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Seeking Visibility:
Action Research With Teachers of Mobile Indigenous
Students

Thesis submitted by

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B. Ed. (JCU), M. Ed. (UniSA)

in February 2012

in fulfillment of the requirements for the

Doctor of Philosophy

in the School of Education at James Cook University.

Statement on the Contribution of Others

I acknowledge the intellectual support of my supervisory team, Professor Angela Hill, Associate Professor Leanne Dalley-Trim and Professor Sue McGinty, who provided ongoing contributions to my research design, proposal writing, data analysis and also editorial assistance with this thesis.

I have received financial assistance from the School of Education in accordance with the *James Cook University Minimum Resources Policy*. A grant from the James Cook University Faculty of Arts, Education and Social Sciences' *Graduate Research Scheme* enabled me to reimburse the participating school for teachers' time and to attend national and international conferences. Additionally, I have received a stipend in the form of an *Australian Postgraduate Award*. I have not sought or received any other contributions.

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted within the guidelines for research ethics outlined in *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (2007). The proposed research methodology received ethics clearance from the James Cook University Ethics Review Committee (approval number H3172) and the project was approved by the Department of Education and Training (reference number 550/27/779).

Andrea Lynch

Date

Acknowledgements

The inspiration, friendship, cajoling and encouragement of my principal supervisors, Angela Hill and Leanne Dalley-Trim, are gratefully acknowledged. I thank them both for including me in the larger mobility study (of which this doctoral project formed a part) and for their unstinting generosity as mentors, colleagues and friends. In particular, I acknowledge Angela's role in encouraging me to become involved in education research that supports equity and social justice.

I also acknowledge the support and encouragement of Professor Sue McGinty whose depth of experience, patience and understanding in the role of associate supervisor helped enormously. In addition, I thank Associate Professor Sarah Prout for her encouragement and support.

My thanks go also to my postgraduate colleagues in the School of Education and the School of Indigenous Australian Studies for their support and collegiality. In particular, to my good friends Fiona Navin and Tanya Doyle – thank you for the cups of tea and hours of conversation – you made every day a good day.

I thank both the School of Education and the Graduate Research School for the financial support to attend conferences and other professional learning events during the course of my candidature. Such events have been invaluable in testing my evolving findings before international and national audiences and as a means of extending my developing professional network. In a time of shrinking budgets this support is much appreciated.

I owe an enormous debt to the participants in this research and to the Indigenous educators who formed the reference group for this project. I thank each of them for their

willingness to be involved in such an extended project and for allowing me into their professional lives. I thank them for their insight, generous spirit and enduring commitment to Indigenous students. They are all morally committed and passionate educators who continue to work hard so that all children receive the best education possible.

Finally, but by no means least, I thank my family and friends for their support on the long journey to bring this thesis to completion. My husband, Peter, has been a source of constant emotional support and encouragement throughout this study and has lifted me up in moments of uncertainty. It would never have been completed without his patience, generosity and understanding. Our children, Regan, Gemma and Thom, have shown me much consideration and given me the time and space to think and write. My mother has offered emotional and practical support that made anything seem possible.

My sincere thanks to everyone who shared this journey with me – I could not have made it without you.

Abstract

In Australia, Indigenous students' education outcomes, as represented by assessments that accompany the current neo-liberal performativity and accountability agendas, are well below those of their non-Indigenous counterparts. While there has been a flurry of policy and rhetoric around 'closing the gap', one aspect of the lived experience of some Indigenous Australian Peoples – temporary mobility – goes largely ignored by education systems that, through policy and its enactment, represent schooling stability as 'normal'. While not all mobility has a negative effect, existing research shows that when accompanied by other risk factors such as low socio-economic status, mobility can have a 'compounding' effect (KPMG Consulting, Australian Council for Education Research, Department of Defence, & Commonwealth Department of Education Science and Training, 2002) and, when multiple school moves occur in the early years, learning is highly likely to be disrupted (Heinlein & Shinn, 2000; KPMG Consulting et al., 2002; Rumberger, 2003). Indigenous mobility, as an educational issue, is largely absent from education policy and this absence, coupled with ongoing literacy policy reform in Queensland, serves to provide little guidance for teachers and schools in regional urban communities working to meet the literacy learning needs of this underserved cohort of students.

This case study was conducted as a critical participatory action research project exploring teaching practices that support the literacy learning of mobile Indigenous students. It was undertaken in a state primary school serving a regional Queensland suburban community characterised by low educational outcomes and low socio-economic status. The study formed part of a larger collaborative action research project investigating Indigenous student mobility, with a focus on literacy and numeracy outcomes, and trialling targeted interventions in 14 low socio-economic primary schools in a range of locations

across Queensland. While the larger project actively focused on responding to the needs of mobile Indigenous students by building school capacity and engaging with the local community, this study, working in parallel, has focused sharply on the work of teachers in relation to supporting literacy learning for mobile Indigenous students. Through all phases of both research projects, an Indigenous reference group from within the Queensland Department of Education and Training provided guidance and support. Additionally, extensive consultations with Indigenous stakeholders were undertaken to ensure the research was consistent with the concerns and interests of the local community.

Over four school terms in 2009 and 2010, I facilitated a participatory action research project involving three classroom teachers working in Years 1 and 3, the school's Community Liaison Officer, the Mobility Support Teacher and the Curriculum Coordinator. Data were gathered and generated through a range of methods including, but not limited to, professional learning activities, professional conversations within whole group meetings, classroom observations and semi-structured interviews.

The methodology was informed by a critical theory approach, underpinned by Habermas' (1984, 1987, 1996) theories of knowledge constitutive interests, communicative action and the public sphere. I also drew upon the notion of 'Disciplined Dialogue' (Swaffield & Dempster, 2009) to ensure professional conversations retained both their focus on literacy teaching practice and on the data that were generated through the participatory action research cycle.

Data collected and generated from the project were managed through the use of *QSR NVivo* software. This software was used to code the collective data. Over time, as analysis progressed and patterns and ideas took shape, these were organised and reorganised into hierarchical, branching structures or 'tree' nodes which allowed the

researcher to organise the coding according to conceptual relationships – as one way of identifying patterns in the data.

This research identified that the practice architectures of the neoliberal state serve as a barrier to teachers' work with mobile Indigenous students through a reduced and narrowed curriculum (Lingard, 2010) and a focus on testing as accountability (Luke & Woods, 2008) that is removed from classroom purposes. Additionally, the lack of a coherent literacy policy in Queensland marginalises this cohort of students and reduces teachers' capacity to support their literacy learning needs. These practice architectures shape teachers' work in ways that draw their work away from the cultural interface (Nakata, 2007a, 2007b) and provide spaces for deficit discourses and low expectations of mobile Indigenous students and their families.

Within this action research project it was found that when temporal and discursive space supported by 'Disciplined Dialogue' is made available, teachers and specialist support staff are able to 'see' local and systemic practice architectures (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008) and, in doing so, strategise critical place-based (Gruenewald, 2008) pedagogical responses that meet the needs of students in the school at that time. Evidence demonstrated that providing this space for praxis can serve to render visible the lived experiences of mobile Indigenous students and their families. Coming to 'see' mobile Indigenous students and their families can reshape aspects of teachers' habitus (Bourdieu, 1990) and provide professional renewal and growth that has, potentially, positive impact for the literacy learning of mobile Indigenous students.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACARA	Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority
CC	Curriculum Co-ordinator
CLO	Community Liaison Officer
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CPAR	Critical participatory action research
EL	Essential Learnings
ESL/D	English as a Second Language/Dialect
ICSEA	Index of Community Socio Economic Advantage
IEP	Individual Education Plan
IEW	Indigenous Education Worker
ILO	Indigenous Liaison Officer
ISSU	Indigenous Schooling Support Unit
MST	Mobility Support Teacher
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program: Literacy and Numeracy
NAEP	National Aboriginal Education Policy
NATSIEP	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy

SAE	Standard Australian English
SES	Socio-economic status
STLaN	Support Teacher: Literacy and Numeracy
TRS	Teacher Relief Scheme

Chapter 1 Background to the Study

Genuine dialogue between people can produce the most transformative outcomes and although the journey may be completely unexpected – that is almost the point (Bashir, 2010, p. xv).

It is my view that if we are to improve the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia we must build understanding of each other. At its core this must be about recognising and embracing difference with mutual respect (Gooda, 2011, “Constitutional Reform”, para. 4-5).

1.1 Introduction

In Australia, Indigenous¹ students’ education outcomes, as represented by assessments that accompany the current neo-liberal performativity and accountability agendas, are well below those of their non-Indigenous counterparts. While public debates about ‘literacy crises’ (Freebody, 2007; Snyder, 2008) and ‘failing’ education systems (Donnelly, 2004; Zyngier, 2011) continue to occupy the public discursive space, educational equity for Indigenous Australian children appears to be a separate (and intractable) issue (Gray & Beresford, 2008). In newspapers, alongside headlines such as *Education fails indigenous kids* (Hughes & Hughes, 2010), *Aboriginal education in crisis: Professor* (Australian Associated Press, 2011) and *Millions spent, no evidence of benefit to indigenous students* (Ferrari, 2012), respected Indigenous educators and advocates conduct very public, and sometimes bitter, debates about the pedagogy teachers should employ in order to ensure Indigenous children receive a ‘quality’ education (Dodson, 2010; Pearson, 2011; Sarra, 2011a). Yet, although there has been a flurry of policy and rhetoric around ‘closing the gap’, one aspect of the lived

¹ The term Indigenous is used throughout this thesis to describe Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia. ‘Indigenous’ means ‘belonging naturally to a place’; this acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first peoples of Australia.

experience of some Indigenous Australian Peoples – temporary mobility – remains absent from the debate.

While long known to be an aspect of the lived experience of some Indigenous Australians, temporary mobility remains largely invisible in both public debate and in policy. Researchers (Prout, 2008, 2009; Prout & Yap, 2010) suggest that the reasons for this ‘invisibility’ lie in an absence of statistical data to inform policy coupled with the prevalence of Eurocentric discourses and policies that “normalise some forms of spatial interaction, such as sedentarisation or employment related migrations, and render others as deviant or irrational (Hamilton, 1987; Young and Doohan, 1989)” (Prout, 2009, p. 408).

1.2 Locating the Research

Since 2006, I have been working as a Project Officer for a series of externally funded, collaborative action research projects that have sought to illuminate the mobility of Indigenous students as an educational consideration and to bring the issue to the attention of both policy makers and educators. To do so among the many competing priorities within systems and schools has proven to be a challenge, but with persistence, the support of schools and a substantial evidence base, we (the project team) have been able to achieve some traction for this issue.

In 2006, I commenced working with a university based Principal Investigator and the Principals of three low socio-economic regional Queensland schools to investigate the ways mobility and material and social disadvantage can create pressures for students’ learning and teachers’ work. Although the participating school leaders had perceived mobility to be a ‘problem’ there was no systemic data available to identify the frequency or the nature of student mobility to assist them to strategise ‘solutions’.

Throughout 2006 and 2007, the Principal Investigator and myself convened and attended many meetings with State government departments, local, state and federal politicians, non-government agencies and Indigenous community groups in order to shine a light on this previously unseen issue. In late 2007, through the unrelenting presentation of both quantitative and qualitative data gathered from the three collaborating primary schools, we successfully obtained funding to trial a range of ‘intervention’ strategies – the most significant of which was the employment of Mobility Support Teachers (MST) at each of the three schools. In 2009-2010, an additional funding source saw this trial grow to encompass 14 state schools across Queensland. Although the funding for the trial ceased at the end of the 2010 school year, through the more flexible school funding arrangements available within National Partnership arrangements, 12 of the schools continue to fund MSTs from internal resources.

In the early stages of my work as Project Officer for this series of research projects, I interviewed many teachers about their perceptions of mobile students. Very often, I heard stories that reflected a sense of ‘helplessness’ in their perceived capacity to progress the literacy learning of mobile students as well as stories that demonstrated entrenched low expectations for students who deviated from an expected norm of ‘stable’ schooling. This sense of ‘helplessness’ and notions of ‘deviant’ schooling patterns appeared to deepen when discussions turned to mobile Indigenous students. Not only did teachers express ‘helplessness’ but they also spoke of the inevitability of students moving on before there was any chance to ‘make a difference’ – giving the impression that this group of students moved silently and almost invisibly from school to school, with little hope of receiving the education to which all children are entitled.

It was this set of observations that led me to consider what teachers might need to know in order to be better positioned to make a positive difference for this group of students. How could we pool our resources – the extensive professional knowledge and understanding of local complexities that exists within the teaching staff (Connell, 2009b) and my (developing) capacity as a literacy researcher with access to the resources of the academy and of the larger project? Given that research has shown that it is teachers who make the most significant difference to students' outcomes in disadvantaged contexts (Hattie, 2009; Rowe, 2003); that collaborative inquiry has significant positive effects for teachers' morale, expectations, the development of school learning cultures and improved student outcomes (Beveridge, Groundwater-Smith, Kemmis, & Wasson, 2005; Comber & Kamler, 2005; McLaughlin & Black-Hawkins, 2004); and, that “action research makes a direct contribution to transformative action and to *changing history* [original italics]” (Kemmis, 2010, p. 425) – for me, the conceptual elements of this doctoral research project began to emerge.

Influenced by my personal experiences as a teacher, I hold the view that if critical reform of/in education is to occur, those in a position to do so, must nurture and support teachers' professionalism and sense of agency, for without these attributes, teachers are in danger of succumbing to the oppressive demands of increasing standardisation and ‘uninformed prescription’ (Schleicher, 2008). At a time when the literacy achievement of many Indigenous students, by most available measures, is well below their non-Indigenous peers and when debate in the public domain undermines teachers' confidence through the promotion of scripted programs (Pearson, 2009, 2011) and ‘blame’ is laid at the feet of teachers and schools (Smyth, 2010), the need to undertake critical reform could not be more urgent. As Kincheloe, McLaren and Steinberg (2011) note:

Promoting teachers as researchers is a fundamental way of cleaning up the damage of deskilled models of teaching that infantilize teachers by giving them scripts to read to their students. Deskillling of teachers and the stupidification (Macedo, 2006) of the curriculum take place when teachers are seen as receivers, rather than producers of knowledge. A vibrant professional culture depends upon a group of practitioners who have the freedom to continually reinvent themselves via their research and knowledge production. (p. 166)

This belief in the need to contribute to a professional culture coupled with my sustained engagement with the school sites led me towards action research as a practice-oriented and theory generating methodology. Through a case study of a critical participatory action research project (CPAR), the research presented in this thesis aims to better understand the ways in which classroom teachers can respond positively to the needs of mobile Indigenous students. It examines how systemic, school and individual factors create opportunities and barriers for teachers in their work with this often invisible group of students by exploring the following research questions:

1. What knowledge about mobile Indigenous students assists teachers to engage positively?
2. How do teachers make decisions about the literacy teaching practices they employ for mobile Indigenous students?
3. Which literacy teaching practices support literacy learning for mobile Indigenous students?
4. How do teachers meaningfully assess mobile Indigenous students' literacy

practices on arrival?

This study builds on existing research in student mobility, literacy, teacher professional development and education policy. While each of these domains has its own body of literature, there is little literature relating to literacy teaching practices that *intentionally* support the literacy teaching/learning of mobile Indigenous students. This inquiry maps the evolving practice of a group of classroom teachers working in a regional Queensland state primary school characterised by low socio-economic circumstances, a high proportion of Indigenous students and extraordinary levels of student mobility within the Indigenous cohort. The research examines the complex interaction of policy, school and individual factors in order to gain a better understanding of the action possibilities when this cohort of students is the focus of teachers' 'attention'.

1.3 Conceptual Frameworks

This project is framed around a number of research perspectives. These perspectives underpin my understandings of the spaces in which this research is undertaken, my understanding of literacy and of Indigenous mobility(ies). Before proceeding, it is important to expand upon my use of the word 'Indigenous'. In the footnote on page one, I noted that:

The term Indigenous is used throughout this thesis to describe Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia. 'Indigenous' means 'belonging naturally to a place'; this acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first peoples of Australia.

I have modelled my use of the term 'Indigenous' on the usage found within documents

produced by the Queensland Department of Education and Training (see for example *Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives* (2011) and *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages Statement* (2011)) and the *Community Guide to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2010). In doing so, I recognise the great diversity within and between both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and the very different histories that have unfolded over time and space, particularly in relation to mobility. In using the word ‘Indigenous’ it is not my intention to conflate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, but to acknowledge their position as first peoples of Australia.

1.3.1 The cultural interface

My understanding of the spaces occupied by Indigenous and non-Indigenous people draws on the work of Martin Nakata (2007a, 2007b), in particular, his Indigenous standpoint theory and conceptualisation of the ‘cultural interface’. It is in these spaces that I, as a non-Indigenous researcher, work with Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants to explore issues of (potentially) deep significance for Indigenous people. It is within these spaces that the non-Indigenous teachers involved in this project interact with Indigenous students and their families.

Indigenous standpoint theory emerged from feminist standpoint theory (Oleson, 2011) for which “poststructural approaches have been especially helpful in enabling standpoint theories systematically to examine critically pluralities of power relations” (Harding, 1996, p. 451). Nakata (2007a) acknowledges that standpoint theory has come under significant criticism over time but he describes Indigenous standpoint theory as:

a method of enquiry, a process for making more intelligible ‘the corpus of objectified knowledge about us’ as it emerges and organises our lived

realities. I see this as theorizing knowledge from a particular and interested position, not to produce the ‘truth’ of the Indigenous position or the awful ‘truth’ of the ‘dominant’ colonial groups, but to better reveal the workings of knowledge and how understanding of Indigenous people is caught up and is implicated in its work. (p. 12)

Nakata suggests that there are three basic principles for Indigenous standpoint. First, that the cultural interface is a highly contested space, discursively and socially constituted (Nakata, 2007a). Second, that “at the interface we are constantly being asked to be both continuous with one position at the same time as being discontinuous with another (Foucault, 1972). This is experienced as push-pull between Indigenous and not-Indigenous positions” (Nakata, 2007a, p. 12). And third, that there are “tensions created between Indigenous and non-Indigenous dualities . . . that inform and limit not just the range but the diversity of responses from us” (Nakata, 2007a, p. 12). For me, this provides a generative ‘model’ for thinking about and through my work as a researcher in this space and the work of the teachers participating in this project.

As a non-Indigenous researcher, I am aware of the political aspects of this work. I am aware that I am an ‘outsider’ in terms of Indigenous knowledges and ways of being in the world. Nakata (2007a) describes non-Indigenous researchers working in Indigenous spaces as being “outsiders in this world of experience and [that] they must fathom our accounts of it and feel what it is like not to be a ‘knower’ of this world”, (p. 12). To feel this way is an unsettling experience, and, at times, I have found myself questioning my capacity or ‘right’ to enter into the space of Indigenous education reform. However, my personal and political beliefs around the ways that many Indigenous Australian children are marginalised by our education system(s) and the

resulting perpetual reproduction of educational inequalities, motivates a deep commitment to act to challenge the status quo and to push for change. As Comber (2011) states:

One of the most intractable problems of contemporary education is the continual reproduction of inequitable educational outcomes for students with different cultural, linguistic and economic resources. ... The educational community urgently needs to create a much clearer picture of actual practices that make a positive difference to the educational trajectories of children growing up in poverty, who may also be marginalized by race and location. (p. 343)

In focussing this research on teachers working with Indigenous students, I am aware of critiques that note that much of the research undertaken by non-Indigenous researchers silences the voices and perspectives of Indigenous people (Nakata, 2007b; Smith, 2005). Although the larger project included Indigenous Elders and community members within the action research group, and this project was supported by an Indigenous reference group, I acknowledge that the perspectives and experiences of mobile Indigenous children and families are not included in this project. This research focuses sharply on the work of teachers as one aspect and a first step in coming to understand a complex and multifaceted issue. As Lingard (2010) notes:

we know that of all the school factors it is teachers' practices – their pedagogies and assessment practices (both formative and summative), which have the most effect on student learning (Hattie, 2009). This is particularly the case ... for ensuring equal educational opportunities for disadvantaged students: teachers are very important for the learning of

disadvantaged students. Teachers have more effect than the whole school on student learning outcomes and they have the most effect with disadvantaged students. (p. 140)

As is noted in the concluding chapter of this thesis, there is still much to be done in this field and giving voice to mobile Indigenous children and families is an important next step.

1.3.2 Literacy as a social practice

Central to this project is how literacy is conceptualised and how this conceptualisation underpins an understanding and the enactment of effective literacy teaching practices, particularly in complex school settings. In this project, literacy is understood as a repertoire of socially and culturally constructed practices developed over time to meet students' communicative needs in a variety of situations. The following definition of literacy, provided by Luke, Freebody and Land (2000) frames my view: "Literacy is the flexible and sustainable mastery of a repertoire of practices with the texts of traditional and new communications technologies via spoken language, print, and multimedia" (p.9).

In adopting this view of literacy, I acknowledge that it stems from White Western understandings of what it means to be literate and, that "particular forms of Whiteness saturate the social and cultural forms of literacy we use and that this may often have an oppressive effect that those of us who are White take for granted and either ignore or simply do not notice as oppressive" (Shore, 2003, p. 21). In an effort to remain cognizant of this issue (and other potential cultural subjectivities), I have sought the advice and guidance of a reference group of Indigenous educators involved in both the larger project and this doctoral study.

While acknowledging that my understanding of literacy is inextricably linked to my own cultural background, it is important to state that in Queensland, Standard Australian English (SAE) is enshrined as the “language of communication, instruction and assessment” (Department of Education and Training, 2011a, p. 2), and at the national level, the Australian Curriculum clearly identifies Standard Australian English as the language of instruction and assessment (Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority, 2011a). The need for Indigenous students to be competent in SAE is strongly supported by Indigenous education advocates from across the political spectrum (Nakata, 2003; Pearson, 2009; Sarra, 2011b). This is not to suggest that SAE should be taught at the expense of existing language(s), but that for Indigenous students to experience ‘success’ in our current schooling system and beyond, explicit teaching in SAE is a requirement (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 2006).

1.3.3 Mobility

The literature informing understandings of the mobility of Indigenous Australians is scant, and what is available is discussed in detail Chapter 2. However, in this section, I offer some understandings that frame the way the term ‘mobility’ is used in this thesis.

Firstly, a mobile student is a young person who makes “non-promotional school changes” (Rumberger, 2003, p. 6) and moves “into and out of schools at times other than the usual ones for joining and leaving”(McAndrew & Power, 2003, p. 3). So, the focus in this thesis is on students who change schools during the school year rather than students who change schools as they transition from primary to secondary school or as they move to the next year level.

Secondly, in reference to the notion of mobile Indigenous students, it is important to note that I am not suggesting that all Indigenous people are mobile or that those who are mobile are mobile all the time. Prout and Hill (2011) refer to a ‘continuum of Indigenous mobilities’, where variations in the patterns of mobility are informed by geography, demography and individual choice, with some people being continuously mobile, others mobile at particular stages of life and others living permanently in the one locale (Prout & Hill, 2011). What is particularly relevant is that (Western) schools and systems struggle to respond to mobility that, through White Western eyes, appears unpredictable and unplanned (Prout 2008).

Thirdly, it is important to note that mobility occurs within and through a range of geographic environments. In focussing on mobility within an urban school setting, I am not implying a cultural binary of urban versus remote. Indigenous academic Tyson Yunkaporta (personal communication, September 13, 2011) identifies this notion as a fallacy when he says:

‘Urban’ is just an economic setting people move through, not a ‘culture’ people live in. Most of us in reality move between urban and non-urban settings, in a physical, cultural and/or spiritual sense. . . . The term ‘Urban Aborigine’ belongs to that discourse of modernised/assimilated natives vs traditional ‘real’ Aborigines.

The distinction is made to contextualise the school setting not to indicate a characteristic of students or of their experience(s) of mobility.

1.4 The Significance of this Study

The research inquiry undertaken here is significant in a number of respects.

Firstly, it is significant in terms of its subject. The research presented in this thesis focuses on meeting the needs of a cohort of students, who until now, has been largely invisible within the education system. To my knowledge, there have been no studies published that identify literacy teaching practices that support this particular cohort of students – mobile Indigenous students.

Secondly, as neoliberalism intensifies and teachers' work becomes universalised, prescribed and devalued, there is an urgent need to establish what can be done to 'head off' the potential damage to the profession and to the education of our most marginalised children. This research provides a 'pocket of hope' (Smyth, Down, & McInerney, 2010) that has the potential to inform teachers, schools and policy makers about professionalising practices that connect teachers to students and their families, and in doing so construct a pedagogical approach that makes sense in particular schools (Comber & Reid, 2006).

Thirdly, this study contributes to research for social justice. It reports on teachers' engagement at the cultural interface and the pedagogies that are made possible by this shift in teacher habitus. Chris Sarra, a leading Indigenous educator and advocate for reform in Indigenous education, quotes Gramsci (as cited in Sarra, 2011c), writing: "I hate indifference. Living means taking sides. Indifference means weakness, cowardice, a parasitical attitude . . . Indifference is the dead weight of history. . . . It is a lead weight for those with new ideas" (p.114). He then goes on to state that:

Engaging Indigenous children in quality schooling, and delivering quality education outcomes, is hard and tiring work. For many teachers it is also perhaps the most rewarding work they will do. What makes it so rewarding is that as teachers we can do more than just getting children to read and

write, and do their sums. As we deliver quality education for Indigenous children we each play our part in contributing to a transformed future.

(Sarra, 2011c, p. 114)

This research project aims to provide a useful account of the impediments and enablers that position teachers as agents for social justice and to play their part in a reconciled and transformed future.

1.5 The Organisation of this Thesis

In this first chapter, I have outlined my reasons for undertaking the research by contextualising it within my experiences as a teacher and as a Project Officer on a series of action research projects. I have provided some background to the key concepts and vocabulary used within this thesis. Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive review of the literature that informs this thesis. Commencing with an examination of the Australian education policy landscape, the chapter then moves to an exploration of literacy theories and what this means for literacy teaching in disadvantaged contexts. The chapter concludes with a review of available literature in the fields of student mobility and Indigenous mobility. Chapter 3 describes the research orientation informing the methodological decisions I made while engaging in this project and how and why I went about the study in the ways that I did. Here, I outline how I have taken up the critical disposition of participatory action research as described by Habermas (1972, 1976, 1984, 1987, 1996) and (re)interpreted by Carr, Kemmis and McTaggart (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, 2009; Kemmis, 2008a; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). Having established the foundational elements of the research, Chapter 4 provides a description and analysis of the socio-cultural context of the school setting. I provide a description of the school and the community, and introduce the practice architectures (Kemmis,

2008b) that frame the action possibilities for the teachers involved in the research. Chapter 5 presents the findings from the CPAR process organised around four major themes: action research as a meta-practice, practice architectures that shape teachers' work with mobile Indigenous students, making practice visible, and maintaining the momentum of change. In the final and concluding chapter, Chapter 6, I discuss the key findings of the project and suggest some possibilities for future research.

1.6 Summary

This chapter has provided an introduction to the research reported in this doctoral thesis – an exploration of the ways in which teachers can support the literacy learning of mobile Indigenous students. The chapter began with a discussion of the evolution of this research project and provided a justification for the research. It then identified key conceptual frameworks that underpin the research. It concluded with an overview of the chapters that follow.

In the next chapter, Chapter 2, I present a critical review of literature relevant to the foundations of this thesis. The literature is drawn from distinct, yet related, fields to highlight the complexity of teachers' work as they negotiate literacy teaching practices for mobile Indigenous students attending urban, disadvantaged state schools. The chapter begins with a review of the educational policy landscape as it has unfolded, and continues to unfold, in Australia, creating the systemic conditions that contribute to the formation of practice architectures (Kemmis, 2008b; Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008) that serve to structure and shape teachers' work.

Chapter 2 Literacy, Mobility and Poverty: Intersections of Policy and Practice

I think we can all agree that a good education is a right and that all Australian children have that right. I think we can all agree that in bestowing knowledge, skills, opportunity and a chance at happiness and self-sufficiency, education also bestows dignity. I think that this right and this dignity are a good deal more than symbolic – they have profound practical effects. (Dodson, 2010, p. 26)

2.1 Introduction

This chapter draws together literature from a number of distinct domains to illuminate the complexity of teachers' work as they negotiate literacy teaching practices for mobile Indigenous students attending urban, disadvantaged schools. The first section of this chapter provides a window into the systemic conditions that contribute to the formation of practice architectures (Kemmis, 2008b; Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008) that serve to structure and shape teachers' work. This is achieved through a review of the educational policy landscape as it has unfolded, and continues to unfold, in Australia. The discussion then moves to the contested and politicised fields of literacy and effective literacy teaching, noting the multiple theories and approaches that guide teacher practice, including contested notions of achievement. This section highlights the research literature about effective literacy teaching practices for students in disenfranchised contexts. This is followed by a discussion of research on student mobility and its potential impact(s), with a particular focus on students facing challenging circumstances. Next, in an effort to gain an understanding of the complex factors that characterise the experience of mobile Indigenous students, and hence the understandings teachers need to incorporate into their decision making about literacy teaching, literature that describes Indigenous mobility practices and motivations is

reviewed. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion on teachers' work in the light of current policy agendas.

2.2 Policy and Practice

To construct an effective literacy teaching program in a classroom context that takes account of mobility, Indigeneity and poverty is challenging work. To do so requires 'informed professionalism' (Schleicher, 2008) within an environment where teachers are supported to use "professional knowledge and evidence to make informed and relevant decisions about teaching, learning and assessment" (Luke & Woods, 2008, p. 16). At least some support for this work should come, arguably, from the systems within which teachers work. The presence or absence of this support and the ways in which it is made available to teachers, contributes to the mediating preconditions (Kemmis, 2008b) that create the social-political, cultural-discursive and material-economic conditions in which teachers practice. These 'practice architectures' (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008) underpin teachers' capacity to meet the needs of this particular cohort of students.

The cumulative effects of educational reform, as embodied in policy, have had profound effects on teachers' work, producing what Ball (1993) terms 'first order and second order effects'. Ball (1993) describes these effects as follows:

first order effects are changes in practice or structure (which are evident in particular sites and across the system as a whole); and second order effects are the impacts of these changes on patterns of social access and opportunity and social justice. (p. 16)

In this study, the effects of policy, as they relate to enabling or constraining teachers' capacity to effectively teach literacy to mobile Indigenous students, provide an essential context to the examination of what is happening and what can happen in classrooms. Teachers do not work in a vacuum, and to isolate practice from policy or from the material and socio-cultural conditions of students' lives would provide a highly reductive view of teachers' work.

Research has shown that not only does educational policy influence teacher practice, but that this can, and does, occur in unanticipated ways (Hardy & Lingard, 2008). The French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, provided a set of 'thinking tools' (Grenfell & James, 1998) that enable sociological researchers to 'see' education as an object of study. These tools are the concepts of *field*, *habitus* and *capital*. Throughout this thesis, these tools are called upon to examine the relations between education policy production, its articulation and reception, and the work of teachers as they negotiate the complexities of effectively teaching literacy to a particular cohort of students – that is, highly mobile Indigenous students.

Bourdieu theorised that the social world is underpinned by a set of separate, relatively autonomous social spaces or 'fields', each of which is a site of contest over the beliefs and practices of most value (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). More recently, theorists have argued that fields exert influence upon one another (Lingard & Rawolle, 2004; Maton, 2005). Furthermore, there can be a clash between the logics that inform policy and those that inform practice, with policy assuming and demanding universal applicability (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010) whereas teacher practice is "always local, emergent, and linked to prior practice" (Coburn & Stein, 2006, p. 42). To better understand the complex interplay between the fields and logics of educational policy

and teacher practice it is important to unpack the trajectory of policy development in Australia.

2.3 The Australian Educational Policy Field

Education policy in Australia is currently encountering interesting times. After almost twelve years of conservative government, characterised by the dominance of human capital ideologies and discourses of managerialism and standardisation (Comber & Nixon, 2009), the 2007 election of a Labor government brought with it promises of an ‘education revolution’ (Rudd & Gillard, 2008). However, it has been argued that so far, in terms of policy, there exists a stark continuity between the Howard and Rudd/Gillard governments (Comber & Nixon, 2009). Literature that describes and critiques the changes in Australian policy direction highlights the impact that global tendencies towards neoliberal orthodoxy have had on Australian education policies (Brennan, 2009; Cranston, Kimber, Mulford, Reid, & Keating, 2010; Singh & Taylor, 2007). Neoliberalism, underpinned by human capital theory (Apple, 2006; Marginson, 1993; Thomson, 2007) and characterised by “competition, choice, devolution, managerialism and performativity” (Ball, 2003, p. 30), continues to dominate government policy regardless of the political persuasion of governments. The discourses that surround the production, articulation and reception of policy, shape and legitimise particular values and practices (Ball, 1993) and, in doing so, both serve to shape and govern teachers’ work and their ‘dispositions’ (Bourdieu, 1998).

2.3.1 The Evolution of equity in policy

Although the provision of schooling in Australia is under the legislative and administrative control of the States, since the creation of the *Schools Commission* in the 1970s, the Federal Government has taken an increasingly active role in education policy

(Cranston, et al., 2010; Henry, 2001; Keating, 2009; Reid, 2009). The creation of the *Schools Commission* represented a landmark in Australian education policy as it was through this entity that the Federal Government produced the first nationally co-ordinated policies directed at groups needing special attention. Arguably, the most significant of these was the *Disadvantaged Schools Programme (DSP)* that operated from 1973-1996 (see Connell, 1993; Thomson, 2007 for analyses of this programme). Since that time, national education policies related to equity and disadvantage in Australia have been formed and reformed in a number of ways (Henry, 2001).

Henry (2001) notes that during the period from the 1970s to the 2000s, there was a shift in conceptualisations and approaches to equity. Earlier approaches – mainly concerned with economic inequality and the redistribution of resources (Henry & Taylor, 2000) – were underpinned by social democratic principles linking education inequality to societal structures, applying the notion that some groups will “perform better or worse than others in education because of the way education is linked to privilege in the social structure along the lines of class, gender, race, ethnicity and geography” (Henry, 2001, p. 30). This approach to policy development saw funding directed to groups of students who suffered deprivation and disadvantage (Karmel, 1973) – such as students with disabilities, students from low socio-economic backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, geographically remote students, and students from non-English speaking backgrounds – with an emphasis on procedural based social justice, that is schools and systems as the unit of change (Henry, 2001; Thomson, 2007). Policy of this period, through programs such as the *DSP*, “gave prominence to the agency of school staff and discursively positioned them as ‘solution’ makers, not as ‘problems’” (Thomson, 2007, p. 250). This approach to equity policy was evident in the key features of the *DSP*, in that it:

focussed on whole-school change and improved school-community relations rather than on ‘fixing up’ individual deficit students. ... Instead of individual pathology and ‘blaming the victim’ assumptions, there was a focus on how school structures, curricula and pedagogies contributed to the reproduction of educational disadvantage across generations. (Lingard, 1998, p. 2)

Programs such as the *DSP*, were not without critics. The limitations of the ‘target group’ approach are highlighted by Sturman (1997) who notes that the target group approach may lead to stereotyping. In view of this, “the broad assumption [is] that because a group is tagged as ‘disadvantaged’ so must be all the individuals” – that is, “individual attributes and needs may be overlooked as everyone is given the fact of the group” (Sturman, 1997, p. 113). Sturman goes on to suggest that a basic line of attack to address disadvantage, rather than focusing on groups, should focus on “a cluster of issues to do with attendance, language skills, physical surroundings, a school climate, personal states and conditions that allow for sustained work” (Sturman, 1997, p. 114).

