Chapter 10 The assemblage of literacy pedagogies in local sites: Teachers' work

> They are expected to provide a 'proper' education for students, to teach them to read, to send the appropriate students to college, to provide others with skills for working-class jobs; they are expected to teach students from other cultures English and to acculturate them into U.S. society. And the schools are expected to keep all the students off the streets and out of trouble. Given these overwhelming tasks, the remarkable thing about these schools is not that they fail in some of these tasks, or that they help to reproduce existing class structure, but that they succeed in so many cases in providing a humane experience for their students. (Weiler 1988, p.67)

> [T]hese classrooms are among the *best* I have observed: children are generally treated with care, are in a safe and protected environment, and are given some time to 'play'; the teachers generally enjoy their students and are kind, well-meaning, and well-intentioned. It is precisely in these 'best' classrooms that we can begin to decode the practices that are adultcentric, and structured to reproduce docility, conformity and educability. (Polokow 1989, p.83)

10.1 Introduction

Banfield teachers were committed, innovative and they cared about their children. They worked hard to ensure that children's experience of schooling was 'humane' and as 'safe' as they could make it. Children's rights and responsibilities were a high priority. Yet, the mandate for teachers in disadvantaged schools goes beyond this provision to the point where the demands are 'overwhelming', and noble hopes along with institutional limits discipline both teachers and students. Teachers' work is subject to contradictory and multiple demands constituted in political and educational discourses. One mandate is to produce literate citizens. Literacy may be constructed in any number of ways, such as correct spelling, filling in forms, appreciating 'good literature', keeping a personal diary, or taking political action. In a school site it is most likely to be an accumulation of many literacies: producing 'pieces of information', writing goals and self-assessments, the weekly spelling test, reading and singing hymns and learning to speak about difficult and overtly political topics. Different societies and local communities produce different versions of the literate citizen.

Teachers are simultaneously charged with controlling, training, skilling and empowering, and this is not a closed set; it may be added to at any time and vary from one locality to another. A perennial demand on teachers is that they manage the children in their care: in

loco parentis. This includes ensuring children's safety and well-being. It means making sure that Ngan is comforted when she is distressed; reading the big book with her ensconced on the teacher's lap. It means making sure that the children 'behave themselves': that they are obedient, polite and cooperative. It means making sure that Allan doesn't interrupt, that Joel controls his temper and that Julia doesn't lie on the floor. Another mandate, for teachers in disadvantaged schools, is to empower children. This requires brave teachers who are prepared to talk about race and gender, about politics and economies.

Teachers' work is complex, contradictory and cumulative. Pedagogies are constructed and reconstructed through an uneasy amalgam of competing discourses and knowledges - legal, psychological, moral, economic, medical and political. In public discourses schools are often charged with a 'transformative' brief - the production of healthy, educated, well behaved, happy, productive citizens - there are many vested interests in debating priorities. As dedicated, up-to-date, knowledgable, self-sacrificing professionals teachers must expand their repertoires as required, to handle for example, mandatory reporting of family sexual abuse, or medical assistance to sick and injured children, or counselling in times of death.

Given these complex and changing conditions, literacy teachers also require regular transformation through professional development in order to become the ideal teacher of the whole language classroom (who reads and writes for pleasure) to the ideal teacher of the genre classroom (who understands systemic linguistics) to the political and cultural worker of the critical literacy classroom (who conducts social analyses of their world). In this study I aim to shift the debates about literacy pedagogy away from competing best methods and totalising solutions to an analysis of teachers' institutional and discursive practices in local sites. My questions relate to how teachers' practices are assembled at this historical moment given the discourses which construct their subjectivities and the political, demographic and economic conditions which shape schools.

This study examined the construction of literacy in this disadvantaged school at this time. Through an analysis of contemporary discursive practices around the trilogy - literacy, pedagogy and disadvantage - I have explored how teachers' work in literacy lessons is constituted and is constitutive of the student subject. In this final chapter I turn to questions about curriculum solutions for the 'disadvantaged' and about theories of literacy pedagogy. I consider the implications of these questions from my position as a literacy educator in a tertiary institution. I want to argue that there remain powerful ways of making space within the literacy curriculum for difference, action and contestation.

10.2 Curriculum solutions for the 'disadvantaged'

The history of modernist education is one of production and veneration of supposed new and better solutions to the same old problems (Popkewitz 1991). Despite reform agendas and a discourse of progress the failure of public schooling to deliver equitable outcomes for different groups of students is a perennial problem. Where literacy is concerned, students who are disadvantaged by poverty are statistically likely to perform less well on mainstream measures of assessment than their more affluent peers. Why this is so has been the subject of numerous research studies which have produced contrastive explanations and associated compensatory or reform programs, including radical, liberal and conservative approaches to 'fix' poor children's literacy.

Some critical researchers have shown the ways in which schools contribute to the reproduction of societal inequities through the privileging of mainstream knowledges, cultures, languages and literacies (Anyon 1980; Apple 1982; Giroux 1983; Luke 1988). By changing the kinds of knowledges, cultures, languages and literacies which count, their hope is that schools can become sites of transformation. However, even when teachers work explicitly for social justice, schools remain but one of a series of institutions employed by modern nation states to manage and train increasingly diverse populations. If there is a lesson to this story, it is not transparent, accessible or straightforward. Knowing how to work for social justice in schools is not immediately obvious as the present study demonstrates.

Schools alone are limited as potential sites of social transformation. The assumption that schools and teachers exercise the kinds of power that can change social structures is problematic. Rather a network of alliances is required. Further, the composition of disadvantaged groups and the nature of poverty in different communities is dynamic and changing as the distribution of wealth and social goods is regulated by the economic conditions of nation states as competitors in global economies. Claims for literacy as the source of personal, social and political empowerment must be re-examined in these new times. The point here is that classroom curriculum solutions for the 'disadvantaged' have tended to be simplistic and over-inflated. Such 'solutions' may deflect educators from forming the kinds of alliances with community, business and government through which material changes can be made.

While the target of change remains the individual teacher in the privacy of her own classroom working to raise literacy standards, the educational system will maintain its own conservatism and the interests of the privileged. I learnt from the Banfield teachers that, despite their best intentions, they found it difficult to make the space for innovative

socially located literacies. When literacy standards or student misbehaviour are made urgent through institutional priorities and media reportage the pressure on teachers is intensified. Despite romantic hopes to the contrary we may need to accept that pedagogy on its own often has limited, unpredictable and local effects.

