believe in the importance of being reflexive in order to challenge any unconscious biases that may occur.

Scoping Review

Based on the guidance by Peters et al. (2015), a scoping review was carried out to gain a better understanding of how EPs engage with GRT communities. The PRISMA model (Moher et al., 2009) was used to systematically identify and screen 208 papers (see Appendix A). The eligibility of the papers was considered based on the inclusion criteria (see Appendix B). Although the final three papers do not directly explore how EPs engage with GRT communities, they emphasise the lack of research in this area whilst providing an insight into the experiences of GRT communities. The findings may inform EPs when considering ways to promote participation and inclusion for the GRT communities. The summary of the findings has been grouped into the following themes: cultural norms, relationships with school, and school experiences.

Theme One: Cultural Norms

GRT children may experience difficulties when forming friendships with non-GRT peers (Kiddle, 1999) due to differences in cultural norms and values (Hyland, 1993), such as differences in expectations around homework and the importance of adult–child interactions (Levinson, 2008). Gould (2017) aimed to identify effective support strategies that have been used to promote social inclusion and academic progress of GRT children and young people in secondary school. An explanatory case study design was used, allowing the researcher to include the views of GRT pupils, GRT parents, school staff and relevant supporting professionals, using interviews, focus groups and questionnaires. Gould (2017) found that school staff would benefit from understanding the GRT communities' culture, as their educational norms and values differ in areas such as their expectations around homework, adult–child interactions (Levinson, 2008), school attendance (Franklin et al., 1993) and home education (Levinson, 2008). Although this research only focused on one school, it is important to seek not only the views of the children and young people from GRT communities but also those of the systems around them. This will help professionals to consider a wider range of ways to support GRT communities. Bhopal and Myers (2016) found that Gypsy and Traveller families elected home education in order to continue their tradition of educating children outside school. The researchers conducted case studies with ten parent/parents from Gypsy and Traveller families where they were all interviewed in order to explore why families decide to home educate their children. In addition, the researchers also interviewed five educational practitioners in order to explore how support agencies work with those who choose to home educate and to explore the policies within home education. Bhopal and Myers (2016) also found that the traditional GRT communities have specific gender roles within the family whereby boys leave school early to work with their fathers, whilst girls support their mothers with domestic chores (Cemlyn et al., 2009). The researchers chose to focus on understanding the Gypsy and Traveller families, as their participants chose to identify as "Gypsy and Travellers". This highlights the importance of listening to the participants and using the same language in order to remain respectful towards their identity.

Theme Two: Relationships With School

Gould (2017) identified that focused staff support and school ethos can promote the social inclusion of GRT children. This involved the staff building good relationships with GRT children, which then enables them to provide individualised support based on their strengths and needs. Frehill and Dunsmuir (2015) highlighted the importance of building strong relationships between GRT children and the school community. The researchers recruited 37 Traveller students and 41 non-Traveller students, who all completed questionnaires designed to measure their emotional engagement with school. In addition, the researchers recruited teachers of participating Traveller students to complete a questionnaire on affective engagement, and they also looked into the attendance records of the students in their research. The researchers found that non-Traveller students had a greater sense of school community and connectedness, and that, overall, children's improved sense of belonging to school

minimised school absence. Although it is positive that the researchers promoted social justice by including children's views, the quantitative nature of the data collected may mean that the information may not capture the individual's personal experiences as to why they experience differing levels of belonging within school.

Theme Three: School Experiences

Gypsy and Traveller children face risks associated with bullying, discrimination (Bhopal & Myers, 2016) and racism in schools (Gould, 2017). GRT parents' own school experience may impact their prioritisation of schooling for their children, as illiterate family members (Okely, 1983) may not be able to support their children's homework or to engage with the communications from the school.

EPs Actively Promoting Participation and Inclusion for Gypsy Roma Traveller Communities

The scoping review highlights the role that EPs can play when promoting the participation and inclusion of GRT communities, as EPs commonly work within the ecological systems theoretical (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) framework and are positioned to support GRT children through the different systems around them. EPs often work collaboratively with groups such as the child's family, school staff and relevant professionals when bringing about change (Shriberg & Clinton, 2016). EPs may be more likely to engage with GRT communities when EPs have a better understanding of the macrosystem, as it is evident from the scoping review that GRT communities are highly influenced by their cultural values.