More recently, a ‘market-individual’ approach has emerged reflecting the elements of neoliberalism. Singh and Taylor (2007) in their study of shifts in the discourse of equity in Queensland education policy of the 1990s, identified a “discursive shift away from the language of ‘social justice’ and ‘target groups’, towards ‘inclusion’ and ‘students at educational risk’” (p. 313), indicative of the increasing dominance of human capital ideologies in policy development. This market-individual approach has been accompanied by a shift to measuring outcomes rather than processes and, most notably, the use of student performance on standardised national tests as a

key indicator of 'success' (Henry, 2001).

Another element of the shift towards globalised neoliberal policy development has been the recasting of the notion of disadvantage from socio-economic to “the literacy proficiency of the individual” (Cranston et al., 2010, p. 187). In Australia, this shift can be traced to the abolition of the *DSP* by the Howard government and its replacement by the *Commonwealth Literacy Programme*, an element of the *National Literacy and Numeracy Plan* (Department of Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 1996) which came into effect in 1998. While proponents argue that the literacy and numeracy focus concentrates resources and pedagogy on the area most needed and for the students most in need, critics of this approach contend that “the literacy approach represents a significant loss because it does not directly address the complex mix of factors which lie behind poor literacy and poor school performance” (Henry, 2001, p. 53).

This refashioning of disadvantage into literacy achievement on national tests has had significant impacts upon schools and the work of teachers. Mosen-Lowe, Vidovich and Chapman (2009), in writing on the impact of the shifts in Commonwealth and State literacy policies in West Australia, note that by utilising standardised tests as quantifiable measures of disadvantage, student failure becomes a reflection of the school and classroom practices rather than an effect of the multiple factors associated with the social and economic problems within society (Ball, 1998). They go on to assert that resource support for students has moved from a social justice imperative to an economic imperative where need is isolatable as literacy achievement scores. Mosen-Lowe et al. (2009) contend that:

Social justice has been reframed by the more dominant, near hegemonic,

discourses of economic rationalism where the ideologies embedded in the governance of education has shifted from an ethos of democracy and a notion of education as a ‘social good’ to one of political and economic concerns. (p. 473)

So, too they suggest that:

the responsibilities for enhancing social justice now primarily fall to agents at the micro levels in how they prioritise student needs and where they place resources, a practice that creates disparity and tensions for schools in how they promote social justice within a performativity culture environment of diminishing resources. (Mosen-Lowe et al., 2009, p. 473)

Over the past two decades, the seemingly relentless march of neoliberalism has continued regardless of the political persuasion of the government, and despite promises of a revolution, education is, currently, even more firmly embedded in the productivity agenda. The Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, (2010), confirms the dominance of human capital ideology when, following a Ministerial reshuffle, she stated:

We created deliberately a human capital portfolio, the Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations [which] I have renamed slightly to talk about skills on the one hand and school education and early childhood development on the other. But of course that covers the full gamut of education from our earliest kids in preschool through schools, vocational education and training, universities. (para. 35)

The key national policy drivers for education are located within the Council of Australian Governments’ (COAG) *Agenda for Productivity Reform*’s prescribed targets.

It is these targets that the government has declared “will guide the actions of policy makers and program managers” (Rudd & Gillard, 2008, p. 11).

As policy makers continue to embrace human capital theory as the way forward, literacy is seen as both a marker of disadvantage and “an intrinsic driver of individual, social and economic development” (Luke, 2008, pp. 347-348). There is a very real danger that politicians and policy makers “actually rely upon teachers’ good faith in this promise [of literacy as a means of reshaping the material conditions of students’ lives] as an ideological palliative to the hard social facts of inequality and structurally uneven life chances” (Luke, 2008, p. 348).

The changing approaches to equity of Australian education policy are summarised in the following table (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1 Summary of Approaches to Equity in Education Policy in Australia

Era	Commonwealth Policy	Queensland Policy	Approach to equity
Pre 1970s	Limited Commonwealth involvement	Education Act 1964	Liberal individualism
1970s	Creation of the Schools Commission eg Disadvantaged Schools Program (1973- 96)	Increasing Commonwealth involvement provided 'additional' funding for equity groups	Social-democratic Targeting groups Redistribution of inputs Recognition of difference
1980s	Disadvantage as structural		Whole school change Democratic decision making and community involvement
1990s	National Literacy and Numeracy Plan Underpinned by Literacy for All: The Challenge for Australian Schools	Queensland State Education (QSE) 2010 Focus on inclusion of students at risk	Market individualism + students 'at-risk', 'inclusion' Broadband funding Devolution of responsibilities and accountabilities to regions and schools Decreasing state autonomy Move away from focus on inputs to a focus on outcomes
Early 2000s			Mainstreaming of equity groups
Late 2000s – 2010	'Education Revolution' Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Productivity Agenda National Curriculum	Towards Q2 Disadvantage as productivity 'problem' Disadvantage as lack of early childhood education	Education = economy Co-operative federalism – limited state autonomy 'Quality' teaching as 'solution' Early childhood education as 'solution'
	Disadvantage as failure to achieve National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) test scores		
	Disadvantage as lack of early childhood education		

2.3.2 Literacy policy: From social justice to economic imperative

As discussed previously, the re-conceptualisation of disadvantage from socio-economic to literacy proficiency became evident with the release of the *National*

Literacy and Numeracy Plan in 1998. This was a pivotal moment in Australian literacy education policy production, and the shift had a profound impact upon teachers' work, such that is still being played out in classrooms today. As Henry and Taylor (2000) noted when writing about this change, "at the commonwealth level, literacy appears to have become a surrogate for other forms of educational and social disadvantage, connecting to a number of global discourses including the potentially narrow 'literacy for a knowledge economy'" (p. 1). The document underpinning the *National Literacy and Numeracy Plan, Literacy for All: The Challenge for Australian Schools* (Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, 1998) [referred to as *Literacy for All* from here on], while embracing neoliberal notions of choice, accountability and market individualism, also takes up previous discourses of target groups and social democratic approaches, highlighting the "incremental nature of policy making and the way competing discourses are 'stitched together' in policy documents and approaches" (Henry & Taylor, 2000, p. 10). Henry and Taylor (2000) go on to determine that the:

most significant system-level trend has been the shift from essentially a needs-based funding approach to one looking for literacy (and numeracy) outputs . . . more in terms of what it might yield in the future than in terms of present practices. (p.17)

Luke, Lingard, Green and Comber (2000) argue that the *Literacy for All* policy neglects the structural dimensions of educational and social disadvantage and constitutes a return to the individual deficit subject. It appears that this commonwealth literacy policy marks the move from a policy discourse of social justice to one of economic rationalism. As Luke et al. (2000) note:

As a result, government policies have attempted to assert market forces

rather than the state as the major steering mechanism for desired policy outcomes. In such a model, the chief function of the (competitive) state then becomes ensuring the competitiveness of the putatively national economy, with the production of a better educated and trained, more flexible and adaptable workforce as a central policy goal of the state. (p. 768)

Current commonwealth literacy policy is embedded in the Labor Government's 'education revolution' document, a document that places the national economic benefits of education firmly at the forefront. This is evidenced by the document's opening paragraph: "Quality education is good for our economy, good for our community and good for individuals. It will help create more jobs and higher wages, and will create better opportunities for all Australians" (Rudd & Gillard, 2008, p. 6). This connection between students' performance on standardised literacy tests and 'quality' education leaves teachers with little room to voice their concerns about the challenges of their work in complex communities (Comber & Nixon, 2009) – such as those characterised by a high proportion of Indigenous families whose dispositions toward formal schooling may potentially be impacted by negative historical experiences, high levels of social and material disadvantage and for some families, high levels of mobility.

In Queensland, literacy policy has been through significant changes in the past decade, presenting teachers with an ever changing representation of, and 'truth' about, their work as literacy teachers. In 2000, the Queensland Department of Education released a comprehensive review of literacy teaching in Queensland, *Literate Futures: Report of the literacy Review for Queensland State Schools* (Luke et al., 2000) [referred to as the *Literacy Review* from here on]. This report followed extensive consultation with teachers and school administrators across the State. The report recommended four

key areas of priority: student diversity, whole school programs and community partnerships, the teaching of reading, and future literacies. After the release of the *Literacy Review* the State government established the ‘Literate Futures project’ to support state-wide reform in literacy teaching. This support included professional development packages on CD ROM, web based resources and support through Literacy Development Centres in each district (closed when funding ceased in 2004).

Flowing from the *Literacy Review*, the most recent document guiding literacy policy is *Literacy the Key to Learning: Framework for Action 2006-2008* (Education Queensland, 2006) [referred to as the *Literacy Framework* from here on], as issued to all State government employed teachers in 2006. This document has a strong focus on teachers’ provision of inclusive programs that deliver for all students and on tracking individuals, and notes for example:

These areas focus on enhancing teacher knowledge so that all teachers are able to effectively deliver inclusive programs that improve literacy (Education Queensland, 2006, p.1).

There is a need to develop a literacy learning profile for each student that will form the basis for identifying specific, appropriate and effective literacy interventions (Education Queensland, 2006, p. 3).

The *Literacy Framework* reflects what Singh and Taylor (2007) have described as the discursive shift “away from the language of ‘social justice’ and ‘target groups’, towards inclusion and ‘students at risk’” (p. 313) and the ‘market-individualistic’ approach framing educational equity in Queensland. This document identifies the “challenges for improving literacy outcomes for all students” (Education Queensland, 2006, p. 1) as being: literacy teaching, literacy learning, literacy in the curriculum and

literacy leadership. This immediately foregrounds responsibility with teachers and schools, and pushes the education system and societal issues to the background. The *Framework for action*, firstly, expands on these challenges before going on to provide actions to be taken at the system and regional levels to meet these challenges. Central to improving student outcomes is the building of “each teacher’s repertoire of approaches” (Education Queensland, 2006, p. 2) and responding to the ‘challenges’ of diversity through an individualised approach. While ‘student diversity’ is the first of the priority areas identified in the *Literacy Review*, and mobility is given prominence as a characteristic of students and identified as an important part of Queensland’s social context, mobility is not mentioned in the description of diversity in the more recent *Literacy Framework*. This absence effectively renders mobility invisible as a characteristic of students and schools. However, the *Literacy Framework* makes extensive references to diversity in general, most often in the context of the challenging nature of teachers’ work.

As of December 2011, no subsequent documents have been released, and *Literacy the key to learning: Framework for action 2006-2008* remains the official guiding document for literacy policy in Queensland. However, in 2008, following Queensland students’ ‘disappointing’ performance on national and international tests (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2008), Anna Bligh, the Premier of Queensland, commissioned a report focusing on literacy, numeracy and science learning in Queensland primary schools. The report, led by Professor Geoff Masters, provided five recommendations to the government, all of which were supported by the Queensland government in its formal response to the report, *Government Response to the Report of the Queensland Education Performance Review — ‘Masters Review’* (Department of Education and Training, 2009b). These recommendations, as pertaining to literacy

teaching and learning, included [original numbering used]:

3. That the Queensland Government introduces a new structure and program of advanced professional learning in literacy, numeracy and science for primary school teachers (Department of Education and Training, 2009b, p.3).

4. That additional funding be made available for the advanced training and employment of a number of specialist literacy, numeracy and science teachers to work in schools (and/or district officers) most in need of support (Department of Education and Training, 2009b, p. 4).

These recommendations, as well as the key actions from the afore-mentioned *Literacy Framework*, form the basis of the current focus for literacy professional development in Queensland state schools. As indicated in the *Literacy Framework*, this professional development is intended to expand teachers' repertoire of literacy teaching practices to enable an individualised approach to monitoring and meeting the literacy learning needs of all students, improving literacy outcomes for all students.

The evolution of literacy policy in Australia is summarised in the following table (Table 2.2).

Table 2.2 Summary of the Development of Literacy Policy Impacting Queensland Teachers

Era	Policy	Emphasis for teachers' work	Theoretical Frame for work of teachers
1970s	Commonwealth: DSP	Explicit teaching, especially genre	Advocate Professional autonomy Problem solver
1990s	Commonwealth: National Literacy and Numeracy Plan	Foundational skills Individualised approach Benchmarks Literacy as surrogate for other forms of disadvantage	↓
1990s	Qld: Literate Futures Qld: Framework for action	Four resources model Recognition of difference 'Balanced' program Diversity as a 'challenge' Individualised approach	
2007 - present	Commonwealth: Education Revolution Commonwealth: COAG productivity agenda	'Basic skills' focus NAPLAN as high stakes	Technicist Performativity Accountability False autonomy

Jostling for position amid the array of literacy policy directives and priorities there are those policies that go to the meeting of the needs of Indigenous Australians – and Indigenous students more specifically. In Queensland, there is an ignominious history surrounding government actions concerning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and this is as evident in education policy as it is in other social policies.

2.3.3 Indigenous education policy: From equity group to mainstream 'problem'

Following the 1967 Referendum, which amended the Australian Federal Constitution to place responsibility for the welfare of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples with the Commonwealth Government, the interests of Australia's Indigenous Peoples came into sharp focus for the reforming Labor government of the day (Helme, 2007). Prior to the 1970s, State-based education programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were based around racist, assimilationist ideas (Helme, 2007), and what Fletcher (1989) describes as the "clean, clad and courteous" (p. 274) policies. These programs gave low priority to the education of Indigenous students

and, in many cases, only a limited primary curriculum was made available (usually to Year 4 followed by vocational training), often in sub-standard facilities with limited or no resources (Helme, 2007; Nakata, 2007b; Whatman & Duncan, 2005). The impact of these policies have had profound effects upon the attitudes of Indigenous Australians towards education (Helme, 2007; Nakata, 2007b) and are essential background information for those endeavouring to understand the multiple issues that face schools, teachers, parents and students today.

Throughout the *Australian Schools Commission* era (1973-1988), a number of educational enquiries were undertaken – among them the influential *Karmel Report* (Karmel, 1973). This report identified the educational disadvantages faced by Aboriginal children and led to the formation of an Aboriginal Consultative Group “to advise on the present needs and future provisions for the education of the Aboriginal people in Australia” (Aboriginal Consultative Group, 1975). This in turn resulted in the creation of the *National Aboriginal Education Policy (NAEP)* (Department of Education, Employment and Training, 1989). It should be noted that no equivalent enquiry was conducted into the education of Torres Strait Islander students, who remained invisible to policy makers until 1993. The *NAEP* established 21 long term goals under four categories:

- involvement of Aboriginal people in educational decision making;
- equality of access to educational services;
- equity of educational participation; and
- equitable and appropriate educational services (Department of Education, Employment and Training, 1989).

As part of a triennial review process the *NAEP* was updated in 1993, at which

time superficial changes were made (Whatman & Duncan, 2005). In this second edition of the policy, Torres Strait Islanders were finally included in the policy language and the document became known as the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (NATSIEP)* (Department of Education, Employment and Training, 1993).

The *NATSIEP* focussed very strongly on ‘cultural difference’ as the most significant factor in the performance of Indigenous students, a paradigm that was considered to be flawed by some Indigenous education researchers and advocates (for examples of these discussions see Nakata, 1993; Nakata, 2003; Rose, 1999). These researchers suggested that “educational approaches and pedagogical practices that do not move beyond the ‘cultural difference’ paradigm run the risk of perpetuating the inequalities they purport to address” (Whatman & Duncan, 2005, p. 134). The debate about cultural difference highlights an ongoing tension for Indigenous education advocates. In offering cultural difference or culturally based learning styles as an explanation for student ‘failure’ one helps to “sustain reductive notions of cultural groups and may help create the rationale for discriminatory social practices and racist ideologies that preserve inequality in education” (Gutiérrez, 2006, p. 45). However, the opposite to this approach, that is denying cultural differences or to see “fairness as sameness” (Gutiérrez, 2006), may lead to the cultural practices of the dominant group being accepted as the norm and “obscuring the link between economic disparities, asymmetrical power relations, and historically racialized schooling practices” (Gutiérrez, 2006, p. 46).

The *NATSIEP* remains however, the key informing policy for Indigenous education across Australia. While this is the case, triennial reviews, numerous inquiries

and research reports have given rise to policy framework documents such as *A National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 1996-2002* (MCEETYA, 1995) and *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005-2008* (MCEETYA, 2006). These documents “established a framework of outcomes-based reporting against selected quantitative and qualitative performance indicators” (Henry, 2001, p. 25) which reflect[ed] the move towards the “outcomes based accountability processes of corporate governance [that] have become so normalized within educational systems” (Henry, 2001, p. 47).

In April 2009, the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs endorsed a *Draft Indigenous Education Action Plan* for the period 2010-2014. In July 2011, following an extensive consultation period, the final version was made public. This document, renamed the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 201-2014* (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs, 2011), aims to progress the goals of the *NATSIEP* and the *Melbourne Declaration on the Educational Goals of Young Australians* (MCEETYA, 2008). The *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-2014* evolved from the goals of the COAG Reform Agenda (Council of Australian Governments, 2009). There are a number of strands within this agenda, of which ‘closing the gap’ in educational outcomes for Indigenous Australians is one. The goals of the Indigenous Reform agenda are to:

- close the life expectancy gap within a generation;
- halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade;

- ensure all Indigenous four year olds in remote communities have access to early childhood education within five years (by 2013);
- halve the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade (by 2018);
- at least halve the gap in Indigenous Year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates by 2020; and
- halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade (by 2018).

(Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs, 2010, p. 2)

Within Queensland, this policy is localised as the *Closing the Gap Education Strategy* (Department of Education and Training, 2009a). The focus of which is identified in the *Introduction* to the recently released addendum (Department of Education and Training, 2011b), which states:

The focus of the strategy is achieving a core set of targets as indicators of progress towards eliminating the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous student education outcomes. . . . It focuses on a small number of key service lines:

- foundation learning with a focus on literacy and numeracy;
- health and physical activity as a precondition to learning;
- participation to employment;
- culture and enterprise (p.3).

These targets are expressed as ‘gaps’ between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students’ scores on the National Assessment Program: Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN),

attendance and retention data. They are measured as mean NAPLAN scores for each region, state-wide attendance rates and state-wide retention rates. There is a clear directive for schools to develop ‘place-based strategies’ to close the identified ‘gaps’.

There is significant disquiet among Indigenous academics and advocates about the use of the term ‘closing the gap’. Dodson states: “the notion of ‘closing the gap’ very easily slides unintentionally into the idea of compensatory schooling – that there is a deficit in our children that must be made up. Or that the languages and cultures of our peoples are part of the problem” (Dodson, 2010, p. 32). Altman and Fogarty (2010) suggest that the deeply entrenched problems within Indigenous education “have been rendered statistical, to such an extent that the Closing the Gap goals have almost become abstractions from the lived reality of Indigenous subjects” (p. 128). Dodson (2010) also critiques the prevailing managerialist discourse in the policy agenda when he says:

In my view, this language expresses both a perspective and an approach, where the human dynamics and substance of the issues to be tackled become subordinate to their external description and measurement. The education of our children is predominantly described and assessed in functional, managerial terms: strategic targets, performance indicators, core competencies and levels of attainment. (p. 28)

How this document plays out in schools has yet to be determined. However, what is clear is that there is a continuation and intensification of the “managerial discourse of accountability and performativity [and the] move away from centralised policy making to school based management” (Singh & Taylor, 2007, p. 310) that permeated previous State and Commonwealth policies. This document more firmly

entrenches the responsibility for enacting policy in the hands of schools and teachers. Also clear is the reliance on ‘targets’ and the measurement of quantitative outcomes such as attendance rates, mean NAPLAN scores and retention rates as determinants of success and vehicles for ‘accountability’. While the document purports to support a case management approach and individualised student support, this is incongruent with the outcomes being measured for success, particularly mean NAPLAN scores (Doyle & Prout, 2011). The document declares that “initiatives under the priority areas are to be data-driven, place based, and where appropriate, case managed” (Department of Education and Training, 2009a, p. 11) giving rise to legitimate concerns about the knowledge required at local levels to collect and interpret data, and the provision of appropriate professional development, time and resources in already over-stretched primary schools (Angus, Olney, & Ainley, 2007).

2.4 Literacy(ies): Theory and Practice

Since the 1970s, when the Australian government first began conducting national surveys of literacy achievement, a great deal of attention has been given to how literacy is conceptualised and taught in Australian schools. And, as disadvantage becomes reconceptualised as ‘literacy achievement’ this has ensured that literacy remains firmly in the sights of politicians, educators and the broader public. Numerous approaches to teaching literacy have been advocated by researchers and theorists, each underpinned by a particular view of what literacy ‘is’ and ‘does’. The debate about what constitutes effective literacy teaching has been intense, polemic and public (see Snyder, 2008) and shows no signs of abating as politicians and the press continue to focus on ‘literacy crises’ in view of the results attained by way of national and global testing regimes. As Luke and Woods (2008) note, “literacy education remains a

contentious political and pedagogic issue for communities, schools, systems, teachers and students – and for politicians (p.11)”.

2.4.1 How is literacy defined?

Central to this project is how literacy is conceptualised and how this conceptualisation underpins an understanding of effective literacy teaching practices, particularly in complex contexts. As noted by Freebody (2007):

There is no neutral space in which literacy can be generically defined for all practical purposes. The term *literacy* has various histories of use. Each of these has, of necessity, produced a manageable object of study and practice for researchers and educators alike. . . . Definitional disagreements are not just different ways of getting toward the same goal; they name the object of debate and action differently; they characterise differently the question to which literacy education is the answer. They place different ‘problems’ in the minds, eyes, values, families, neighbourhoods and demographic backgrounds of different learners; and, thereby, they connect, or fail to connect, with the goals and consequences of education and schooling in different ways (p.12).

In this project, and in line with socio-cultural theories of language acquisition and literacy learning, literacy is understood as a repertoire of socially and culturally constructed practices developed over time to meet students’ communicative needs in a variety of situations. The following definition of literacy, provided by Luke et al. (2000) frames the view adopted here: “Literacy is the flexible and sustainable mastery of a repertoire of practices with the texts of traditional and new communications technologies via spoken language, print, and multimedia (p.9)”.

My position on literacy and effective literacy education is further informed by the work of Alloway, Freebody, Gilbert and Muspratt (2002), who advocate:

‘Literacy’ is thus seen as referring to particular forms of communication that themselves entail particular valued repertoires of physical, psychological, social and cultural practice, demeanour and disposition. Effective literacy education therefore involves practice in these valued repertoires, in the context of accessing the powerful curricular ways of knowing and finding out about the world, and in the knowledge that the communicational environment in which young Australians live is undergoing a process of rapid cultural and technological change. (pp. 7-8)

As Australia moves towards a national curriculum it is important to highlight the ways in which the term literacy is used in the Australian Curriculum documents – for it is this usage that serves to position teachers. Literacy has been given a significant profile in the evolving Australian Curriculum. It is one of the three organising and interrelated strands in the *Australian Curriculum: English* (Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority, 2011a) – alongside Literature and Language – and is identified as a ‘general capability’ in the document *The Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Version 2.0* (Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority, 2010b).

As a ‘general capability’, literacy is referred to as “the foundations upon which further learning depends” (Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority, 2010b, p. 12) and, it is further noted that while “the foundation for literacy will be built primarily in English ... [it] must be reinforced and strengthened through learning in other contexts including science, history, geography and technologies” (p.12). Clearly indicating a view that literacy is essential to each Learning Area and must be developed

through teaching in each Learning Area.

In the document, *Shape of the Australian Curriculum: English* (Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority, 2010b), the following definition of literacy is provided:

Literacy conventionally refers to reading, writing, speaking, viewing, and listening effectively in a range of contexts. In the 21st century, the definition of literacy has expanded to refer to a flexible, sustainable mastery of a set of capabilities in the use and production of traditional texts and new communications technologies using spoken language, print and multimedia. Students need to be able to adjust and modify their use of language to better meet contextual demands in varying situations. (p.6)

This definition would appear to be synchronous with the definition that underpins the current Queensland literacy policy documents and informs current Departmental professional development programs.

2.4.2 Theoretical standpoints informing the teaching of literacy

Seemingly, there is no clear ‘right way’ for teachers to approach literacy teaching but, rather, teachers are expected to draw from a range of theoretical and practical understandings to inform their practice. As literacy demands, community expectations and the measures of ‘success’ have changed over time, so too have the ways we conceptualise and teach literacy (Luke & Gilbert, 1993; Snyder, 2008). Education draws on many disciplines for its knowledge bases and the interweaving of this diverse range of fields and disciplines, including psychology, sociology, anthropology, linguistics and English literature, has resulted in a “continuous evolution”

(Stahl & Miller, 1989) of theories, beliefs and practices about literacy acquisition and teaching. While acknowledging that this complexity has been conceptualised in myriad ways (Anstey & Bull, 2004; Comber & Cormack, 1997; Freebody, 2007; Luke & Freebody, 1997), I have chosen to adopt the conceptual framework of Lo Bianco and Freebody (2001) who grouped together clusters of teaching approaches based on the underpinning beliefs about literacy's nature, purposes and effects. I have chosen to do so because it succinctly draws together the multiple approaches that have populated literacy education in recent decades. They describe these 'families of thought' as:

Skills approaches which emphasise the perceptual and technical procedures of decoding and encoding

Growth and heritage approaches which emphasise the private, personal, and individual ways in which people use reading and writing, and grow through reading and writing, and the significance of reading and writing as offering access to the valued literary heritage of culture;

Critical-cultural approaches which emphasise the variability of everyday literacy practices from culture to culture and setting to setting, and the importance to everyday social experience of critically analysing literate communications for their underlying belief systems and cultural consequences. (Lo Bianco & Freebody, 2001, p. 24)

Skills approaches to literacy teaching draw on psychological understandings of human functioning and focus on auditory and visual perceptual skills, that is, discriminating between letters and words and between the sounds associated with letters and words (Anstey & Bull, 2004; Hannon, 2000). Such approaches "have pointed to the need for beginning literacy learners to acquire, systematically and explicitly the

fundamental coding conventions of the written script” (Lo Bianco & Freebody, 2001, p. 36). This approach holds that complex literate practices can be broken down into component parts to be learned in a hierarchical order from simple to complex (Anstey, 2002). Critics of this approach express concern that skills are then taught in isolation and “teaching ‘skills’ omits so much value in the use of English that it is restrictive . . . and inadequate” (Allen, 1980, p. 32). Additionally, as a result of this view of literacy, reading programs at the emergent level were designed to develop students’ perceptual skills, with competent readers encouraged to read faster, the assumption being that this would lead to quicker and more efficient reading. The flaw in this notion being that at some point the eyes become too fast for the brain (Hannon, 2000).

While few would dispute that literacy involves a vast number of interrelated skills, this does not necessarily assume that the skills have any existence separate from the activities in which they are exercised. While the skills approach made a valuable contribution to literacy instruction through the development of coding and decoding resources, it is problematic on a number of fronts. Firstly, it promotes the teaching of decontextualised skills, unrelated to the purposes or meaning of what is read or written. People do not read and write to decode or encode text, they read and write to derive or communicate meaning (Anstey & Bull, 2004; Hannon, 2000). The skills approach fails to take into account the social, cultural or ethnic background of students, assuming that all students develop skills in a linear and predictable way. Research has shown that this is not the case (Hill, Comber, Loudon, Rivalland, & Reid, 2002). The skills approach also fails to address the needs of reading and writing for multimodal and new texts. However despite these critiques, programs such as the USA’s *No Child Left Behind* are underpinned by the assumption that “teaching basic literacy code breaking skills and regular testing can generate more equitable results and better achievement by students

from cultural and linguistic minority and lower socio-economic backgrounds (Luke & Woods, 2008, p. 11).

Growth and heritage approaches draw on constructivist theories of learning (Department of Education Science and Training, 2005) with an emphasis on the whole text and learning in real life contexts (Anstey, 2002). It encompasses experiential, whole language, process writing, growth, language experience and cultural heritage approaches. This approach emphasises an “immersion in language and print materials, and the need for instruction to centre always on the meaning of texts, and on readers’ responses to literature, and the appropriateness of more qualitative and observation based assessment procedures” (Luke & Freebody, 1997, p. 190).

This approach views reading and writing in such a way as to not require explicit teaching (Ivanic, 2004). Rather, it relies on the notion that, like oral language, these are natural functions and that students will learn to read by reading and learn to write by reading the ‘good’ writing of others. Children’s background knowledge is seen as a starting point for instruction. However, researchers, such as Heath (1982), have demonstrated that there are significant differences in the home literate practices of different cultural groups and that basing teaching practices on assumptions about early language acquisition serves to value the linguistic and social capital of some students while marginalising that of others (Luke, Baty, & Stehbens, 1989).

Critical-cultural approaches to literacy emphasise plurality of literacies and the need for approaches that connect to modern demands of the literate person (Bull & Anstey, 2003; Comber, 2001; Lo Bianco & Freebody, 2001). Again, this ‘family of thought’ incorporates a range of approaches including genre theory, critical literacy and multiliteracies. In the 1980s and early 1990s, theorists, responding to concerns that the

implicit teaching that characterised growth and heritage approaches disadvantaged students from minority backgrounds, developed an approach to teaching and learning that explicitly taught genres that are valued by schools. This work drew heavily on that of Halliday (1985) and focused on understanding how purpose and context influence the composition of a text. The development of the genre approach represented a move to a social critical approach (Anstey & Bull, 2004).

In response to this broader understanding of literacy, new or revised approaches to literacy teaching and learning have been proposed. These models offer teachers a theoretical basis to inform their teaching practice. Three of these models, each currently in use in Australian schools, will be discussed here. They are the *Three Dimensions* model (Green, 1988), the *Four Resources* model (Luke & Freebody, 1990; 1999) and the *Multiliteracies Framework* (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; New London Group, 1996).

Green (1988) developed a conceptual framework for teaching literacy known as the *Three Dimensions* model. In this model, literacy is seen as an ensemble of social practices involving three dimensions – operational, cultural and critical – which overlap, intersect and are interdependent (Comber, 2001). The operational dimension involves technical competence as well as using texts appropriately, the cultural dimension involves using literate practices for particular purposes in particular circumstances, and the critical dimension considers the “relationships between language, knowledge and power and the effects of different practices on different groups of people” (Comber, 2001, p. 21).

In the 1990s, Luke and Freebody developed what has come to be known as the *Four Resources* model. The *Four Resources* model began as ‘four reader roles’ and has evolved from a model of ‘what readers do’ to being reconceptualised as the repertoire

of practices a literate person brings to texts. These are: *code breaker* – using the codes and conventions of language; *meaning maker* – emphasising the knowledge of the topic the text participant brings to the text; *text user* – emphasising the purposes and uses of different texts; and *text analyst* – emphasising the constructedness of texts and that texts are not neutral and can be challenged. Each role is considered necessary, but not sufficient, for effective literacy development (Luke et al., 2000).

Also reflecting this conceptualisation of literacy and literacy teaching is the *Multiliteracies Framework*, as developed by the New London Group – who advocate a wider ranging view of literacy pedagogy as needed for/in ‘new times’. This model involves four components: *situated practice* through immersion in literacy experiences, *overt instruction* through explicit teaching, *critical framing* relating meaning to social contexts and purposes and *transformed practice* where meaning is put to work in other contexts (New London Group, 1996).

In the classrooms of today, teaching practices can be based on various approaches and “remnants from all of these models are sustained in most contemporary classrooms and lessons” (Luke & Freebody, 1997, p. 191). While it is acknowledged that teachers may hold and employ combinations of ideas (Badger, Comber & Weeks, as cited in LoBianco & Freebody, 2001) that are a complex amalgam of knowledge and personal beliefs (Wray, Jane, Poulson, & Fox, 2002) it is also important to note that each approach “provides a distinctive view of the ‘problem’ of literacy . . . and appropriate interventions to solve literacy problems” (LoBianco & Freebody, 2001, p. 26). Given the likely diversity of beliefs and approaches to teaching literacy among classroom teachers, it is essential to have evidenced-based research to guide and inform teachers as they make crucial decisions about literacy teaching practices that will be

effective for mobile Indigenous students. While there is no research that specifically addresses this need, there have been attempts to broadly identify the literacy teaching practices that make a difference for disadvantaged students.

2.4.3 ‘Effective’ literacy teaching

Emanating from a media-led focus on falling literacy standards and performance pay for teachers, in 2005, the (then) federal Minister for Education instigated the *National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy* (Department of Education Science and Training, 2005) in an attempt to establish which literacy teaching approaches could be shown to be effective, with a particular focus on meeting the needs of students experiencing difficulty. The resultant report made 20 recommendations related to the teaching of reading. (It is to be noted that, despite being named as the *National Inquiry Into the Teaching of Literacy*, the terms of reference limited the inquiry to the teaching of reading.) Although recognising the need for teachers to possess a repertoire of effective teaching strategies to meet the needs of a diverse student body, the report strongly foregrounded a ‘skills’ based approach and prioritised the teaching of decoding through phonics above other components of reading. The report recommended that equipping teachers with teaching strategies “based on findings from rigorous, evidence based research [and providing] systematic, direct and explicit phonics instruction” (p. 14) would meet the learning needs of children from a diverse range of backgrounds during their first years of schooling. This would seem to move the teaching of reading away from a critical-cultural approach, which accommodates a plurality of literacies, towards a skills based approach, valorising print as the dominant literate technology. It would appear that, as a source of future directions and a means to progress the understanding of teaching literacy for the 21st century, the inquiry had missed the mark

by some considerable distance.

The report received a lukewarm response from most quarters. Australia's peak literacy Associations responded to the recommendations through a joint press release (Primary English Teaching Association, 2005) urging a "balanced" approach to teaching literacy. The associations highlighted the report's focus on phonics as a 'cure-all' as problematic, citing the disadvantages this approach has for linguistically and culturally diverse students as demonstrated in evaluations of the *No Child Left Behind* program in the United States of America. They were not the only groups offering criticism. A number of authors contributed articles to a book titled *Beyond the Reading Wars* (Ewing, 2006) in an effort to "rebalance the scales for primary and middle school teachers . . . who need to understand both the current issues and latest research about reading process and pedagogy" (p. 2). In the *Introduction*, the book's editor describes the *National Inquiry Into the Teaching of Literacy* as taking a "highly reductive view of what reading is" and the report as not having "moved us forward at all" (Ewing, 2006, pp. 1-2). In the same publication, Armstrong (2006) describes the report as "shoddy" (p. 10) and notes that "to uncritically read the report of the National Inquiry is to assume that learners come to education free from experiences and independent of the histories of their communities and families" (p. 8).

And so the debate continues about which approach to teaching literacy is the 'right' one – the 'silver bullet' that will provide solutions for students who experience difficulty in acquiring the literacies valued by schools and beyond school. Despite the (then) Minister's intentions, the *National Inquiry* does not provide a clear vision for teachers, particularly those teaching in culturally and linguistically diverse contexts. Comber and Reid (2006) highlight the dilemmas for teachers when they state, "there is

still a vacuum in terms of a clear vision for literacy education” and that what is required is research about “what is good teaching *in particular classrooms, with particular students in particular social and geographic locations* [original italics]” (p. 346).