> [C]ontemporary scholarship makes us aware that however noble our hopes, a curriculum is a socially constructed and politically bound practice. At all times, our language and social practices in schools are precarious and limited, containing contradictions. As we engage in the task of constructing and realizing a curriculum, what are defined as possibilities are also prisons. (Popkewitz 1991, p.306)

The promotion of pedagogical solutions to societal injustice may be seen as wallpapering over the bars, to extend Popkewitz' prison analogy. At Banfield teachers struggled constantly to offer 'their kids' a literacy curriculum that was fun, challenging, rigorous and 'as good as other children might be getting somewhere else'. Under pressure to deliver raised standards they became increasingly concerned with use of time, correctness and productivity. Drama, writing stories, student generated projects and other progressive activities vied for the prime time slots with handwriting practice, spelling activities and learning the 'thousands' of genres. In these curriculum sites, teachers disciplined themselves and children for what they saw as the job at hand. The 'airy fairy' 'no guts to it' curriculum was overtaken by that 'working mode', 'quality' and 'information'.

Being literate, however literacy might be defined, does not come with any guarantees and poverty and other social injustices are not solved by effective school literacy programs. Unequal distribution of resources in Australia, unemployment and underemployment are not caused by, nor will they be solved by, the literate competence of the population. Yet the 'literacy equals empowerment' hypothesis is sustained by governments, academics, publishers, employers, parents and teachers. People from different political positions, cultures and institutional locations proclaim its significance. Words such as 'literacy' and 'empowerment' are code words, empty sets (Gee & Lankshear 1995; Green et al. 1994; Gore 1993). Therefore such words may be simultaneously deployed to different ends by radical educators, conservative politicians, social activists and economic rationalists. It is easy to make assertions with vocabularies with transient meanings.

The 'literacy equals empowerment' hypothesis has achieved the status of 'truth claim' made robust by its hegemonic status in a text-mediated world. The last fifty years of literacy education have seen the production of competing pedagogical models - cognitive skills, cultural heritage, natural language, genre, critical literacy - each of these with promises of better literacy for Australia's 'disadvantaged'. The empowerment rhetoric -

popularised and relocated - draws attention away from some of the immediate effects that institutional practices and judgements of literate competence can and do have on students and workers.

Schools, along with numerous institutions and workplaces in western society, are textually managed environments. Because both school organisation and learning are dependent on textual practices, students who don't have the reading and writing repertoires required for school work experience failure. The present study suggests that the ability to demonstrate knowledge orally is rarely enough in school. At Banfield, for instance, written products were key sites for evaluation of both literacy and subject knowledge. Increasingly employers use written packages as part of their training mechanisms to meet the government demand of award restructuring. Even for positions which require little textual work on the job, the training may be largely textually mediated. Further, assessments of literate competence below a required norm may be used to exclude people from employment, further training and education, and promotion.

Teachers at Banfield understood that while literacy does not come with any lifetime guarantees, the absence of Standard Australian English literacy from students' discursive repertoires increases their chances of school failure and reduces future options. On the one hand literate competence does not automatically produce equitable outcomes for disadvantaged groups, yet on the other hand 'illiteracy' is still a major dividing practice in Australian society. This contradiction produces dilemmas for educators. Because literacy is seen as a solution it can be made the problem, the reason for exclusion.

To summarise, literacy has become a goal and a priority of modern education (particularly in disadvantaged schools) because teachers subscribe to the belief perpetuated by literacy educators and governments that literacy in and of itself is an empowering tool. This creates a problem. When poverty, delinquency, inequities and unemployment remain, it can then be said that schools and teachers have failed to produce the kinds of workers that society needs, that literacy standards are low. Because school literacy is promoted as a solution it can be used to deflect blame for social ills away from governments and employers. The education system can then be blamed for Australia's poor economic performance.

Inflated claims for the potential of literacy for social change simultaneously produce a scapegoat for governments and disillusionment for teachers. Given the contradictions in claims made for literacy and how assessment of literate competence is used as a dividing practice in contemporary Australian society, literacy remains a social justice issue for educators. Having made the case that there is nothing essentially empowering about

literacy, I do not wish to argue that literacy is not important in schools. In fact as I have shown literacy has been made central to school learning, behaviour management, moral training and work management. Successful functioning at school requires literate work. My argument here is that utopian theories and models of literacy pedagogy do not take into account the sociological and material conditions of teachers' work in local sites, nor the limits of schooling for social change. Specifically, curriculum theorising and production edit out teachers' lifeworlds and discursive resources. What is needed then, is that literacy pedagogy is theorised as part of a broader project of the sociology of schooling, which incorporates the study of the socio-cultural milieu of school and community.

10.3 Local assemblage of literate pedagogies

The gap between pedagogical models and their take up and production in local sites is well documented (Popkewitz 1991). The so called 'theory practice divide' is a dominant question in educational research and curriculum studies. In such work teachers are typically positioned as translators of utopian pedagogical discourses. Teacher competence, systems resourcing, problematic student and community populations are variously cited as the causes of failure when enacted theories fail to produce the promised outcomes. In the present study I have used everyday local practices as a lens through which to re-examine theories and their take-up in the school community and in classrooms. As I have shown, at Banfield no pure models or theories were enacted. There were no 'whole language', 'traditional' or 'genre' teachers. In contrast, literacy lessons often represented a curious and sometimes innovative amalgam of each of these models deployed in action together.

Teachers do not work from a unified theoretical position, rather they act as 'bricoleurs' using available resources to construct an ad hoc pedagogy focussing on immediate problems (Hatton 1988). Educational discourses and practices intersect in often unpredictable ways with teacher subjectivities, produced by their own class, religious, gender and cultural locations and histories. Teachers assemble literacy pedagogies on the basis of their discursive resources, knowledges and cultures. Hence at Banfield the literacy lesson simultaneously became a site for discourses of Catholicism, individualism, managerialism, progressivism, behaviourism and social justice. Thus apartheid became an issue in the grade five/six/seven class not only because the teacher was exploring 'critical literacy', but also because one of her closest friends was South African and feared violence as a result of the South African referendum. The students' intense response to this topic sparked an ongoing series of classroom conversations and journal

entries about racism and difference. This study barely touches upon the complex issues of teacher subjectivity and biography. However it indicates the need for further research to explore the complex intersections of teachers' cultures, teachers' work, curriculum construction and pedagogical theories as they are enacted in local sites.