The more recent bio-ecological theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) which evolved from the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which included the process–person–context–time model, emphasises that interactions are more effective when they occur over time. This suggests that EPs should direct their support towards the teachers and families of GRT children, as teachers and families have more opportunities for interaction with the children over time. Furthermore, Gould (2017) found it challenging to develop a relationship with GRT communities prior to conducting the research, which emphasises the need for EPs to consider the most appropriate system to support, in order to effectively promote change.

Values and Frameworks Underpinning Educational Psychologists' Practice

EPs are guided by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) (2015) *Standards of Proficiency*, as it states that practitioner psychologists must be "aware of the impact of culture, equality and diversity on practice" (p. 8) and "understand psychological models of the factors that lead to underachievement, disaffection and social exclusion amongst vulnerable groups" (p. 16). The *Code of Ethics and Conduct* (British Psychology Society [BPS], 2018) outlined that EPs must demonstrate respect, integrity, responsibility and competence. These standards and codes ensure that EPs maintain high standards of professionalism. When working with GRT communities, it is particularly important to demonstrate respect, as the *Code of Ethics and Conduct* (BPS, 2018) highlights the need to have equal moral consideration towards the individuality and worth of all individuals, regardless of their differences. The Children and Families Act (2014) also emphasises that all children should be able to succeed, regardless of their background.

The ethical principles that guide the work of an EP are autonomy, social justice and beneficence (Beauchamp & Childress, 2001). As a trainee EP, I am conscious of how my own values and skills may affect the promotion of the ethical principles. It is positive that the EP doctorate training programmes now incorporate training in managing ethical dilemmas whilst acknowledging the trainee's own values and knowledge (Lindsay, 2017). It is inevitable that, at times, my values will be misaligned with others. For example, others may value happiness differently from how I do, and it is imperative that I manage those conversations respectfully and appropriately where I can share my views whilst also validating and listening to their views.

EPs aim to promote social justice whilst being aware of the impact that systems of oppression may have on individuals (Schulze et al., 2017); therefore, EPs may promote the need for children to remain in education. Research indicates that, without earning sufficient qualifications, individuals are more likely to struggle with poverty, unemployment and social despair (Kortering et al., 1997). Individuals who drop out from school are more likely to struggle with depression, feel alienated, be dissatisfied with their lives (Larsen & Shertzer, 1987; Tidwell, 1988), be involved with criminal behaviour, have fewer employment opportunities and have poorer physical and mental health (McNeal, 1995). EPs may perceive themselves as promoting beneficence by providing GRT children with the appropriate educational opportunities; however, that may be considered paternalistic, as EPs may be diminishing the individual's autonomy, since the GRT communities' culture may not value education equally.

Educational Psychologists' Positioning and Their Skill Set When Supporting Clients

EPs are skilled and positioned as advocates to promote social justice, as they can consider the socioeconomic circumstances and diverse backgrounds on educational attainment (Rogers & O'Bryon, 2008). The cultural humility model (Fisher-Borne et al., 2015) highlights principles that are central to the skills that an EP requires when working with marginalised groups; it encourages EPs to be aware and

respectful of their client's world-view and background (Hook et al., 2017). EPs must engage in critical self-reflection in order to recognise "biases, assumptions and cultural world-views" (Pitner & Sakamoto, 2005, p. 685) and to address any power imbalances. When working with disadvantaged groups, I value the safe space for reflection with my supervisor and other EPs, as talking about subjects such as racism may be uncomfortable (Eddo-Lodge, 2017) but will facilitate my learning journey (Rawlings & Cowell, 2015).

As EPs aim to understand their own and others' cultural influences and reflect on their own biases and assumptions, this should minimise the chances of imposing their own values and beliefs onto their clients (Anderson, 2018). EPs should value cultural diversity whilst actively embedding anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive principles within their practice. There is a need to challenge others' assumptions and judgments (Anderson, 2018) towards GRT communities, as they are commonly stigmatised (Powell, 2008).