However, not only is there debate about which ‘method’ or ‘theory’ is most effective, there is continued debate about which factors contribute more significantly to achievement outcomes – the ‘quality’ of the teaching, the background of the student or the characteristics of the school. The answer to this question goes to the heart of the ‘solutions’ proposed by the government. Can the education ‘gap’ be addressed through changes in teaching, or prescribing a ‘right’ way to teach literacy, or is it the background of the student or perhaps the characteristics of the school community that require our focus? Where are resources best targeted?

Hattie (2009) in his synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses identifies teachers as among the most powerful influences in student learning. Hill et al. (2002) argue that quality teaching is fundamental to improving student outcomes. They purport that there are common patterns of teaching that make a difference to students’ literacy development. These are less about “particular teaching strategies or pre-packaged curriculum content” and more about “teacher’s philosophical and ideological understandings about the purposes of literacy” (Hill et al., 2002, p.8). They describe the importance of good teachers as a “key factor for the literacy of the nation” and go on to point out that: “Teachers who are the most successful in setting up and managing classrooms where children have consistent success and make consistent progress are informed about current and conventional theories of literacy development and instruction” (p. 106).

The finding that it is theoretically informed teacher practice that is the most

influential component of literacy success has been well supported in research (see Loudon et al., 2005; Wilkinson, 2005) and, hence, consideration of teacher practice is central to this research project. However, it must be acknowledged that other Australian studies have found strong correlations between school socio-economic characteristics and achievement results (Holmes-Smith, 2006; Leigh & Thompson, 2008), with schools in low socio-economic areas consistently obtaining poor test scores. This research does not indicate that achievement can be predicted by background, as many students from low socio-economic backgrounds perform at very high levels (Holmes-Smith, 2006). But international tests, such as the *Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)*, have shown that those students performing at the lowest end of the range tend to be from low socio-economic backgrounds, including, but not limited to, Indigenous students (Thomson & De Bertoli, 2008). Clearly, socio-economic circumstances have a role in potentially constraining students' potential to achieve in literacy and, as is explored in this thesis, teachers and schools have a role in mitigating the impacts of poverty.

Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) theorised that the greater the cultural and linguistic distance between the home and school, the less successful the teaching and learning of the school. Comber et al. (2001) argue that literacy development is “contingent on a number of interrelated factors, both in the home and in the school environments” (p. 273). Through a longitudinal ethnographic study (Comber et al., 2001), they determined that the effects of poverty cannot be ignored and that students' home lives must be taken into account – but they clearly state that deficit equations about literacy and poverty must be actively resisted and that schools must work with what students bring with them to build the discursive resources and literate practices that they do not possess.

Recently, place-based pedagogies have begun to emerge as an approach to providing an inclusive and socially just education designed to motivate the acquisition of literate competencies (Nixon, Comber, Kerin, & Milroy, 2009). Gruenewald (2008) has suggested that, in the current neoliberal ‘reform’ era, what is needed is a coming together of critical pedagogy and place-based education “to challenge the assumptions, practices, and outcomes taken for granted in dominant culture and in conventional education” (p. 3). Gruenewald’s approach proposes a pedagogy that “seeks the twin objectives of decolonization and “reinhabitation” through synthesizing critical and place-based approaches” (p.3). In Australia, some researchers see strong connections between critical literacy and place-based pedagogies, encouraging students to take active roles in their communities (Comber, Nixon, Wells, Trimboli, & Longin, 2009; Comber, Reid, & Nixon, 2007). However, McInerney, Smyth and Down (2011) suggest that there is still much more to be understood about the ways in which critical place-based pedagogies might play a role in challenging the current individualistic approaches to schooling and assisting young people to make sense of the world they inhabit.

This is complex work, requiring direction and support at both the macro (policy) and micro (classroom) level. Teachers require a high level of informed professionalism, including pedagogical content knowledge, to provide a sound basis for their judgements as they make the crucial decisions about the practices they employ when teaching students with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. It is these practices, as deployed for mobile Indigenous students, which this thesis seeks to foreground. In doing so, it will provide some degree of clarity in the ways systems and schools can enhance and sustain teacher capacity in teaching literacy for this cohort of students.

2.4.3.1 Literacy teaching for Indigenous students.

In their extensive review of contemporary research into Indigenous Australian education outcomes, Mellor and Corrigan (2004) draw attention to the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the “limitations of the suitability and applicability of research and policy that egregiously assumes an undifferentiated whole when considering Indigenous people” (p. 3). In comparison to other fields of educational research, there exists a limited literature base with respect to research into Indigenous literacy education – with most of the research in the field having been conducted in remote and very remote settings (Frigo et al., 2003). In light of the above ‘warning’ (Mellor and Corrigan, 2004) it would seem that there is indeed a very limited research base to inform literacy teaching practices for Indigenous students attending urban schools.

However, this is not to say that no literature exists. But, research findings show that although researchers active in this field – such as Berry and Hudson (1997), Harris and Malin (1994), Harrison (2008), Martin (2008) and others – have published books, reports and journal articles outlining literacy teaching practices that have been shown to make a difference in urban and/or remote contexts, this knowledge has not filtered through to classroom teachers (Perso, 2003 as cited in Frigo et al., 2003), who do not feel equipped to meet the needs of Indigenous students (Martin, 2009; Tripcony, 2000; Working Party on Indigenous Studies in Teacher Education, 2004). This may well be attributable to the absence of contextualised professional development in Indigenous education made available to teachers, particularly those serving regional and rural communities (Bull & Anstey, 2009).

In one survey of Queensland teachers, for example, it was found that only 7%

felt they were adequately prepared to meet the needs of Indigenous students (Tripcony, 2000). From this it is possible to conclude that non-Indigenous teachers, who make up the vast majority of Queensland's teaching workforce, perceive challenges in effectively teaching literacy to Indigenous students in general without the added complexities of poverty and mobility. Tripcony (2002) summarises the key findings of several Queensland research projects to draw attention to the fundamental challenges facing educators in planning and delivering relevant school programs for Indigenous children. She highlights four key challenges:

Values – Particularly the tensions of maintaining major cultural touchstones in an increasingly globalised society largely underpinned by western values.

Indigenous students' lack of dominant cultural capital – While Indigenous students bring with them rich cultural capital it is rarely the sort valued by the formal education system (Buckskin, 2002 as cited in Tripcony, 2002)

English language and literacy – Particularly the communication misunderstandings that arise when children and families possess different cultural and linguistic backgrounds to educators. Also, the challenge of effectively using students' existing linguistic resources to develop skills within dominant culture and language settings.

Teacher education – Programs that enable educators to acquire the relevant skills and knowledge for meeting the educational needs of Indigenous students.

Tripcony is not alone in voicing these concerns. Rather, these themes are prevalent throughout the research literature (see Clancy & Simpson, 2002; Harrison, 2007; Malin, 1990; Sarra, 2008) and in government reports (Ministerial Council on

Education, Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 2006) which highlight the damaging impact of low expectations for Indigenous students' achievement. The recurrent themes from the literature are summarised in the following table (Table 2.3).

Table 2.3 Summary of Challenges in Indigenous Education

Challenge	Authors
Cultural and language differences	Tripcony (2002); Clancy & Simpson (2002); Malin, 1990
Lacking dominant cultural capital	Sarra (2008); Tripcony (2002);
Systemic issues (eg staffing, inconsistent programs, short term 'interventions')	Sarra (2008); Tripcony (2002); Mellor and Corrigan (2004)
Appropriate curriculum and pedagogy	Mellor and Corrigan (2004)
Deficit views	Harrison, 2007; Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), 2006; Sarra, 2008)

While the challenges in Indigenous education are well documented there is also research – largely case studies – that highlights the potential of positive, evidence based practice (McRae et al., 2000). Further insight into the complex area of Indigenous education can be found in the work of Indigenous researchers such as Martin Nakata (2007a, 2007b) and Tyson Yunkaporta (2010). Nakata, in his discussions of the lived realities of Torres Strait Islanders, offers a means of re-conceptualising the space between cultures away from “binary (op)positions such as ‘black-white’, ‘them-us’, ‘traditional-Western’ and ‘Islander-mainstream’” towards a more productive notion of a “cultural interface” (Nakata, 2007b). He characterises this as:

A multi-layered and multi-dimensional space of dynamic relations constituted by the intersections of time, place, distance, different systems of

thought, competing and contesting discourses within and between different knowledge traditions, and different systems of social, economic and political organisation . . . that provides the conditions that shape thinking, understanding, knowledge, identities, history and change in a constant state of process. (Nakata, 2007a, p. 199)

This research project throws light on what it is that enables teachers to better work within this space to build the literate competencies that have ‘currency’ in schools. As stated in the introduction to this chapter, for teachers to construct an effective literacy teaching program in a classroom context that takes account of mobility, Indigeneity and poverty takes considerable professionalism. It cannot be achieved by applying what Luke and Woods (2008) have termed the ‘standardised curriculum hypothesis’. Of this, they state:

This hypothesis states that standardised curriculum programs that script, monitor, and benchmark teachers’ everyday teaching can be implemented across schools, communities, and student cohorts to achieve a better and more uniform spread of the optimal ‘method’ for teaching literacy. (Luke & Woods, 2008 p.14)

What is required is an ‘informed professionalism’ (Schleicher, 2008) “where teachers are supported to use professional knowledge and evidence to make informed and relevant decisions about teaching, learning and assessment” (Luke & Woods, 2008, p. 16). This informed professionalism can be achieved through ongoing professional development which, research shows, is most effective when teachers engage in collaborative learning communities, working together to develop and share successful strategies within a particular school context (Comber et al., 2001; Comber & Kamler,

2005; Hargreaves, 2003; Kamler & Comber, 2005). Timperley, Wilson, Barrar and Fung (2007), in an extensive study of effective teacher professional learning and development, identified seven elements in the professional learning context that have positive impacts on student outcomes:

- providing sufficient time for extended opportunities to learn, and using the time effectively (ie the quality of the use of the time is as important as the amount of the time);
- engaging external expertise, which requires funding;
- focussing on engaging teachers in the learning process, which is more important than being concerned about whether they volunteered or not;
- challenging problematic discourses, which involves iterative cycles of teachers considering alternatives and the impact on student outcomes of a range of discursive positions;
- providing opportunities to interact, in a community of professionals, that focuses on analysing the impact of teaching on student learning in an iterative, ongoing manner;
- ensuring content is consistent with wider policy trends;
- in school-based initiatives, having leaders actively leading the professional learning opportunities Such as has occurred within this research project. (Timperley et al., 2007, p. xxvi)

It is these notions of effective professional learning that underpin this doctoral study as it seeks to come to understand what it is that facilitates responsive teaching of literacy for mobile Indigenous students.

While it is recognised that literacy is a highly contested and highly political field and that what constitutes ‘effective’ literacy teaching is equally contested, the weight of research supports the notion that it is the quality of teaching, through theoretically informed practices that recognise and respond to the social and cultural histories of students (Wilkinson, 2005; Comber & Reid, 2006), that has the most significant effect on students’ literacy outcomes. Unfortunately, there is very little research that speaks directly to the characteristics and needs of mobile Indigenous students attending urban schools. To provide an understanding of the socio-cultural histories of mobile Indigenous students as they pass through, or reside in urban communities, it is necessary to examine literature from a range of fields. These fields – student mobility, Indigenous population mobility and Indigenous education – are discussed in the following section.

2.5 Student Mobility

As an educational issue, student mobility has not gained significant policy traction in Australia. This is not to say that it has gone completely unnoticed, but policy responses have been built around the lobbying of advocacy groups. For example, a study into the impacts of mobility on children of defence force personnel (KPMG Consulting et al., 2002) precipitated a recognition of the challenges faced by this particular group. Following the findings of the study, that mobility can be disruptive to learning, these children now receive assistance through the Defence Community Organisation (Department of Defence, 2007). In co-ordination with State governments, Defence Transition Aides are appointed in schools enrolling children of Defence personnel. These positions support children in social and academic transitions to new schools. The Federal Government also provides tutoring funds to enable the children of

Defence personnel to ‘catch up’ any gaps that result from changing schools. Transfers for personnel with children now most often occur during the summer holidays to facilitate an orderly entry to a new school at the beginning of the school year. Another outcome arising from this work has been the production of a set of booklets and an ‘interstate transfer note’ as part of the *Changing Schools* project (Department of Education Science and Training, 2006). These resources are intended to assist schools and families in interstate movement.

In Queensland, after intense lobbying by the Showman’s Guild, the Queensland School for Travelling Show Children was established by the State government (Danaher & Danaher, 2000). This school caters for a very specific group of children and, rather than integrating students into existing schools, provides a separate mobile school following the show circuit with the students. Other than a trial recently completed (see Chapter 4 for a detailed explanation), there are no other specific programs that acknowledge the needs of students who change schools (often multiple times) during the school year. It appears that policy follows research and the paucity of research in Queensland is reflected in the lack of policy and programs for mobile students. And, while it is recognised in the literature that some Indigenous students are sometimes highly mobile (Harrison, 2008; McRae et al., 2000), it appears that very little is understood about the extent and nature of mobility for this group of students.

What is understood is that there are complex and layered ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors that influence the temporary movements of Indigenous families, which will be discussed in section 2.5. While there are some pockets of research underway (Hill, Navin, & Lynch, 2009; Lynch, 2009; Prout & Yap, 2010) that go directly to this area of research, there is a growing body of national and international research that informs our

understanding of the impacts of student mobility on students, schools and teachers (Dobson, 2004; Dobson, Henthorne, & Lynas, 2000; Fields, 1995; Hartman & Franke, 2003; Heinlein & Shinn, 2000; Henderson, 2001a, 2001b, 2008a; Hotton, Monk, & Pitman, 2004; KPMG Consulting et al., 2002; London Councils, 2007; Machin, Telhaj, & Wilson, 2006; Moriarty & Danaher, 1998; Rumberger, 2003; Sanderson, 2003; Schafft & Killeen, 2007; Strand, 2002; Strand & Demie, 2006).

2.5.1 Impacts for students

There is a significant body of national and international research which suggests that mobility is potentially damaging to students both emotionally and academically (see Rumberger, 2003 for a review). However, it is important to note that not all research indicates mobility has a negative impact for students. For some students, changing schools develops social skills, resilience and personal growth as well as providing the benefits of a ‘fresh start’ for students who may have been experiencing various difficulties. It may also release children from problematic or dangerous situations (KPMG Consulting et al., 2002). In the case of Indigenous students, mobility is seen as essential to the maintenance of important connections to family and country that are integral to cultural and spiritual well-being (KPMG Consulting et al., 2002; Prout, 2008).

However, western child development theories support the notion that mobility is likely to have a negative impact on the social and emotional wellbeing of students. Bronfenbrenner (1979) sees instability and unpredictability in family life as a destructive force in a child’s development and argues that “the degree of stability, consistency, and predictability over time in any element or level of the systems constituting an ecology of human development is critical for the effective operation of

the system” (Bronfenbrenner, 1989, p. 241) – in this case, the school environment. Relationships build over time, and interruptions and relocation are likely to disrupt the establishment of relationships with peers and teachers. Berthelsen (2006) similarly notes that moving schools in the formative years disrupts the building of identities, social skills and capacities to develop strong relationships with both adults and peers as well as the foundational competencies for later academic achievement – all of which have implications for teachers working in schools experiencing high levels of mobility.

Research into whether mobility has a negative impact on academic achievement is not conclusive, largely because the mobile cohort is rarely disaggregated and reasons for mobility are seldom identified. To date, much of the research has centred around the collective achievement of schools, high mobility versus low mobility, on national tests – a measure which has been drawn into question by recent work (see Doyle & Prout, 2011). Research studies that do not control for background characteristics suggest that mobile students have lower achievement scores than non-mobile students. For example, in the United Kingdom, Demie et al. (2005) reference a body of work (including Alston, 2000; Demie, 2002; and Demie & Strand, 2004) to support their claim that “there is now evidence that mobile students attain lower results than stable students who have had an uninterrupted education in the same school” (p.132). However, the picture changes when background characteristics are taken into account. For example, while Strand & Demie (2006) found that, in the United Kingdom, educational mobility is “strongly associated with low attainment in national end of Key Stage 2 tests in English, mathematics and science” (p. 563), it was “no longer significant” when background characteristics such as sex, ethnicity, socio-economic status and previous achievement were taken into account. Nevertheless, the weight of research suggests that there is a negative correlation between mobility and student achievement, particularly for highly

mobile students (Fields, 1997; Rumberger, 2003; Sanderson, 2003) and that further research is needed in this area.

Various reasons are attributed to the lower levels of attainment experienced by mobile students. These include the psychological disruption of relocation (Rumberger, 2003), disruption to foundational learning, and the discontinuity of instruction (Heinlein & Shinn, 2000; Mehanna & Reynolds, 2004; Rhodes, 2008; Strand & Demie, 2006). That mobility disrupts the cohesive flow of instruction is evident – especially when students are moving across State borders. Content, teaching methods, rules and procedures, school cultures and ‘ways of doing school’ (Lynch, 2009) vary from school to school, thus creating barriers to transition and achievement (Mehanna & Reynolds, 2004; Rhodes, 2008).

While, as indicated above, there exists a body of research that suggests that the impact of mobility is potentially problematic, more recent work (Henderson, 2008b) suggests that while negative conceptualisations of the impacts of mobility are common, this is not necessarily the case. The available research demonstrates that mobile students are not a homogenous group and that changing schools impacts on different cohorts of students in different ways (KPMG Consulting et al., 2002, Heinlein & Shinn, 2000; 2002; Strand & Demie, 2006). Again, very little research, if any, has been conducted that illuminates this in the case of Indigenous students attending urban schools and the pedagogical work needed to be employed by teachers for students who are mobile.

While no direct relationship between student mobility and student achievement has been definitively demonstrated in the research, the indication is that negative impacts are more likely to occur for students who are already experiencing other factors

(such as low socio-economic status) that place them at an educational disadvantage.

Research from Australia – the *Changing Schools* report – presents mobility as a ‘compounding’ factor whereby:

High levels of mobility compound other factors that have a negative impact on learning outcomes, and student learning has an inverse relationship with mobility, with the higher the mobility the less likely that learning at age appropriate levels is expected to occur. (KPMG Consulting et al., 2002, p. 129)

The *Changing Schools* report goes on to suggest, “if mobility occurs in significantly high levels, it might itself become the major cause of learning difficulties” (KPMG Consulting et al., 2002, p. 28). As the socio-economic disadvantage of Indigenous Australians is well documented, it is highly likely that high levels of student mobility may play a strong role in limiting educational ‘success’ for Indigenous students.

2.5.2 Impacts for schools and teachers

In addition to the impact on students, frequent enrolling and exiting of students also impacts on schools as institutions. Strand and Demie (2006) draw attention to the significant resource implications for schools managing high mobility. These resource implications can have a ‘knock-on’ effect on the resources available to support student achievement. A report by London Councils (2007) stated that:

Schools with mobile children face additional costs for extra administrative, teaching and other support. The induction or settling process has clearly identifiable costs associated with the tasks which are necessary to settle all

new pupils. Currently, schools cope by diverting staffing resources away from other priorities and by working extra unpaid hours. . . . However, schools already tackling the effects of multiple deprivation are unlikely to have sufficient staffing resources to provide the level of support their pupils need. High levels of pupil mobility compound the pressures these schools face and help to perpetuate under achievement for all children attending that school. For these schools, a significant movement of pupils with high needs can be critical. (p. 3)

In a recent study in Queensland (Hill & Lynch, 2008), the researchers identified the impact high levels of mobility have upon teacher morale and identity. Teachers, while recognising the challenges faced by administrators, reported feeling professionally compromised by the procedures for bringing additional students, often unannounced, to their classrooms. The lack of information that often accompanies new students can mean that planned learning activities are ‘put on hold’ while appropriate assessments and judgements are made that ensure that classroom planning reflects the strengths and needs of newly enrolled students. This can also have a negative influence on non-mobile students who are kept in ‘holding patterns’ while adjustments to curriculum are made. Rumberger (2003) refers to this phenomenon as the ‘chaos’ factor – when mobility impacts on classroom learning activities, administrative load (of enrolling and integrating new students) and teacher morale. Awareness of these multiple impacts, as identified in this thesis, should be a call to action for researchers, educators and policy makers.

Another layer informing the professional judgements of teachers serving highly mobile, economically disadvantaged communities is an understanding of the historical,

socio-cultural and structural factors that underpin the mobility of some – certainly not all – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. If teachers are to utilise pedagogies that connect with the capital of communities and students and recognise and valorise that capital, an understanding of the factors underpinning mobility is essential.

2.6 Indigenous Mobility: Absence and Presence

Research into Indigenous mobility in Australia is drawn from a range of disciplines, including housing research, human geography and anthropology – bringing a range of perspectives to the field. In reading the research in this field, I would advocate that it is important to be aware of the prevalent ‘Othering’ discourse, underpinned by a positivist, ‘value-free’ approach to research in which the researcher draws a line between ‘us’ and ‘them’ through which social distance is established and maintained (Lister, 2004).

That noted, Indigenous mobility is an extremely complex issue, embedded in a history of colonisation, racism and marginalisation, with socio-cultural and socio-economic effects still being played out today. One aspect of colonisation was the effort by early Australian governments, through legislation and administration, to control the mobility of the Indigenous peoples whose nomadic lifestyle was ‘at odds’ with the colonisers’ notions of civilisation and economic development (Gray, 2004; Prout, 2008). While these control mechanisms no longer exist, the marginalisation of Indigenous mobility as legitimate cultural practice continues through public policy that fails to accommodate the cultural needs and expectations of the people. Although mobility is known to characterise the lived experience of many Indigenous people, very little is known about contemporary practice. As Taylor (1996 as cited in Newbould 2004) notes, “while the fact of frequent mobility among Indigenous people is acknowledged, the

facts remain largely unknown” (p. 117).

2.6.1 Patterns of temporary Indigenous mobility

Available research indicates that Indigenous Australians have higher rates of mobility and different patterns of mobility to that of the non-Indigenous population. While the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2008) describes the macro patterns of the mobility of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians as reasonably similar, Taylor (2006) notes that “Indigenous people change their usual place of residence at consistently higher rates than the rest of the population” (p. 11). Taylor (2006) goes on to explain that the difference in data arises because there is a higher proportion of younger people in the Indigenous population and when “Indigenous rates are age-standardised against the total population, the difference in rates is much reduced” (p. 11). Other research literature notes that not only are the moves of Indigenous Australians more frequent, they are also shorter in distance and much shorter in duration (temporary) than those of non-Indigenous Australians (Kinfu, 2005; Memmot, Long, & Thomson, 2006; Taylor & Bell, 2004), with different social and economic ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors (Taylor & Bell, 2004) inducing a pattern of migration “characterized by family rather than labor [sic] mobility” (Kinfu, 2005, p. 20).

Prout (2008) draws on existing Indigenous mobility studies to summarise Indigenous temporary mobility practices. She identifies three processes (or directions) of temporary mobility: circulation, bi-local or multi-local and perpetual movement. In the following extract, Prout (2008) notes that each process can be conceptualised in relation to the notion of a ‘home-base’:

The first of these matches Zelinsky’s definition of circulation,
[encompassing] a great variety of movements usually short-term, repetitive,

or cyclical in character, but all having in common the lack of any declared intention of a permanent or long lasting change in residence (Zelinsky 1971: 226). This type of mobility, common in Melanesian contexts (Chapman & Prothero 1985), involves continual returns to a 'home-base' after frequent journeys away. The home-base may be a particular community, town, or settlement. The second process of Indigenous short-term mobility is known as bi-local or multi-local residence. This type of mobility involves continual movement between two or more 'home-bases' in more than one community, town or settlement. These two or more locales may be viewed as extensions of one another: places in which an individual might be considered usually resident (e.g., Burns 2006). The third process of Indigenous short-term mobility identified in the literature is perpetual movement between a series of locales within which an individual has family. This form of mobility involves no particular physical home-base. 'Home' is embedded within a social network of relatedness rather than a specific geographic region or locale (Taylor 1992). (pp. 7-8)

The available literature indicates that these patterns of Indigenous mobility are broadly consistent across localities and groups, however, it must be noted that very little is known about the mobility of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Australians within and through urban environments, with much more research focused on the mobility experiences of Aboriginal people moving within and through remote and very remote locations (Prout, 2008).

Literature on Torres Strait Islander mobility is particularly limited. Until the end of World War II, Torres Strait Islanders were required by law to live in the Torres Strait

archipelago, however, since then there has been large-scale movement to the mainland (Taylor & Bell, 2004) and now a large Torres Strait Islander population is living in ‘diaspora’ on the mainland (Taylor, 2006). ABS (2008) statistics from the 2006 census indicate that of the 53 300 people who identified as Torres Strait Islander (including 20 200 of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin), 15% lived in the Torres Strait Indigenous Region, 46% lived in the rest of Queensland (mainly the regional cities of Cairns and Townsville) and 39% lived in the remainder of Australia. However, there does not appear to be any reliable research that clearly describes current mobility patterns of Torres Strait Islander people through either urban or remote locations other than that identifying the general movement of families and/or students to the mainland for employment opportunities or secondary education (Arthur, Hughes, McGrath, & Wasaga, 2004). Taylor (2006) notes that the only secondary school in the Torres Strait region is located on Thursday Island and many students attend boarding schools or live with friends or relatives on the mainland for their secondary education. Arthur et al. (2004) suggest that this pattern of schooling helps establish the pattern and frequency of mainland visits later in life. Their research indicated that it was not uncommon for students to attend multiple schools during their stay on the mainland with 15% of those surveyed attending three or more schools. Their research did not, however, include the factors that led to high levels of student mobility.

2.6.2 Indigenous mobility in urban communities: Push and pull

Given the dearth of research into the mobility of Indigenous Australians, the mobility of Indigenous students remains poorly understood (Prout, 2008). What is known is that “Indigenous people in urban areas are more likely to be younger, poorer, be unemployed, in poor health, and have had less formal education and more contact

with the justice system than their non Indigenous neighbours” (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, 2001, p. viii). And, while high levels of mobility are known to characterise the lived experience of some Indigenous Australians living in urban communities, there are scant details of the facts. Housing research indicates that in urban and regional centres – where 75% of Indigenous Australians reside (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008) – kinship relationships and obligations play an important role in movement, but mobility is also linked to economic and social pressures, with housing affordability, entrenched poverty and family violence contributing to housing instability. This housing instability often results in either homelessness or movement between relatives, often in overcrowded arrangements (Birdsall-Jones & Corunna, 2008).

In a recent study conducted in regional West Australia, Prout and Yap (2010) identify the relationships between ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors influencing temporary mobility through the regional centre (see Figure 2.1) and note that the high level of mobility is more likely to involve Indigenous people whose primary connections lie outside the town. They divide the ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors into ‘socio-cultural’ considerations and ‘structural’ considerations (see Table 2.4 following) – acknowledging that the delineations are “somewhat misleading, since many people come to Broome for multiple and overlapping reasons” (p.22). Table 2.4 identifies the socio-cultural and structural considerations as identified by Prout and Yap (2010). Figure 2.1, demonstrates the relationship between these factors as experienced in the regional West Australian community of Broome.

As Prout and Yap (2010) note, although mobility can be considered an integral part of Indigenous life, this is not to say that all Indigenous people are mobile, or that

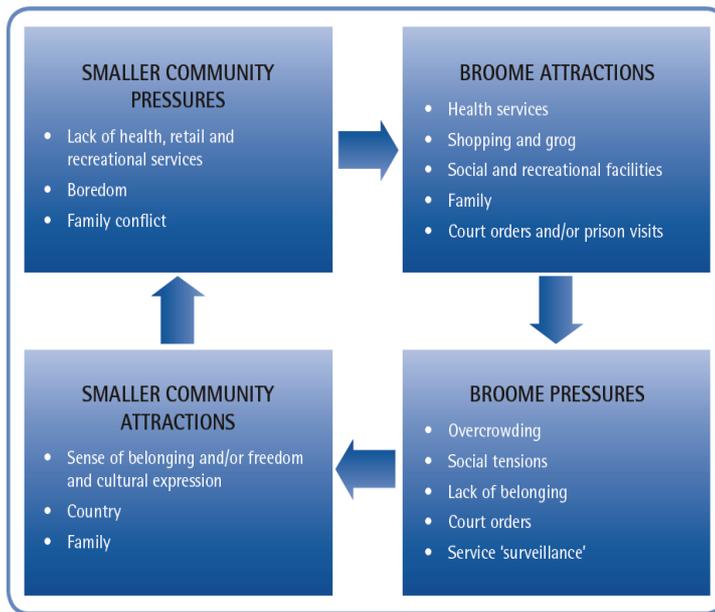
mobile Indigenous people are mobile all the time. Research, including the earlier noted study by Prout and Yap, highlights the existence of a non-mobile core of household members. For example, in three waves of surveys conducted in the township of Kuranda in regional North Queensland between 1999 and 2001, 37% of respondents had remained living in the same house (Henry & Smith, 2002). However, again very little is known about these relatively non-mobile people and the factors that shape their decisions to remain sedentary. Prout (2008) underscores the paucity of research in the area of urban Indigenous mobility when she writes, “there remain significant research gaps regarding Indigenous temporary mobility in urban settings, movement associated with mainstream economic engagement, and the characteristics of ‘core’ population” (p. vii).

Table 2.4 Summary of Factors Inducing Mobility in Broome

Socio-cultural Factors	Structural factors
Family and family structures	Grog and shopping
Funerals	Health
Football	Justice
Festivals	Economy
Law	Overcrowding
	Subverting the structures

Source: Prout and Yap, 2010

Figure 2.1 'Push' and 'Pull' Factors Influencing Temporary Mobility Through Broome



Source: Prout and Yap, 2010, p. 22

In summary, Indigenous mobility is a multifaceted issue – with both positive and negative ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors motivating movement. The limited research that exists is drawn from anthropology, housing research and human geography, with the majority focusing on remote lifestyles and the socio-cultural drivers of mobility (Prout, 2008) and very little is understood about the complexities imposed by factors associated with urbanisation and socio-economic disadvantage. Given that three-quarters of Indigenous Australians live in urbanised areas and are concentrated in areas marked by socio-economic disadvantage (Atkinson, Taylor, & Walter, 2008), the lack of educational research knowledge has serious implications for policy, teacher practice and ultimately students’ literacy outcomes. This is not an issue that can be reduced to a binary of mobility as ‘bad’ and stability as ‘good’ behaviour – this would only serve to marginalise and even negate the centrality of kinship relationships in Indigenous culture and the structural challenges faced by many Indigenous Australians. This is relatively unknown territory, both conceptually and practically, and an important area for emerging research especially given the predicted movement of Indigenous Australians

towards increasingly urban lifestyles (Fordham & Schwab, 2007).

2.7 Summary

In this chapter I have critically reviewed a range of literature from a number of distinct fields to highlight the complexity of teachers' work as they negotiate literacy teaching practices for mobile Indigenous students attending urban, disadvantaged state schools. In the first section, I provided a sketch of the trajectory of Australian education policy around equity, literacy and Indigenous education. This review has shown that over time, there have been significant shifts in the Australian education policy field, reflecting global shifts towards neoliberalism and the accompanying elements of marketisation, choice, performativity and managerialism, which have had cross-field effects for the field of teacher practice. In the 1970s and 1980s, Principals and teachers were positioned, through policies, as professional problem solvers, working with and for their local communities. However, in recent times, policy ensembles position Principals as ultimately responsible for the resolution of the impacts of social and material disadvantage and teachers as technicians who are both the problem and the solution. Both Principals and teachers bear the responsibility for the 'failure' of students to achieve, with this 'failure' measured by a range of standardised national and international literacy tests. By both implication and direct assertion, 'quality' teaching will overcome the structural inequalities that exist in Australian society.

The review highlighted the contested and political nature of literacy education and the multiple theoretical and ideological positions that form the discursive background for teachers' work in this field. In particular, I identified the need for research that provides teachers with a way forward as they work to meet the needs of mobile Indigenous students.

Additionally, this review identified the lack of research that ‘speaks’ to the lived experiences of Indigenous families who are moving within and through urban communities. This scarcity of research is reflected in an absence of attention to the educational needs of Indigenous students and the ways in which systems and schools can support their literacy learning needs.

This research investigation explores what it is that teachers know and need to know about mobile Indigenous students in order to support their literacy learning in classroom/school contexts and to make decisions about pedagogy and teaching practices that are effective for this almost invisible cohort of students. Chapter 3, following, introduces the research questions and the research methodology adopted.

Chapter 3 Research Design

Participatory action research is like jazz. It is built upon the notion that knowledge generation is a collaborative process in which each participant's diverse experiences and skills are critical to the outcome of the work. (Brydon-Miller, Kral, Maguire, Nofke & Sabhlok, 2011, p. 387).

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 identified the policy moment and the multiple factors that exert influence over the work of teachers' in schools where "a constellation of inequalities" (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 37) shape schooling. These factors reflect global shifts towards neoliberalism and the accompanying elements of marketisation, choice, performativity and managerialism. This, seemingly, relentless march of neoliberalism is driving continual (literacy) education reform characterised by reductive notions of literacy and 'effective' literacy teaching, and Indigenous education policies that push responsibility to teachers and schools to demonstrate improved educational outcomes as measured by narrowly focused standardised national and international tests.

In this chapter, Chapter 3, I introduce the research questions guiding this project and discuss the methodology adopted. In the following section, I discuss the theoretical framework that underpins this research project and identify the strengths of the chosen methodology as applicable to this particular research project. Following this, I discuss the establishment of the 'communicative space' and the challenges and tensions generated through the emergent nature of the critical participatory action research process.

Next, an explanation of the data collection and the methods and tools of analysis used in this study is presented. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the research

issues and limitations, drawing out issues of voice and representation, validity and reliability and essential ethical considerations.

3.2 Methodology: An Orientation to Inquiry

This thesis reports on a qualitative case study of a critical participatory action research (CPAR) (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005) enquiry that constitutes one element of a larger research project investigating student mobility in low socioeconomic status (SES) state schools. I have adopted Stakes' (2005) position that case study is "not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied" (p. 443). While a number of topologies have been offered with regard to case study (see White, 1992), this research aligns with Stake's (2005) category of *instrumental* case study where:

A particular case is studied to provide insight into an issue or to redraw a generalisation. The case is of secondary interest, it plays a supportive role and it facilitates our understanding of something else. . . . We simultaneously have several interests, particular and general. (p. 445)

This research project investigates teaching practices that support the literacy learning of highly mobile Indigenous students attending a regional, urban public school in Queensland, Australia. While it involves an intensive exploration in one school setting, it was informed by relevant findings from other schools participating in the larger project. The larger project involved 14 primary schools in a range of low socioeconomic locations across Queensland and researchers from a regional university's School of Education. The larger project, also operating within an action research framework, examined whole school approaches to improving literacy and numeracy outcomes for mobile Indigenous students in low socioeconomic schools.

A key component of the larger project was the trial and evaluation of Mobility Support Teachers (MSTs), a role modelled on England's Department for Children, Schools and Families 'Induction Mentors' (Department for Education and Skills, 2003a). This position provided a human resource in under-resourced low SES state primary schools (Angus et al., 2007) and enabled interventive action at several levels – for example, individual support strategies, curriculum initiatives, school organisational change, community oriented approaches and systemic change. (The relationship between this doctoral project and the larger project and the role of the MST are discussed in detail in Chapter 4.)