Teachers in particular sites at particular times hear and reconstruct pedagogical theories differently and with different social effects. Thus teachers work on and rework versions of theories and pedagogies from their own standpoints and in these ways teachers' discursive resources and lifeworlds mediate discourses of social justice. For example, a single parent teacher on one income living in the local community is already differently positioned in regard to social justice than a married teacher with a partner on a high salary living in an upper class suburb. It is not that the middle-class teacher has no agency and cannot work for equity, but that her primary discourses and lifeworlds are elsewhere. It is also not the case that the single-parent teacher necessarily shares an empathy with members of the local community. However each teacher is differently positioned to hear and see students and their parents differently; to construct social justice differently. Whilst one teacher may be insulted by students arguing with adults and see peer teasing as abusive, another teacher may here such language practices as 'normal'. These moment by moment assessments of language appropriateness depend on what it is that teachers are able to see and hear in what students present.

Teachers are not unitary or fixed subjects and there can be no easy assumptions about what such differences in teachers' lifeworlds may mean in their everyday classroom practices. Yet teachers 'are not necessarily free of class and race prejudice' (Polakow 1993, p.107). My point here is that questions of teacher identity and take-up of curriculum theorising and practice are rarely considered. Theories of literacy learning and teaching have focussed relentlessly on the nature of the child resources and difference - their class, language and culture- almost to the point of the fetishisation of the child, but little work has been done to consider how teacher identity intersects with theories of pedagogy, nor to consider how teachers hear and work on competing theories and discourses in local sites.

10.3.1 Recontextualising pedagogy as teachers' work

The work of feminist educators is useful here. Whilst teaching, especially in the primary school years, is a feminised profession educational theory has largely been a patriarchal domain. Yet the effects of that theorising constitutes teachers' work and subjectivities (Walkerdine 1984). In turning attention to the teachers' work, the positioning of teachers in educational discourses and the need for critical analyses of the discursive and

institutional practices of university theorists, feminist educators have disrupted the unproblematic production of theoretical pedagogical solutions (Baker 1995; Ellsworth 1992; Gore 1993; Hatton 1988; McWilliam 1992; Walkerdine 1984). The achievement of progressive educational goals requires changes in teachers' work, yet theorisation of teachers' work in relation to curriculum reform is limited (Hatton 1988).

The texts of literacy education construct ideal pedagogues which intersect with versions of 'teacher' from other sites, including for example, policy, experience, industrial, media representations of 'teacher'. Teachers are compiled in contradictory ways through the contemporary texts which shape their work and subjectivities (Green forthcoming; Baker 1995). Part of teachers' work is the assemblage of their teacher selves, drawing on the 'moral tales' or master narratives of pedagogical theories (Baker 1995). Teachers can be understood 'as individuals who are the sites of competing discourses about what teachers should and could be or do and who have some agency in determining the outcomes of such struggle' (Baker 1995, p.5). The present study suggests that pedagogical and curriculum theorising be relocated within the study of teachers' work. Further, such theories need to take into account teachers' histories and identities and the discursive construction of teachers' work through policy media and academic texts.

The context of the production of literate individuals is central. Literacy is a social practice - part of the institutional work of the school. Often literacy is treated as a clearly defined and bounded curriculum focus, as though it can be considered in a context-free way. Literacy becomes an academic problem. Yet how primary school teachers relate to students is an integral part of the way they teach literacy. Behaviour management, marking the roll, writing reports, and pastoral care of sick children are done by the literacy teacher. This is important because whilst teachers may hold enlightened views about the powers of literacy, from whatever theoretical perspective, there are institutional requirements which define their work and limit who they can be. From the teacher's position having a manageable class may be more urgent work than critical literacy; or versions of critical literacy may exist alongside a behaviour management regime with a normalising agenda. This complexity of contradictory roles is foregrounded for teachers but frequently backgrounded by literacy theorists, curriculum writers and researchers.

In this study I have illustrated the local assemblage of discursive practices in one school site, noting how teachers draw on contradictory discourses in order to produce the literate student. Teachers' discursive resources from their own lifeworlds, including family, childhood, local community, leisure activities, religious affiliations and so on, are constitutive of pedagogical discursive practices in ways which are frequently ignored. Recent feminist work on teaching indicates how maternal discourses are constitutive in

teachers' discursive practices (Acker 1995). Yet literacy education theorists have proceeded as though pedagogical discourses are context-free. The assumption has been that if we could get our theory right and fill teachers with the rights kinds of knowledge and skills teaching would proceed unproblematically. For example whole language, genre and critical pedagogies have promoted themselves as offering pedagogical solutions for disadvantaged students. If teachers knew more about how language works they would pass this on to students who would use this knowledge prudently and justly towards personal and community empowerment. Knowledge of how language works, whether it is the literary cannon of cultural heritage models, the voice and authorship of new literacies, the textual analyses of power and representation, is always central.

Literacy theories are built on the assumption that teachers' other knowledges are bracketed out, that a knowledge of language or literate practices will overtake other discourses when it comes to classroom pedagogies. However teachers' primary discourses are constitutive of their practices and affect local formations of literacy pedagogy (Heath 1982; Gee 1990). While considerable attention has been devoted to the impact of children's 'home background' in literacy acquisition research teachers' discursive repertoires are largely considered in terms of their professional location. Teachers' 'home backgrounds' are sometimes ignored. This project does not foreground teachers' biographies, as this was not I had negotiated with the teachers, but in conducting the research I became increasingly aware of this gap in much curriculum and pedagogical theorising including my own.

In many studies of educational disadvantage the object of criticism remains the school-based teacher. Researchers take up a position of wise educator, whose consciousness is raised in regard to equity and who see, hear and interpret things that practitioners cannot. School practitioners are often portrayed as unenlightened and as unwittingly contributing to cultural reproduction and the maintenance of social inequalities. It is claimed that middle class mainstream teachers maintain the status quo through their linguistic, pedagogical, curriculum and relational practices. How students are positioned within educational encounters is usually the focus of counter-hegemonic research in schooling and teachers are often characterised as powerful agents in this process (Freebody et al. 1995). However how teachers are positioned and how this impacts on their practices is less often investigated.

The unanticipated and complex effects of competing discourses in local sites are foregrounded in the case of Carlo's report archive. Carlo's reported failure to access and control the literate competencies he needed for high school, was intricately related to the ways in which professional discourses direct teachers to observe, interpret, diagnose and

record the behaviours children display. In these terms, it becomes possible to understand, if not sympathise, with Carlo's teachers in their attempts to 'value what Carlo brings'. It is all too easy to blame teachers. It is all too easy from the outside to see what could have or should have been done; to argue for example that teachers need to know more about learning English as a Second Language; to argue that teachers should have explicitly stated Carlo's difficulties from the beginning; to argue that Carlo should have had access to reading recovery in grade one; to argue that Carlo was the victim of progressive discourses and practices.