The HCPC (2015) expects practitioners to be able to recognise the communication needs of their service users. EPs are skilled to gather information about the individuals they work with and to set out their role and expectations as guided by the first stage of the problem-solving framework (Monsen & Frederickson, 2008). Adaptations such as the organisation of interpreters and the simplification of written reports ensure that families are able to access the EP service. EPs may also use their consultation skills to validate and listen to the voices of their clients, whilst attempting to understand how they are communicating their constructs. The *Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice* (Department for Education [DfE], 2014) also encourages professionals to adopt a person-centred approach by involving GRT children and families within decision-making processes relevant to them. EPs can position themselves when working in schools to promote the GRT communities' autonomy by giving them the space and time to communicate their needs.

EPs are skilled to use frameworks such as the constructionist model of informed, reasoned action (Gameson et al., 2003) to co-construct a shared understanding with GRT families. From the scoping review, it is evident that GRT communities hold different educational values, and therefore EPs must remain mindful of their language and existing constructs when enabling dialogue with others. This is necessary in order to build relationships with the families by ensuring transparency whilst applying psychology in the EPs' practice in a way that is accessible to families.

Enhancing Educational Opportunities for Gypsy Roma Traveller Communities

Based on Tajfel's (1974) social identity theory, it is possible that individuals within GRT communities develop their self-concept based on their group membership. Being part of a group may promote a sense of belonging and may be a source of their self-esteem and pride. The GRT communities' experience of hostility and stigmatisation from non-GRT individuals may enable the GRT communities to strengthen their identity as a group (Powell, 2016), which may reinforce their desire to follow their cultural norms. Schools appear to reinforce the group status that GRT communities holds, as schools have been found to express negative attitudes towards GRT communities (Bhopal, 2011) and be less willing to accept GRT children into their schools due to their low attendance and achievement, as this would consequently affect the overall school performance (Bhopal, 2000; Cudworth, 2008). GRT communities have the tendency to engage in educational opportunities by learning through work with family members and practical activities (O'Hanlon, 2010). EPs should promote acceptance and allow for more educational opportunities for GRT communities by encouraging change within the school curriculum to incorporate the teaching and learning of skills relevant and important to GRT communities (Levinson & Hooley, 2014). The inclusion of GRT children within the school community may promote their sense of belonging to the school as GRT children may then feel proud to identify as members of the school.

The differing beliefs and values of education between the GRT and the non-GRT communities may result in cognitive dissonance and cultural dissonance within individuals. Cognitive dissonance may occur when tension arises from holding two conflicting thoughts (National Foundation for Education Research, 2008), such as having a view of attending secondary school and not attending secondary school. Cultural dissonance may occur when there is a conflict between home and school expectations (Harding, 2014), such as different expectations towards homework. GRT children are less likely to complete secondary education (Derrington, 2005), whilst non-GRT children are commonly expected to continue into further education or training when they finish secondary school. EPs should enhance educational opportunities for GRT children by equipping them with the skills and autonomy to cope with the dissonance adaptively, so that they can choose to avoid psychological discomfort and dissonance by seeking social support from their culture, mixing with non-GRT children or cognitively re-framing their experiences (DfE, 2010). Otherwise, GRT children may elect maladaptive coping strategies such as physical or verbal defence, non-attendance at school or masking their identity (DfE, 2010) when managing their dissonance.

Educational Psychologists Working to Address Oppression and Discrimination

EPs should adopt a critical community psychology lens when supporting GRT communities, as there is a focus on social justice, promotion of welfare within the oppressed

and disadvantaged, and the need for transformational change (Nelson & Evans, 2014). This approach focuses on the communities within their contexts (Kagan et al., 2020), and it is evident that GRTs have a strong group identity with their communities. EPs should remain reflexive and critical as they consider how power can be shared with GRT communities to promote their wellbeing.

Intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989) guides EPs to better understand individuals as multidimensional group members within their entirety, as there is an emphasis on the consideration around the interplay of an individual's multiple personal and social identities. This theory may invite EPs to better understand the complex layers of identities for GRT communities based on their lived realities and their experiences (McBride & James, 2022). It encourages EPs to consider how GRT communities may experience oppression within the society, as the GRT communities' social and political identity combined may lead to further discrimination and systemic disadvantages. GRT communities hold multiple complex identities due to their cultural values towards religion, gender roles and health (Ministry of Justice, 2020). This theory enabled me to reflect on my own personal and social identity, with the aid of the social GGRRAAACCEEESSS framework (Burnham, 2012). It allows me to consider how my features may impact my own values and approaches when engaging with GRT communities. As a 27-year-old, Chinese, educated woman, I am conscious that my features may impact the way that others view me and whether this would affect their level of engagement with me as a trainee EP. The model highlights the power differences that individuals have and can be used to drive conversation when considering ways to minimise discrimination and oppression.