While the larger project had a wider brief that included numeracy, the two projects were intertwined in ways that complemented each other, with the findings from each research project informing the other. To investigate practices that support the literacy learning of highly mobile Indigenous students, within the context of a targeted intervention, namely the deployment of the MST, this research addressed the following questions:

1. What knowledge about mobile Indigenous students assists teachers to engage positively?
2. How do teachers make decisions about the literacy teaching practices they employ for mobile Indigenous students?
3. Which literacy teaching practices support literacy learning for mobile Indigenous students?
4. How do teachers meaningfully assess mobile Indigenous students' literacy practices on arrival?

3.2.1 Critical Participatory Action Research

This investigation was informed by critical theory and my orientation to criticality shaped all elements of the research including the methodological decisions (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). This research project recognises that the quality of teaching is a significant contributor to student outcomes (Hattie, 2009; Rowe, 2003) and aims to go beyond describing, analysing and theorising about literacy teaching practices, to working in partnership with practitioners (Somekh, 2006) in ‘public spheres’ (Habermas, 1996). In such a space, through ‘communicative action’ (Habermas, 1984, 1987), public discourse and collective and individual reflection (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005), practice can be understood, reframed and transformed as positive social action. It is through the processes of action research that this reframing and transformation can occur.

Action research, as an educational research methodology, has experienced increasing popularity in recent years (Noffke & Somekh, 2009); however, there is considerable divergence in the conceptualisation and application of action research as practice. Reason and Bradbury (2008) define action research as:

a participatory process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities. (p. 4)

Under this definition, action research offers the critical researcher “value resonance” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 178) between substantive theories and methodological paradigms, and provides a framework from which to achieve the

research aims. While the definition as offered by Reason and Bradbury (2008) closely resembles the characteristics of the research reported in this thesis, it is important to note that the practical application of the research is informed by theorists including Stephen Kemmis (Kemmis, 2001a, 2008a, 2009), Robin McTaggart (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, 2005) and Wilfred Carr (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, 2009), and is grounded in the theories of Habermas.

Habermas' 'knowledge constitutive interests' (1972) may be used to define approaches to research and the concepts also used to distinguish between various possibilities in action research and the role of the researcher as facilitator (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, 2009; Zuber-Skerritt, 1996) – see Table 3.1 following. (A more detailed discussion of the role of the researcher as facilitator follows in section 3.1.2.)

Technical action research in education aims to improve effectiveness of practice as judged by criteria that may be external to the action research process. It relies very heavily on the facilitator as the authority. And while it may result in improved practices, technical action research runs the risk of being inauthentic, with the main aim being the development and extension of research literature rather than the development of praxis (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). Practical action research has the same goals as technical research but it develops the practical reasoning of the practitioners, and the criteria by which the practices are judged are developed through self-reflection rather than assigned by the researcher. The facilitator guides the process and assists the participants in their self-reflection (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Zuber-Skerritt, 1996). Emancipatory or critical action research – as employed in this study – includes the same aims as the previous two approaches but “is a form of research that seeks to create a communicative space within which practitioners can participate and make decisions, taking action and collaboratively inquiring into their own practices, and the conditions

under which they practice” (Carr & Kemmis, 2009, p. 79). Within this communicative space, practitioners use discourse to “help test the truth claims of opinions (and norms) which the speakers no longer take for granted” (Habermas, 1973, p. 168), leading to action to overcome irrationality, injustice, suffering, harm and unproductiveness or unsustainability (Kemmis & Smith, 2008).

Table 3.1 Types of Action Research and Their Main Characteristics

Type of action research	Aims	Facilitator’s Role	Relationship between facilitator and participants
1. Technical	Effectiveness/efficiency of educational practice Professional development	Outside ‘expert’	Co-option (of practitioners who depend on facilitator)
2. Practical	As (1) above Practitioners’ understanding Transformation of their consciousness	Socratic role, encouraging participation and self-reflection	Cooperation (process consultancy)
3. Emancipatory /critical	As (2) above Participants’ emancipation from the dictates of tradition, self-deception, coercion Their critique of bureaucratic systematization Transformation of the organization and of the educational system	Process moderator (responsibility shared equally by participants)	Collaboration

Source: Zuber-Skerritt, 1996, p. 3

The model of CPAR as proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart (2005), and further elucidated by Kemmis (2008a) and Carr and Kemmis (2009), synthesises their developing views of CPAR in light of Habermasian critical theory. It is this model of CPAR that informs this research project on both a practical and theoretical level. This version of action research is grounded within the critical theories of Habermas, on the basis that his social theory provides a way to understand the nature of the social relationships involved in CPAR as well as a theoretical framework to imagine (or re-

imagine) educational action research that “is not so much ‘in’ and ‘about’ education as ‘for’ education . . . and the development of collective [and individual] capacity (Carr & Kemmis, 2009, p. 82). While this version of action research includes the self-reflection spiral of cycles – that is, plan, act, observe, reflect – it also aims to become a process of facilitating public discourse in public spheres (Kemmis, 2008a). Kemmis (2008a) offers a definition of CPAR developed around six major tenets. It is these guiding principles of CPAR, as summarised below, that demonstrate the clear advantages of an action research methodology to this thesis project. Critical participatory action research:

- is research undertaken collectively by participants in a social practice to achieve historical self-consciousness in and of their practice as praxis;
- is a process in which participants reflect critically and self-critically (individually and collectively) on their praxis, understandings of practice, the conditions of their practice and the settings and situations in which their practice is conducted;
- opens a communicative space where participants reach shared insights into and decisions about what to do about their practice in terms of its evolution, themes and issues that arise as common concerns;
- transforms reality by making changes in what participants do and gathering evidence of the observable consequences of their actions
- has a practical aim in particular situations; and
- has emancipatory aims, eliminating unjust, irrational, unproductive conduct or consequences.

3.2.2 The role of the researcher: From facilitator to collaborator

As seen in Table 3.1, the role of the researcher is a key characteristic of each approach to action research. In order to shape emancipatory action research, the researcher must be more than a technical expert supervising the work of others. In this project, it was my aim, as researcher, to engage in democratic, collaborative inquiry with local stakeholders and, in doing so, “to seek and enact solutions to problems of major importance to [the] stakeholders” (Greenwood & Levin, 2005, p. 54). According to Greenwood and Levin (2005), this process results in “co-generative inquiry” (p.54), harnessing the diverse knowledge bases of researchers and knowledgeable stakeholders to create a “powerful research team” (p. 54). In this research project, I also drew upon the notion of ‘Disciplined Dialogue’ (Swaffield & Dempster, 2009) in an effort to ensure conversations retain both their focus on the moral purpose of practices that support the literacy learning of mobile Indigenous students and on the data that is generated through the CPAR cycle. My role, as researcher in this team, is a complex mix of aspiration and pragmatism, of technical facilitation and co-participation.

Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) reflect on the role of the facilitator noting that “conceptualizing facilitation as a neutral or merely technical activity denies the social responsibility of the facilitator in making or assisting in social change” (p. 571). While there is a range of literature that describes the practice of facilitation (see Heron, 2000; Shaw, 2002; Spinks & Clements, 1993; and Wadsworth, 2006 for examples of the variety of approaches to facilitation), for this research project I adopted the model of “*facilitation as a form of ongoing action research* in which facilitators are continually asking themselves, and sometimes the group, what is needed here? [original italics]” (Mackewn, 2008, p. 618).

Mackewn (2008) identifies four interrelated dimensions of the facilitation of action research: purpose, conceptualisation, wider field, and choreography of energy – as summarised in Table 3.2, following. As facilitator, the researcher must “remain mindful and interweave all four dimensions almost simultaneously” (Mackewn, 2008, p. 627). Such facilitation involves a moment to moment unfolding of information, processing of that information and redesigning the event in order to both serve the purposes of the project and to address issues emerging from the current dialogue or the wider field. The correlation between Mackewn’s conceptualisation of the facilitator role and that previously identified by Carr and Kemmis (1986) in emancipatory research (see section 3.1.1) is evident. Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) use Habermasian theory to highlight the complexity of the role when they write:

The theory of system and lifeworld allows us to see the doubleness of the role in terms of a specialist role and functions in critical tension with processes of cultural, social and personal reproduction and transformation that aspire to achieving self-expression, self-realization and self-determination [both individual and collective self]. (p. 594)

To achieve the aim of transformation of praxis, an important part of my work as facilitator was to ensure that participants were genuinely positioned as knowledge creators and collaborators rather than as technicians and informants, particularly given the risks of action research masquerading as a research model which positions teachers as more than research subjects, yet serves only to limit and constrain (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). In order to avoid positioning teachers as informants or technicians of/in this project, questions beyond those related to methodology needed to be carefully considered. Issues of ontology and epistemology needed to be transparently addressed.

Table 3.2 Interrelated Dimensions of the Facilitation of Action Research

Purpose	Conceptualisation	The wider field	Choreography of energy
Catalyst to transformation Co-created with group Can change with emerging understandings	Multiple ways to conceptualise a group and how it works	Require awareness of the complex interactive phenomena that influence lifeworld and system	1. awareness of own intrinsic energy 2. awareness of the group's energy and how to connect own energy to group's and vice versa

Source: Mackewn, 2008

In this project, teachers were positioned as critical, knowledgeable professionals and as active constructors of knowledge rather than as 'subjects' of study or critique or passive recipients of knowledge. The CPAR process provided a recursive framework for all participants to inquire about, and reflect upon, their practices. It provided opportunities to interact with peers and to use this process as a bridge between theory and practice (Grisham, 2000). The formation of a democratic communicative space was intended to position all participants as equally able to contribute to the discursive critique of not only individual and collective practice but the conditions under which that practice occurs, and to work towards intersubjective agreement on actions for transformation (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). Additionally, the use of Disciplined Dialogue as a scaffold for professional conversations ensured that conversations were not trivial, piecemeal or sporadic, nor were they derogatory, censoring or coercive (Swaffield & Dempster, 2009). They were positively focussed on the moral purpose of schools and of teachers' work. Conversations were not irrationally based on stereotype or hearsay, but on reason and values, stimulated by helpful qualitative and quantitative data (Swaffield & Dempster, 2009).

The professional learning interventions and data collection procedures served to inform the recursive cycle of planning, acting, observing and reflecting as it evolved for each participant. Through CPAR, the participants were provided the opportunity to

exercise and further develop their professional capacity, to become ‘empowered’ change agents in the sense that:

the basis for empowerment is not to be understood in terms of activism justified by ideological position taking; rather, the basis for empowerment is the communicative power developed in public spheres through communicative action and public discourse. On this view, the aim of empowerment is rational and just decisions and actions that will be regarded as legitimate by those involved and affected. (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 594)

In summary, the work of the facilitator has a paradoxical form, both a science and an art: “It is a science in that it draws on theory and evidence; it is an art in that it requires precision, attention and timely action” (Mackewn, 2008, p. 628). Engaging with this role presents many challenges, but it lies at the heart of creating a functional, democratic space that supports and enhances the work of teachers as they support the literacy learning of mobile Indigenous students.

3.3 The Evolution Of The Research Project

As is discussed in detail in Chapter 4, in 2006 I commenced work as a part time Project Officer for, what was to become, a continuing series of collaborative action learning projects investigating the ways in which mobility and material and social disadvantage intersect and create pressures for students’ learning and teachers’ work. This doctoral research project arose through my ongoing involvement as a member of the action research team for the original project, working with Principals, MSTs, Indigenous Education Workers and university colleagues to develop strategic interventions that operate to improve learning outcomes for all mobile students, but

particularly for Indigenous mobile students.

3.3.1 Framing the questions

As the larger project moved from a focus on interventions that developed and sustained a sense of belonging and smoother transitions for students and their families, to examining classroom practices that met the needs of mobile students, priorities for further research began to emerge. The quantitative research findings made clear the over-representation of Indigenous students in the mobile cohort (Hill & Lynch, 2008; Hill et al., 2009), and this, coupled with low levels of achievement for this group of students (Doyle & Prout, 2011), indicated that an intensive exploration of literacy teaching practices was required. Teachers required clear and deeper understandings of practices that enable them to work effectively at the ‘cultural interface’ (Nakata, 2007a), to build the literate competencies that have ‘currency’ in schools. In consultation with the larger project’s research group and key staff members from Riverside State School, I prepared a series of questions that would support practical action, add to knowledge in the field, and recognise the particular challenges of and opportunities for constructing a literacy teaching program in a classroom context that takes account of mobility, Indigeneity and poverty.

This, in effect, meant that although the research questions emerged from the situation in which teachers were practising, they were pre-determined and not generated from the immediate concerns of all the co-participants. By bringing the questions to the participants, I positioned those involved in particular ways – and this had implications for the researcher-participant stance and the form of involvement assumed by the participants. Herr and Anderson (2005) use the term ‘researcher positionality’ to describe the different researcher-participant stances. They propose a continuum of

positions, moving from: 1) an insider working on his own practice, 2) insiders in collaboration with other insiders, 3) insiders in collaboration with outsiders, 4) insider/outsider teams working in reciprocal collaboration, 5) outsiders in collaboration with insiders, through to, 6) an outsider working with insiders. Herr and Anderson characterise insider/outsider teams as potentially the most democratic, and while this was the ultimate goal, it must be recognised that by bringing the questions to the participants I had positioned myself as a researcher ‘working with’ the participants rather than in a relationship of ‘reciprocal collaboration’ and ‘collective action’ (Cornwall, 1996). This positionality gave rise to particular dilemmas that are discussed in the following section.

3.3.2 Communicative action and public spheres

Habermas (1984, 1987, 1996) has written extensively on his concept of ‘communicative action’. In the first volume of *Theory of Communicative Action* (1984), he defined communicative action as “the form of social interaction in which the plans of different actors are coordinated through an exchange of communicative acts, that is, through the use of language orientated towards reaching an understanding” (p. 44.) These communicative actions are not those of everyday communication where self-interest can sometimes shape discourse. Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) have distilled Habermas’ conceptualisation of communicative action in the following way:

Communicative action is communication in which people consciously and deliberately aim

- to reach *intersubjective agreement* as a basis for
- mutual understanding so as to

- reach an *unforced consensus about what to do* in the particular practical situation in which they find themselves.

[Also] communicative action opens a *communicative space* between people. . . . [which] produces two particular and simultaneous effects. First, it builds *solidarity* between people who open their understanding to one another in this kind of communication. Second, it underwrites the understandings and decisions that people reach with *legitimacy* [original italics]. (pp. 575-576)

This communicative action occurs within ‘public spheres’ (Habermas, 1996), arenas in which individuals and groups participate in discussions about matters of common concern, in which they “work together to explore their practices, understandings and situations, . . . not just to perfect or improve themselves as individuals, but also in the interests of acting rightly in terms of the historical consequences of their action” (Kemmis, 2008a, p. 127). The formation of communicative spaces and public spheres enables participants to work across the boundaries of ‘lifeworlds’ (Habermas, 1987), the social-cultural component of society constituted through communicative action (Crossley, 2005) and ‘systems’ (Habermas, 1987), the administrative systems of society constituted through strategic action guided by functional reason (Kemmis, 2008a). It is within these public spheres that transformational social actions are generated and sustained.

3.3.3 Laying the foundations of a communicative space

The formation of a communicative space is the crucial first step and a central principle of action research:

The first step in action research turns out to be central: *the formation of a*

communicative space which is embodied in networks of actual persons. . . .

A communicative space is constituted as issues or problems are opened up for discussion, and when participants experience their interaction as fostering democratic expression of diverse views and to do so in a way that will permit people to achieve mutual understanding and consensus about what to do [original italics]. (Kemmis, 2001b, p. 100)

Literature that describes the practice of establishing an inquiry group is limited (McArdle, 2008) and errors in this aspect of the research can have far reaching and potentially damaging effects for the relationships that underpin the overall CPAR process. Reflecting on the ways in which I found this to be most challenging, I realise that I had aspirations of creating a democratic communicative space, where co-generative inquiry (Greenwood & Levin, 2005) would flourish and the lofty ideals of CPAR would be well met. In my imaginings, the whole experience would result in positive change for all – the participants (myself included), the school and most importantly the students. But, as Montaigne observed over four hundred years ago, “saying is one thing, doing is another”.

While I initially envisaged my role as the “outsider within, . . . both a researcher and an actor-participant” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 76) facilitating and scaffolding the professional conversations, it was apparent from the earliest stages of the project that the classroom teachers saw my role quite differently. To them, I was the researcher and they were the informants. They gave generously of their time, shared their knowledge, spoke candidly about their practice and the situations in which they practise, opened their classrooms to my observations and answered my questions – yet remained passive. They were ‘on board’ with the goals of the project – to identify and better

understand practices that support the literacy learning of mobile Indigenous students – but I had not successfully engaged them in the participatory process. The realisation that the research could potentially fail before it began meant that I needed to reflect very carefully on my own practice as a researcher (Lather, 1991; Reid & Frisby, 2008) and the realities of the situation for the teachers, and the implications these had for the project.

Stringer (2007) describes three elements of researcher positioning that can have an impact on the success of an action research project: agenda, informing people of your purpose; stance, demonstrated through body language, dress and demeanour; and position, awareness of the social space, visible, neutral and accessible to all stakeholders. In my first meeting with the action research group (i.e., the classroom teachers, Curriculum Co-ordinator and MST) I had made errors in all three areas. While I had informed the participants of my agenda, I had not allowed sufficient time for the discussion around this to include specifically addressing my role and their (potential) roles. I had assumed too much about their understanding of research as action and my discussion had been far too implicit. In my efforts to not appear as the overbearing ‘expert’ I didn’t present myself as sufficiently purposeful and/or knowledgeable. My demeanour was tentative and I was perhaps overly thankful for their participation, which may have added to positioning the teachers as informants rather than participants. While I was aware of the social space occupied by teachers, having only recently left the classroom myself, I had not demonstrated to this group that I was aware of *their* work, and the demands on *their* time. These errors had significant flow on effects for the dynamics of the group and the development of a truly democratic and participatory communicative space.

Having inadvertently sent the group dynamics down an unhelpful trajectory, it took time and deliberate actions to bring about a functional communicative space. Based on my reflections, I reframed my approach. I realised that the notion of Disciplined Dialogue with which I had commenced the project needed to be tighter and more sharply focussed. To that end, I ensured all our shared meetings were preceded by the circulation of an agenda. I devised activities that required participation with concrete outcomes related to practice and spent as much time as possible in the school, undertaking a highly visible reconnaissance (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). I applied for, and was successful, in obtaining a Graduate Research School grant that enabled me to 'buy out' the time of the classroom teachers. This was particularly successful in that it not only provided scheduled, uninterrupted time for our discussions, but it also clearly valued the teachers' time and their participation (Christensen et al., 2002). Providing this time was a powerful tool in providing the temporal space for generative conversations and a thorough examination of data. Although the shift took time, as one participant cast aside her passivity the others followed.

3.3.3.1 The participants

A key characteristic of participatory action research is the notion of co-generative inquiry built on researcher-stakeholder collaboration (Greenwood & Levin, 2005). Collaborative partnerships often take considerable time to build (Herr & Anderson, 2005) and mutual trust and respect do not occur simply because a group share a common concern. My history with this school provided an opportunity to develop this research project as CPAR.

As indicated previously, I had been working with Riverside State School as part of an existing research team investigating student mobility. Upon commencing the

research reported here I enjoyed a strong relationship with the school leadership and with the MST, although my interactions with teaching staff had been limited to interviews and briefings about the broader mobility project. The Principal (at that time) enthusiastically welcomed the undertaking of a project focussed on identifying literacy teaching practices that support the learning of mobile Indigenous students for a number of reasons. Included in these reasons were the very low levels of achievement of Indigenous students in the school identified through a range of measures (most notably NAPLAN results), the State government's reform agenda for, and considerable investments in, literacy teaching, and the strong attention from both the Federal and State Governments on strategies to 'close the gap' for Indigenous students. While these systemic priorities and initiatives provided 'buy in' from the school's administration, they also made available the potential for the research to be skewed towards narrow, quick fixes (Connell, 2009a; Lingard, 2010) that ignore the significant contextual complexities of educational practice in this particular state school. However, the Principal's support was a valuable asset at the outset of the research project.

Participants were recruited to the project in a number of ways. Firstly, I directly invited the MST, the Curriculum Coordinator (CC) and the Community Liaison Officer (CLO) to be members of the action research team. The MST is a key element of the larger mobility project's interventions and her knowledge of the role, its challenges and potential as a catalyst for whole school and possibly systemic change was invaluable. The MST was enthusiastic about the potential of this action research to support and inform her role, build school and teacher capacity and ultimately improve student outcomes. The CC, who I knew to have a depth of knowledge about literacy and literacy teaching through our professional associations during my time as a classroom teacher, also agreed to be involved and saw her involvement as a part of her role as CC

and key teacher in the school. I also approached the Community Liaison Officer (who was at that time one of two Indigenous Education Workers employed by the school) as she has a deep understanding of the school and the community and often worked with the MST, as well as supported the work of classroom teachers. The CLO was willing to participate in a consultative role and made herself available to share her experiences and insights through interviews and informal conversations. However, she was reluctant to become directly involved in the CPAR. This may have been because of her substantial work commitments or for other reasons. Although we met informally throughout the duration of the project and engaged in a range of discussions, she chose not to identify her reasons for her reluctance. I respected her decision and she maintained an informal ‘consultative’ stance to her involvement.

Secondly, on my behalf, the Principal invited three classroom teachers to participate. I held an informal meeting with these teachers to discuss the project and their potential involvement, and all welcomed the opportunity to be involved. While every effort was taken to ensure that participation was voluntary I was concerned that these teachers may have felt compelled to participate, given that the invitation was issued via the Principal. However, at our first shared meeting I realised that my concerns on this front were unfounded. During the course of this meeting, each participant expressed a personal commitment to the goals of the project and described their efforts to maintain an ongoing renewal of their practice and for maximising outcomes for all students, especially those facing challenging circumstances.

The teachers who participated were all at different stages of their careers and have followed different professional trajectories. Table 3.3 summarises the participants’ backgrounds in education. All names used in this thesis are pseudonyms and care has

been taken to ensure that the identity of the teachers and school is protected. However, due to the specific roles participants have within the school, total anonymity is not possible.

Sarah was the Mobility Support Teacher (MST), recruited to the role after 13 years experience as a classroom teacher. Sarah has worked in two regional Queensland centres over the course of her career. She originally trained as an early years teacher and began her teaching career in a small coastal city. Seven years ago she moved to the city where this study was undertaken. Since moving here, Sarah has taught across a variety of year levels, most recently as a Year 5 teacher.

The role of Mobility Support Teacher was one of the key interventions being deployed as part of the larger research project, and Sarah has played a key role in the evolution of the position – acting as mentor for other MSTs and actively contributing to the larger mobility project. While the role was an evolving one, the aim was to support the transitions of students entering and leaving the school in direct ways including:

- Supporting students' *readiness to learn*, based on a broad interpretation of the ecological and social factors that promote school or learning readiness (see Dockett & Perry, 2007; Hilferty, Redmond, & Katz, 2009; Kagan & Rigby, 2003). This could include connecting the family to essential services such as those related to housing, nutrition and health; providing necessary school materials such as books and uniforms.
- Supporting students' *engagement with learning* by ensuring regular attendance and participation; promoting active participation in school activities; supporting behaviour needs, including timely

referral to support staff; ensuring personalised learning plans were developed for each student with a focus on literacy and numeracy learning needs.

- Supporting students' *learning achievement* by completing on-arrival learning needs assessments and working collaboratively with the classroom teacher to promote learning achievement, for example by sourcing specific resources or support.

The second member of the team was Nadya. Nadya's role was the Curriculum Co-ordinator. She spent 13 years as an early years teacher at Riverside State School before being seconded to a team established within the region to support teachers in the teaching of literacy. Since returning to Riverside State School, Nadya has worked part time as a classroom teacher and more recently as the Curriculum Co-ordinator (0.6 full time equivalent). The Curriculum Co-ordinator role was a school-based role devised by the Principal to support curriculum development within the school. At that time, 2009, Nadya was also a casual employee of the university, tutoring first year students in a foundational language and literacy subject. Nadya had a deep commitment to her own professional learning as well as contributing to the professional learning of pre-service and in-service teachers. As well as her in-school commitments, she also facilitated a systemic professional learning course in functional grammar provided to teachers at Riverside State School.

Sandi was one of two Indigenous Education Workers at the school and at the time the project commenced, was working as the Community Liaison Officer (CLO) at the school. As the title implies, the CLO assisted in the development of school and community links and in facilitating two-way communications between the school, the parents/carers and the school community (Department of Education and Training,

2009c). Sandi had strong links to both the school and the community. She attended this school as a young girl and has been a resident in this community most of her life. In the five years she had been employed at this school, Sandi had worked in various roles and had undertaken training as an in-class teacher aide as well as an administrative assistant. It is important to note that Sandi's position was offered on a contract basis, solely contingent upon recurrent funding. Over the duration of this project, Sandi's role in the school shifted from a mix of administration and student welfare to become primarily concerned with reducing absenteeism. Sandi's duties could, on any one day, include: home visits for a range of purposes, including to follow up on documents for signing (for example permission notes for various co- and extra-curricula activities, health checks and school records) and addressing chronic absenteeism; assisting the visiting Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) as a 'translator' between the SLP and Indigenous students; working with students with behaviour incidents; administering medications; and consulting with teachers on students' home/family circumstances. Sandi's workspace was in the school's reception area, where she also had some administrative responsibilities such as answering telephones and attending to student or visitor enquiries. As noted previously, while Sandi chose not attend the CPAR meetings, she made herself available for an interview and for informal conversations about the project and her work within the school.

Anne had been a classroom teacher for almost 26 years. She taught for 10 years across all grades in a range of regional Queensland locations before taking seven years parental leave. Anne then returned to teaching part time as a relief teacher in this regional city. She worked in a range of schools, both government and non-government, before beginning full time work at Riverside State School where she had been a Year 1 teacher for almost 16 years.

Laura had been a classroom teacher for over 30 years and taught in a range of regional locations before coming to Riverside State School almost 20 years ago. She had taught across all year levels in this school, with the exception of the Preparatory Year, and had been teaching Year 3 for the last four years. All four of these teachers have been trained in Queensland and have worked only in Queensland.

Kali was a beginning teacher, and completed her education degree in Western Australia two years before coming to this school. Since completing her degree she had been travelling throughout northern Australia, taking on short term teaching contracts as well as a range of casual positions in tourism and hospitality. Kali was in her first year of full time teaching at this school and was teaching Year 3.

The school based work experiences of the participants in the study is summarised in Table 3.3, below.

Table 3.3 Participants' School Based Work Experience

	Sandi	Sarah	Nadya	Kali	Laura	Anne
Current position	Indigenous Education Worker	Mobility Support Teacher	Curriculum Co-ordinator	Year 3 teacher	Year 3 teacher	Year 1 teacher
Overall teaching experience	0	13 years	17 years	1 year	30+ years	26 years
Qualifications	Dip. Social Work	B. Ed	B. Ed	B. Ed	B. Ed	Dip. Ed
Time in this school	5 years	3 years	16 years	1 year	20 years	16 years
Time in current role	2 years	3 years	2 years	1 year	3 years	16 years

In addition to the participants identified previously, staff from the Indigenous Schooling Support Unit (ISSU) acted as a reference group and provided invaluable assistance in ensuring the perspectives of Indigenous stakeholders were not overlooked. Although this research project focussed on the work of a group of non-Indigenous teachers, it was essential that the views of Indigenous education experts were canvassed

and the best interests of mobile Indigenous students were firmly foregrounded. The input of the ISSU staff was an essential element in ensuring that the resources used were appropriate and that ethical considerations were foremost.

3.3.4 Inhabiting the communicative space

Having established the beginnings of a communicative space, it was important to appropriately furnish it with opportunities to examine and reflect upon current practices and the ‘materials’ to support praxis and transformation. Central to establishing these opportunities is the conceptualisation of ‘practice’. There are a number of theoretical traditions that inform our understanding of practice. Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) summarise the relationships among five broad traditions in the study of practice, reproduced here in Table 3.4. These approaches use different research methods and techniques that reflect “choices about what it means to *know* a practice (the epistemological choice) and about what a practice *is* and thus how it manifests itself in reality (the ontological choice) [original italics]” (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 572). These choices are fundamental to how the researcher theorises practice and, therefore, the data or evidence that might be used to describe practice as it is enacted in teachers’ everyday work situations.

Table 3.4 Relationships Among Different Traditions in the Study of Practice

Perspective	The Individual	The Social	Both: Reflexive – dialectical view of individual-social relations and connections
Objective	(1) Practice as individual behaviour, seen in terms of performances, events and effects. Behaviourist and most cognitivist approaches in psychology	(2) Practice as social interaction (e.g., ritual, system-structured): Structure-functionalist and social systems approaches	
Subjective	(3) Practice as intentional action, shaped by meaning and values: Psychological verstehen (empathetic understanding) and most constructivist approaches	(4) Practice as socially structured, shaped by discourses, tradition: historical verstehen (empathetic understanding), and poststructuralist approaches	
Both: Reflexive-dialectical view of subjective-objective relations and connections			(5) Practice as socially and historically constituted and reconstituted by human agency and social action: Critical methods; dialectical analysis (multiple methods)

Source: Kemmis & McTaggart , 2005, p. 573

In this research project, providing time, space and experiences that supported the participants in exploring their practice as both ‘individual’ and ‘social’ was a key consideration. The view of practice adopted in this project required that participants be enabled to reflect upon the idea that not only their personal skills, understandings and values informed their practice but also that the tensions and interconnections between the system and their lifeworlds exerted influences that often went unnoticed and unremarked upon. To that end, a wide range of activities were conducted to bring these factors forward. Table 3.5 provides an overview of the activities conducted as part of the Disciplined Dialogue.

3.5 Group Activities

Meeting	Activities
1 30/04/09	Semi-structured discussions: Relating personal teaching history; identifying key professional development events that have contributed to current understandings.
2 16/06/09	Professional reading: Indigenous temporary mobility (Prout, 2008); Discussion: Motivations for Indigenous student mobility.
3 16/06/09	Scenarios: Examining current literacy teaching practices for mobile Indigenous students.
4 12/08/09	Professional reading: Literacy teaching in disadvantaged contexts (Comber et al., 2001; Wilkinson, 2005); Indigenous education (Harrison, 2008; Harris & Malin, 1994; Nakata, 2003).
5 12/08/09	Semi-structured discussion: Mapping the contextual challenges and opportunities for literacy teaching in this school community.
6 17/11/09	Discussion: 'Ideal' practices in schools and classrooms with high levels of Indigenous student mobility and socio-economic disadvantage. Naming of individual mini action research projects.
7 25/01/10	Cultural Awareness training provided by the Indigenous Schooling Support Unit (informed by their involvement in the larger mobility project).
8 29/03/10	Report back on individual mini action research projects Structured reflection on the CPAR, identifying changed and unchanged practices, and next steps

Integral to developing conceptual resources for the participants to talk about practice was the use of the grid (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; McTaggart & Curró, 2009) shown in Table 3. 6, identifying the domains of practice. The concepts identified within the grid were introduced to the participants over time to support their reflection. In the final reflection session the Disciplined Dialogue was constructed to prompt reflection in each of the identified domains.

While the recursive cycle commonly associated with action research (i.e., plan, act, observe, reflect, replan) formed part of the methodological process it did not become a methodological mantra, for to do so would understate the complexity of what is occurring at both the individual and collective level (McTaggart & Curró, 2009). In view of this, I concur with Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) when they write:

Questions of research methods should not be regarded as unimportant, but (in contrast with the methodologically driven view) we would want to assert

that what makes participatory action research ‘research’ is not the machinery of research techniques but rather an abiding concern with the relationships between social and educational theory and practice. (p. 574)

Table 3.6 Domains of Practice

Individual (subjectivity)	Knowledge		
	Understandings	Skills	Values
	Social Practices		
	Communication	Production	Social Organisation
Social (structure, ideology)	Social Structures		
	Culture	Economy	Political life
	Social Media		
	Language (discourses)	Work	Power

Source: McTaggart & Curró, 2009, p. 52

The focus of this research is an examination of teachers’ practice as they work with mobile Indigenous students in a regional suburban state school. Central to the CPAR process was the creation of the public sphere(s) facilitating public discourse within which there is intersubjective agreement and unforced consensus about what to do (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). This enabled and supported practical critiques of the existing situation and supported the participants’ exploration of alternative actions that had the potential to improve their individual and collective literacy teaching practices at the cultural interface. Through this, the participants aimed to improve literacy outcomes for this particular cohort of students.

3.3.5 Moving on

While building and furnishing the communicative space was a crucial element

of the research, serious consideration was given to the researcher vacating the project. While a project such as this could potentially continue indefinitely as educators continue to strive for improvement in their own practices and student outcomes, the reality in this case was that this work constituted a doctoral study with a limited timeframe. When I initially invited the participants to become involved I had envisaged completing the project by the end of the 2009 school year, however, this had to be renegotiated. As discussed previously, moving to participatory action research required considerable effort on my part as facilitator. Building the relationships necessary to create a genuinely democratic communicative space took time, more time than I had originally anticipated, and to rush may have limited the possibilities for success. The day-to-day realities of teachers' professional lives meant they were not always available to meet with me. Meetings were sometimes rescheduled in accordance with school priorities; teachers took long service leave and at times were absent due to illness. As well, they had numerous competing priorities as they continued to be actively involved in ongoing curriculum projects, professional development and the trialling of systemic initiatives.

To symbolise a formal end to the work of my doctoral project, rather than the end of my relationship with the participants, the final activity (see Table 3.5) included a lengthy and detailed reflection on the changes (or not) to each participant's practice, and a discussion of the constraining and enabling factors. This reflection was constructed around the notion of 'practice' expressed earlier – that is, that practice is located within “frameworks of participants' knowledge, in relation to social structures and in terms of social media” (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 574). This final group session concluded with a discussion of 'Where to next?' during which the group made plans to disseminate their findings at a whole school staff meeting. Following the final

meeting, the participants expressed a desire to maintain the group and, at the presentation to the whole school staff, invited other staff members to become involved in an informal collective. The group proposed to continue to share ideas and reflect on what could be done both individually and collectively to better understand literacy teaching practice and, in doing so, navigate the cultural interface and improve outcomes for mobile Indigenous students. However, as the data will show, a range of circumstances mitigated this ‘plan’.

3.4 Data Gathering

It is necessary to decide what kinds of things “practice” and “theory” are, for only then can we decide what kinds of data and evidence might be relevant in describing practices and what kinds of analyses might be relevant in interpreting and evaluating people’s real practices in the real situations in which they work. (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 574)

The data for this thesis were generated using a range of methods as participants engaged in communicative action that acknowledged and shaped the emerging intersubjective space that took communicative action to social practice (Kemmis, 2008a). These not only provided rich data but also provided the opportunity for the triangulation of results to ensure authenticity. Specifically, data collection included:

- observations, including field notes and a research diary;
- interviews (recorded) with all participants to collect reconnaissance information and to gather their reflections on the process and the interventions;

- interviews (recorded) with school staff to collect reconnaissance information;
- review of relevant school and system documents;
- shared meetings (recorded) with participants during which we engaged in planned activities, reviewed data, planned and evaluated actions;
- review of workplace artefacts including teachers' planning documents, professional development schedules and materials and classroom resources;
- participants' written reflections of their experiences and findings.