But none of these arguments make a difference to Carlo, nor to his teachers. It is all too easy from the outside and in hindsight to bring our preferred professional discourses to the problem of Carlo. However, it is difficult for those of us who work in the production of pedagogical or curriculum theory and the education of teachers to implicate ourselves and our discursive practices in this critique. In coming to know Carlo as a student, Carlo's teachers diligently followed the professional advice available to them in professional educational discourses. It is all too easy - not to see how complex the situation really was. For Carlo's part, he managed his life at primary school very well. When the academic side of schooling was difficult, he sometimes played the role of the class clown, allowing him to maintain status, particularly with his male peers. At other times he actively avoided the teacher's academic gaze (and the help which may have resulted) by offering to do jobs instead. As an observer in other classes I noted how frequently Carlo visited, to replace the stapler, to borrow a set of markers, to move the computer, to drop off a bundle of photocopying. In these ways Carlo made a place for himself in the social world of school, as the clown for his peers and as the helper for his teachers.

My argument here is that Carlo's story presents me, as a teacher educator, educational researcher and producer of literacy curriculum materials for teachers, with many unresolved questions about my own practices. What kinds of educational, sociological and linguistic knowledges (amongst others) might help Carlo's teachers to see and teach him differently so that he is not failed by his schooling? And what does this mean for my work with teachers? And what are the limits of pedagogical interventions of any kind for Carlo and other children living in relative poverty in Australia?

10.3.2 Teachers' lifeworlds and the mediation of educational discourse

Teachers' common sense everyday theories and folklore filter the professional educational discourses to which they are subjected. The use teachers make of available

discourses in assembling a pedagogy has been my interest in this thesis. I shift the focus from the cultural and discursive resources of students to those of teachers. My hope in future work is to write the embodied historicised teacher back into theories of literacy pedagogy. It is standard practice in progressive child-centred educational discourses to abhor the treatment of students as 'empty vessels'. Yet much academic, policy and curriculum development has proceeded as though teachers were exactly that. While theories of literacy pedagogy have advocated strong defence of teacher autonomy and warned against teacher deskilling, they have operated on a model of professional development as discursive reconstruction of the generic literacy teacher, working in generic classrooms with albeit, diverse communities of learners. Whether teachers are constituted as writers, linguists or cultural workers in pedagogical theories the assumption remains that teachers need to change in order to produce the kinds of students society demands. How such change might conflict with or be mediated by teachers' primary discourses and lifeworlds is rarely considered.

How teachers' lifeworlds mediate educational discourses is evident in the following instance. As part of our work in foregrounding social justice in university literacy education, a group of colleagues and I produced a series of videotapes examining literacy, poverty and schooling. The documentaries include interviews and classroom footage of teachers, parents and students from disadvantaged school communities (including Banfield) about local approaches to teaching literacy in these sites. The explicit aim of the documentaries is to disrupt and discredit deficit discourses about disadvantaged students. As we showed the documentaries to teachers and teacher educators we found audiences reluctant to take up standpoints which see poverty as structurally determined by political and economic systems. After viewing the video exploring the material nature of poverty a teacher educator commented that people were poor because they lacked the necessary skills and knowledge to use their money wisely. He drew on the dominant media discourse of 'blame the victim' (Green et al. 1994; Bessant 1995b).

This deficit discourse that the poor require more thrift is present in social science discourses and government policy as well as media reportage (Bessant 1995b). Such discourses combined with this educator's middle to upper-class position of privilege, constituted the problem of poverty as at least in part self-induced. Following his lead other participants went on to give personal accounts of the ways in which they coped on minimal resources as students. In this way the group rebuilt a scenario where poverty is deserved and reinstated a view of the poor as deficit. On this occasion my colleague and I were present and continued to challenge these propositions, but this example indicates the

resilience of deficit discourses and illustrates how social justice discourses are filtered through educators' own locations and lifeworlds.

Teachers assemble pedagogical practices drawing on an amalgam of professional discourses and primary discourses. Within a school, particular discourses may be dominant officially. At Banfield, for example, social justice was authorised through the Catholic Education Office policy and the principal employed a vocabulary of empowerment and liberation. In staff meetings and interviews with me teachers also spoke of empowering children. In classroom sites, however, individual teachers assemble pedagogies not only on the basis of a social justice standpoint, but from a multiplicity of competing and contradictory discourses. Social justice is reconstructed along with managerial discourses and teachers' commonsense views on social realities such as poverty. To illustrate, a teacher may read students' verbal interactions with peers as cruel (moral) inappropriate (linguistic) and unfair (social justice) and as evidence of family violence (sociology) and employ a behaviour management technology (educational psychology) to handle the problem. At the same time students may wonder what the fuss is about and see such forms of interactions as a part of the ways they form and maintain friendships and peer relations. How students are read by teachers and what kinds of curriculum and pedagogical practices are configured depend on the intersections and interplays of the mediating filters through which teachers see their classroom world and the student subjects who inhabit it.

While deficit discourses were officially outlawed from the public arena at Banfield this could not prevent teachers taking such a position in evaluating student behaviour or ability as I have demonstrated in Chapter Six. While the principal was vocal in her social justice and liberationist philosophies what these principles meant in everyday classroom interactions was the province of the individual teacher. Even where teachers consciously struggled to do so, how to remove deficit hangovers from pedagogical practices is not automatic or obvious. In each separate classroom the teacher faces her own private dilemmas: what kind of pedagogy she can and should construct for these kids, how the school world should be for these kids and for herself as their teacher. It must be a world the teacher can manage. This world may have little to do with the utopian views of intellectuals.

A Foucauldian reading of teachers' work explicates how the intersections of educational, political, economic and other discourses discipline teachers in their work, even in sites where emancipatory and liberatory discourses are promoted and sanctioned. Curriculum theorising and production therefore needs to foreground the social and institutional contexts of teachers' work. Theories of school literacy pedagogy cannot be de-

institutionalised. School contexts require teachers to manage large groups of children in small spaces for lengthy periods of time. To construct classroom discursive practices which work against institutional regulation and make claims for diversity and difference, we must first understand teachers' work.