Bourdieu's (1986) theory of capital argues that cultural, social, symbolic and economic capital enables an individual to gain power. EPs have a high level of cultural capital; those who choose to use their "Doctor" title in front of their names hold even more institutionalised and embodied cultural capital, as it allows others to become instantly aware of their educational credentials. When working with GRT communities, EPs must be mindful of the power and position they have, and how others may position them (Fox, 2015). As the DfE (2018) found, Gypsy/Roma children are over three times more likely than the whole school population to be excluded from school, and Traveller of Irish heritage children are over four times more likely than the whole school population to be excluded from school. This suggests that they may have less embodied and institutionalised capital. They also lack the opportunities to learn language and mannerisms and to gain qualifications and educational credentials. Although individuals from GRT communities may lack educational credentials, it can be argued that they have social capital from the strong sense of community (Bhopal & Myers, 2016) and that they have high levels of economic capital due to their traditional belief that boys are to work with their fathers whilst learning the tools of economic independence (Cemlyn et al., 2009).

Although EPs aim to redress power imbalances and challenge oppressive and discriminatory practice, GRT communities may not necessarily consider themselves disadvantaged. GRT communities often feel proud of their identity and therefore may not acknowledge the existence of any power imbalances. This highlights the need for EPs to have open conversations with GRT families to better understand their priorities, aspirations and wishes based on their values, perceptions and constructs formed from their lived experiences.

Local Authority Educational Psychologists' Reflection of Their Engagement With Gypsy Roma Traveller Communities

When I asked two EPs from my LA to share their professional experiences when working with GRT communities, both EPs identified the need to be respectful and understanding towards the GRT communities' norms, identity and values. One EP noted that one of the GRT families that she has worked with were "fearful of outside professionals", which further emphasises the need for external professionals such as EPs to build a positive relationship with these communities. The *Code of Ethics and Conduct* (BPS, 2018) highlights that EPs must demonstrate "empathy, sympathy, generosity, openness, distress tolerance, commitment and courage" (p. 5) when building positive relationships with their clients.

Both EPs highlighted the negative connotations and stigma that teachers and schools may have towards GRT communities. EPs should aim to change staff's narrative and discourse around GRT communities so that EPs can better understand the child for who they are. EPs should be advocates for GRT communities as EPs challenge negative or inaccurate language used in association with GRT communities, whilst encouraging discussions that enable professionals to reflect on their misconceptions. Appropriate language and terminology usage should also be modelled by EPs, where we include the GRT communities as "us" rather than separating the GRT communities as "them" (Abbey et al., 2011). EPs should also ask the families how they would like to be referred to, rather than giving them a label, and to welcome their views. It is also important to demonstrate cultural sensitivity, for example by understanding the cultural attitudes and behaviours relating to death. Children and young people from GRT communities may find it difficult to cope with a death in the family, as the possessions of the deceased are commonly burnt or sold soon after their death. This may make it difficult for families to keep something tangible in memory of the deceased (Child Bereavement UK, n.d.), therefore by being culturally sensitive, EPs are more likely

to be able to tailor appropriate support for the children and young people.

Personal Reflections as a Trainee Educational Psychologist

Considering that GRT children have the worst outcomes when compared to other ethnic groups, it surprises me that, prior to this paper, I have not had discussions with any professionals regarding this group. Furthermore, having grown up in Hong Kong, where I was not exposed to GRT communities, I am aware that my construct of GRT communities is possibly biased. This forces me to question my own competence whilst highlighting the need to engage with continual professional development to support my understanding of GRT communities, as well as other diverse communities, and how to support them.

As I work within a service that offers a partially traded model of delivery, I am aware that I may have less power and autonomy to advocate for GRT communities, as my support and engagement for GRT communities will be dependent on the schools' priority. In my future practice, I aim to advocate for this group by raising questions around the schools' provision and support for GRT children. As more EP services adopt a partially or fully traded model of service delivery, EPs need to develop their ethical sensitivity (Lee & Woods, 2017) when negotiating with schools to ensure that vulnerable children will be supported.