3.4.1 Observations

Observations allow researchers to construct “richly descriptive and interpretive accounts of events, practices or cultures over time” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004, p. 219). This research used Spradley’s (1980) different phases of observations, that is, descriptive, focused and selective observations to follow up on ideas and hunches that allowed me to get at the significance of certain events and practices (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004). Initially, *descriptive* observations were made to gain an overall understanding of the school context and the situations in which teachers were practising. This included sketches of the classrooms, classroom routines and teachers’ interactions. Following preliminary analysis of this data, *focused* observations were made to examine patterns and points of interest. Drawing on the ongoing analysis of descriptive and focused observations, I undertook *selective* observations to develop fine-grained understandings of teachers’ practices.

Lankshear and Knobel (2004) identify different types of observations that can

be placed along two continua: a) more or less structured and b) more or less non-participant or participant. My observations were conducted with varying levels of structure depending upon the context and purpose of the observation. Observation schedules were developed in the light of emerging patterns and ideas from a range of data sources, including interviews, informal conversations, teachers' suggestions and the shared meetings. Observations also varied in levels of participation. When observing teachers' practice in classrooms I attempted to remain as passive as possible. However, it was important to take opportunities to interact with the teacher to clarify her motivations or thinking when engaging in particular practices. Wragg (1994) noted that observers have an effect upon classroom interactions, with both teachers and students behaving differently. It is anticipated that this effect was somewhat reduced by my constant presence in the school and in the classrooms over many weeks. The observations were conducted over a minimum of three weeks spent continuously with each teacher-participant in their classrooms, across two school terms. The observations also included spending time with teachers when on playground duty (when appropriate) and in the staff room during breaks.

In the case of the shared meetings, my observations were undertaken as a full participant (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004). All those attending the meetings were aware that I was taking observational notes as well as recording the meetings. My notes were made as soon as possible after the event. I attempted to maintain a reflexive approach (Lather, 1991; Reid & Frisby, 2008) to my own involvement through a research journal maintained on computer from "thick" field notes (Carspecken, 1996). Observation schedules and fieldnotes were available to the relevant participant at any stage.

3.4.2 Interviews

Interviewing is one of the most commonly used qualitative methods yet it is far from being straight-forward and uncontested (Bishop, 2005). As Freebody (2003), suggests:

Considering how people conduct themselves in interviews as instances of cultural practices, how they find ways of telling the truth-for-then and there, how they establish consistency and relevance, and how they attend to their co-speakers to enact and validate their rightful participation in the interviewing event . . . make the business of conducting and analysing interviews more complex and tentative than the naïve understandings that have guided much work to date. (pp. 168-169)

In this research project, interviews are understood as “cultural practices *about* cultural practices” positioning the interviewees as “artful, reasoned and sophisticated cultural practitioners” (Freebody, 2003, p. 169). This understanding served to enhance reliability and validity in that it recognised the complexity of interviewees’ responses, locating these responses in the reality of the cultural context.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen rather than open or fully structured interviews to provide consistency across the interviews while, at the same time, allowing for some latitude (Freebody, 2003) for the researcher to further explore points of relevance as they arose. Krueger’s catalogue of question types formed the basis for the construction of questions. Krueger’s (1994) listing includes:

- opening questions: simple, factual, quick answers;

- introductory question: to introduce the topic for discussion and/or provide interviewees with an opportunity to reflect on past experiences;
- transition questions: to move the conversation to the key questions;
- key questions: typically 2-5 questions that form the body of the analysis;
- ending questions: bringing the discussion to a close, allowing the interviewees to reflect on their comments. (pp. 54-55)

Two semi-structured interviews were held with each participant, one prior to the commencement and one at the conclusion of the CPAR project. These interviews were conducted at the school and were audio recorded and transcribed. The key questions were provided to the participants at least three days before the interview to allow them time to consider their responses (Kamler & Comber, 2005) (See Appendix 2). The transcripts were provided to the participants for their approval and clarification was invited to ensure maximum validity.

One semi-structured interview was held with each of a number of other key informants. The interviewees included the Principal of Riverside State School at the time of the commencement of the project, the Manager of the local Indigenous Schooling Support Unit (a Department of Education and Training service) and Sandi (the CLO).

3.4.3 Artefacts

Lankshear and Knobel (2004) describe artefacts as the “physical ‘props’ people use to get things done within the contexts of their daily lives” (p. 235). In this project, I collected a wide range of artefacts that served to contextualise the spaces in which

teachers were practising, for example, school newsletters, work programs, test booklets, professional development schedules, school policy documents and the school prospectus. Artefacts were also collected to support and contextualise other forms of data, for example, teachers' written reflections, teachers' schedules, planning, class lists, student work samples, homework booklets and copies of notes home to parents. These were cross-referenced against other data sources such as observations, meeting transcripts and field notes.

3.4.4 Analytical tools

Data collected and generated from the project were managed through the use of *QSR NVivo* software. This software was used to code the collective data. Data were coded as soon as possible after collection – in line with Miles and Huberman's (1994) 'rule of thumb' for the coding of qualitative data, that is:

Always code the previous set of field notes before the next trip to the site . . . [because] the ultimate power of field research lies in the researcher's emerging map of what is happening and why. So any method that will force the differentiation and integration of that map, while remaining flexible, is a good idea. (p. 65)

An extract from an interview transcript provided in Appendix 3 demonstrates how the coding was applied to the data. Initially, 'free' nodes – that did not presume any relationships or connections – were used as a means to sort ideas. Over time, as analysis progressed and patterns and ideas took shape, these were organised and reorganised into hierarchical, branching structures or 'tree' nodes (Bazely, 2007). Tree nodes allow the researcher to organise the coding according to conceptual relationships and are one way of identifying patterns in the data.

3.5 Research Issues and Limitations

The scope of this research project is limited to exploring the practices of a particular group of educators working as individuals and as a collective to navigate the ‘cultural interface’ (Nakata, 2007a). The emergent characteristics of CPAR lead to uncertainties as the communicative space took form and evolved. Along the research path there were multiple decisions to be made (Reason, 2006), individually and collectively, that are chronicled in this thesis. Key issues for myself, as researcher, are discussed in the following sections.

3.5.1 Voice and representation

Guba and Lincoln (2005) note that ‘voice’ has come to mean many things to researchers. They argue that “today voice can mean, especially in more participatory forms of research, not only having a real researcher – and a researcher’s voice – in the text, but also letting research participants speak for themselves” (p. 183). In CPAR, where the creation of a communicative space is fundamental to the research process, and in which communicative action constitutes the basis of transforming practices, it is crucial that the voices of participants are authentically represented. To this end, where appropriate, direct quotations as recorded during interviews and meetings are used to chronicle the generation of subjective and intersubjective knowledge.

Reflexivity (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Lather, 1991) is adopted as an important part of the methodology. It served to consciously focus on locating myself within the research process, as well as my interactions with the participants and the ways in which I represent these in written texts (Guba & Lincoln, 2005) such as field notes and this thesis. Additionally, reflexivity was an important part of the research process as I came to understand the cultural interface and my ‘place’ in this space.

3.5.2 Validity and reliability

In recent decades, qualitative researchers have challenged the positivist assumptions that underpin traditional conceptualisations of validity and reliability (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Lankshear & Knobel, 2004). Guba and Lincoln (2005), writing about constructivist and phenomenological inquiry, identify fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity, and tactical authenticity as the “hallmarks of authentic, trustworthy, rigorous, or ‘valid’ . . . inquiry” (p. 207). These ‘criteria’ of research validity mesh well with the aims and processes of CPAR where research is collaboratively conducted “to investigate the world in order to transform it . . . and to transform the world in order to investigate it” (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 577).

Stake (2005) includes “triangulating key observations and bases for interpretation” (p. 460) among the key conceptual responsibilities of the qualitative case researcher, and notes that “triangulation has been generally considered a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning” (p. 460). In this research project, triangulation was achieved through discussions of the data with supervisors, as well as through a range of ‘member checking’ (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) strategies, including confirmation of data, and interpretations, through discussions at shared meetings, sharing of draft writing and confirmation through individual conversations with participants. These processes contributed to the validity of the research findings.

Reason (2006), using the term ‘quality’ rather than validity, argues that the four main characteristics of action research – worthwhile practical purposes, democracy and participation, many ways of knowing, and emergent developmental form – “present a broad range of criteria beyond those of the empirical research paradigm against which

quality research might be judged” (Reason, 2006, p.187). He goes on to state that, “action research is characteristically full of choices, and . . . quality in inquiry comes from awareness of and transparency about the choices available at each stage of the inquiry” (p. 187). In Habermasian terms, the quality of the research is legitimated through the communicative actions of the collective as we searched for intersubjective truths, such that, as Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) suggest:

- are comprehensible to us;
- are true in the light of our own knowledge (both shared and individual knowledge);
- are regarded by us as sincerely and truthfully stated;
- are regarded by us as morally right and appropriate in terms of our individual and mutual judgment. (p. 577)

As Reason (2006) states: “Quality comes from asking, with others, what is important in this situation? How well are we doing? How can we show others how well we have done?” (p. 198). It is these considerations, recognised, acknowledged acted upon at every stage of the research, and openly reported through this thesis, that determine the judgments of others with regard to research quality.

3.5.3 Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for this project was obtained from the University’s research ethics committee. The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted within the guidelines for research ethics outlined in *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (2007). The proposed research methodology received ethics clearance from the James Cook University Ethics Review Committee (approval number H3172) and the project was approved by the Department of Education and

Training (reference number 550/27/779). The University works within the *Australian Code for Responsible Conduct of Research* that requires researchers to:

- maintain high standards of responsible research, by fostering and maintaining a research environment of intellectual honesty and integrity, and scholarly and scientific rigour;
- report research responsibly;
- respect research participants, that is researchers must comply with ethical principles of integrity, respect for persons, justice and beneficence (National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Research Council, & Universities Australia, 2007).

This code also requires that research that involves or affects Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island peoples be conducted within the guidelines provided in the *Values and Ethics: Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research* (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2003) and the *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies* (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2002). To that end, I have invited input from Indigenous Education Workers at the school at every possible opportunity. In the first instance, I discussed the research project with the two Indigenous Education Workers employed at the school and invited them to participate in a reference group that included key personnel from the Queensland Department of Education and Training's Indigenous Schooling Support Unit. At various points throughout the research project, I sought the advice and counsel of members of the reference group to ensure that the project, and any products arising from the project, respect and take into account the values and cultural protocols of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This was particularly important given that I am a non-Indigenous researcher,

and am conscious of my work in the cultural interface and of working in ways that acknowledge and respect the agency and cultural capital of Indigenous stakeholders. In particular, I was cognizant of the potential harm in inadvertently positioning myself as a white 'expert' seeking to 'fix' Indigenous students. The reference group was invaluable in supporting the research and in shaping and re-shaping the process as well as the research outputs.

Overarching ethical considerations were framed by the writing of Drew, Hardman and Hosp (2008) who identify key considerations for ethical research. These are: consent, harm, privacy and deception. These considerations, and the requirements of the Australian Codes noted above, guided the ethics application. All aspects of effective informed consent (capacity, information and voluntariness) (Drew, Hardman and Hosp, 2008) were present. All participants were adults and all information was provided both in verbal and written form and questions were encouraged. All participants were regularly invited to continue and/or given the opportunity to withdraw. While I had initial concerns about inadvertent coercion, as discussed in section 3.2.2.1, I believe that all participants were offered opportunities to withdraw and felt free to do so.

Drew et al. (2008) note that in the context of research ethics, harm not only includes physical pain or death but also psychological stress, embarrassment, humiliation or anything that might affect the participants in an adverse way. To embody the emancipatory principles of critical research Kemmis (2006) urges a form of participatory action research that is open to the counter narrative and "discovering and telling some unwelcome truths about how things are here and now, and how they have come to be" (p. 474). Achieving this presented some risk of harm to the participants and

every effort was taken to minimise this risk. It was imperative that a respectful, democratic communicative space was nurtured and maintained especially given the sensitive issues we were exploring. Views on literacy, teaching practice and Indigenous education can be tightly held and deeply personal (Green, Hodgens, & Luke, 1994; Luke, 2008; Snyder, 2008). Our initial meeting included a discussion of protocols for shared meetings and this was briefly revisited at each group discussion, and I followed up with each participant in an informal ‘debrief’ to attempt to detect any potential conflict or concern. Throughout the research I remained attentive to the dynamics of the group. Fortunately, but not surprisingly to me, all participants worked collegially and collaboratively and potential ethical dilemmas were averted. As well, participants were provided with and encouraged to read transcripts of interviews and shared meetings and to amend their own statements at any time.

In participatory action research, privacy is a vexed issue. While participants were guaranteed anonymity in publications (pseudonyms are used throughout this thesis and in other academic publications) absolute anonymity could not be guaranteed as their co-workers and participants in the larger mobility project were aware of their involvement. This was discussed with the participants and again the option to withdraw was offered if they were uncomfortable with potential identification.

The issue of privacy also intersects with issues of authorship and intellectual property where knowledge is co-generated. In this project I encouraged and supported the participants to produce publications of their own, individually and collectively, based on their research experience. This resulted in a ‘teaching tips’ sheet being produced for use on the larger project’s website and also being submitted to a professional body. Other products have also emerged from the research process. As a

group we negotiated authorship and public recognition of the contributions made by the participants. The teacher-participants declined anonymity in favour of acknowledgement of their intellectual property.

Every effort was made to ensure that there was no deception either by omission or commission. I regularly kept the participants informed of my agenda, how the project was contributing to my thesis and any other relevant information. I treated all participants as evenly as possible. Any deceptive practices would have completely undermined the entire methodology.

3.6 Summary

The critical participatory action research methodology chosen for this qualitative research project is grounded in the theories of Habermas and follows a framework suggested by Kemmis (2008a) and Kemmis and McTaggart (1988, 2005). It connects critical participatory action research to contemporary understandings of the richness of dialogue – Disciplined Dialogue – drawn from the work of Swaffield and Dempster (2009).

The context for the research was an intervention project that included the two-year trial of Mobility Support Teachers in the research site and across 14 other low SES schools in Queensland, Australia. Data were gathered through interviews, observations and analysis of artefacts arising from the action research process. Ethical processes were followed ensuring confidentiality and democratic participation. *NVivo* computer software was used to aid the analysis of the data.

Chapter 4 Reconnaissance: Reading the Context

Organisations, institutions and settings, and the people in them, create *practice architectures* which pre-figure practices, enabling and constraining particular kinds of sayings, doings and relatings among people within them, and in relation to people outside them. The way these practice architectures are constructed shapes practice in its cultural-discursive, social-political and material-economic dimensions, giving substance and form to what is and can be said and done, by, with and for whom. (Kemmis, 2008b, pp. 57-58)

4.1 Introduction

This study aims to understand, reframe and transform educational practice to better enable teachers to work at the cultural interface to support the literacy learning of mobile Indigenous students. In doing so, it recognises that “practice is socially and historically constituted and reconstituted by human agency and social action” (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 573).

Chapter 3 described the critical participatory action research methodology adopted for this study. This methodology is underpinned by critical theory and aimed to create public spheres in which teachers could resolve legitimisation crises and reach consensus about practices that support the literacy learning needs of mobile Indigenous students. This methodology provided a space for working in partnership with practitioners to come to understand, reframe and transform teachers’ practices as positive social action at the cultural interface. Additionally, Chapter 3 identified and justified the instruments and tools for data collection and analysis.

This chapter, Chapter 4, examines the school context in which the research was

conducted. It describes the situation in which the research participants practised and identifies key ‘practice architectures’ in place at the time of the critical participatory action research (CPAR). The concept of ‘practice architectures’ (Kemmis, 2008b; Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008) serves as a means by which to examine the factors that shape taken-for-granted practices and the ‘dispositions’ (Bourdieu, 1990) that enable or constrain action possibilities. The background of this CPAR project is presented in order to clearly establish the situation in which the participants practise and to identify the factors that served to prefigure or frame the action possibilities as they existed in 2009, at the commencement of the research project. I draw on data that was collected as part of the ‘reconnaissance’ (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988) phase of the research project. This chapter, Chapter 4, contextualises and grounds the research methodology as outlined in Chapter 3.

This chapter begins with a brief description of the school and the community it serves. I examine how the (then) Principal’s (known as Principal 1) approach to leadership and clearly espoused vision for the school served to pre-figure or frame the action possibilities, with particular reference to her response to poverty, mobility and Indigeneity. This response took form in a series of externally funded, collaborative action research projects that aimed to develop targeted interventions to improve learning outcomes for all students in this highly mobile school community. It is this series of projects that frames both the context for the research and my approach to this doctoral project. Following this, I discuss the key intervention, that is, the development of the position known as ‘Mobility Support Teacher’ (MST), acknowledging the problematic nature of short-term compensatory programs within current neoliberal frames for equity funding. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how this history and the local practice architectures have positioned both me, as researcher, and the

participants in this doctoral research project.

4.2 Riverside Community

At the time of the fieldwork for this study, 2009-2010, Riverside State School was a mid sized outer suburban state school enrolling around 470 students aged from five years to 13 years. Almost 41% of the student population identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander or both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. In 2009, the school was classified in the mid-low socio-economic (SES) category, as indicated by the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) value of 776, with 96% of the student population represented in the most disadvantaged quartile (Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority, 2010a). It is to be noted that the ICSEA value is calculated by the Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority (ACARA) for the purpose of statistical comparison of schools' socio-economic circumstances.

4.2.1 School location and environment

The school is located in an outer suburban area of a regional North Queensland city, consisting mainly of residential dwellings. The suburbs in this area of the city have developed in a corridor along a river, and are served by Riverside State School and two other adjacently located state schools, which work together as the Rangeview Cluster (a pseudonym). Historically, this area has been the location of a significant quantity of public housing and has been considered to be one of the least advantaged areas of the city. Among the wider city community, this area is perceived as having high crime rates, especially property crime such as vandalism; a low level of community facilities, especially public transport, and is considered a generally undesirable place to live. These perceptions are often reflected in the local newspaper, with headlines that refer to this area of the city such as: *[Suburb] gangs rile residents* (March 4, 2008), *Outrage at*

vandals: 'Stop these grubs' (March 7, 2008), Hoons hauled to court (June 3, 2009), Young thugs terrorise public parks (December 10, 2009).

The area has recently undergone considerable physical change through a State government urban renewal program and through a City Council community facility development project. These have brought changes to the appearance and use of the riverbank areas and the development of community facilities along the riverbank. For example, where previously there existed small huts for the local Scouts and other community groups, there now exists a two-storey community meeting facility, located in landscaped parklands adjacent to a renovated skate park and extensive aquatic facilities. The land immediately in front of the school has recently been landscaped and now includes a sealed, curbed and guttered car park, modern bus shelter and some seating whereas previously it was a dirt carpark. Some community services, such as the Police Citizens Youth Club, have been recently redeveloped and the local shopping precinct is scheduled for redevelopment. The prevalence of public housing is changing reflecting changes to State government policy, and the public housing that remains continues to be upgraded. There are a number of new residential land developments in the vicinity offering low cost housing.

Statistics from the 2006 census, as shown in Table 4.1 below, indicate that, when compared to the city and the State, the community is characterised by a high proportion of Indigenous Australians, low levels of educational attainment, a younger age profile, high level of rental accommodation (greater than one quarter of which is public housing) and a higher level of unemployment. The school under discussion here – Riverside State School – draws the majority of its students from the suburb in which it is located, with some students coming from the neighbouring suburbs.

Table 4.1 Comparative Community Profiles: Riverside in Context

2006 census	The suburb	The city	Queensland	Australia
Median age	28	32	36	37
Proportion of Indigenous people	11.2%	5.7%	3%	2.2%
Unemployment	6%	4.5%	5.5%	5%
Rental houses	40.3%	36%	30%	27.2%
State housing rentals	28.1%	15.4%	10.7%	14.9%
Educational attainment – Bachelor degree or above:	7%	20%	26%	30%
Income (per person)	\$470	\$534	\$474	\$466
Household Size	2.9	2.6	2.6	2.6

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006

4.3 The School

Riverside State School was opened in 1978 and, prior to the building of a state primary school in the adjoining suburb in 1986, enrolments peaked at approximately 700 during the late 1980s. In 1996, a Catholic primary school was built 300 metres from Riverside State School, further reducing enrolments. In 2009, the school was a medium sized primary school with 473 students enrolled from Preparatory Year to Year 7. At the 2009 February census, the school population included 194 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, with 1% of all students identified as having English as a second language (ESL). The staff (see Table 4.2) included a Principal, a Deputy Principal, several full and part time specialist positions (both teaching and non-

teaching), 24 classroom teachers, 14 (casual) teacher aides – including one Indigenous teacher aide and a Community Liaison Officer. In 2009, one staff member at Riverside State School held a Masters degree, 27 teachers and leaders held a Bachelor degree and 14 held a Diploma as their highest educational qualification.

Table 4.2 Riverside State School Staff List

Administration team	Principal Deputy Principal Head of Special Education Services
Curriculum co-ordinator	0.6 fte (School appointed position)
Guidance Officer	0.1 fte
Mobility Support Teacher	1
Learning Support Teacher	1
Teacher Librarian	1
Music Teacher	1
Physical Education Teacher	1
LOTE Teacher	1
Behaviour Management Teacher	0.2 fte
Classroom Teachers (P-7)	24
Non-Contact / Relieving Teacher	1
Teacher Aides	13 (part time - casual)
Community Liaison Officer	1
Janitor/Groundsman	1
Cleaners	3

Source: Department of Education and Training, 2009

Architecturally, the school is typical of many Queensland schools built during this era – low set fibro construction with air-conditioned, double, open teaching spaces, with exposed beams and no ceilings. Each pair of classrooms has a ‘withdrawal’ room attached. These rooms are used for a variety of purposes including intensive learning support and independent group work.

At the time the research project commenced, classes were arranged in year levels for Preparatory to Year 3, with Years 4 and 5 and Years 6 and 7 conducted as composite classes. Students in these years were streamed according to their literacy level. These were known within the school as the ‘Learning for Living’ levels. However, this structure was discontinued in 2010 with a view to assist teachers to manage preparation for standardised testing (NAPLAN and Queensland Comparable Assessment Tasks or QCAT) within each year level. Where student numbers made it possible, the school returned to straight year level groupings.

The school includes a fully integrated Special Education unit. All Special Education students are included in mainstream classes and in-class support is provided by teacher aides and specialist teachers on a needs basis. In 2009, the school population included approximately 60 students identified with special needs.

4.4 Shaping the Domains of Practice: The Work of the Principal

When considering the work of Principal 1, I draw on the work of Kemmis and Grootenboer (2008) and their notion of ‘practice architectures’. In particular, that “the notion of practice architectures invites us to think of practice settings, like schools and classrooms as *designed* – even if only partly so” (p. 58). When examining the role of the leadership as a practice architecture, it is important to note that in July 2009, part-way through the project and after almost five years in the role, the Principal received a promotional transfer to another school in the district and her Deputy assumed the role of Acting Principal for the final school terms of 2009. In 2010, the Acting Principal received a promotional transfer and relocated, and a permanent Principal commenced in the role. Due to personal issues, this person vacated the position in mid-2010, and her Deputy, formerly the Head of Special Education Services at the school, assumed the

role of Acting Principal. In January 2011, a new permanent Principal commenced at Riverside State School only to be replaced in July by yet another Acting Principal. Between January 2009 and July 2011, six different people held the role of Principal or Acting Principal. Table 4.3, below, summarises the changes in the role of Principal. The effects of this parallel churn, or mobility, in leadership will be discussed in Chapter 5, in which the findings of the CPAR are examined in detail.

Table 4.3 Summary of Principals' Tenure 2004–2011

Principal	Tenure	Reasons for relocation	Apparent focus
1	Appointed Jan 2004- Sep 2009 ~5 years	Promotional transfer	Long term vision: Developing a positive, peaceful learning environment Teachers as key agents in students' success Pedagogy and curriculum underpinning student engagement Data driven learning programs Active support of this CPAR Active engagement with larger mobility project
2	Acting Sep 2009 – Dec 2009 ~ 3mths	Promotional transfer	'Caretaker' mode Maintain status quo – bureaucratic focus Passive support of this CPAR and larger mobility project
3	Appointed Jan 2010 – Sep 2010 ~ 9 mths	Ill health	Long term vision: Developing community partnerships Focus on monitoring and supporting attendance Passive support of this CPAR Active engagement with larger mobility project
4	Acting Sep 2010 – Dec 2010 ~ 3 mths	Return to previous position	'Caretaker' mode Passive support of project Limited engagement with larger mobility project
5	Appointed Jan 2011- Jun 2011 ~ 6 mths	Ill health	Long term vision: Unknown Unknown – no engagement with mobility project

In this school, in the years preceding the CPAR reported in this thesis, Principal 1 had invoked a range of metapractices, practices *intended* to shape the content and conduct of other practices (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008), in her approach to responding to the 'constellation of inequalities' (Darling-Hammond, 2010) evident in the school. As identified in Chapter 2, the discourse of equity in Queensland education

policy had, throughout the 1990s and into the early 2000s, shifted away from the language of “‘social justice’ and ‘target groups’ towards ‘inclusion’ and ‘students at risk’” (Singh & Taylor, 2007, p. 313). Accompanying this shift has been the refashioning of disadvantage from socio-economic into literacy achievement on standardised tests (Mosen-Lowe et al., 2009), with the result being that students’ ‘failure’ is perceived as a reflection of the school, its Principal and classroom practices rather than an effect of the multiple factors associated with the social and economic ‘problems’ within society (Ball, 1998).

Drawing on my interviews with Principal 1 in 2009, her application for promotion, the examination of a range of school documents, comments by the participants and observations in the field, the data suggests that Principal 1 had attempted to establish, through her practices, a naturalised way of being a member of the Riverside State School community built around what she called “a futuristic, capacity building ethos” (Principal 1’s application for promotion, 2009) and as encapsulated by the words, *Peaceful, Proud and Learning for Living*. Principal 1 described her thinking when shaping this phrase in the following way:

I drew from the PeaceBuilders notion which I needed to ensure was at the forefront of thinking and decision making; the fact that there was a high Indigenous enrolment, and my discourse with the Indigenous children was that they needed to be very proud of who they were; and then the whole purpose of what a school is all about – that is to set children up for a successful life. I always told them that they were learning for being able to live whatever life (including career) they chose. I also used the ‘proud’ discourse with all students about being proud of our school, our

achievements and the way the community viewed us. So it was very much an anchor for the philosophy and the vision. (Email, 05/05/11)

These words, *Peaceful, Proud and Learning for Living*, appear on school signage, on the school's letterhead and newsletters, on the welcoming page of the school website, on the cover of and within the Information Booklet (Prospectus) and in classrooms. This phrase sits alongside the official school motto, *Consideration Truth Knowledge*. During her tenure, Principal 1 focussed her efforts on moving school practices away from a "behaviour management focus, with punishment to regulate learning environments [towards] transforming school culture and improving the school tone" (Principal 1's application for promotion, 2009) by modelling and actively promoting the PeaceBuilders program that had been operating in the school upon her arrival. (PeaceBuilders is a school-based violence prevention program aimed at altering the school climate through teaching students and staff ways to improve child social competence and reduce aggressive behaviour (Flannery et al., 2003)). Through active engagement in this program and other programs, such as Circle Time for Emotional Literacy (Roffey, 2006), Principal 1 worked towards transforming the school culture and building "capacity to address and deal with social and emotional dysfunction, violence and trauma evident in the wider community and impacting directly on the school environment" (Principal 1's application for promotion, 2009).

Principal 1 embraced a notion of 'no excuses'. In an interview, she described her approach to ensuring equity in the following way:

So, what we did was actually put physical things into place to remove a lot of those barriers. For example, we made sure that the kids were fed when they came to school. There was no excuse about not having school uniforms

because we would provide school uniforms. There are no excuses about them not being able to learn because [of] culture or background or socio-economic side of things, these don't indicate what can be achieved.

(Principal 1, 05/03/10)

Her vision also extended to improving the school's reputation within the education and wider communities. She aimed to position the school as a 'school of choice' within both the education community and the local residential community and she explained this goal in the following way:

The other part about no excuses was having high standards for our school because one of the things we needed to address at the school was the reputation of the school in the eyes of the other educators in town.

(Principal 1, 05/03/10)

There are significant parallels between the philosophy of Principal 1 at Riverside State School and previous research in disadvantaged contexts (in particular see Comber, 1998). At Riverside State School, Principal 1 actively drew on research that positions teachers' expectations as one of the key variables in children's educational success. As Comber (1998) notes, this philosophy leads to a situation where the Principal "constructs the child in the school world as impervious to outside influences – backgrounding 'background'; in effect – in a conscious struggle to contest a 'pedagogy of poverty'" (p. 12).

This 'flattening' of background is particularly evident in Principal 1's articulation of her approach to Indigenous education:

My philosophy was very much that everybody, regardless of race, culture,

creed, background deserves the best education possible and then within each of those [groups of] children each child is an individual and I think it is a mistake to stereotype and say just because a person is Christian or just because a person is Indigenous or just because he is a person who is poor then we have to give them this sort of education. . . . and I think it is quite wrong to say that because someone is of Indigenous background their education should consider such and such. Every family, every Indigenous family has a different story to bring to the school. (Principal, 05/03/10)

In aiming to provide the best possible and most equitable educational experience for all students, Principal 1's approach reflects the tensions evident in Indigenous education policy debates where cultural difference can become construed as a 'reason' for educational failure (as discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.3) rather than an essential consideration in curriculum and pedagogical decision making. The dangers of this approach lie in the unintentional provision of space for practices that marginalise, and in some cases deny, cultural differences and promote a 'sameness as fairness' (Gutiérrez, 2006) paradigm that, as noted in Chapter 2, leads to the cultural practices of the dominant group being accepted as the norm and "obscuring the link between economic disparities, asymmetrical power relations, and historically racialized schooling practices" (Gutiérrez, 2006, p. 46). This 'no excuses', 'fairness as sameness' approach both opens and closes discursive spaces for teachers that, as will be shown in Chapter 5, have significant impact on practice.

Although Indigeneity was marginalised as a student characteristic, Principal 1 worked tirelessly to ensure all teachers held high expectations for students and for themselves. She constantly modelled this in her interactions with staff and students and

spoke often of the need to ensure high expectations of all students. This culture of high expectations and inclusivity was identified as a key element of Principal 1's leadership by the Regional Director, when she wrote in support of Principal 1:

She articulates a strong vision and direction which is informed, inclusive and aspirational. At Riverside State School [Principal 1] has created a culture of high expectation and sets high standards for not only herself but challenges others as well. (Regional Director, n.d.)

Principal 1 actively pursued innovative solutions to barriers to student achievement, becoming involved in a range of systemic curriculum trials and collaborative projects with university researchers. These projects included values education and the mobility project noted earlier. Her willingness to innovate and to ensure ongoing school improvement is particularly evident in her long-standing partnership with researchers from the local regional University.

Immediately following Principal 1's promotion to a larger school within the city, the participants in the study expressed their admiration for the legacy of her tenure when they commented:

She had definite values too, that she wanted to instil here, and a direction.
(Anne, 12/08/09)

[It was] respect, for the school, self-respect, reputation, being a part of something that was bigger than just yourself. (Sarah, 12/08/09)

Making it [the school] look like a place you wanted to be in and continually encouraging people to step up – it was 'you can do this', and 'I believe in you' and 'I trust you will do a good job'. (Kali, 12/08/09)

4.5 Changing Schools: Responding to Mobility at Riverside State School

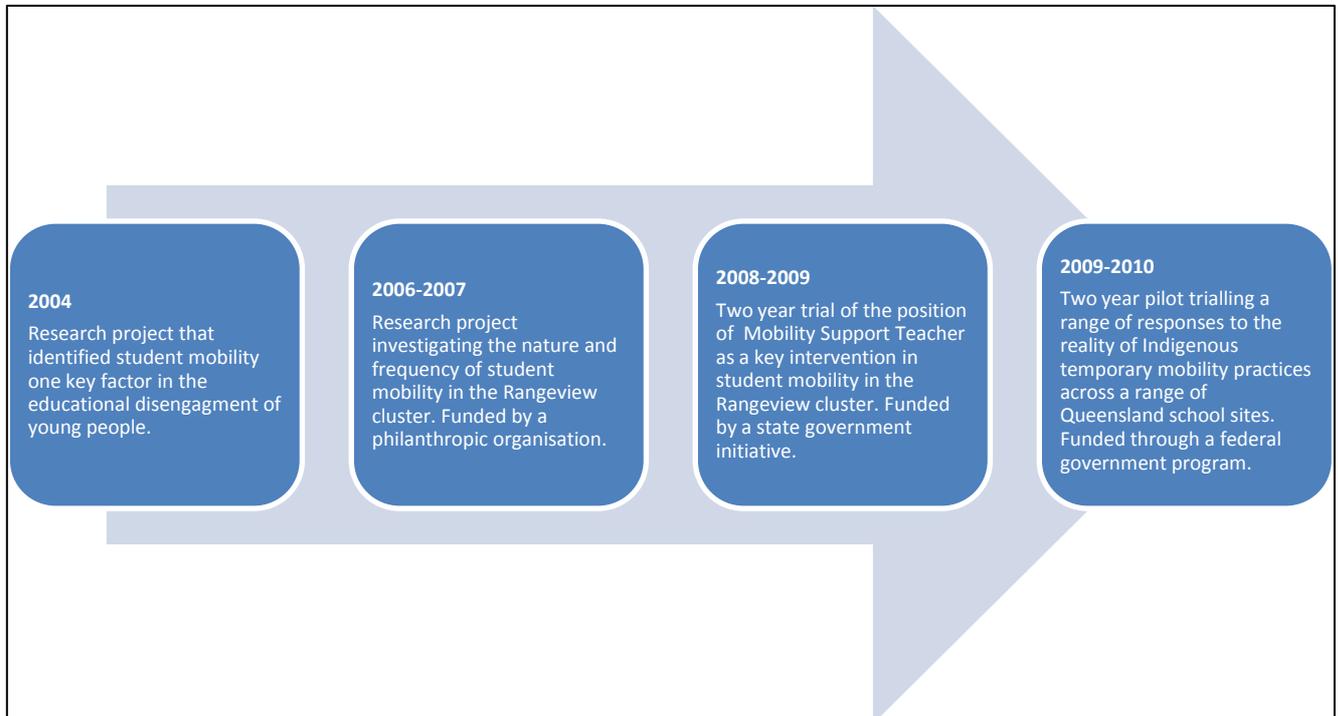
Since arriving at Riverside State School in 2004, Principal 1 had been focussed on coming to grips with the high levels of student mobility observed within the school population. In an effort to meet the educational and social needs of all students, she instigated and actively participated in a series of collaborative action research projects to identify the impact of mobility and to respond to the needs of mobile students.

