

# Exploring Early Years Literacies Through Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Heritage



## Aims

To understand the original, multiple and diverse literacies of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers.

To recognise the role that children, parents, siblings, community members and early years practitioners play in early years literacies.

To Identify and co-create empowering literacy practices working with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.



# Theoretical Foundations

- **Literacy as a Social Practice**

Literacy is shaped by culture, context, and power—not just reading and writing skills (Street, 1984, 1993).

- **Heritage and Community Literacies**

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children's literacy practices are shaped by extended family, community knowledge, and heritage—not just by school (Rumsey, 2009; McCaffery, 2012).

- **Children as Social Actors**

Children are experts in their own lives and engage in creative literacy practices at home, in the community, and in education settings (Mauthner, 1997; Kellett & Ding, 2004).

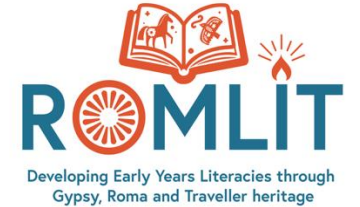
## Research Questions

- How do children approach literacies at home and in school?
- What are the key barriers and facilitators of the literacies produced at home and in school?
- Who are the key people involved in the production of early years literacies at home and in school?



# Methodology

- **Relationship-building through trust and visibility:** Used trusted school staff, home language (e.g. Romanian) and fostered participation at schools and in the community.
- **Home visits and interviews:** Explored family engagement and home literacies through multilingual, informal practices, often involving several family members.
- **Parental engagement sessions:** Ran inclusive, Romanian-language sessions featuring storytelling; facilitated literacy discussions; co-developed resources; worked with extended family members.
- **Classroom observations:** across early years settings (Reception to Year 2) to explore children's formal literacy learning in whole-class, small-group and EAL sessions.



## HOW WE WORK WITH GRT CHILDREN AND SCHOOLS

Video

# Key Findings

- **Cultural and linguistic mismatch in schools:** curriculum-insensitive to culture & language of GRT students.
- **English-language dominance** hinders inclusion and language acquisition.
- **Rich home literacies:** Learning at home is multilingual, relational, and embedded in everyday family life—highlighting a more autonomous and emotional literacy model than that in schools.
- **Digital and embodied learning as enablers:** Digital literacy, hands-on activities, and family-school trust help bridge the gap between home and school literacy practices.
- **Barriers to literacy development:** Irregular attendance and lack of recognition of home literacies pose challenges to educational inclusion and success.
- **Need for transformation, not just inclusion:** Literacy should be seen as a social and cultural practice, requiring intercultural approaches that promote co-created, recognition and transformation knowledge.

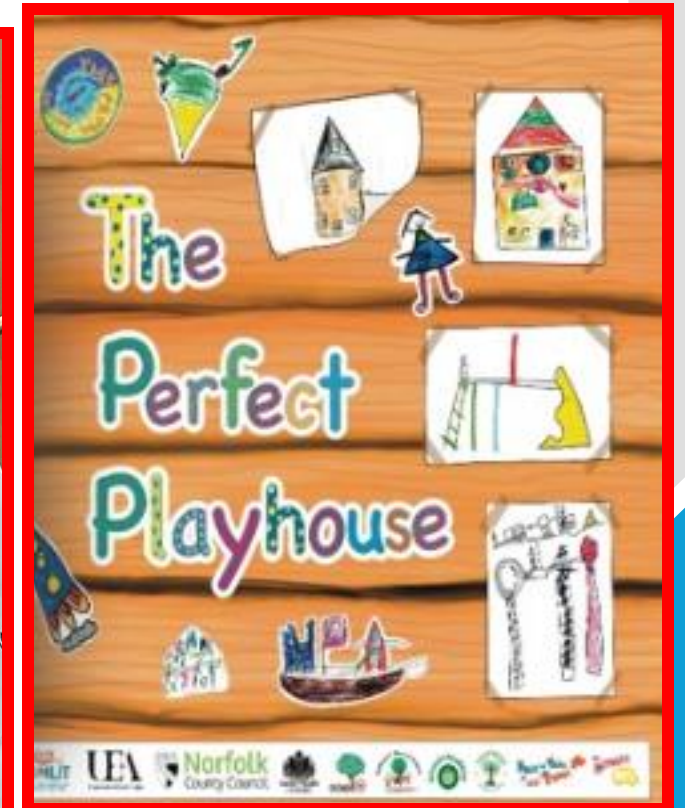
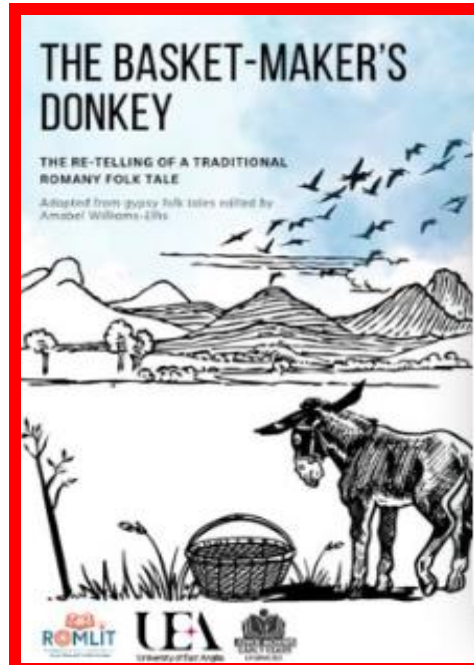
# Outputs