Teachers take action on students' actions second by second without necessarily being aware of the effects of their decisions. As Foucault has argued people know what they do they know and why they do what they do but they may not know what they do does. For example, while teachers may hold out hopes for the development of the individual self through journal writing, students may view such writing as a tedious, routine, intrusive chore. While teachers may stop a class discussion just at the point where students begin to argue and challenge each other, students may see such a strategy as a cop out. Recall for instance the teacher's closing down (by 'changing topics') of the discussion of enemies in the classroom. Teachers may threaten time-out for talking at an inappropriate time and then expect the offending child to take risks by voicing an opinion about a political or moral issue in the literacy lesson.

Teachers know what they are doing and why they do it, but the effects of their practices, both short and long term may be difficult to anticipate. These are the contradictions of schooling, where each new lesson and each new day is meant to be a new beginning, where what happens at home is not meant to affect the child's ability to learn at school and where the child's behaviour is not meant to affect the teacher's academic expectations – where the effects of past histories and present lifeworlds continue to have effects that theorists and practitioners alike would wish otherwise. Yet each new lesson is not a new beginning. The child and teacher in the literacy lesson are not separate from the child and teacher of the time out.

In schools, issues of control and management are not neatly divided from the academic subjects. They may be separate matters for policy and theory and teacher education, but they are not separate matters in everyday classroom life. A recent study on everyday literate practices in homes and schools in socio-economically disadvantaged communities (Freebody et al. 1995) found, as I did, that a large percentage of literacy lesson time was spent on managerial issues, issues of control and organisation. Freebody et al. (1995) point out that this is a problem as it takes away time from literacy pedagogy and interrupts the academic agenda of lessons. Yet I would argue that this problem cannot simply be dismissed as peripheral to the interests of literacy researchers. How teachers manage their students is not separate from the literacy lesson. Literate practices in school require particular formations of student behaviour. In considering school literacies educators will need to confront questions about relations of power. What kinds of social control are

OK? In what instances should power be exercised and by whom? Until such questions are considered theory will continue to be limited to what 'is meant to be' and produce little that can make a difference to teachers' and children's lives in schools. Curriculum theorists may need to consider the mundane, as that is how school is done.

Given that teachers construct pedagogical practices on the basis on their primary discursive and cultural resources, not exclusively from educational discourses, pedagogical theories need to address teachers as a key variable. Theories of literacy pedagogy are not simply scripts that can be enacted unproblematically. Teachers are no more empty vessels than are their students. Each theoretical position constructs teacher subjectivity and identity in particular ways, yet taking for granted the teacher as forever malleable raw material for the theorists' artistry. Yet teachers' histories and identities ensure that they work on theories and reconstruct them in often unpredictable ways. For instance critical literacy is not the same anywhere! Its reworking involves intersections with competing discourses, local lifeworlds and commonsense.

Local assemblage of discursive and pedagogical practices ensure that the effects of enacted theories vary with locality. Thus the social effects of literacy pedagogies are not predictable in terms of the student subjects constituted in local sites. Prior claims for literacy pedagogies in terms of their social effects are therefore untenable. I do not mean to suggest that school literacies do not have immediate and longterm social effects, nor to suggest that theoretical work on literacy pedagogy is unproductive. My questions are concerned with the ways in which particular teachers in specific locations work on theory and construct pedagogical practices drawing on conflicting educational and adjacent discourses as well as the cultural resources of their out-of-school lives. The task is to rewrite teachers, as embodied identities, back into our theorising of pedagogy as cultural work. Dyson (1993) explores the ways in which children draw on the peer and home resources in the official world of schooling in order to participate in a permeable curriculum. Similar theorising and local research may be useful in considering the worlds which teachers draw on in assembling a pedagogy.

10.4 Making space for difference, action and contestation

In concluding this thesis I return to the questions which generated this project, questions about the construction of literacy in a disadvantaged school and questions about how literacy educators might work for social justice in school and university settings. In considering implications of this study, I make some observations as a teacher educator

and researcher in reference to my own institutional location. I conclude with some observations about ways of making space for difference, action and contestation.

10.4.1 Abandoning totalising solutions

The recent history of literacy pedagogy has operated on if/then propositions based on totalising theoretical solutions. If teachers changed from pedagogy x to pedagogy y then 'these kids' would be literate and empowered; if teachers knew more about x and y then the quality of their teaching would improve, literacy standards would rise, the national economy would improve and 'these kids' would be empowered; if parents changed their home practices then 'these kids' would be educable, literate and empowered. These propositions misread the social effects of literacy and schooling. Classroom pedagogical change does not alter structural poverty. Children are poor because society distributes resources inequitably, not because they or their parents have the wrong language or literacy.

Totalising theoretical solutions are problematic not only because they cannot possibly deliver what they promise but because they prevent the generation of other forms of local action which may make a difference. In other words the dominance of grand theories acts in a normalising fashion colonising the discursive space, limiting what can be said and done about literacy for disadvantaged students in local sites. At Banfield, teachers' actions in the literacy classroom were done with a sense of urgency if not panic, where the usefulness of time was judged in terms of productivity. In such a discursive space it becomes difficult to make time for other forms of literate practices which result in no tangible products or outcomes, but may be nonetheless important in the construction of students' literate identities.

Schools as mandatory social institutions do have social effects, both immediate and long term in the resources they authorise for students and how they deal with the resources students bring to this official world. Totalising discourses ignore the contextual constraints and in so doing the local possibilities. Making a space within the institutional politics of schooling for language and literacy use as a site of positive power in students' and teachers' lives requires that we take seriously teacher identity and the politics of teaching as a labour process. We will not move forward whilst we produce generic pedagogies for generic pedagogues and generic students in generic locations. As Foucault's analyses show there can be no universal intellectuals, no totalising solutions or programs, the role of the intellectual may be critique and refusal in local action (Smart 1985, p.62).

10.4.2 Theorising the subjectivities of the literacy educator

Curriculum cannot be fixed independently of teachers' work conditions and lifeworlds. There is a need for sociological analyses of schooling and literacy which take into account teacher subjectivities in the sociocultural milieux of schools and communities. Researchers and educators have over the past two decades focussed extensively on children's cultural backgrounds as a key variable in language and literacy acquisition. However the focus on students, while important, needs to be matched by a dynamic analysis of teachers' lifeworlds and communities. In addition such work needs to avoid the reproduction of binary divisions between school and home as signalled by the term 'cultural background'. 'Background' suggests a static approach to culture and a devaluing of culture, since it is remains 'background' to the foreground of schooling.