The collaborative partnership had its roots in 2004, when Principal 1 became involved with researchers from a regional university who, at that time, were conducting an investigation into the educational disengagement of young people in Riverside and adjacent suburbs (Hill & Dawes, 2005). One of the central findings to emerge from this investigation was that student mobility in the primary school years was a common experience of the disengaged young people who had participated in the research. This particular finding resonated with the experiences of the Principal and she began a collaborative partnership with the Chief Investigator to further examine student mobility and its possible impact for schools, teachers, students and their families. This initial collaboration resulted in an application for funding to a philanthropic organisation to fund a two-year research project involving the Rangeview Cluster – that is Riverside State School and the two adjacent state primary schools – and to employ a Project Officer.

Following the success of this first project, a second research project was funded through a State government initiative (2008), which in turn led to a third project funded by the Federal Government (2009-2010). I began my involvement with Riverside State School as Project Officer on the first (2006-2007) action research project and remained in the role of Project Officer as the subsequent projects evolved. This sustained

involvement ultimately led to this doctoral thesis. The evolution of this series of projects is illustrated in the following diagram, Figure 4. 1.

Figure 4.1 Summary of Mobility Research at Riverside State School



The 2006-2007 project focussed on collecting and collating data that enabled an informed understanding about the nature and prevalence of student mobility. Central to providing a clear understanding of the situation, as it existed at the time, were the development of a useful measure for mobility and the analysis of data to identify the profiles of mobile students. While previous research offers some understanding of the issue, it provided an equivocal picture of the impact of mobility and lacked consistency, including of how mobility is conceptualised and measured.

4.5.1 Measuring mobility: what counts?

Throughout the literature there are multiple ways of naming, defining and measuring mobility, all of which affect the way research can inform an understanding of the issue. In a major Australian study conducted in 2002 for the Commonwealth

Department of Education, Science and Training and Department of Defence (KPMG Consulting et al., 2002), the authors highlighted the complexity of reviewing research into student mobility when they wrote: “one of the difficulties associated with trying to gain a clearer understanding of research in this area is the problematic nature of the concept of mobility itself” (p. 2).

Different studies use different terms, including *mobility*, *transience*, *itinerancy*, *turbulence* and *relocation*, sometimes interchangeably, sometimes in particular ways. In addition to varied naming, student mobility has been examined in previous studies in differing ways. Some researchers have measured mobility as a characteristic of schools (Demie et al., 2005; Kerbow et al., 2003), while others have examined mobility as a characteristic of students (Heinlein & Shinn, 2000; KPMG Consulting et al., 2002). This is further complicated by varying conceptualisations of mobility with the inclusion of students making promotional change (that is, transitioning to the next phase of learning) in some research and only those making ‘non-promotional’ changes in others.

In Queensland, the Department of Education and Training monitors School Continuity Data – that is, the number of students who enrol at a school and remain enrolled at given temporal points through the year. The Department assigns each enrolling student a unique student identifier (USI) that enables the tracking of individual students. This tracking occurs at the three census points in the school year, in the months of February, July and November. This practice has been in place since 2001. Prior to this time, enrolment collections were undertaken only in February and July. While this tracking provides some indication of the movements of students attending government schools, it gives no insight into movements that may occur between these collection points, nor movements that may occur between government and non-

government schools. For example, data from my research shows a student enrolling at one of the three schools in the Rangeview Cluster on March 13, 2008 and exiting May 2, 2008, returning to that school on September 9, 2008 and exiting again October 24, 2008 – thus, this student was not present at any of the collection dates and his movements are unrecorded under the Departmental data collection system. There are numerous similar examples each year in this school and others in the Rangeview cluster. As Prout (2008) confirms, this lack of rigour around basic measures of such things as attendance, “renders comparisons from school to school, system to system (state/private/independent), and jurisdiction to jurisdiction, . . . virtually baseless” (p. 26).

Throughout each of the research projects noted here (see Figure 4.1), school enrolment data was used to carefully map the movements of both students who enrolled (known as joiners) and students who exited (known as leavers) (Dobson, Henthorne & Lynas, 2000) across the three Rangeview schools, thereby creating an accurate picture of mobility in terms of transactional pressure and school characteristics. The research team chose to quantify mobility through the *Joiners Plus Leavers (JPL)* formula (Dobson, Henthorne & Lynas, 2000). The JPL formula is:

$$\frac{\text{students joining the school} + \text{students leaving the school}}{\text{total school roll on the census date}} \times 100$$

This formula has been used by the United Kingdom Department for Children, Schools and Families to establish a consistent measure for mobility across all schools. Further, the use of the JPL formula – for the purposes of this research – has been applied around a particular definition of mobility, that is, where students are making “non-promotional school changes” (Rumberger, 2003, p. 6) and are moving “into and

out of schools at times other than the usual ones for joining and leaving” (McAndrew & Power, 2003, p. 3). It measures the aggregate of individual movements after the first census of the school year. In Queensland, and for this study, this date is referred to as the ‘Day 8’ census. This is the date that, traditionally, the school population is reported for the purposes of resource allocation by the State government –including teacher numbers. ‘Day 8’ precedes the Department’s first February census date by approximately three weeks.

In an extensive research project conducted across Britain, Dobson, Henthorne and Lynas (2000) found that while mobility rates vary across a wide range, schools with a mobility rate above 20 are a minority and schools with a very high mobility rate, that is those above 35, are a small minority. Drawing on the data from this British research project, the Office of Standards in Education declared that, “using this calculation, high mobility is considered to be more than 20% whilst very high mobility is in excess of 35%” (Department for Education and Skills, 2003b, p. 20).

In this series of research projects – as noted previously (see Figure 4.1) – the research team used student enrolment and exit data from the participating schools to identify rates of mobility and to benchmark them against the indicators developed in the United Kingdom. Additionally, this data served to provide a profile of mobile students and to identify patterns of movement. The analysis of the data has enabled a targeted intervention and the evaluation of the intervention over time.

4.5.2 ‘Seeing’ mobile Indigenous students

A key element in bringing mobility as an educational issue into sharp focus for funding bodies, teachers and other school staff members has been the collection of the micro-level data that paints a very clear picture of the level and nature of mobility in

each school. Recalling that education authorities in the United Kingdom determined that a mobility index of above 20 was ‘high’ and an index above 35 was ‘very high’, it is clear that Riverside State School’s mobility index of 63.3, as measured in the first collaborative project in 2006, was extraordinary. However, as extraordinary as this index was, it was the mobility index of 94.7 for the Indigenous cohort that captured the attention of the school’s staff. Prior to the collection of this micro-level data, teachers and administrators had reason to suspect that the mobility of Indigenous students was a serious educational issue; however, it had not been quantified in any useful way. This data, then, provided evidence of a clear need for action – such that has had a significant impact upon school and teachers’ practices in supporting the literacy learning needs of mobile Indigenous students. This increased visibility of mobility confirms the position taken by Prout and Yap (2010) who urged the use of the JPL formula as one means through which Indigenous mobility could be rendered visible to educators and policy makers and to subsequently bring about reform of educational delivery. However, as this thesis will illustrate, it takes more than ‘seeing’ the numbers quantifying Indigenous mobility to bring about change.

4.5.3 Supporting the work of schools: Identifying points of intervention

In the series of collaborative action research projects undertaken, and in accordance with Principal 1s’ vision for Riverside State School, the emphasis has been on a whole school approach to the issue of mobility. This involved a two pronged approach to address the impacts of mobility. Firstly, working to reduce mobility where possible and, secondly, working to respond to the impact of mobility for teachers, administrators, students and their families. A number of interventions were trialled on a range of levels, including revised administration practices, changed induction

procedures, a focus on teachers' professional learning and, crucially, the addition of a Mobility Support Teacher to the school's staff.

Using the data collected and drawing on findings from existing research, it became clear that creating an environment that was equipped to support and welcome students and their families as they transitioned to the new school setting was essential. This was achieved in a range of ways. Firstly, standardised entry and exit procedures across the three schools (that is, in the Rangeview Cluster) in the project were collaboratively developed. These procedures included extended interviews with families/carers and students on enrolment and exit and a structured orientation for both students and their families. As well, teachers received professional development on classroom practices that facilitate the development of a sense of belonging. Curriculum units that built a positive approach to diversity and explicitly valued the richness of experiences mobile students brought to the classroom and the school were developed. The data analysis was shared with all school staff at regular intervals to ensure they had a clear notion of the characteristics of the community they were serving and an explanation of (some of) the challenges they were facing in their classrooms and playgrounds.

As previously noted, in 2008 (the second project in the series), the researchers were successful in obtaining funding to employ part time Mobility Support Teachers in each of the three Rangeview schools. This additional staffing resource enhanced the possibilities for responding to student mobility and provided opportunities to reduce mobility and respond to the needs of mobile students and their families through genuinely changed school and teacher practices. Comber, Badger, Barnett and Nixon (2001), in identifying six factors that make a difference to the assemblage of literate

practices by students in low socio-economic schools, note that one such factor is “the extent to which schools have the human and material resources they need” (p. 21). In this school, the additional resources provided by the MST position has enabled the development of ways of supporting the literacy needs of mobile Indigenous students that may not be evident in other school settings.

4.5.4 The role of the Mobility Support Teacher

As noted previously, the findings of the first project, along with extensive and persistent lobbying from the research team, prompted the support of a State government initiative. This initiative was established as “a whole-of-Government program coordinated by the Department of Housing which aims to develop communities where people feel valued, safe and proud” (Department of Communities, 2010). This program provided funding for a two year trial of the position which came to be known as the Mobility Support Teacher (MST) (see Appendix 1 for MST role description). The role of the MST, as noted previously, was modelled on the Induction Support Officers provided in the United Kingdom to schools experiencing high levels of student mobility (see Department for Education and Skills, 2003a). When presenting a case for this position, the research team advocated for a registered teacher to undertake the role. This specification was to ensure that the role could include important aspects such as providing teacher release for the classroom teacher to meet with parents/carers upon enrolment, conducting holistic learning needs’ assessments to provide much needed information in a more timely fashion, and to advise on professional matters such as pedagogy and classroom resources. The role called for a high level of communication skills as well as a high degree of cultural sensitivity, particularly in regard to engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families.

4.5.5 The position of Mobility Support Teacher: An enabling practice architecture?

As a consequence of the series of action research projects, the MST and the Community Liaison Officer (CLO) at Riverside State School had developed a productive working partnership to provide classroom teachers with the background knowledge and on-arrival literacy assessments that ensured teachers were well equipped to include incoming mobile students into the social and learning community of the classroom. As indicated previously, in this school, the MST undertook the enrolment procedures and collected and collated relevant information about students' personal, social and academic backgrounds for the classroom teachers. Should the family be Indigenous, this enrolment interview was usually conducted with the support of the CLO with a focus on building positive relationships between the school and the family and ensuring the student was well positioned for learning. Where required, the MST and CLO, working within the school's 'no excuses' philosophy, ensured that the student's material needs were met – items such as uniforms, books and transport were sourced. They also informed families about services that might assist them – such as local health services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander support services – and where necessary arranged this support.

The MST also undertook on-arrival literacy (and numeracy) assessments so that the teacher was equipped to immediately include incoming students into his or her day-to-day planning. Depending upon the currency and depth of information provided by the parents/carers and the previous school, these assessments could include writing samples, running records or standardised tests such as Waddington's Diagnostic Spelling and Reading Tests (Waddington, 2000), the South Australian Spelling Test

(Westwood, 2005) or PM Benchmarking Tests (Smith, Randall, Nellie, & Giles, 2002).

While arguments can be made about the usefulness of these tests – including, but not limited to, cultural appropriateness – it remains that these were the tests in use at the school at that time.

Together, the MST and CLO provided a means to support the entry of students in to the classroom and ensured that there was sufficient accompanying information to facilitate a systematic entry process. The MST and CLO also provided the student and their family with an induction into the school as an organisation. The MST (or in some circumstances, the CLO) acquainted the family and student with the school. She escorted them on a walkthrough, familiarising both the student and his/her family with the buildings and grounds, while providing information on using the tuckshop, where the appropriate playing and eating areas are located, procedures for assemblies, the location of toilets and other day-to-day navigation information.

In Habermasian terms, these actions could be considered to be technical actions (Habermas, 1972), motivated by instrumental reasoning, intending to provide order and predictability to both the work of the teacher and to the school-world of the student. As can be seen from the following comments, these technical actions were highly valued by the classroom teachers, and brought an element of predictability to the ad hoc enrolment and entry procedures that often characterise highly mobile, disadvantaged school contexts (Lupton, 2004):

[MST's] role is so important because she will interview the parents and talk to them and get all the information that will be pertinent to what we need to

know really, up to a point, and give you a summary sheet of all that. (Anne, 27/07/09)

Usually their files take a long time to come, like a month or a couple of months so [MST] usually does the initial sounds check list or Waddington, or running record and that gives you an idea. (Kali, 27/07/09)

It's a huge plus. . . . to know you have a child coming; you had to run around and hope you had a child away so they could actually sit at that child's desk for the day until you have time to find one for them. You didn't get notice. They just lumped up on the door. (Laura, 27/07/09)

This process of 'staging' entry meant that teachers felt more able to respond to new students with a professional, responsive demeanour. This contrasts to the situation prior to the addition of the MST role, where teachers felt pushed to a reactive and potentially unprofessional stance. This feeling of diminished professionalism arose because prior to the addition of the MST, a new student might arrive at the classroom door at any point in the day, at which time the teacher would need to immediately calculate how he/she could physically accommodate a new student, how he/she could possibly integrate the new student into the learning currently underway, what might be a suitable time to meet with the parents/carers, if the student has the required equipment – all the while maintaining his/her composure and a warm and welcoming visage – even if this may well be the third new student in his/her class this week. As one teacher recounted:

Before you wouldn't know anything until they turned up at the door and then it was a mad panic, who's away? Where can I put you? Now at least we get notice we so can think, right, we're getting a girl, I'll put her with

this child so I have time to re-arrange the room if needed, I know who to put them beside and things like that so that's really helpful. (Laura, 29/07/09)

While the MST role provided a staff member dedicated to working with mobile students and this had led to significant improvements in schools' and teachers' capacity to support mobile students, and mobile Indigenous students in particular, the tenuous nature of the funding serves to highlight some of the more problematic issues around using externally funded projects to address the needs of disadvantaged schools.

4.6 The Problem With Projects

Within the field of education there is much debate about the ways in which to most effectively address the inequalities that exist. As Fullan (1992) observed of public schools in the United States of America almost twenty years ago, "schools and districts are overloaded with problems – and, ironically, with solutions that don't work" (p. 744). It would seem, given the constant reforms to schooling in Queensland and the statistical evidence of achievement gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, that this observation could describe the case in Queensland today. Connell (1993, 1994, 2009a) has written extensively over a lengthy period about the schooling of children in poverty and overcoming inequalities in education. While acknowledging that genuine education reform is a "hard policy area" (Connell, 2009a, p. 1), she identifies a number of flaws in the ways governments have approached this vexed issue. Central to the issues Connell has with the approaches of governments over the years has been their reliance on compensatory programs that "are 'targeted' to a minority of children, . . . act by grafting something onto the existing school system . . . [and] are generally administered separately from conventional school funding" (Connell, 1994, pp. 129-130). Connell argues that this then produces a 'false map' of the problem, providing a

set of assumptions that drive policy but are “factually wrong, doubtful, or profoundly misleading” (Connell, 1994, p. 130). She goes on to identify three central, false assumptions: “that the problem concerns only a disadvantaged minority; that the poor are distinct from the majority in culture or attitudes; and that correcting disadvantage in education is a technical problem requiring, above all, the application of research-based expertise (Connell, 1994, p. 130).

In this 1994 paper, Connell argued for a ‘re-mapping’ of the issues by researchers, teachers, teacher educators, students and administrators. She encouraged them to recognise the impacts of poverty in creating a vulnerability to institutional power, to understand schools as institutions that deliver class advantages through competition for grades, and to see the curriculum as a key source of educational inequalities. Although it could be argued that much has changed since Connell made these original observations, it would appear that, in Australia, by all measures available (see Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority, 2009a; Thomson & De Bertoli, 2008), some groups of students – particularly the students this study focuses on, that is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students experiencing high levels of social and material disadvantage – are not well served by our school systems (McGaw, 2009). Connell (2009) argues now as she did then, that:

The mechanisms of educational disadvantage have to do with the workings of the *whole* education system, [original italics] not with poverty in itself. Kids in poverty get the worst consequences of a broader pattern of advantage and disadvantage . . . and tightly targeted ‘inclusion’ programs will miss the system-wide dynamics that are the main source of inequalities in education. (p. 2)

Further to this assessment, Connell (2009a) identifies five strategies to work towards overcoming systemic inequalities:

1. Rethinking the curriculum (including assessment) to make it work for the full range of social groups in the education system.
2. Designing initiatives to make full use of teachers' creativity and collective skill.
3. Focusing resources where they are most needed.
4. Renovating technical and vocational education.
5. Developing schools as community resources. (p. 2)

The series of research projects that form the evolutionary history of this doctoral project are framed within the above understanding of sustainable reform. Central to the philosophy of these projects is the notion of utilising participatory action research to create a communicative space that supports and increases the capacity of teachers, as well as valuing and making the most of the considerable knowledge and skills of teachers who have worked at Riverside State school over long periods of time.

Through the participatory process, this doctoral project aimed to generate 'curriculum justice' (Connell, 1994) for all students at Riverside State School. However, it must be acknowledged that the work occurring in this school and others in the state-wide project group was constrained by the funding arrangements in place and, as such, experienced the inherent problems of unstable funding. Each of the projects in the series has required an external funding source. The time and effort contributed by school Principals (in particular Principal 1 of Riverside State School) and the

researchers in identifying funding sources, preparing submissions and providing reports should not be underestimated. Each project has brought with it a considerable administrative workload in order to press on to the next potential funding opportunity.

The most recent state-wide project (2009-2010) was funded through the National Partnerships arrangements and fell under the category of ‘pilot program’. The gains that were made over time have been supported through the additional human resource, the MST, and despite demonstrable success, this position did not received funding support beyond the pilot project. However, Riverside State School (and most of the other schools involved) has continued funding the role throughout 2011, and as long as possible – drawing on schools funds and the discretionary funding provided through National Partnerships arrangements.

The National Partnerships arrangements represent a form of redistribution of resources, and ostensibly a return to a more democratic, socially just approach to addressing the impacts of disadvantage for students and teachers. However, Principals in the state-wide project see the National Partnership arrangements as potentially, deeply problematic in the ways in which they position teachers and schools. This is borne out by the comments of participants in this doctoral project, for example:

In a school that is a disadvantaged school . . . you get targeted for more interventionist sort of crap you know, but the trouble is . . . how many of them actually have impact because some are competing against each other and it’s money coming from the federal government. (Laura, 29/03/10)

4.6.1 The National Partnerships: Redistribution contained by neoliberalism

The National Partnerships are funding agreements between Australia’s State and

Federal Governments and align with the COAG *National Education Agreement* (Council of Australian Governments, 2008). The National Partnerships are intended to address teacher quality, low SES school communities and literacy and numeracy – areas that all jurisdictions have agreed will enable the objectives of the *National Education Agreement* to be met:

The objective of this Agreement is that all Australian school students acquire the knowledge and skills to participate effectively in society and employment in a globalised economy.

The Agreement will contribute to the achievement of the outcomes that a) all children are engaged in, and benefit from schooling, b) meet basic literacy and numeracy standards and that levels of achievement are improving, c) Australian students excel by international standards, d) schooling promotes the social inclusion and reduces the educational disadvantage of children, especially Indigenous children and e) young people make a successful transition from school to work and further study. (Council of Australian Governments, 2008, p.1)

Smyth (2010), in his discussion of the impacts of current federal policies as they relate to disadvantaged schools, highlights the “overall deficit narrative being portrayed in respect of disadvantaged schools” (p. 119). He demonstrates how the ministerial press release accompanying the announcement of the National Partnerships for low SES school communities moves blame from “schools, to principals, to teachers, to students, to school-to-work transitions and then to buildings” (p.119) but with no recognition of the way our society is structured and what this can mean for people in poverty. As Smyth (2010) notes:

Missing in any sense that social exclusion might be a problem to do with the way society is structured – rather that it is the fault of groups like teachers, schools and communities themselves. The way the supposed problem is to be fixed is through technical and managerial means – ameliorative and punitive processes like accountability, transparency, marketization, targets and heroic forms of leadership. (p. 125)

So, while funding is becoming available to schools to work towards ensuring equity in education, it is bound and constrained by neoliberal processes that focus on an audit and accountability model that “comes across as deeply distrustful, disrespectful and demeaning of those at the grassroots community level as well as the professionals who work there” (Smyth, 2010, p. 125). While the Federal Government’s own review (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 2006) has highlighted the damaging effects of Indigenous education initiatives being ‘bolted-on’ rather than ‘built-in’, schools continue to be required to engage in compensatory programs with decontextualised and narrow accountability measures, such as NAPLAN.

The utilisation of measures, such as NAPLAN, continue to position schools and teachers as both the solution and the problem without acknowledging the structural issues that face communities experiencing high levels of mobility as well as high levels of social and material disadvantage. Teachers in this study have found that the accountability measures are working against their beliefs about social justice and education as a public good as well as their capacity to provide a ‘quality’ education to all students. For example, in identifying the incursion of accountability measures into teaching schedules, one teacher noted:

Because of the projects we’re involved in . . . in week 2 we had that cold

writing sample . . . week four we had to do PAT-R . . . week five we had NAPLAN practice, another week had to do the next writing sample then week seven we did the NAPLAN practice test. . . . At least four weeks we were assessing in first term. (Laura, 29/03/10)

The effects of accountability measures on teachers' practice will be further discussed in Chapter 5, however, it is clear from this meeting transcript excerpt that these accountability measures are a source of concern for teachers at this school.

4.7 Locating Literacy and Literacy Teaching

In the current education environment, where 'blame' for student 'failure' has shifted to the actors in schools, literacy has, as mentioned in Chapter 2, become the new marker for disadvantage, and 'quality' literacy teaching the solution to the structural inequalities facing Australian children experiencing high levels of social and material disadvantage. Teachers have been required to 'buy in' to the notion of literacy as a solution to structural disadvantage (Luke, 2008). In this environment, education systems – Federal and State – measure literacy 'success' in terms of NAPLAN scores. As identified in numerous submissions to the Senate Inquiry into the administration and reporting of NAPLAN testing (Senate Education Employment and Workplace Relations Committee, 2010), this narrow measurement tool has created serious concern for a range of educators, professional bodies and researchers. The disproportionate value afforded to NAPLAN as a marker of literacy success has significant implications for systems, schools, teachers, and for students. Although school based measures are also identified, these often take the form of commercial standardised tests such as PAT-R (the Progressive Achievement Tests in Reading developed by ACER). In effect, NAPLAN scores have become the central measure for the effectiveness of interventions

funded through the National Partnerships arrangements.

NAPLAN scores are also a central measure for Queensland's *Closing the Gap Educational Strategy* and the Commonwealth *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-2014* – this is particularly problematic given the grave concern about the use of NAPLAN scores as a performance measure of literacy expressed in the submission to the *Senate Inquiry into the administration and reporting of NAPLAN testing* by the *Queensland Indigenous ESL Program and Languages Team*. In this submission, the team argued for the recognition of Indigenous students as speakers of English as a second language or dialect (ESL/D), noting that “it is indefensible to create a situation where parents are forced to believe, wrongly, that their young, non-English speaking children are failures” (Queensland Indigenous ESL Program and the Languages Perspectives Team, 2010, p. 2). The team goes on to note that the lack of recognition of Indigenous students as speakers of ESL/D is leading to generalised literacy intervention measures that represent poor value for money and are, potentially, educationally detrimental:

The high stakes of NAPLAN testing is driving so-called ‘data driven’ responses, however the data collected and made visible through NAPLAN results provides no data at all which would indicate that the barrier to learning and performance for a given student might be related to their second language proficiency in SAE. (Queensland Indigenous ESL Program and the Languages Perspectives Team, 2010, p.4)

However, the neoliberal funding mechanisms of compensatory programs, such as National Partnerships, are pushing NAPLAN to become not only a data source but also a curriculum driver (Senate Education Employment and Workplace Relations

Committee, 2010), and this can serve to structure teachers' work in ways that conflict with their professional intentions and the best interests of students – in particular, the best interests of students who already find their linguistic and schooling backgrounds to be 'at odds' with the hegemonic curriculum.

4.7.1 The approach to literacy teaching at Riverside State School

Principal 1 had instigated a whole school approach to literacy teaching that included prioritising explicit teaching and upskilling all teachers and teacher aides in the use of Guided Reading as a teaching strategy and of running records as a diagnostic tool. My examination of the professional learning program within the school showed that multiple sessions were allocated across all year levels, with titles such as "Reading and writing. Whole school focus for Term 4" (Riverside State School Meeting Schedule Term 3, 2008) and "Running record analysis" (Riverside State School Student Free Day Schedule, 2008). At Riverside State School, as in all Queensland state schools, teachers have been required to attend professional development (PD) in teaching literacy. This PD program commenced in 2008 and took the form of five days (not contiguous) of lectures and 'hands-on' workshops. This program was mandatory for all Queensland teachers as is reflected in this statement from the Department of Education (2008):

All teachers (P-9) will participate in a five-day literacy professional development program to support the actions described in the *Literacy – the Key to Learning: Framework for Action*. The professional development will focus on enhancing teachers' knowledge, pedagogy, and understanding of literacy across the curriculum. (p. 3)

The PD program foregrounds a functional model of language that draws on Hallidayian conceptual understandings (Halliday & Hasan, 1985; Halliday &

Matthiessen, 2004), and the explicit teaching of literacy within and across all Key Learning Areas. The PD program is built around coming to understand and utilise four ‘informing frames’: a functional model of language, the *Productive Pedagogies*, the *Four Resources* model and discipline based curriculum literacies. The PD outline is shown in Table 4.4 below.

Table 4.4 Outline of Literacy Professional Development

Day One	Day Two	Day Three	Day Four	Day Five
Literacy-the Key to Learning: Framework for Action 2006-2008	Focus on texts	Getting a grip on grammar	Focus on texts	Focus on texts
Overview of five-day program	A functional model of language	Introduction to curriculum literacies	A functional model of language	A functional model of language
Changing times and understandings	Understanding the reading process	Explicit teaching strategies for reading	Understanding the reading process	Understanding the reading process
Assumptions impacting on student learning	The teaching of reading		The teaching of reading	The teaching of reading
Responding to diversity: Classroom interaction				

Source: *Department of Education, Training and the Arts*, 2008b, p. 17

Principal 1 took a highly visible role in leading the improvement of literacy teaching in the school. She made this visible by participating in the literacy PD along with other staff members and actively modelled a commitment to whole school literacy improvement. This is evident in an excerpt from her application for promotion, where she wrote:

Through engaging with current systemic professional development in Literacy for Principals and Language and Literacy course, I have . . . positioned myself to understand and engage with the content and pedagogy that I expect to observe in classrooms. I have built a strong focussed team, who assist me in whole school literacy leadership. (Principal’s application for promotion, 2009)

The participants in this study perceived that the systemic PD had exerted a significant impact upon their literacy teaching practice, in particular their understandings of teaching writing, as illustrated in these interview excerpts:

The professional training we did last year, the literacy, that really impacted on me. (Anne, 30/04/09)

The five-day literacy training and then I came back and did the functional grammar course with [Nadya]. It improved my understanding of how to teach children to write and I've really noticed a difference in my teaching of writing before and after. (Laura, 30/04/09)

It was five days of high quality material. It was the presenter as well – it wasn't just the information either, it was very good. She is obviously very passionate about it and she has a great knowledge of what she is talking about so therefore you're sucked in straight away. I found her excellent. (Sarah, 30/04/09)

It was recognised by all the participants that explicit teaching was an essential element of the school's approach to literacy teaching, and the Curriculum Coordinator identified 'explicitness' as the central tenet of the school's *Whole School Literacy Plan*. She commented:

It comes back to knowing what the learners need, knowing what your curriculum says that they should be doing and the explicit teaching that you have to go from there to there. (Nadya, 04/08/09)

In my reconnaissance observations I noted consistently that each teacher engaged in explicit teaching, particularly classroom talk that was focussed and built

metalanguage. This included clear instructions that, in all three classes, was often preceded by “Your job is...”. As an example, in a discussion revisiting an earlier learning activity in which a Year 3 teacher, Kali, had engaged in a teacher led deconstruction of a Dreaming Story, she used the terms, ‘narrative’, ‘coda’, ‘processes’, ‘participants’, ‘orientation’, ‘complication’, ‘resolution’ with accompanying explanations and with reference to a large commercially-produced poster with an annotated story identifying the elements she was highlighting. In another example, while working with a Year 3 reading group, Kali explicitly named and modelled a range of reading strategies such as ‘self-correction’ and ‘looking for cues’ using a ‘think aloud’ strategy. Essentially, the teachers had accepted the school’s literacy policy and were working in accordance with it.

4.8 Positioned for this project

As can be seen from the preceding sections in this chapter, a range of factors served to position both me, as researcher, and the participating teachers. In some ways the existing practice architectures provided positive action possibilities for me as a researcher. Through my role as Project Officer for the larger project – which had delivered the role of MST – my standing in the school provided a positive platform. As well, the endorsement of my project by a deeply respected Principal provided some initial traction. Additionally, the professional learning community established by Principal 1 had encouraged deprivatised practice and the use of evidence for decision making. However, teachers in this school had experienced numerous projects and were wary of the implications for their work of yet another project.

Importantly, the approach to equity modelled and led by Principal 1, had created an environment in which foregrounding background was equated with providing

‘excuses’ for both students’ and teachers’ performances. To foreground the lived experiences of mobile Indigenous students as an educational consideration would be a challenge.

However, the multiple actions taken by Principal 1 during her tenure to focus attention on a whole school approach to literacy teaching and the immediacy of the teachers’ participation in the systemic PD all provided rich ground from which to generate critical reflections of teaching and learning. But again, the absence of a focus on Indigeneity as an important teaching/learning consideration evident in both the policy documents and the school’s culture meant that careful consideration needed to be given to the Disciplined Dialogue activities and the unfolding CPAR.

4.9 Summary

In this chapter I have explored the context within which this research project was grounded and identified a range of factors that worked as practice architectures shaping taken-for-granted practices and the dispositions that enable or constrain action possibilities. In particular, I drew attention to the meta-practices of the Principal at the time the project commenced as she worked to provide a high quality, high equity schooling experience for all students, discussing the ways in which these meta-practices, in effect, eliminate background as a student characteristic. While she actively worked to respond to mobility, her adoption of an approach that Gutierrez describes as ‘sameness as fairness’ meant that Indigeneity was largely ignored. This rejection of difference opened spaces for a deficit discourse that may have limited teachers’ capacity to support the literacy learning of mobile Indigenous students.

As well, I identified the evolution of this doctoral research project and the interventions that it has brought to Riverside State School. The key intervention has

been the provision of the position of Mobility Support Teacher and this too has acted as a practice architecture, enabling new and meaningful ways of responding to the literacy learning needs of mobile Indigenous students.

Additionally, this chapter has drawn attention to the ‘double-edged sword’ presented by short term projects ‘bolted on’ to existing school structures without sustainable funding sources and the disquiet such projects can generate with teachers. The National Partnerships arrangements, while potentially offering a more equitable distribution of funds for low SES schools include ‘pilot projects’ with no guarantee of extended funding and are accompanied by accountability measures that can, and do, impact negatively on the students they purport to assist.

Next, this chapter identified the current guiding policies for literacy teaching at Riverside State School. These include a strong take-up of the current functional model of language PD provided by the Department of Education and Training and the school’s focus on explicit teaching. Finally, this chapter identified the ways in which coming to understand the reconnaissance data provided a sense of the ways in which the existing practice conditions positioned both me and the participants.

Chapter 5, following, presents the data generated by the CPAR process. The analysis of this data highlights the role of practice architectures in the shaping of teachers’ classroom practice and the ways in which these practice architectures make visible or obscure the possibilities for teachers to work at the cultural interface, and in doing so support the literacy learning needs of mobile Indigenous students.

Chapter 5 Visibility, Reflection and Change

We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are (Anaïs Nin, n.d.).

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 3, presented data from the reconnaissance phase of the research that highlighted key practice architectures, as they existed at the time the fieldwork for this project commenced (2009). The actions of Principal 1 were central in establishing the school climate. In particular, an approach to equity that ‘backgrounded’ background was identified as a key practice architecture that both opened and closed discursive spaces. Principal 1’s focus on explicit teaching as a key element of the Whole School Literacy Plan was also discussed.

In this chapter, I present the findings from the CPAR process organised around four major themes: action research as a meta-practice, practice architectures that shape teachers’ work with mobile Indigenous students, making practice visible, and maintaining the momentum of change. In constructing this thematic framework, I recognise the ‘situatedness’ of this research project and the interconnectedness of the social-political, cultural-discursive and material-economic features of teachers’ practice.

The first section represents findings borne of the emergent nature of the CPAR. Coming to understand how the methodology was enacted and the ways in which particular discursive resources were used provides insights into the ways CPAR can inform professional learning in schools. Additionally, the findings in this section underpin the notion of research as praxis – that is, the ways in which CPAR contributes to transformative actions. The ‘processes’ detailed in this section were fundamental in attempting to (re)shape the ‘dispositions’ (Bourdieu, 1990) of the participants towards

emancipatory action, or praxis. Cajete (1994) conceptualised research as a ‘Pathway’ for both an internal and external journey. He wrote:

Learning involves a transformation that unfolds through time and space. . . . Pathway is an appropriate metaphor since, in every learning process, we metaphorically travel an internal and, many times an external landscape. In travelling a Pathway, we make stops, encounter and overcome obstacles, recognise and interpret signs, seek answers, and follow the tracks of those entities that have something to teach us. We create ourselves anew. Path denotes a structure; Way implies a process. (p. 55)

While the research methodology described in Chapter 3 formed the structure for the research – a Path – as each of the participants, including myself, engaged in individual and collective reflection within both social and personal spheres, an internal journey was also occurring – the Way. The following section provides an analysis of the role of the interventions in this transformative journey.

5.2 Action Research as a Meta-practice

As noted previously, meta-practices are those practices intended to shape other practices (Kemmis, 2008b; Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008). Action research as a “practice-changing practice” (Kemmis, 2009, p. 467) might, therefore, be conceptualised as a meta-practice. By incorporating Disciplined Dialogue into the methodology, it was my intention to provide a sound basis for critical reflection and for the development of new, or renewed, understandings that, in turn, could (re)shape the participants’ literacy teachings practices in ways that might support mobile Indigenous students. As identified in Chapter 4, central to developing a pathway for transformation was coming to understand the existing practices of the participants and the conditions in

which they practice and, through this understanding, developing ‘intervention’ activities that ‘made sense’ in terms of teachers’ everyday work.

The intervention activities were developed in response to the emerging situation – not made a priori. They were intentionally devised to make available discursive resources that, in some instances, would serve to disrupt or compete with those of the participants, encouraging them, as praxis oriented professionals, to question their practices and the situations in which they practice. My experiences in the larger mobility project led me to believe that, in this school and others, teachers were at a loss to know what could be done to progress the literacy learning of mobile Indigenous students and, that the lived experience of this diverse cohort of students was poorly understood and perceived by some to be irresponsible and at odds with Western education traditions. Through the Disciplined Dialogue of this action research, and the CPAR process more broadly, I hoped that the participants would see that change was needed and that coming to grips with the lived experiences of mobile Indigenous students would illuminate a path for change.