Developing Early Years Literacies through  
Gypsy, Roma and Traveller heritage



# Stories and story sacks



## Photo Books

- Families shared photos and text showing home learning
- Co-created books celebrating identity and literacy
- Highlighted learning in everyday contexts





# CPD sessions



**ROMLIT**

Developing Early Years Literacies,  
through Gypsy, Roma and  
Traveller heritage

**FREE CPD**

ROMLIT UEA, an innovative  
research project, is delighted to  
offer free CPD sessions for  
school staff, managers, Local  
Authorities and NGOs



The area we cover is Suffolk, Norfolk and Cambridgeshire.  
**Sessions are limited, so book your session(s) today!**



**ROMLIT**

Developing Early Years Literacies through  
Gypsy, Roma and Traveller heritage

**The aim of these sessions...**

To develop a deeper understanding of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture and heritage in order to support literacy acquisition of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children in EYFS.

Each session is 1.5 hours long. Sessions are stand-alone, but session one is developed as background to the other sessions.

**Session One:**  
Who are the Gypsies, Roma and Travellers?  
What is their history, culture and heritage in Europe and the UK?

**Session Two:**  
Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children as learners –  
teacher perceptions and expectations.  
The role of families and communities in learning.  
Ways of engaging with families and communities.

**Session Three:**  
Why is heritage and culture important in literacy learning?  
What do we mean by “literacies”?  
Intergenerational learning and influences on literacy acquisition.  
Culturally appropriate resources.

For further information or to book a session, please contact:  
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# Good Practice Guide

Aims to challenge deficit approaches to literacy by recognising the rich, diverse, and multimodal literacies embedded in Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

It provides practical strategies, examples and case studies to help practitioners engage with families. It draws on community heritage in curriculum design, and fosters inclusive educational approaches.



You can access and download our resources using this QR code.

## Conclusion – Key Takeaways

- **Literacy is cultural and relational:** For Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children, learning is rooted in family life, oral traditions, and intergenerational storytelling—not just classroom-based reading and writing.
- **A deficit model** is pervasive and it hinders the attainment of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children.
- This has **knock-on effects** on their engagement and achievement.
- **School practices often miss the mark:** Dominant, standardised approaches can overlook the rich, multilingual and embodied literacies that children bring from home.
- **Equity starts with recognition:** Education systems become more responsive when they value and integrate the strengths of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

# Alternatives exist, but they require

- **Resources**
- **Training**
- **Commitment**
- **Multi-agency working**
- **Transformations**
- **Patience**
- **Unlearning as much as learning (new practices etc)**

# A huge thank you to those who participated in the project!

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For more information on ROMLIT, the team, the partners and partnership schools, please visit the [ROMLIT website here](#).