This maintenance of the binary division between school and home between the supposed 'acultural' world of schools and the problematics of 'different' home cultures is implicated in the production of deficit views of students. Whilst students' 'cultural backgrounds' are seen as an independent variable rather than as a positive resource and whilst teachers are themselves treated as 'acultural', difference is constructed as problematic as something to be tamed and ordered by the world of school. Under these circumstances school literacies may be colonised for normalising purposes under an empowerment rubric.

Work on teacher identity and subjectivities could be informed by recent feminist, post-colonial and poststructuralist theorising which demonstrates that subjectivities are neither unitary nor static, but multiple, hybrid and dynamic. Considering the interplay between teachers' lifeworlds and subjectivities and curriculum and pedagogical theorising and practices could yield important insights for both preservice and inservice teacher education.

10.4.3 University discursive practices: What do they produce?

An urgent issue from my position as a university literacy educator is to analyse the effects of the institutional and discursive practices of teacher training and educational research. University educators are recognising the extent of own roles in constructing the fragmented and contradictory nature of pedagogical knowledges and the conservatism of teacher education programs (Grundy & Hatton 1995; McWilliam 1993). As producers and brokers of pedagogies teacher educators and researchers cannot absolve ourselves of responsibility for school-based practice. The ways in which we teach, research and write - our textual practices in universities - produce particular effects on students, teachers, informants and readers. Given that teachers' and students' subjectivities are discursively

constituted then as academics we need to shift our research gaze to questions about the effects of our own everyday institutional practices.

Recent critical evaluations of university courses suggest that literacy and language education for preservice and inservice teachers ignore, or pay lip service to, social justice issues, including class, poverty, race, languages and gender. (Christie et al. 1991; Polakow 1993). As Polakow (1993, p.107) puts it, 'Teacher training institutions offer very little in the way of anti-bias education'. A review of my earlier work in the university and professional development indicates that this indictment applies in my case and raises questions about educational practices within the academy (Comber & O'Brien 1993).

In what ways are the binaries: theory and practice maintained as rational divisions in course structures and assignments? In what ways do teacher educators and educational researchers produce the fragmented divisions and limited analyses for which we blame school-based teachers? In what ways do we promote the myths that better literacy teaching solves disadvantage? Which myths do we perpetuate in our efforts to make literacy central? In what ways do we make teachers' work harder? In what ways do we contribute to the construction of difference as deficit? In what ways do we offer student teachers and teachers a depoliticised analysis of social justice, literacy education, behaviour management, curriculum, methods as unrelated topics?

The divisions, fragmentation and omissions from tertiary education require preservice and inservice teachers to assemble a collection of mini solutions and philosophies for predefined problems. Teachers educators need to start by critically reviewing our own offerings in terms of the maintenance of class-related privilege. While a critical re-examination of the pedagogical and discursive practices of teacher education sites may seem far from the world of Banfield it is a necessary, if insufficient, first step in building new alliances with school-based teachers and working on theorised practices with school communities. In terms of concrete action, the Banfield community are eager to continue to explore and critically analyse their practices and have invited my ongoing participation in this collaborative task. This will require that I put my own educational practices up for similar scrutiny.

10.4.4 Local alliances for social justice

Running alongside my work on this project, I have tried to make some inroads on my own textual and institutional practices as a tertiary educator, researcher and writer. Working in a collaborative team - university colleagues, student-teachers, school-based

administrators and teachers (including volunteers from Banfield) and parents and students - we have worked on a project making video documentaries intended to explicitly foreground and problematise literacy, poverty, diversity and social justice (Comber et al. 1994). A number of educators argue for the need for university researchers to cultivate a more humble position (in line with our own pedagogic inadequacies) and to acknowledge our privilege in the relative comfort zone of university work (Gore 1993; McWilliam 1993).

We make no claims for the significance of the documentaries except insofar as they have created alliances between university educators, school personnel and communities. As products they have generated conversations in graduate and undergraduate programs about literacy and social justice. The substantive nature of the documentary project is documented elsewhere (Nixon & Comber 1995). Of importance here are the possibilities the documentary has suggested to us for further collaborative work in local sites exploring problems which are often set aside for theorists. The project shows the potential for university educators and school-based educators to form alliances, to become collaborators for social justice across the educational sectors.

In such projects school and university educators could explore a social analysis which highlights the complexity of the local: community conditions, economies and cultures, not as a pathology of deviance, but as a political economy in which children, parents, employers and teachers are related. Teachers need ways of analysing the local communities they serve and the relationships of those local communities to the state. Such analysis needs to go beyond criteria often specified by educational discourses. In other words it is not helpful to look at students' home for what is not there. Not finding books or pencils or places for quiet reading is the product of an educational analysis infused with middle-class white literacy practices.

The present study suggests that teachers need analytic tools which help them understand how poverty is produced and distributed in late capitalist societies, rather than deserved. The desperate phone call for help from the single parent may then be heard not as an intrusion, but as evidence of the difficulty of life in this community; the supposed chaos of the home world may be less a matter for moral judgement than for understanding of how the unequal distribution of resources plays out in the everyday lives of families living in poverty. We can then move from an expectation that families manage their poverty in quiet and leave the ordered world to get on with business as usual, to a recognition of the positive roles that schools could play in the lives of disadvantaged communities. When the analysis of communities is removed from the arena of moral

judgement and broadened beyond the language and literacy checklist, then the place of literacy education in a social justice agenda can be recontextualised and acted upon.

Recognising that literacy is not a solution to socioeconomic disadvantage does not mean that school literacy lessons cannot become sites of social change, but it does entail examining what can be changed within the school and to what ends. Teachers must be in the forefront of that theorising. The mediation of theory in teacher education and teachers' work on and with theory are urgent research sites for literacy educators committed to making a difference for disadvantaged students.

> The future of literacy education and research on literacy, however, relies not on language theorists, not on researchers, not even on teachers as researchers, but on teachers knowing theories and assessing their value on research on literacy. (Brodkey 1992, p.307)

Brodkey goes on to argue that 'teachers need to recover their right to conceptualise teaching and learning and hence to reform education from within' (Brodkey 1992, p.308) and suggests that ongoing analysis of the constitutive nature of discourse offers possibilities for interrupting discursive practices that are counter-productive to teaching and learning (Brodkey 1992). As a tertiary teacher my task is to consider how I might anticipate with teachers the different effects of our practices on different groups of students and which evaluative frames are useful in considering the effects of practices.