Equally important were the discursive resources made available that supported or complemented existing practices. It was my intention that, by engaging with these resources, the participants would (re)commit to the conceptualisation of literacy as a social practice and that effective literacy teaching required a theoretical basis from which to construct a repertoire of teaching practices. This research was not directed towards finding a ‘silver bullet’, rather towards coming to understand what ‘good’ practices look like.

Throughout the reconnaissance phase it was clear that the participants and I were, for the most part, in agreement about the ways in which we conceptualised

literacy (as a social-cultural practice), effective literacy teaching (as providing access to curricula ways of knowing) and the value of education as a public good. These underpinning philosophical positions went unchallenged by the interventions – because, for the most part, we shared these epistemological and ontological positions.

5.2.1 Transforming practice

The activities or interventions that I constructed were based on the data that emerged throughout the CPAR process. This ensured that they were purposeful and attempted to respect and engage the professional knowledge that the participants brought to the communicative space. They were developed within the unfolding story of the CPAR and drew upon input from the participants, my supervisors, the Indigenous mentors and reference group and relevant findings from the larger project (see Chapter 4.4 for a description of the relationship between this doctoral project and the larger mobility project within which it was located). The research was deliberately designed as an exploratory action (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005) with each next step contingent upon the outcomes of those that went before. With hindsight, I see that the intervention activities fell into three major groupings: activating critical reflection, identifying practice architectures and action possibilities, and praxis in response to new and renewed understandings. Coming to understand this framework, through the research process, offers insight into ways in which PD can be innovated to meet particular needs of particular schools and teachers.

5.2.1.1 Activating critical reflection: Examining practice and unsettling habitus

The first interventions provided participants with opportunities to reflect upon the sayings, doings and relatings that, at that time, constituted their professional practice as literacy teachers for mobile Indigenous students. As identified in Chapter 3 (see

Table 3.5), these activities were:

1. Semi-structured discussions: Relating personal teaching history; identifying key professional development events that have contributed to current understandings.
2. Professional reading: Indigenous temporary mobility (Prout, 2008); Discussion: Motivations for Indigenous student mobility.
3. Scenarios: Examining current literacy teaching practices for mobile Indigenous students.
4. Professional reading: Literacy teaching in disadvantaged contexts (Comber et al., 2001; Wilkinson, 2005); Indigenous education (Harrison, 2008; Harris & Malin, 1994; Nakata, 2003).
5. Semi-structured discussion: Mapping the contextual challenges and opportunities for literacy teaching in this school community.
6. Discussion: 'Ideal' practices in schools and classrooms with high levels of Indigenous student mobility and socio-economic disadvantage.

Naming of individual mini action research projects.
7. Cultural Awareness training provided by the Indigenous Schooling Support Unit (informed by their involvement in the larger mobility project).
8. Report back on individual mini action research projects; Structured reflection on the CPAR, identifying changed and unchanged practices, and next steps.

As also noted in Chapter 3, in the period prior to and during the CPAR that formed this project, all teachers in Queensland were required to undertake professional

development in literacy and literacy teaching. This took the form of a five-day program constructed around four ‘informing frames’: a functional model of language, the teaching and learning cycle, the *Four Resources* model and *Productive Pedagogies* (Education Queensland, 2008). Independent of this project, the three classroom teachers/research participants also volunteered to participate in an extended program of professional learning called *Language and literacy: Classroom applications of functional grammar* (Dare & Polias, 2004). This professional learning program extended over several weeks and was facilitated by the Curriculum Co-ordinator (CC), who (until her departure from the school) was also a member of the CPAR group. Through these systemically funded professional learning experiences, the participants were actively engaging with the connections between literacy theory and literacy teaching practice while concurrently involved in a project to determine literacy teaching that supported mobile Indigenous students. While the systemic programs were not directly linked to meeting the needs of this particular student cohort, they provided teachers with an increasing metalanguage that assisted in the articulation of literacy teaching practice and an expanding skill set by which to inform their practice. Crucially, this served to position teachers as active users and builders of theory – which supported their sense of professionalism as well as their professional practice.

The Indigenous Schooling Support Units (ISSU) of the Department of Education and Training provide a range of services to schools across Queensland. Among their services is the provision of a whole school Cultural Awareness workshop entitled, *The Big Picture: A Hidden History*. In the North Queensland region, this program has been influenced by the ISSU’s role within the action research team of the larger project – in that mobility is foregrounded and direct links are made to the school’s local community. In this professional learning experience, the main presenter,

an Indigenous member of the school's immediate community, delivered two sessions that outlined and explained Aboriginal history and culture and the impacts of various government policies on the lived reality of Aboriginal peoples over time. Importantly, the presenter(s) directly linked this history to the local context and highlighted how a history of dislocation has led to some families becoming highly mobile. (It is to be noted that the reason for focussing only on Aboriginal people is administrative, and that the Torres Strait Islander package was nearing completion but had yet to be fully endorsed for use.) This program was delivered to all staff at Riverside State School at the commencement of the 2010 school year.

Although recognising the limitations of workshop style presentations (Timperley et al., 2007), this event was pivotal in unsettling habitus and making visible an alternate discursive construction of the lived experiences of Indigenous people in this locale. Through this PD session, teachers were presented with a notion of place that brought together the complexities of the past and of the present. As Cormack, Green and Reid (2007) note: "place is an ideological and discursive construct and place making is inherently political" (p. 26). This representation of place made visible the connections to country and family that lie at the heart of contemporary Indigenous Australians' lived experiences. As is suggested by Heiss (2006):

When non-Indigenous people talk of 'stories of place' with an Indigenous context in mind, many immediately think of traditional stories, stories used by our old people to pass on cultural information and knowledge, or the history of a specific geographic region and the significant sites of such areas. In contrast to such expectations imposed upon us, when contemporary Aboriginal authors talk of space, and consider our sense of place and our

connections to country, we often do so in terms of the environments we live in in the twenty-first century. . . . That said, . . . it does not mean that we are ignorant of our clan groups or language groups, our roles as owners and managers of country and our moieties. Rather, what it means is that we consider our connections to country through familial lines, as well as connection through long political, social and other cultural associations to particular places. (p. 68)

Combining the CPAR activities and the systemic professional development activities provided the resources that enabled the participants to consider the factors that informed their practice at that time. In effect, they were not only reflecting upon their practice, but rather they were gently problematising and unsettling the factors that underpinned those practices – their professional habitus.

This unsettling of habitus can be seen through incidental comments made by the participants as they began to link the Disciplined Dialogue activities to their everyday taken-for-granted practices. For example, as we were leaving the second CPAR meeting, during which the group had discussed motivations for Indigenous mobility (Prout, 2008), Anne, a late career teacher remarked, “I’d never thought about mobility as a different way of living in the world” (Fieldnotes, 16/06/09). This challenge to her taken-for-granted assumptions about why some Indigenous families might be mobile was, for her, the first domino to fall and would, over time and with other factors, lead her to implementing significant changes in her literacy teaching practice.

The unsettling of habitus occurred in different ways and at different times for each participant and could be traced through their discourse. In one case, following discussions about establishing relationships with mobile Indigenous families, a teacher

who had during my observations in her classroom expressed a view that “it is too hard” (Fieldnotes, 26/10/09) to involve mobile Indigenous families in the education of their children, began to actively seek information from the other participants about the ways in which they were providing classroom information to new families, and implemented these practices with positive results.

A third example can be seen as another teacher, following discussions about Indigenous students as English as Second Language or Dialect (ESL/D) learners, began to rethink the ‘markers’ she saw as indicators of the need to focus on ESL strategies. In an early interview she had stated:

You say, what do you speak at home and a lot of them will come with a community accent, when there’s an accent maybe we need to think about ESL . . . it’s like a second language isn’t it? (Interview 29/07/09)

This teacher noted in the final reflection session that, after undertaking the professional reading and participating in discussions on the topic of Indigenous (literacy) education, she had begun to record her new students using a digital recording device so she could “hear their grammar” (Fieldnotes, 29/03/10) in an effort to personalise planning for learning.

As each participant engaged in active critical reflection of their practice by participating in the Disciplined Dialogue activities, they embarked upon a personal internal journey that, at times, unsettled dispositions that were at odds with new or renewed understandings. In some instances, the activities served to reinforce understandings. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) suggested that habitus, as a “system of open dispositions” (p. 133), could be open to improvisation and change. In this case, this change was facilitated by providing the temporal and discursive space in which to

individually and collectively reflect upon practice with the support of carefully chosen activities and resources.

I contend that this shift required the input of a facilitator external to the school. Webb, Schirato and Danaher (2002) offer the following analogy to explain the reflexive practice afforded to the involved outsider. They suggest that:

it is rather like a person who looks down at a town from an overlooking hill. . . . In some senses that person's perspective is more privileged than that of someone driving a car within the town, who is preoccupied with the immediate needs of negotiating the traffic and avoiding a crash. (p. 137)

From my privileged vantage point, I could see that as the status quo became disrupted, spaces opened up for innovative action-possibilities.

5.2.1.2 Generating action by identifying action-possibilities

The second identifiable set of interventions comprised a series of discussions, both in person and electronically, through which a document identifying 'ideal' practice in the context of high mobility within the Indigenous cohort of students was co-constructed. This document drew not only on the data generated by the CPAR at Riverside State School, but also from a variety of sources outside of the CPAR group. These sources included members of the larger project's action research team (including my doctoral supervisors) and, importantly, the Indigenous mentor and Indigenous educators of the reference group.

As noted in Chapter 3, while at times it was a challenge to move the research process beyond passive engagement, it was the completion of this co-constructed document (see Appendix 4) that was a catalyst for action by the participants. The

document was the product of much discussion and progressed through several draft stages before the practices identified were legitimated through intersubjective agreement – both within the CPAR group, the Indigenous reference group and from participants in the larger project. It contained practices that were clearly drawn from the classroom practice of the CPAR group, and identified by them as ‘effective’, as well as practices drawn from the literature. Each participant could see her work reflected in this ‘ideal’. This constituted recognition of the considerable professional expertise available within this school setting and provided a way for the teachers to see the possibilities for change. The production of this document served as the catalyst for action. It functioned as a self-audit tool, a support for the articulation of practice and validation of existing professional knowledge.

Each classroom teacher used the document to ‘audit’ her classroom practice and to identify ‘new’ practices to trial in her classroom. It appeared that the presence of a ‘list’ was a significant support in encouraging each teacher to trial new ways of working to support the literacy teaching/learning of mobile Indigenous students. The purpose in this section is not to document those actions but rather to identify the production of the document as a key support in shifting the role of the participants in the CPAR from passive ‘research subjects’ to active action researchers. As noted in Chapter 3, the strength of researcher-stakeholder CPAR lies in the coming together of local context-centred knowledge and professional research knowledge in a co-generative inquiry (Greenwood & Levin, 2005). This document was a tangible product of that co-generative process.

Another element of the document was the identification of ‘ideal’ practices at the leadership level. In response to perceived gaps in a whole school approach, the

Curriculum Co-ordinator and the Mobility Support Teacher organised for the Indigenous Schooling Support Unit (ISSU) to provide professional development in Cultural Awareness as a first step in their move towards coming to understand what it means to genuinely engage with the systemic priority to embed Indigenous perspectives across all aspects of school life (see 5.2.1.1). Although this professional learning program is a systemic program and not an intervention designed for this small-scale doctoral research, its inclusion in the school's professional learning program was a direct result of the involvement of the MST and CC in the CPAR. As well, the content and delivery of the Cultural Awareness program was influenced by the participation of the ISSU staff in the larger project. Mobility was firmly on the agenda for ISSU staff and their work with MSTs and the community had, in many ways, shaped the content of the program as it was delivered in this region. The professional development event had, evidently, a significant impact on the outcomes of the research and represented a bridge between systemic mandates and the work of classroom teachers.

5.2.1.3 Privileging praxis: Reclaiming teacher agency as emancipatory action

Although the term 'praxis' carries different meanings in different cultural and intellectual traditions (Kemmis & Smith, 2008), I have chosen to adopt the definition provided by Kemmis and Smith (2008), in which *praxis* refers to "those forms of practice that are enacted by those that are conscious and self-aware that their actions are morally-committed, and oriented and informed by tradition" (p. 4). To imbue their teaching practices with a self-conscious moral agency, the teachers in this project reshaped their habitus in sometimes subtle and sometimes quite confronting ways. At times, they began to question assumptions that had underpinned strongly deficit views and discourses; they came to see the role of practice architectures as shapers of their

professional practice, and in doing so rediscovered their (potential) agency as educators. In constructing pedagogies that supported the literacy learning needs of mobile Indigenous students they moved their practice from the technical domain – that is, ensuring they were drawing on recognised theories (Habermas, 1972) – to the emancipatory domain. In this emancipatory domain they became theory builders (Wilkinson, 2005) and moved from being operatives of the system towards becoming (potential) agents of change.

This is not, however, to suggest that the participants commenced the project as robotic operatives, following rules outlined by the system, and that they were ‘born again’ as change agents through their involvement in this process. The teachers in this project became involved, and remained involved, because of their commitment to ongoing professional development. They held strong views about the purpose of education and their roles as educators. However, through the CPAR process, they experienced ‘legitimation crises’ (Habermas, 1976) both small and large which prompted them to rethink taken-for-granted assumptions and, in doing so, reframe their practice to meet the literacy learning needs of mobile Indigenous students. However, while teachers were focussed on their own classroom practice, there were a range of “extra-individual practices” (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008, p. 37), that pre-figured and shaped the action possibilities for teachers in their work with this cohort of students.

5.3 Practice Architectures Framing Action Possibilities

An understanding of the extra-individual conditions – that is the discursive-cultural, material-economic and political-social resources – that framed the teachers’ work with mobile Indigenous students is essential in coming to understand the challenges and opportunities to innovating and enacting literacy teaching/learning

practices for mobile Indigenous students in this school. In this research project, the ways in which each of the Principals went about their work created a ‘dappling’ effect – producing different strengths of light on different aspects of teachers’ work – legitimating and valorising different possibilities and priorities. Understanding how the Principal’s priorities played out here adds to the body of literature concerning leadership in schools facing challenging circumstances. This is especially relevant given current moves to move away from centrally managed schools to vest considerable autonomy in school Principals.

5.3.1 Principals’ priorities as practice architectures

At the commencement of this CPAR, the practices of Principal 1 had privileged particular discursive constructions of teachers’ work at Riverside State School. In summary, she actively resisted notions that background was a determinant of school performance and promoted a ‘high expectations’, ‘no excuses’ philosophy for herself, and for all staff. As discussed in the literature review, this notion of equity has been prevalent in Queensland policy documents over the last two decades (Singh & Taylor, 2007) and is underpinned by a ‘market individual’ approach. This is particularly apparent in the document that guides literacy teaching/learning in Queensland, the *Literacy Framework* (Education Queensland, 2006), where ‘diversity’ stands in place of naming individual target groups. This approach to equity, evident in policy and taken up by Principal 1, served to ‘flatten’ notions of background and, in effect, reduced the visibility of Indigeneity as a consideration in teachers’ planning and classroom practice. Again, this is not to suggest that the Principal acted in a discriminatory way – only that her acceptance and promotion of the ‘no excuses’ rhetoric had unintentional, and possibly hidden (Apple, 2004), consequences for teachers’ work with Indigenous

students generally and mobile Indigenous students in particular.

As identified previously, although the school experienced stable leadership during Principal 1's five-year tenure, a period of significant 'turbulence' within the school's leadership team followed her transfer (see Table 4.3). In addition to changing Principals, personnel in other key roles also changed. For example, the MST – who had been in the role since its inception in March 2008 – commenced extended maternity leave at the end of 2009 and, in March 2010, the Curriculum Coordinator took a promotional transfer to become Head of Curriculum at Principal 1's new school.

Following the departure of Principal 1, a different person occupied the role of Principal almost every six months. This unpredictable change in leadership can undermine the sustainability of school improvements (Fink & Brayman, 2006). Each of these school leaders brought to the position a vision for their work within the school based upon their individual habitus, the systemic policies and agenda in place at the time and the circumstances of their employment. The Acting Principals, not unreasonably, appeared to see their role as maintaining the current direction of the school and ensuring that administrative tasks were completed in an appropriate and timely fashion.

Principal 2 had been Deputy Principal at Riverside State School for several years and had applied for a Principal's position at another local school. Her role as Acting Principal at Riverside State School was largely one of 'holding the fort' until the new administration team was formed in 2010. No substantive changes to the operation or the strategic direction of the school were made during this time. Principal 2 attended the 4th term 2009 action research meeting for the larger project and undertook responsibility for reporting to the funding agency. However, most of the responsibility

for matters linked to mobility was delegated to the MST, including finalising the report and ensuring it was passed to the funding agency.

Principal 3 (see Table 4.3), came to Riverside State School with experience as a leader in a low SES school in a different regional city. Her previous school was located in a community with a higher ICSEA value than Riverside State School (804 at Riverside and 877 for previous school). The previous school included 24% Indigenous students, whereas at Riverside State School, 43% of students identified as Indigenous. Using the NAPLAN continuing cohort data available on *MySchool* (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2011b) it is possible to suggest that student mobility was also an issue at the previous school – however, as no other comparative data is available this cannot be confirmed. Principal 3 came to Riverside State School with a strong personal agenda around attendance and community engagement. Her introduction to directly engaging with the issue of mobility came via her active involvement with the larger mobility project. While Principal 3 indicated her support for the work during a telephone conversation in which I outlined the CPAR project and provided an overview of progress to that time (i.e., February 2010), invitations to attend meetings received no response.

As identified above, Principal 3's vision for the school focussed on improving attendance through actively engaging with families and the community. This focus on attendance was in line with an extensive campaign by the Department of Education and Training called *Every Day Counts* (Department of Education Training and the Arts, 2008a). This campaign, supported by posters, brochures and other advertising began in 2009 and was still operational at the time of writing this thesis.

In support of this agenda, Principal 3 restructured the roles of several non-

teaching staff and established a *Participation and Engagement Team* comprising the (new) Curriculum Coordinator, the (new) MST, the Community Liaison Worker (CLO) and the Senior Support Teacher: Literacy and Numeracy (STLaN) – a position formerly known as the Learning Support Teacher. The main focus of this team was to develop and implement strategies to improve attendance, which the Principal believed would lead to improved educational outcomes. Her over-riding philosophy is exemplified by the following comment made at an action research meeting for the larger project:

It's about moving outside the gate. If we really want to make a difference then we need a bum on the seat. We're not 'big brother', it's about going into homes and seeing what's going on and how can we help. (Principal 3, 28/05/2010)

The arrival of Principal 3 brought a number of changes to the resources made available to classroom teachers in their work with mobile Indigenous students. Resources were directed away from direct support to classroom teachers towards attendance and community engagement. The MST role was reshaped to more sharply focus on home visits and monitoring attendance as well as enrolling new students and providing inductions for both students and their families. This necessarily meant there was less time for the MST to directly support classroom teachers, a shift noted by one CPAR participant in the following comment:

The MST job has changed a lot since [Principal 3] started, it's more about attendance and home visits than about the classroom. [MST] doesn't do the tests, they get done by [STLaN] and we don't get the same sort of info we did with [former MST] and it takes longer. It's good in some ways because absences get followed up and we see some kids more often but that early

info was really useful. (Laura, 29/03/10)

These actions suggested that Principal 3 conflated mobility and attendance, perceiving them to be similar issues, with a shared ‘solution’.

As discussed previously, teachers had placed great value in the actions of MST 1. Actions such as ensuring a summary of an incoming student’s academic and social information was made available prior to the child’s entry into the classroom and being available to release the classroom teacher to meet new students and their families, brought predictability and certainty to the transition of mobile Indigenous students. It also located ‘responsibility’ for the student with the classroom teacher, with the MST facilitating the student’s transition. This shift in the focus of the MST, from mobility and supporting classroom teachers to attendance and community engagement, created some tensions between teachers and the new administration team.

Under Principal 3, the work of the Indigenous Education Workers was also substantially refocussed to the attendance agenda. While the improvements to communications between the school and Indigenous families, and attendance at school by Indigenous students were welcomed by the classroom teachers involved in the study, it was also noted that this meant these valued support staff were drawn away from other areas of support – including working in classrooms – to become more involved with home visits and monitoring attendance. However, teachers recognised the connections between mobility and attendance. They noted that highly mobile students sometimes experienced high levels of unexplained absences. As can be seen in the comment that follows, they also suggested that the strategies needed to engage, or re-engage, Indigenous students who were absent for extended periods of time were not dissimilar to those needed for mobile Indigenous students:

They're away for three weeks, it's like an internal mobility. They come back in not knowing the routines, where you're up to. It's pretty much like a day one every three weeks, a lot of content gets covered in three weeks and they've usually missed out on the lot. (Kali, 29/03/10)

The research literature notes that low attendance rates of Indigenous students is a significant issue (Bourke, Rigby, & Burden, 2000) and that attendance and achievement are linked (Simons, Bampton, Findlay, & Dempster, 2007), but the absence of research that explores the nexus between attendance and mobility, highlights the low visibility of this issue in Australian schools. What is clear from my research is that the shift in focus by the Principal brought about a shift in what was made visible, as the following comment from Laura, when asked if attendance was as significant as mobility, suggests:

I think it is now, until we had the [mobility] program I think mobility was probably on equal par but that seems to have kept kids here, now the attendance is really obvious. (17/11/09)

Clearly, these changes to the responses to mobility and Indigeneity at the school level positioned teachers differently over time and made visible different (yet potentially linked) contextual issues.

Although research has shown that positive cultural identity as well as positive student identity of Indigenous students is an important factor in academic achievement and attendance (Purdie, Tripcony, Boulton-Lewis, Gunstone, & Fanshawe, 2000), the 'backgrounding' of Indigenous identity is not uncommon in Australian schools. It has been suggested that: "Indigenous students are in one way or another expected to leave their culture at the school gate, only to be revisited either when they are learning 'about'

themselves, or when school communities are trying to deal with problems” (Yunkaporta & Kirby, 2011, p. 204). While it could be argued that Principal 1 worked to build a school culture that supported a positive student identity, this, on its own, is insufficient to address the needs of Indigenous students and may have inadvertently provided discursive space for repressive practices or indeed racism.

The reorientation by Principal 3 of human resources towards community engagement appears to have provided some small gains in attendance with a 2% increase in attendance from 2009 to 2010 as recorded on *MySchool* (Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority, 2011b) and shown in the Riverside State School’s Annual Report (Department of Education and Training, 2011). As well, this shift appears to have increased engagement between the school and parents/carers of Indigenous students. In an interview, Sandi (the CLO) described her efforts and the efforts of MST 2 (under Principal 3) in the following way:

I really get in there and explain to the parents why the kids need to be at school and try my best to make them understand what the kids will benefit from the school, why it’s important for kids to go to school, what will the parents get out of it. . . . [MST 2], he does a lot of one on one with the parents and goes out of his way to go to their place before and after school so I’ve seen a change there. (Sandi, 19/09/2010)

In essence, the priorities of the Principals characterised the changing milieu of the school during the CPAR project. As the teachers were participating in the interventions and negotiating discourses that challenged the status quo and brought into question taken-for-granted assumptions about equity and diversity, the practice architectures that had previously bound their practice were changing. This change

shifted both the ‘problem’ and the ‘solutions’. The priorities of the Principals established the basis for a range of flow-on effects that impacted the aspects of student identity made visible and the action possibilities for teachers to work positively with mobile Indigenous students. In particular, this impacted the message systems of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment (Bernstein, 1975) as well as the provision of resources.

5.3.2 Curriculum decisions: Balancing tensions, maximising opportunities

Comber et al. (2001) identify the curriculum, particularly the quality, scope and depth of what is made available, as one of six factors that make a difference to students’ literacy learning. Additionally, a Eurocentric perspective to education is noted as a significant impediment to the educational success of Indigenous students (Anderson, 2011). As previously discussed, in this school, there are a range of contextual factors that need to be considered when constructing a curriculum that responds to the needs of the student cohort and (potentially) makes a difference. At Riverside State School, 96% of students experience socio-economic disadvantage, over 40% of the students identify as either Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, and less than 50% of the Year 3 cohort are likely to still be present in the school in Year 5 (Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority, 2011b). Providing a culturally responsive, comprehensive curriculum that complies with the intentions of Departmental policy and serves the best interests of students is a complex undertaking in any school setting, to do so in this setting requires ‘informed professionalism’ (Schleicher, 2008) and a deep knowledge of the learner.

5.3.2.1 *The curriculum: what counts as ‘knowledge’ in this school*

As noted in Section 5.3, it was the priorities of Principal 1 that dominated the

beginning stages of the CPAR and, in many respects, this dominance continued through the tenure of the various Principals, as their short lengths of stay did not provide space for significant changes to the status quo. The Curriculum Plan was one area that remained relatively unchanged throughout the CPAR. In accordance with the policy directions of the Department (Department of Education and Training, 2008b), the school adopted a whole school approach to curriculum planning. Year level teams worked with the Curriculum Coordinator to collaboratively develop integrated unit plans for each term with each year level following a set curriculum plan based on a 2-year rotation. Each integrated unit was intended to be enacted over a term, supported by stand alone units for elements of the curriculum that fell outside the frame of the integrated unit. For example, all Year 3s in Term 1 of 2009 completed the Unit entitled *Pirates and Peacebuilders*, in Term 2 they worked through *Earth, Sky and Living Things*, Term 3 saw Year 3s working on *Schoolyard Safari* and in Term 4 it was *Multicultural Australia*. The Curriculum Coordinator noted that: “The idea was to have consistency so that we could really map out the Essential Learnings across the junctures” (Email, 05/10/11). However, she conceded that, for a highly mobile school population, there are tensions in ensuring the curriculum meets the needs of all students. This is demonstrated in the following comment made in an interview:

When we're looking at curriculum, we're always aware that, you know, from one year to a next there will be a significant cohort that might not have done their schooling at our school in terms of science strands and things across the juncture years with the ELs [Essential Learnings]. . . . Because we just have such a range of learners and we know mobility is high, the teachers don't start with an expectation that the kids in [Riverside] did this in Year 3, therefore they should be ready to move on. . . . Our danger is

more that we double up on the work, for the fact that we know that the clientele has changed so much, rather than that we expect them to have a knowledge but they don't, or an experience but they don't. (Nadya, 04/08/09)

These prescribed units, while ensuring that all students within a year level were engaging with the required (and same) Essential Learnings that built across terms and across year levels, also meant that teachers were not able to construct units of work that engaged with the interests and strengths of their particular class group at the time. It also limited opportunities to draw students' lived experiences into the classroom. Kali, in particular, found this very frustrating. She commented:

Here we do 'Water' or 'Pirates' or what the [school's] curriculum says to do because the children need to come to these outcomes, whereas I could do so many things that they were really interested in at the moment and build on that. You know, like we'll go to a collaborative planning and say this is the theme we'll be doing and I think I'd like to go, they're more interested in Roald Dahl books at the moment and I'd love to jump into that. Some of the kids, they are really loving like skateboarding and things like that and we could really go into debating, talk about skateboarding in the local area, parks, skate parks and council parks. You can go into so much stuff that's real life and relevant to your community and everything. (Kali, 27/07/09)

The decision to prescribe units meant that particular discursive-cultural, social-political and economic-material resources were made available to students through the delivery of curriculum. In this school, as in many others, units of work were carefully developed to accommodate the syllabus requirements and to ensure consistency in what

is taught across the cohort, and indeed across the school. Yet, this form of curriculum organisation serves to shape what counts as ‘knowledge’ and what counts as ‘literacy’ (Bernstein, 1975; Comber & Cormack, 1997) and sends a message to students about student identity and whose cultural capital is valued.

In 2004, the Department of Education and Training launched the *Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives in Schools (EATSIPS)* policy initiative. In 2008-2009, project officers were employed to assist schools in the *EATSIPS* implementation (Department of Education and Training, 2011c). Yet, in 2009, in this school – in which over 40% of the students identify as Indigenous – *EATSIPS* had yet to be included in the curriculum. The low priority given to *EATSIPS* was borne out in the schedule of meetings and professional development conducted within the school. In 2008 and 2009, one 30-minute session was allocated to discuss *EATSIPS*. The Curriculum Coordinator was not unaware that that the school had been slow to engage with this aspect of policy and she indicted this in the following comment:

[We have a] long way to go on that particular topic which is a bit bad considering our percentage of Indigenous kids. (Nadya, 04/08/09).

As the interview progressed she also suggested that one of the reasons why this may have been the case, was that teachers were ‘nervous’ about engaging with the *EATSIPS* agenda. This ‘nervousness’ was indicated when she commented:

We have a tendency for people to avoid actually indulging or engaging in the Indigenous perspectives for fear of the complexity of it, I think, and possible ramifications if they bring up things that are controversial or that. But, like NAIDOC Week celebrations are considered, you know, that’s something important. (Nadya, 04/08/09)

This reluctance to engage out of fear that it was ‘too difficult’ was a view shared by each of the research participants, and one that I suggest was framed by the teachers’ distance from the lived experiences of local Indigenous people, coupled with prevailing public discourses about state school teachers failing Indigenous students (Hughes & Hughes, 2010; Pearson, 2009; Sarra, 2010) This view is not uncommon and has been reported elsewhere (Yunkaporta, 2010); however a reluctance to engage with the lived experience of 40% of the student population could, arguably, be construed as racism by default. Sanctioned at the school level through the curriculum plan and unconsciously enacted in the classroom through what is seen to be valued, this represents a significant practice architecture – identifying what is ‘authentic’ capital and helping to reproduce the inequities faced by Indigenous students generally.

5.3.3 Navigating cycles of teaching and testing

Another enduring legacy of Principal 1 stemmed from her determined efforts to build a “culture of data-informed decision making” (Principal’s application for promotion) in order to inform curriculum design, classroom and whole school intervention. Again, this was in accordance with Departmental policy (Department of Education and Training, 2008b). To this end, in Term 2 (2009 and 2010) all teachers were required to administer a range of both standardised and school devised literacy and numeracy tests to inform their planning for Term 3, and in Term 4, these same tests were administered to support class placements for the following school year and to provide the following teacher with information that would assist with initial planning. The data was collated into electronic spreadsheets for analysis. This data, as well as the major assessment tasks undertaken by students in Terms 2 and 4, formed the basis for teacher judgments for twice yearly A-E reporting as required by the Department of

Education and Training (Department of Education and Training, 2008). The teachers in the study referred to the school year as divided into ‘testing terms’ (Terms 2 and 4) and ‘teaching terms’ (Terms 1 and 3). However, by Term 2 in 2010, it became clear that Term 1 had evolved as a de facto testing term as practice for NAPLAN and data collection for a range of National Partnerships projects exerted a strong presence. This placed considerable pressures upon the teaching and learning program (Lingard, 2010; Smyth, 2010), with teachers acknowledging the challenges for mobile students through comments such as the following:

Advance warning is crucial in the testing terms [2 and 4] so I can rearrange my program so we’re not testing when they come in the door and they have an opportunity to settle. (Laura, 26/10/09)

[There’s] no time for teaching or addressing weakness in any sort of focused way as the testing schedule is full on [in the second half of terms 2 and 4]. (Kali, 29/10/09)

In this school, the drive to ensure curriculum programs were informed by data, and that reporting was based upon reliable evidence, had served to construct and constrict the temporal space for teaching and learning, thereby creating a practice architecture – or condition that frames subsequent action possibilities. Although similar challenges around data collection were faced by the Year 1 teacher, it was the Year 3 teachers who found that this structuring created significant challenges to their capacity to settle a new student and meant that practices they believed to be effective in supporting the transition of the new student were not always implemented. It also meant that there were significant pressures to ensure that all students had the ‘right’ data beside their names on the spreadsheet.

This pressure to collect ‘data’ was evident during my observations in the Year 3 classrooms in the fourth week of Term 4. At that time, I noted several instances where the teachers were juggling the required testing with their classroom programs. For example, in one morning session, Kali had one student working on the school-based Maths test (a 20 page booklet) and another completing the Waddington’s Reading Test while the rest of the class completed a set of spelling activities.

In 2009, Year 3 attendance was 86% (School Annual Report, 2010), so it is possible and likely that up to 14% of students might be absent each day. In the period of my observations, there was not one school day in which all students were marked ‘present’ on the roll at the start of the school day. This meant that absent (and newly enrolled) students needed to sit the test(s) whenever the opportunity presented itself. For a recently enrolled student or one who is chronically absent, school days focussed on testing could seem irrelevant. In the case of making judgements about the performance of mobile Indigenous students, Kali remarked:

Often mobile kids lack confidence and need extra support to show what they can do. They need to feel really comfortable before they can do stuff on the spot. (Kali, 16/10/09)

This focus on testing, and the effects this can have on Indigenous students, is noted by Dodson (2010) when he writes:

Quite simply, the experience of school for many Indigenous children in Australia is negative. It remains a place for the formal assessment of how far you fall short. The measurable gap in educational outcomes is preceded and produced by subtle, subjective factors – attitudes and beliefs and expectations feeding off and reinforcing low levels of self-esteem. (p.31)

During the final CPAR meeting, Anne, Laura and Kali noted that the focus on supplying data was a constant constraint and had an effect on their capacity to work with both mobile and non-mobile students. Their frustration was evident in comments that included:

We're constantly having to assess children, were always assessing but never teaching and it's not conducive to children's learning improving and getting better. (Laura, 29/03/2010)

And confirming Dodson's (2010) assessment of the impacts of testing, Kali and Anne commented:

We're just assessing how bad they are. When we put this data up and they [administration team] say, 'What are you going to do about it?' and I say, 'Not a lot, because I'm still collecting all the frigging data'. (Kali, 29/03/2010)

It really affects how you teach and your relationship with the kids. Before we had to collect this data we had time to work with kids, to deal with them as human beings, not bits of paper to be shuffled. Not only did you diagnose what the problems were, you had time to rectify them. (Anne, 29/03/2010)

And when asked what happens with the data, the teachers responded with significant scepticism, making comments such as: "We don't even know what they're using it for anyway" (Laura, 29/03/2010), and, "It looks pretty somewhere" (Kali, 29/03/2010).

And, serving as an example of the unreliability of the data, Laura recounted her experiences at the commencement of the 2010 school year:

The running record the teacher did last year was logged into the little format.

So, at the beginning of the year, when I got my new class, I got that sheet of paper out and it said this child was reading at a level four so, I thought righto, and then I got informed they had support after that so now are reading at a level eight. But no way is that child at level eight. (Laura, 29/03/2010)

Similarly, Kali added her own story of misleading data:

I found that data more than painful. I had one child that the data sheet said was reading at level twelve, so I started her off at level twelve. Well, three days later after 30,000 running records we're down to level three. So that sheet really threw me out. We put all this effort into this dodgy system and it's a big waste of time. My time, the aide time to type it all up. We could have been doing more in the classroom instead of this. (Kali, 29/03/2010)

While the use of data to inform programs could be considered 'good' policy, it is the ways in which this is enacted that has significant effects on how teachers are able to work with students. Because they cannot see a meaningful use for the data, because not all teachers are competent in interpreting or implementing the tests, this group of teachers found the focus on data collection to be an imposition and a reflection of the perceived decreasing respect in which their professionalism is held. Importantly, it set up barriers to their capacity to engage with students, to focus on teaching and learning, and to work intensively with students who needed assistance. In the case of mobile Indigenous students, there were concerns about the number of times the students took these tests as well as the possibility that the tests could be culturally inappropriate. On the whole, this reliance on a suite of tests to form judgements had significant implications for teachers' capacity to transition incoming students into the classroom

program and to promptly develop personalised learning programs. It also sent a powerful message to students about ‘doing’ school in this location.