Conclusion

Despite the theories and frameworks that guide the work of EPs when engaging with diverse groups, it is important for EPs to adapt their services to enable them to embrace their service users' individuality. EPs are skilled to promote social justice through balancing the need to celebrate the uniqueness of GRT communities whilst ensuring that they are provided with the support and opportunities to enable them to thrive. By working within the multiple systems around the child, EPs can encourage anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory principles holistically, in order to improve the child's school experience.

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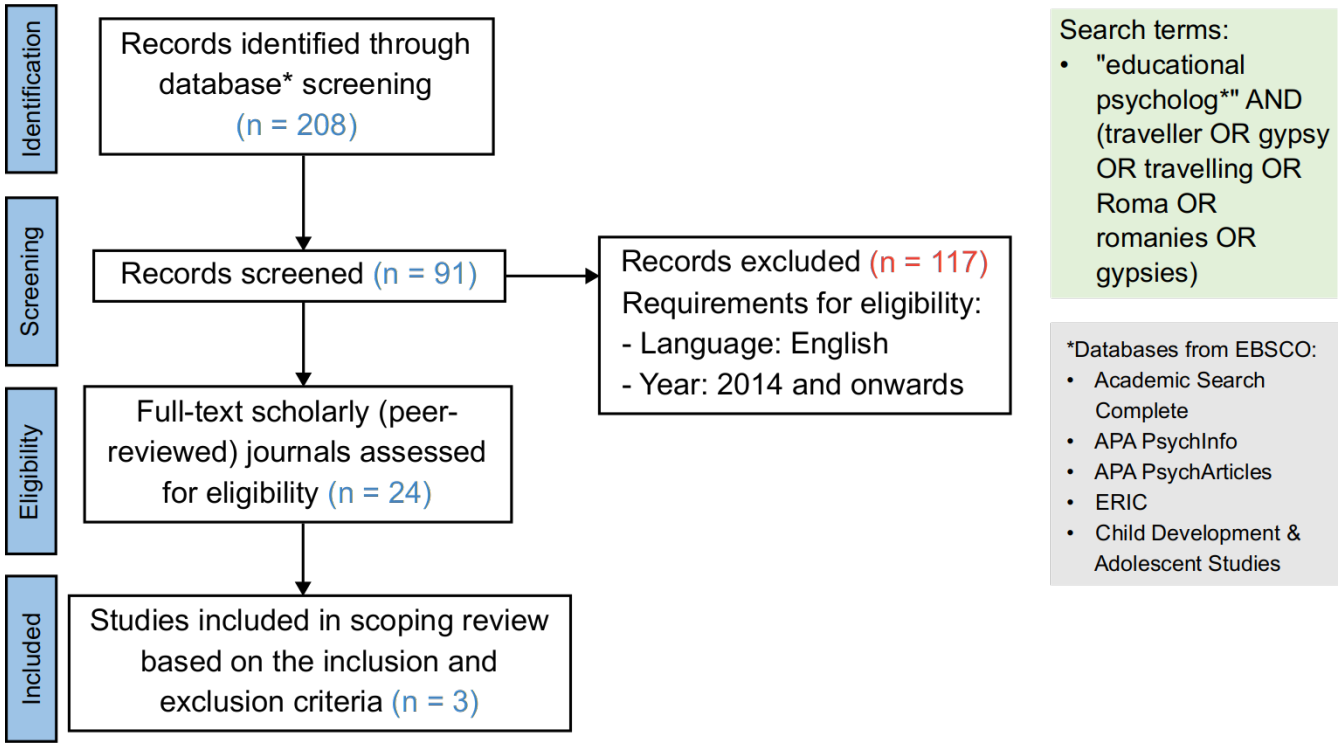
Appendix A
Use of Moher et al.'s (2009) PRISMA Model for the Scoping Review



Appendix B
Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria Used for the Scoping Review

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Sample is within the United Kingdom	Sample is outside of the United Kingdom
Main focus of the paper is on GRT children	Main focus of the paper is not on GRT children
Peer-reviewed journals	Articles that were not published in peer-reviewed journals (e.g., news articles or chapters in a book)
Full text	Texts that were not available as a "full text"