10.4.5 Literate practices, identity formation and life trajectories

Literacy instruction is a site for training in technologies of the self. Student subjects are produced by and transform themselves through reading and writing (Foucault 1988). Through autobiography, journal entries and self-assessments students construct themselves as objects of knowledge across 'grids of specification' designed by their teachers. School literate practices are occasions for self-examination and self-surveillance. Students' writing becomes a confessional site. Literacy is both a tool for the constitution of self and for recording traces of that production.

If teachers' work is understood as the production of future citizens then literacy pedagogy can be seen as the discursive construction the literate 'citizen-to-be'. Literacy is often put with morality, health and economic well-being as an index by which the modern citizen can be evaluated and known. In a disadvantaged school where children arrive already classified as 'other', normalising is a high priority. The child is not only to be made literate but also non-violent, healthy, productive and well-behaved. Literate work is a key contributor to the normalisation of the child population. The present study indicates a discourse of work became dominant as teachers assembled local responses to these competing demands.

One of the dilemmas raised by poststructuralist theories is from which position we evaluate discourse. In other words, after analysis what then? The question remains: in what ways do the discursive practices of teachers in schools such as Banfield produce negative effects for students? In what ways is human subjectivity 'diminished'? (Brodkey 1992, p.312). Gee argues that we need to examine classroom literacy practices in order to see whether what is going on is 'ethical human discourse' (Gee 1993, p.292). He suggests two key steps: that discourses need to be scrutinised firstly to check if they harm someone else and secondly to check who they advantage over other people. However these questions are not simple to answer in the day-to-day practices of schooling and different discourses provide different rationalities to questions about 'what is good for other people's children'. Nevertheless simply asking such questions foregrounds a social justice grid of evaluation for teaching and learning. This in itself is a useful step. As Gee concludes:

> In the end we run out of words, and meaning is rooted finally in judgement and action. (Gee 1993, p.293)

A parent of a child with literacy difficulties recently published an article entitled, 'Ideology Battle Places Theory Before Children', in a daily newspaper in Melbourne, where she deplored the whole-language versus phonics debate (*The Age,* November 14 1995, p.18). She argued that such debates have been between 'experts' and parents' views are rarely given any coverage. She goes on to illustrate what she sees as the effects of such debates on her son who, a few weeks before his eighth birthday, in her terms could read 'only four words'. This parent argued that teachers' operating from a whole language philosophy judged her son as not ready to read and took no interventionist action. She points out that lessons in phonemic awareness may have benefited her son, but that he was not given access to such help. Her point is reasonable and consistent with Freebody and Luke's (1990) analysis of what readers need to do. Here my point is not to argue the pros and cons of different techniques, but quite the reverse. Children such as Carlo and the child reported in *The Age* story may ultimately pay the price for discourses which claim to tell the truth about literacy pedagogy. Developing an ethical analysis of the effects of different pedagogical discourses will need to be an ongoing project for literacy educators and researchers.

In everyday classroom lessons teachers make decisions about how students should spend their time. They communicate what counts as 'proper school literacy' and identify the 'good students'. These are not unimportant actions and have much to do with students' identity formation and therefore future life trajectories. Teachers' moment by moment evaluations and feedback tells children who they are, who they can and should be.

Following Foucault, we can see these as the 'positive functions' of schooling - the 'development of the minds and bodies of school children' (Smart 1985, p.89). What Foucault's work alerts us to is the need to be aware of what limits who we can be as and teachers and as students. Together, teachers and students can study the ways in which textual practices contribute to the exercise of power in society; they can study the ways in which different writers have used literacy to strengthen identities of minority groups; they can explore how schools function in society. School literacies can be sites of social action and analysis. But it will need stamina from teachers such as those at Banfield to continue to work for more than just the 'basics' at a time when dominant ideologies ensure that the 'basics' enjoy a new prominence. In regard to this project the questions remain: What kinds of literacy were made important for these children in this place and at this time? In what ways do these literacies allow students to use the multiple resources of their peers, popular culture and communities?

Foucault has more to say about how modern societies institute disciplinary practices in order to govern the population than about how resistance and freedom operate. In employing Foucauldian interpretive analytics I have perhaps followed a similar path. One reason may be that traces of resistance are more difficult to observe, that instances of resistance happen less obviously under the public gaze of a researcher, than official school regimes of practice. However those instances of contradiction, disruption, discontinuity and resistance which I have explored here indicate their potential. Despite academic and philosophical discourses of liberation and emancipation we know less about the ways in which schools as disciplinary institutions might work against normalising practices which limit who students can be and in some cases maintain disadvantage. Perhaps a multiliteracies project will begin to document a process of research which focusses on the creation of such spaces and narratives which explore how local projects are constructed (The New London Group 1996).

10.4.6 Making space: Reasons for hope and action

My work at Banfield indicates how difficult it may be to create space for difference in schools; how the interplay of liberatory and managerial discourses produces a sense of urgency, a sense of no time to waste, a sense of needing to prioritise and deliver 'the basics'. Under a discursive overload of contradictory imperatives teachers have to work very hard to make time and space for the innovative, the risky, the long-term projects. And it is never a simple matter of changing just one thing. For example new and relevant topics can flounder when they are offered through restrictive tasks and talk. Alternative texts can be quickly colonised by the daily journal entry. Thus school literate practices

need to be examined in terms of what they work to do in particular contexts and how these produce particular teacher and student subjectivities.

A number of researchers paint a bleak picture of the results of schooling and literacy education for poor children: from accounts which see schools as harsh and at times brutal landscapes for children (Polakow 1993); to accounts which claim a 'pedagogy of poverty' (Haberman 1991) to accounts which indicate that even with the teachers' best intentions literacy lessons are characterised by a high degree of 'interactive trouble' (Freebody et al. 1995); and to accounts which indicate that educators strongly believe that there is a causal relationship between poverty and school achievement (Badger et al. 1993; Freebody et al. 1995).

Some aspects of my project confirm the dominance of disciplinary practices in producing docile subjects; the transformation of 'these kids' and 'their chaotic home lives' into the literate student of the ordered and peaceful school. The present study also confirms the high priority given to normative standards of behaviour, correctness, quality and order. It indicates the ways in which the literacy lesson becomes a site for training in particular kinds of technologies of the self and the production of an ethical subject who is highly self-regulated, hard-working, self-monitoring and productive. However, this project also suggest reasons for hope and hints for action through the occasions during which teachers and students made the space and time for other ways of being in school which challenge normative grids of specification and open up possibilities for social action within the school domain.

