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**An Illuminative Participatory Evaluation of the Response of
Queensland Schools to Indigenous Literacy Policies**

Thesis submitted by

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For the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the School of Education

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Abstract

**Thesis Title: An illuminative participatory evaluation of the response
of
Queensland schools to Indigenous literacy policies**

This study is a naturalistic inquiry into the implementation of Indigenous literacy policy in Queensland schools, written as a multi-voiced collective story. Queensland's literacy policy for Indigenous students, *Partners for Success* (Education Queensland, 2000a) stood in contention with national literacy policies in that it recognised the impact of second language learning status in Indigenous student literacy performance. This study charts how *Partners for Success* was read and implemented in four focus schools with large numbers of Indigenous English as a Second Language/Dialect students. The researcher's participatory role in supporting its implementation allowed opportunities to see resonance and dissonance between these four focus schools and other contexts in Queensland over a three-year period between 2001 and 2003.

Using four interpretive frames, Gewirtz's (2001) interrogative framework for socially just educational research; academic literature relating to social justice, socio-cultural theories of literacy and minority language learning and understandings and frameworks for sustainable organisational change; the fieldwork itself and notions of language (Bakhtin, 1981; Ferguson, 1959; Wardhaugh, 1998; Wells, 1990), the study reveals a complex web of inter-related oppressive relationships in the implementation of *Partners for Success* (Education Queensland, 2000a) in

Queensland and how particular social categories of participants supported, resisted, interrupted and subverted them. It explains how the authoritative, monologic voice of assessment and accountability in the national literacy policies echoed through *Partners for Success* implementation processes, silenced and marginalised Indigenous, practitioner and research voices and perspectives and reinforced dominant social constructions of Indigenous ESL students as failing literates.

The inquiry reveals that Indigenous ESL students and their educators remain in a systemic *Terra Nullius* despite the counter-hegemonic intent of *Partners for Success* (Education Queensland, 2000a). However, the study also shows that, although language is a key site for the contestation of power in Queensland's State education system, it can also be a prime site for the recognition of "otherness" and reconciliation of past wrongs.

The study suggests that public dialogic spaces are a necessary element in the development and implementation processes of policy intended to address issues of equity and social justice. Besides, to avoid the replication of social order or historical injustices, consideration needs to be given to the way in which systemic data is recorded and publicly reported. Again, mandated complementary, appropriate and rigorous assessment tools should be incorporated into Education Queensland's school accountability processes that have the capacity to reflect successful *language* learning. Yet again, allocative funding models to schools should be reviewed to better resource schools with significant numbers of Indigenous ESL learners and ESL pedagogy. Finally, issues of language for Indigenous students should be a core element of pre-service teacher education programs.

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