Here teachers and students, through different kinds of language and literate practices changed the landscape of mundane school behaviours and discursive practices, even if briefly. On these occasions teachers explored a 'permeable curriculum' (Dyson 1993) made a 'third space', (Gutierrez et al. 1995) took up a meta-analysis on societal literate practices, disrupted the exercise of power within the school and used new technologies to produce local knowledge.

My final comments are not bleak. At Banfield, teachers worked hard to construct school lifeworlds which were challenging and satisfying, pleasurable and productive. They struggled to deliver what the official world required of them. They agonised over events and products in order that they could be proud of their kids, so that parents could be proud of their kids and so these kids could be proud of themselves. There was never any sense of just going through the motions at Banfield. Teachers cared to the point of exhaustion. School events were key events in the parent community. The literacy curriculum was only part of a very complex school world where liturgies, aerobics,

maths projects, music and art exhibitions were important too. For some children and teachers these other curriculum events were more joyful and offered more space for innovation and play than the literacy curriculum, which during my time at the school became serious and urgent work. However in some instances teachers and students were able to construct literate practices which opened up space for students to take up different positions. To conclude I return briefly to such occasions and discuss the potential for freedom and resistance in school literacies.

In all the Banfield classrooms there were instances of disruption and contestation of the regimes the teachers worked so hard to put in place. Sometimes students actively worked against the teacher's control, both overt and coercive forms. Mark, an able student in the senior class, disrupted time on the mat with daily requests to go to the toilet. On his return he physically disturbed as many students as possible. He corrected the teacher's spelling and punctuation errors and commented on the content and neatness of her blackboard notes. He openly read banned books under his desk in writing time. He questioned the teacher's professional discourse and argued directly that her suggestions for time lines and planners were not useful to him. He argued against writing a critical letter to the author of *Counting on Frank* (Clement 1990). Mark questioned and disrupted literacy lessons as a matter of course. His peers sometimes joined him in his criticism and on occasion small groups complained to the principal about the amount of work they had to do.

In other classrooms there were individuals like Mark who publicly questioned the teacher about tasks, instructions, ways of behaving. Students did not simply accept teachers' views of how they should be. As Foucault has argued in modern disciplinary societies wherever power is exercised there is resistance. My interest in this project has been teachers' work in the production of the literate student and the discourses informing that formation. Instances of student resistance and contestation throw into relief more sharply the ideal student teachers are working towards. Thus Mark's transgressions illuminate the official school literacies promoted by his teacher at this time. His criticisms of her 'language workshop', his challenge to her critical letters to authors questioning gender representation, his continued disruption of whole class discussions, his reading Stephen King novels under the desk, his assessment of her planners as unhelpful, his pointing out the odd blackboard error: all indicate his struggle with the official school literacies his teacher is working to produce and in so doing make the sanctioned priorities clearer. Mark was not the only student to operate in such a way. Similar strategies for exercising power were employed by other students in each of the classrooms. For example the girls in Mark's class did not resist the critical letters to the author, but argued with their teacher

for more time for their own story writing. When students fight back both what is being asked of them and what is absent from their curriculum become clearer.

However it was not only students who contested the regime of work and productivity dominant in literacy lessons at this time. Each of the teachers at different times abandoned their plans and made space for different kinds of literacies. In these instances the usual use of time and space and relationships were disrupted by the teacher. In one classroom the teacher simply made time for children to hear each other read in pairs and made time for readers' theatre where children planned and acted out picture books in small groups. On these occasions literate activity became a social event and the gaze of the teacher was interrupted. In another classroom the teacher let children say what they knew about the topics of study and took on the role of computer scribe documenting their knowledge. In another classroom the teacher used the production of enlarged class stories to critique the power relations of schooling and regularly critiqued her own teacher behaviour in humorous ways. In another classroom the teacher made time for students to talk about race, gender, culture, adults, children - topics where power was made central to the reading and writing of the literacy lesson.

In every classroom there were occasions where teachers consciously changed the usual patterns of literacy lessons - the content, the social arrangements for talk and work, and the kinds of texts which were read and produced. At such times it was possible to see the 'literacy and empowerment' pair as a possibility for school life. However, in some classrooms such events were rare. Teachers maintained their commitment to 'lifting the standards of these kids' literacy', which meant increasing students' work rates and productivity and attention to the quality of students' products.

Teachers discipline themselves in order to discipline students (King 1990). Yet it was often the occasions where teachers made space for other kinds of literacies where students 'worked best', where attention to the text interpretation and production was heightened. My plan is to continue to investigate such occasions where a 'third space' (Gutierrez et al. 1993) is created in the classroom text, where a 'permeable curriculum' (Dyson 1993) is constructed, where students and teachers push the boundaries of school literacies. In closing I return to a comment from one teacher:

> This is not what I set out to do.

Referring to the time she spent in managing students' behaviour, this teacher discussed her hopes for teaching and how her goals were swallowed by the mundane and the trivial. It may be that in studying the everyday mundane routine practices of school life that hints for change and action are located, because it is in such events that power

relations are maintained. The grand plans for empowerment through literacy become buried beneath the lunch orders, the threats of time out for misbehaviour, the roll book the institutional practices of schooling which limit not only who students can be, but who their teachers can be. It may be that in studying the instances where teachers and students fight back and disrupt the disciplinary and normalising practices of schooling - 'the spaces of freedom we can still enjoy' (Foucault 1988, p.11) - that hints for local action for literacy teachers committed to social justice may be germinated.

Mark, and Tatiana are still in high school and doing well, according to the Banfield principal. Benjamith is doing well too and so is her younger sister, Melinda ('Speedy Gonzales') now in the middle grade at Banfield. Carlo is out of school and out of work, but still goes back to visit his old primary school, where his sister Adrianna is now in the senior class. Joel is barely holding on in high school and is suffering from an eye condition that will result in him losing his sight. Julia's mother has died and the principal is unsure where Julia is now. Anne, who pointed out the double standards of the father in *Counting on Frank* (Clement 1990) has left school and at fifteen is expecting her first child. As the principal commented 'sometimes you wonder' about what school can really do. However, she added that she is still committed to making a difference to the children of Banfield. Exactly what this might mean remains and how it might be achieved remains unclear - to both of us.

Her position is to do what can be done within the school. She's pleased that three years after graduating the students still come to visit. She's delighted with the new young teachers she's appointed since the school enrolment doubled in size. She warmly invites me back to see how well they're doing and how much has changed. She and I consider how the current teachers might be able to learn from the research reported here, what she has learned as a principal and what I have learnt as a teacher educator. Together we feed on each other's energy and commitment and make a time to get together again. We realise we have lots of work to do.