5.3.4 Resourcing: Directing the ‘big funnel’

Another of the factors that make a difference to children’s literacy learning, as noted by Comber et al. (2002), is the resources factor – or the extent to which schools have the material and human resources they need. In this school, from 2008-2010, teachers had the services of a Mobility Support Teacher. As discussed in Chapter 4, the provision of an MST had fundamentally changed the ways teachers were enabled to manage the arrival and induction of students into their classrooms. However, as the role of the MST evolved with the priorities of new Principals, different action possibilities were made available while others were closed off. But, regardless of the actual tasks performed by the MST, the fact that a senior staff member was responsible for the orderly entry and exit of students and the case management of their transition to the school meant that the capacity of teachers to promptly integrate incoming students, both academically and socially, into the classroom, was much enhanced.

In addition to the human resources made available, the provision of material resources also served to prefigure teachers’ practices. Principal 1 had firm ideas about the distribution of material resources within the school. In an interview she outlined her philosophy with regard to managing budgets as follows:

My philosophy was very much that if they [resources] are used as a compartmentalised bucket of resourcing . . . then it really loses its potential impact. So I have the option of a big funnel and all of that comes into the funnel and as the manager of the school I decide how best to use that funding to make sure that it’s focused on the needs of the kids. (Principal 1,

05/03/10)

This policy allowed greater flexibility in overall resourcing, permitting the Principal to fund school programs on a needs basis.

When Principal 1 commenced her role as Principal at Riverside State School, she found that there had been no policy for the storage and cataloguing of classroom resources. Resources were not stored centrally, nor were they recorded in any searchable catalogue or database. She instigated a school-wide audit of resources and developed a resource management and allocation policy that was intended to align resources with curriculum and students' learning needs. In an interview, Principal 1 described her stance in the following way:

Well, again it was a very deliberate strategy. I believe that the person with the best expertise should decide on resourcing the curriculum. We didn't have a Head of Curriculum as such, but I created a role for a Curriculum Co-ordinator with a very able person managing that. So all requests for resourcing and all the decisions about how best to resource the school programmes went to her. In collaboration with the Support Teacher: Learning Difficulties and Librarian she managed her budget and she managed the requests and they used evidence about what we had in the school, about what we needed, about where the gaps were. (Principal 1, 05/03/10)

While this policy represented a significant step forward in the management of classroom resources, when enacted in a discursive environment that 'backgrounds' background and where the Curriculum Coordinator acknowledged a lack of momentum around Indigenous education, the material resources made available to classrooms

necessarily reflected this situation. While the school held a range of texts that were considered ‘Indigenous’, my observations showed that many of these were information texts about ‘traditional’ Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander lifestyles or stories drawn from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander myths and legends. This lack of textual resources – and indeed those reflective of contemporary Indigenous perspectives – may have contributed to a pedagogy that defaulted to ‘traditional’ representations of Indigenous Australians. As noted by Harrison (2010):

Most teachers know little or nothing about Indigenous people and so they present a pedagogy that fantasises about the lives of Indigenous people before the British invasion rather than confronting the historical and political controversies of the present. Non-Indigenous children learn to think about Indigenous people in the past tense, while many teachers overlook the myriad resources available to narrate and explicate the contemporary lives of Indigenous people for children. (p. 99)

An examination of the texts used for levelled guided reading, for example, showed very few texts included any contemporary representations of Indigenous children or families and their lifestyles. That this had apparently not troubled teachers before may be due to the taken-for-granted assumptions that accompany cultural subjectivities about literacy and what counts as educative texts (Shore, 2003). Prior to the increased visibility of mobile Indigenous students, the teachers in this study appeared comfortable with the resources available and untroubled by the lack of representation of contemporary Indigenous Australians in classroom texts. Compounding the issue of the availability of texts was the fact that at least one of the participants seemed largely unaware of what was available, as indicated by the

following exchange:

Anne: I need more readily available resources with Indigenous perspectives that I can use for literacy – like books, picture books – getting [Teacher-Librarian] to buy more books.

Laura: There's a lot over there when you get in and have a look.

Anne: Not so much at our level [Year 1] like picture books

Laura: There's a lot, but they're hidden. They're not actually out on the shelf for kids to borrow or in teacher resources.

Anne: OK, so they're not in the shelves, 'cos I was just going through the shelves.

L: No, ask [library teacher aide]. (Laura and Anne, 29/03/10)

From the above exchange it can be seen that, although Anne had developed a willingness to use picture books that included representations of Indigenous Australians, she had not sought the assistance of the library staff and simply assumed that there were none available.

In summary, it can be seen that there were a range of practice architectures within the school that served to shape the ways in which teachers worked with mobile Indigenous students. The priorities of the Principal appeared to establish a discursive space that had both intended and unintended consequences. In the specific areas of interest to this research, as the influence of Principal 3 began to replace the influence of Principal 1, the focus moved from building teacher capacity to respond to mobile Indigenous students within the classroom to engaging very directly with the community

(and mobile Indigenous families) on issues of attendance. This is not to suggest that Principal 1 did not work to improve attendance and Principal 3 ignored the role of classroom teachers – only that the spotlight was focussed on different priorities during their tenures.

The invisibility of Indigeneity as a student characteristic had significant ‘knock on’ effects for professional learning, curriculum and resourcing. So, too, it can be seen to have provided a space for ‘ignorance’ among the staff about contemporary Indigenous people and about culturally responsive pedagogies. The absence of a positive, informed understanding gave rise to negative stereotyping and ‘unreasonable’ anxieties about engaging with Indigenous issues, knowledges and perspectives. Clearly, the priorities of school leaders have significant impact for what is perceived as possible, or necessary, in school settings.

5.4 Seeing Possibilities

As noted in Section 5.2, the CPAR process was a complex and unfolding ‘story’ of the participants’ evolving practice in a setting characterised by poverty, Indigeneity and mobility. The ‘intervention’ activities were constructed with the aim of problematising practice, and through individual and collective reflection, generating knowledge and understanding about what it is that teachers and schools can do to progress the literacy learning of mobile Indigenous students. In this section I will discuss the ways in which teachers engaged (or did not engage) with the intervention activities and examine their responses in terms of curriculum, pedagogy, resources and coming to know the learner.

As seen in Section 5.3, teachers were positioned in particular ways by the existing cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political conditions within

the school. The priorities of Principal 1 had an enduring effect in many ways, largely because no other Principal had remained in the role long enough for his/her priorities to result in sedimented or institutionalised conditions with the potential to shape teachers' dispositions. The interventions, too, intentionally positioned teachers. Each activity provided a set of resources that potentially competed with, complemented or confirmed the discourses that underpinned their literacy teaching practices with mobile Indigenous students. And, as discussed in reference to the methodology and in Section 5.2.1.2, although the participants came to the research project with intentions to develop their practice, it was not until we began to co-construct a list of practices, perceived by the group to 'make a difference' for mobile Indigenous students, that they began to relate the resources provided within the activities to their own classroom practices.

It appeared that the presence of a concrete artefact provided a structure and language for individual and collective reflection and action. The co-construction of the 'list' (see Appendix 4) generated substantive conversations and also served as a 'self-audit' tool that revealed to teachers what they were and were not attending to. It was following a self-audit based on this document that teachers developed their own very small-scale practitioner research projects.

While it is difficult to isolate the interconnected sayings, doings and relating that form the domains of teachers' practice, for the purposes of this analysis I have again drawn upon Bernstein's (1975) messaging systems of curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation or assessment. In particular, I note that in conceptualising these messaging systems he highlights their 'symbiotic' relationship, whereby changes to one aspect of teachers' core business – curriculum, pedagogy and assessment – can often have effects upon the others.

5.4.1 Curriculum

As identified previously, the Year 3 curriculum (and curriculum as a whole) at Riverside State School was organised into ‘integrated’ units, intended to be completed over the course of one term. In the ‘testing’ terms (2 and 4), units of study were designed to be completed in six weeks, with the remaining weeks of the term given to ensuring all assessment (both of the learning in the unit and that required for year level and whole school planning) could be logged and reports to parents generated, checked and distributed. The Year 3 units were more product oriented (that is, producing textual representations of the ‘knowledge’ acquired) than the work undertaken in Year 1, which Anne described as “less about content and more about the concepts of literacy and numeracy” (Anne, 23/10/09).. She perceived that this focus on developing literacy and numeracy, rather than ‘learning’ discipline specific content made it “easier to bring a student into the program” (Anne, 23/10/09).

At the final CPAR meeting, Laura and Kali outlined the adaptations they had successfully negotiated to the 2010 units for Year 3. These modifications included restructuring the organisation of term length units into smaller ‘mini-units’ and timing ‘lessons’ to ensure they were completed each day. The changes were motivated by the conversations around the list of practices, which included the following statement:

Curriculum planning is responsive to a mobile context. e.g.:

- Shorter units
- Strategies to meet the dual tensions of providing an engaging sequenced curriculum and ensuring new students have the prior

knowledge needed to successfully progress their academic understandings (List of practices, see Appendix 4).

Kali and Laura indicated that they had encouraged this change at the planning sessions to ensure that incoming students, in particular mobile Indigenous students, were able to complete activities and gain a sense of ‘success’, as well as to reduce the time spent in ‘catching up’ every student before the class could move onto a new learning activity. Laura described the changes as follows:

When we do something in the classroom we don’t extend it over a two week period so you don’t get here, miss, here, miss. We shorten it so that they’re either here so it gets done, or if they are away and they come back we can continue on to something else and not have to catch up. The way we’ve done our unit this year, it’s more like a series of mini-units really. . . . Each day most of the lessons do not need them to have been there the day before, so they don’t need this to be able to do that. (Laura, 29/03/10)

These changes, while instigated to assist students for whom mobility is often connected to cultural and family obligations, also address some of the issues in managing the learning of students experiencing high levels of absenteeism.

Additionally, the Year 3 teachers had reorientated the written assessment tasks to focus more on developing concepts of literacy and literacy learning, rather than as a means for students to communicate their understanding of the ‘content’. For example, in the 2008 version of the unit, *Around the World*, students were required to create a folktale from a country they had studied during the course of the unit. The folktale needed to demonstrate that students understood the genre of folktale and could locate a folktale within the culture of one of the countries they had studied. This required

students to have participated in all learning activities about that country, as well as to have engaged with the folktale genre. The written assessment task for the 2010 version of the unit, however, was to create a narrative using a picture as stimulus. Laura suggested that the rationale behind this decision was to allow students to draw on their “general knowledge of narratives” (Laura, 14/03/10) rather than to ‘learn’ the ‘new’ genre variation of folktale.

Laura perceived that this new approach had been much more successful, especially for those mobile Indigenous students who entered the class during the term and for students who experienced extended periods of absence. In her reflections on the effectiveness of this change, Laura wrote:

As there is less pressure on the children to become familiar with folktales from other countries, they are more comfortable with the process and don’t feel as pressured. They are able to focus more on the required format and their own ideas and less about the countries studied. Their sentence structure and cohesion have progressed from their first attempt in week 2.
(Laura, 14/03/10)

Laura also identified that she had “upped the ante” with regard to her expectations of students to produce written texts that demonstrate “good writing” as a first priority, rather than as a means of communicating an understanding of the content that the student may or may not have been present in the classroom to receive. This served to focus students’ learning as ‘code breakers’ and ‘text users’ (Luke & Freebody, 1997), with the intention of developing transportable literacy learning skills that can be drawn upon in a new classroom setting. This focus reflects the comments of a teacher as drawn from the larger project, who said:

I think the focus is on teaching [mobile] children how to be good writers, how to be good readers, not specifically how to write a narrative. So if you look at the Functional Model of Language where you have your assessment piece already there, your success criteria, your exemplar and then you sort of backward map from that. What do we need to be successful for those particular assessments? Whether you're assessing their spelling or their punctuation or their paragraphing or whatever you're assessing. (Teacher, 20/08/09)

This sense that instruction in writing should enable transportable literate practices, was also present in the Year 3, 2010, Guided Reading program. In 2010, greater attention had been paid to aligning the Guided Reading to the genre for production and/or content of the unit, rather than as a 'stand alone' reading program, as was previously the case. This is not only attributable to the CPAR, but rather to the coming together of the school's professional learning program in the teaching of reading and the participating teachers' coming to see more clearly the needs of mobile Indigenous students. At the final CPAR meeting, all three teachers indicated that their focus on the needs of mobile Indigenous students (through the CPAR) had brought to the foreground the decision making processes involved in planning and resourcing curriculum units. To maximise the opportunities for students to build field knowledge (Halliday, 1985), the teachers worked to align their reading and writing programs.

While changes to the organisation of units and the focus on teaching and learning within the unit had altered to some degree for Year 3, no change was discernable in the school's mandate that prescribed units form the basis of the school's curriculum plan. Again, it was Kali in particular who found this to be frustrating and

perceived that this represented a lost opportunity to draw on the literate practices and interests that students bring to the classroom. However, in light of the Department of Education and Training's directive that schools not achieving a grade of 'outstanding' on their 'teaching and learning audit' (a policy response to the *Masters Review*) must utilise centrally developed units for Maths, Science and English, it is unlikely that Kali's sense of frustration will be eased in the immediate future. However, while this policy will ensure that students moving from school to school will, in fact, experience the same or similar curriculum in each location – if the schools they attend are not 'outstanding' – it is yet another reflection of the diminishing recognition of teachers as informed professionals (Schleicher, 2008) and the move towards tight and narrow frames of curriculum (Lingard, 2010).

Another important aspect of the curriculum that, through the CPAR, came to the attention of the research participants was the *EATSIPS* agenda. While the inclusion of *EATSIPS* in the curriculum did not substantially change during the course of the CPAR, the research participants' understanding of *EATSIPS* was progressed. At the commencement of the project, it is reasonable to suggest that, both conceptually and practically, *EATSIPS* was poorly understood by the participants. Through the implementation, in 2009, of science units from *Primary Connections* (Australian Academy of Science, 2005), Kali and Laura had developed some idea of what a curriculum that engaged with Indigenous perspectives might look like. However, through my engagement with the unit outlines and observation of classes in 2009, it could be seen that this preliminary understanding had not extended beyond the units provided by *Primary Connections* (for example *Schoolyard Safari*) and relied upon generalised notions of Indigenous knowledges and worldview.

The lack of engagement with Indigenous perspectives was identified previously (in Section 5.3.2) and linked to the ways in which Indigeneity was ‘backgrounded’ in the school culture. This was particularly evident in the Year 3 unit, *Multicultural Australia*, which although one might presume from the title explored Australia’s multicultural community, in fact was students’ first curriculum unit ‘about’ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and history. This unit of work, as is typical of many reported in the literature (Harrison, 2010), focussed on traditional notions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, with few references to the lived experience of contemporary Indigenous Australians, and no engagement with contentious historical events. And, although the unit outline included activities intended to present a view of the lived experience of modern Indigenous people, my observations showed that this was quickly skimmed over by the teachers, in favour of focussing on traditional lifestyles. Again, this reluctance to engage with contemporary Indigenous experiences demonstrated the teachers’ ‘nervousness’ in directly engaging with the lived experiences of contemporary Indigenous Australians and their apparent defaulting to stereotypical binaries that act to separate Western and Indigenous cultures without recognition of the shared human experiences.

When discussing the implementation of this unit, Laura expressed her concerns about teaching Indigenous history and culture to Indigenous children. She made a number of comments that indicated she may have engaged with stereotypes that subscribe to the notion that Indigenous people living in urban settings are somehow ‘less’ Indigenous and have ‘lost’ their culture, without any acknowledgement or understanding of the role history has played in dislocating Indigenous people and disrupting their cultural connections. For example, she stated:

[It's a] shame that Indigenous kids don't know any of this stuff. Look at R – his [relative] works at the ISSU and is very active, but he doesn't even know any of this. (Laura, 26/10/09)

Half of the kids don't know they are Aboriginals [sic] and they don't know the colours of their own flag. We're trying to value their cultural background at school but really is this being enhanced in the home life? I don't think it is. (Laura, 26/10/09)

Here, Laura demonstrates her acceptance of cultural binaries such as 'urban' and 'traditional', suggesting that Indigenous Australians residing in urban locations are somehow 'less' Indigenous than their remote counterparts. She appears to be 'accusing' the students and their families of not being 'Indigenous' enough. Nakata's theory of the cultural interface (2001) suggests that, in order to work effectively with Indigenous students, such binaries need to be dispensed with – replaced by an understanding of what it is that we share as well as what it is that differentiates people.

However, in the final meeting of CPAR, Laura's discourse around Indigeneity had altered and she was quite vocal about the need to incorporate Indigenous perspectives across the curriculum. In particular she sought to explain to Anne what incorporating Indigenous perspectives could include:

It's about incorporating Indigenous knowledge, like how Aboriginal people used plants for food and medicine, how they saw the stars, about recognising different forms of families like [ISSU presenter] talked about family structures and that. (Laura, 29/03/10)

Anne appeared to continue to struggle with the principles of *EATSIPS*. While

she had yet to come to terms with the ways in which Indigenous perspectives could be incorporated into the curriculum, she had moved to actively sourcing more classroom resources that included representations of Indigenous Australian life, both traditional and contemporary. I suggest that, these small changes had the potential to send a powerful positive message to all students in her classroom about the place of Indigenous students in the school. Actions such as these, indicated Anne's growing recognition that such changes to her program would assist mobile Indigenous students to experience a sense of belonging in her classroom. This is demonstrated in Anne's written notes at the final CPAR meeting:

New Ideas: More indigenous picture books used in English unit creating awareness of being Indigenous – Amazing me. (Anne, 29/03/10)

Kali, identified her improved understanding of 'place' as a key factor in her developing capacity to engage with Indigenous perspectives. In her final reflections Kali wrote that she now felt more confident in her capacity to:

Invite guest speakers (with the support of the ISSU); Engage [more positively] with parents/carers; Include Indigenous perspectives (by going out and learning about local stories); Understand why families are mobile (eg roles in cultural events, funerals). (Kali, 29/03/10)

5.4.2 Pedagogy

While the fundamental paradigms that underpinned the teachers' approach to literacy teaching and assessment remained unchanged through the CPAR, there were some noticeable changes in their practices. While the teachers appeared to draw upon a range of theoretical approaches, my observations, interviews and the shared meetings

with the teachers, revealed that, for the most part, a critical-cultural approach (Lo Bianco and Freebody, 2001 as discussed in Section 2.3.2) with a strong emphasis on explicitly teaching the genres valued by schools formed the basis of their classroom programs. This was particularly evident in the Year 3 classrooms where, prior to the commencement of the CPAR, the production of texts in particular genres formed the basis for assessment of students' knowledge and understanding of the 'content' as well as of the generic features of the text (either spoken or oral).

The approach adopted by the teachers in many ways closely resembled the approach (currently) advocated by the Department of Education and Training through the 5-day professional development in literacy teaching provided to all (State employed) teachers. The acceptance of this approach is not surprising given the strongly supportive statements made by the teachers following their engagement with this professional development (PD) (see Section 4.6.1) and the congruence of this approach with the school's literacy policy (see Section 4.6.1).

Throughout the CPAR, I observed teachers engaging in explicit teaching, with a particular focus on developing metalanguage and metacognitive strategies. For example, in the Guided Reading program, Reciprocal Teaching (Palincsar & Brown, 1984) was used to build metacognitive strategies for comprehension. In addition, the teacher aides and the teachers promoted a view of readers as 'problem solvers'.

The school had invested considerable resources into their Guided Reading program to upskill teacher aides and teachers. This PD featured prominently on the school's schedule of meetings and in-service learning. Yet, as mentioned previously, at the commencement of the CPAR, the Guided Reading program ran as a separate program – removed from the work of the theme or unit. It was not until it became

apparent that closer links between these elements of the curriculum would provide greater opportunities for mobile students to engage with the genres or ‘content’ of the unit that some alignment began to occur. This served to add more depth to students’ semantic knowledge. However, the possibilities for this alignment were constrained by the availability of appropriate texts – which as noted previously was problematic.

In the lead up to the NAPLAN tests, the Guided Reading program was not impervious to NAPLAN effects. In their NAPLAN preparation for both 2009 and 2010, both Kali and Laura used NAPLAN ‘magazines’ as texts in the Guided Reading program so that students would be familiar with them at the time of the test. They focussed on ‘basic skills’ – as Laura noted:

In that last week [immediately prior to the NAPLAN test] we didn’t even look at comprehension, we just focussed on word attack skills. (Laura, 29/03/10)

At the beginning of the CPAR (30/04/09) and towards the end of Term 1 in 2010, both Laura and Kali asked me to delay my observations of their classrooms until after NAPLAN due to their concerns that their work at this time did not represent their ‘real’ teaching. Laura described her pedagogy in this pre-NAPLAN period as “not how I usually teach, we’ll be doing a bit of teaching to the test”. NAPLAN exerted a strong presence over both what was planned for the Year 3s and the ways in which it was taught. Kali and Laura, in later conversations, revealed that their planned work had been either suspended or co-opted as NAPLAN preparation commenced (Cobbold, 2011).

Kali described how preparation for NAPLAN was included across the curriculum:

We are using multiple choice questions in our SoSE [Studies of Society and Environment] and our spelling matches NAPLAN. (Kali, 29/03/09)

The ways in which spelling was taught was changed to ‘match’ the ways that the spelling component of the NAPLAN was presented. Therefore, the spelling program during NAPLAN preparation necessarily focussed on learning words to the detriment of developing strategic spelling skills (Willett & Gardiner, 2009). Practices such as these, I suggest, do not provide the teaching and learning experiences that mobile Indigenous students need if they are to build literacy learning strategies. The high stakes nature of NAPLAN pushes teachers to forego their own beliefs and professional understandings about what constitutes ‘good’ pedagogy for the students in their classes, particularly those experiencing difficulties. It highlights the reductive pedagogy that Lingard (2010) identifies as damaging to students in low socio-economic circumstances.

Central to each teacher’s approach to literacy teaching was the primacy of the development of oral language as a basis for literacy development for all students, but particularly for mobile Indigenous students. This central tenet of their approach to literacy teaching appeared to become more deeply established as the CPAR progressed. At the final meeting for the CPAR, the participants identified the elements of their practice that they perceived to have remain unchanged. Here, Anne stated emphatically, “You need to make oral language the initial basis for literacy teaching” (Anne, 29/03/10), to which both Laura and Kali nodded in agreement. While the notion that oral language is central to the development of literacy remained firmly entrenched, as the CPAR process progressed each of the teachers appeared to develop a greater awareness of their propensity to make assumptions about students’ home language and how that might differ from Standard Australian English (SAE).

During the CPAR discussions, teachers often conflated poverty and Indigeneity in terms of language. Laura demonstrated this conflation in saying:

It's not just Indigenous kids who don't have standard English, it's our other kids too. (Laura, 27/07/09)

The teachers expressed the perception that students from low socioeconomic environments came to school with a non-standard English characterised by 'bad' grammar, 'sloppy' pronunciation and a restricted vocabulary. And while they recognised some Indigenous students as acquiring English as an additional language, there appeared to be a vague understanding of the grammatical differences that underpinned the linguistic diversity of students whose language could appear to be SAE. Such is indicated in the following comments from Laura about previous professional learning:

We've done some basic stuff about the language . . . like looking at how they don't use pronouns and Creole and that sort of stuff. (Laura, 27/07/09)

Coming to grips with the language needs of incoming Indigenous students was considered by all teachers to be fundamental to ensuring the learning needs of Indigenous students were assessed and planned for. Yet, while this was agreed upon by all participants, there were few systematic ways of creating an accurate assessment of students' home language and identifying the differences between home language and SAE. As was discussed in Section 4.4.5, at the commencement of the CPAR, Sarah (MST 1) administered a range of tests and, when possible, collected and collated data from previous schools. Sarah focussed her 'information sheet' to teachers on the results of standardised testing, behavioural information, information about learning or behaviour programs the student was previously involved in, and the reasons for

mobility.

In this setting, with the practice architectures that marginalised background as a student characteristic, she gave priority to issues other than linguistic background. At a meeting focussed on on-arrival testing attended by all MSTs from the Rangeview cluster, it was noted that Sarah took a highly medicalised approach to oral language, focussing on disabilities such as conductive hearing loss rather than on language or dialect differences. It is important to note also that Sarah did not possess any formal qualifications or experience in Education for Special Needs nor had she experienced any specific training in Indigenous Bandscales².

While standardised diagnostic testing provides teachers with information about potential areas of need in literacy teaching, it does not reveal the student as a requiring ESL teaching/learning strategies. Additionally, the enrolment process does not specifically support the accurate identification of students who have a home language other than SAE. McTaggart and Curró (2009) note that many Indigenous families whose home language is a community language or a dialect of English, identify as speakers of English, not perceiving that their home language differs from SAE. This has the effect of distracting teachers from potential language differences.

Another aspect of the teachers' pedagogy that remained unchanged throughout

² The Bandscales for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Learners, commonly referred to as the Indigenous Bandscales, "were developed by the department in the mid to late 1990s, based on the National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia (NLLIA) rating scales (Bandscales) for English as a Second Language (ESL) students that are used throughout Australia. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Bandscales are used to assess students' SAE language development and monitor students' progress. They are currently being used to raise awareness with teachers in regard to language perspectives for Indigenous students" (Department of Education and Training, 2010, para. 1).

was the constant discursive shaping of a particular student identity. In each classroom, at assemblies, and in the playground, the teachers continuously sought to reinforce a particular version of student identity. This was closely linked to the PeaceBuilder program and the *Peaceful Proud and Learning for Living* motto developed by Principal 1 (as described in Section 4.3). This ‘ideal’ student was: resilient, independent, regularly attended school, a ‘worker’, on task, a ‘Peace builder’ and a problem solver (both academically and socially). This discursive shaping was ongoing and appeared unaffected by the CPAR.

Related to this shaping of student identity was the building of ‘classroom capital’ for all students, and in particular for mobile Indigenous students. Since the commencement of the larger mobility project (in 2006), teachers had developed a range of classroom organisational practices in a deliberate effort to provide cues to newly enrolled students about how to ‘do’ school at Riverside State School. Each of the classroom teachers had taken steps to ensure that students entering their classrooms had multiple and clear indicators of how school is ‘done’ in that particular classroom. These actions included: prominently displaying classroom routines, such as a daily and weekly schedule, visible organisation of learning groups and clearly labelled activity stations to provide students with cues about everyday classroom procedures.

In recognition of the range of literate practices students (in particular mobile Indigenous students) brought to the classroom, these visual cues were displayed as combinations of words and images to ensure meaning was conveyed. This also served to promote independence and reduced the disruption to teaching from students asking procedural questions. The actions of the teachers enabled new students to focus on learning rather than how to ‘do’ school. Laura noted that displaying routines was an

important element of assisting new students to settle, and commented:

I always make sure I leave the timetable up every day so the kids know what they're doing . . . and they like having it there, they like to know what their routine is and I find it settles a new child – they know what to expect just having those same little things. (Laura, 27/07/09)

The teachers had developed a range of strategies to ensure students were emotionally supported and 'ready to learn'. This included 'training' students as 'buddies' so that current students were well prepared to assist new students and, that they saw assisting a new student as a valuable contribution to the school community. During my observations, a number of students received "Peacebuilder Awards" in recognition of their 'buddy' activities. 'Buddies' were carefully selected by the teacher following the receipt of information from the MST and CLO to ensure that the students were compatible. In the case of new Indigenous students this meant being aware of complex kinship arrangements that may preclude some children from such close contact. The buddy ensured that a new student had a partner for any in-class activities and helped the student with the ways of the school – such as where to 'line up' after lunch breaks, where designated play areas were located and the many details that can cause stress for new students.

This discursive construction of the 'ideal' student by teachers in disadvantaged schools, however, as noted by Comber (2004), left little room for difference. This was made particularly evident in Anne's classroom during a Maths lesson when G, an Aboriginal student who is frequently absent or late, was handed his set of *Unifix cubes* (connecting coloured plastic cubes often used to demonstrate mathematical concepts). G immediately arranged his cubes into one stack of black, yellow and red and a second

stack with the other colours. He used only the second stack for the maths activities. Later, as the teacher and I were discussing the ways in which she discursively shaped learner behaviours of Year 1 students, and I described the actions of G, she remarked:

I didn't see that, but you know, Year 1 is less about Indigenous identity and more about learner identity. (Anne, 23/10/09)

It appears that Anne's discursive construction of the 'ideal' student leaves little space for Indigenous students to develop a sense of Indigenous identity, possibly contributing to what Sarra (2011b) describes "as one of the binaries created for us . . . usually within the context of scarcity around resourcing . . . but also scarcity around professional capacity and knowledge (para. 73) – to be strong culturally or to be smart academically.

5.4.3 Assessment

The third of Bernstein's message systems, evaluation or assessment, defines what counts as a valid realisation of knowledge by the student (Bernstein, 1975). In this section I also consider assessment in terms of the ways that assessment informs teaching and learning and the ways in which this is reported to parents. While some researchers have chosen to add 'testing' as a fourth message system (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010), for the purposes of this analysis I consider it a subset of the broader evaluation message system.

Assessment at Riverside State School, as in most schools, occurred in a range of ways for a range of purposes. These included high stakes national benchmark testing (NAPLAN) that informed national, state, regional and school priorities; a set of standardised and school based tests from which whole school and year level planning

was leveraged; testing associated with the various National Partnership projects the school was engaged in and ongoing formative and summative assessment associated with curriculum programs.

As identified previously, the effects of NAPLAN testing had a reductive effect on both the curriculum and the pedagogy employed by teachers (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). In some ways, so too did the collection of data for the purposes of whole school and year level planning. The most obvious impact was the time that was consumed in preparing for and administering the tests. With as many as four students absent each day, some for extended periods, ensuring that all students had a result from these required tests took up a great deal of teaching time. As identified previously, the teachers were also cynical about the usefulness of collecting large amounts of data that, in their experience, was often inaccurate. They were also aware that by the time the data was acted upon, many of the students may not even be enrolled at Riverside State School to experience the program developed based on their data.

In the case of testing that accompanied National Partnerships projects, the Year 3 teachers held concerns about their observation that each project was accompanied by a different measurement mechanism (see Section 4.5.1) and that these were undermining their capacity to attend to their core business of teaching and learning. The teachers perceived that these required tests served purposes away from the business of the classroom and instead of contributing to learning, demonstrated to students what they cannot do. Kali gave the example of a recently enrolled Indigenous student, T, who in Year 3 had yet to demonstrate a sound grasp of letter sound relationships and was required to undertake the full battery of tests. She remarked:

I am so unhappy that T has to do this test because he will not be able to be

successful and this will just reinforce his lack of success overall. How does that help him or me? (Kali, 3/11/09)

The teachers' impressions of the value of on-arrival testing conducted by MST 1 and later by the STLaN were at times contradictory. In our discussions they suggested that having academic data was crucial to their efforts to ensure incoming students experienced success and were immediately engaged in positive learning experiences that accommodated their strengths and needs. Yet, they also expressed the preference to undertake their own on-arrival testing that was much less formal and provided them with data they valued highly. They perceived that they deployed a range of informal assessment strategies in order to exercise their judgement about the literacy learning strengths and needs that mobile Indigenous students brought to the classroom. They also expressed concern that newly enrolled students were often anxious and their performance on formal tests could be compromised by this anxiety, offering this as a further justification for informal assessment strategies.

In accordance with Principal 1's focus on teachers taking 'ownership' of new students, MST 1 offered teachers the opportunity to be released to work with incoming students, providing 'one-on-one' time for informal assessments. Kali, Anne and Laura identified choosing and reading a book as one such informal assessment opportunity. This activity provided information on students' reading strategies, interests, confidence and fluency. For Indigenous students in particular, informal activities served a range of functions, such as assessments of oral language, identifying past learning experiences, determining interests, allocating a suitable buddy and, very importantly for the teachers, establishing the foundations of a positive teacher-student relationship. So, even though teachers were often presented with standardised test results as starting information, they

greatly valued drawing on their own judgement. They saw this as not only an opportunity to assess students' learning needs but to also begin to build a relationship with students.

This preference for exercising their own judgements in one-on-one 'conversation' or informal activities is exemplified in the following interview extracts:

it [assessment] needs to be not sit down and do pen and paper – it needs to be done through observation and it needs to be done in a calm relaxed manner. When I first listen to a child read I don't do a formal record – it's, 'Grab me a book. Come on, let's sit down here and read with me'. (Laura, 27/07/09)

A lot of it you can tell by their body language, um, you can just look at a child and look at the way they are approaching work and you think [pause] something will tell me you are going to be pretty good at this. Just read their body language, I suppose that comes after 30 years of teaching. (Laura, 27/07/09)

The accurate assessment of oral language was a challenge for Kali in particular. She had received no in-service education on assessing the oral language of Indigenous students, and could not recall this being included in her teacher-education program. Laura and Anne had attended a range of in-service PD sessions over their many years in the school; however, the most recent that they could recall had occurred in the late 1990s. This disparity in teachers' capacity to diagnose students' language needs has implications for the mobile Indigenous students entering these classrooms.

However, the shared conversations of the CPAR went some way towards

enhancing Kali's capacity to make judgements about the needs of mobile Indigenous students. In particular, she found that through conversations that drew out Laura's and Anne's knowledge and experience, and through her engagement with the systemic PD, she had begun to understand much more about the connections between oral language and writing and how to make some assessment of student need. As a result, she had modified her practice with newly-arriving Indigenous students. Now, when she has doubts or concerns about a student's grasp of SAE, she uses her smartphone to record students' classroom talk so that she can, "pay attention to the grammar, away from the pressure of the classroom" (Kali, 24/10/09). This pressure was clearly evident during my observations and our conversations in the 'testing terms', during which the teachers were working very hard to ensure all assessments were completed and logged in line with the school's schedule, while trying to diagnose the needs of new students and develop personalised plans.

Formal summative assessment tasks were a feature of each unit in the Year 3 curriculum. Both Kali and Laura indicated that, in Terms 1 and 3 – the 'teaching' terms – it was much 'easier' to vary these assessments to accommodate the learning experiences of newly enrolled students. This is because the teachers perceived some degree of flexibility available to them in this term given that reporting was based largely on the assessment items for Terms 2 and 4. Laura gave the example of how she usually went about varying assessment:

I have a talk [with the student] to determine their familiarity with the genre, then restructure the assessment [task] to accommodate their experience with the genre. If none, then the task becomes a narrative with similar elements so I can look for the continua items [key indicators listed in the

Developmental Continua for Reading, Writing and Numbers]. If it's Term 2 or Term 4 and after week 4 then I need to think if there is sufficient data to report on progress, otherwise only written comments from me. (Laura, 28/10/09)

A focus on structured summative assessment tasks was much less the case in Anne's Year 1 classroom, where assessment was ongoing and based upon collecting evidence against both the Key Indicators on the Developmental Continua for Reading, Writing and Numbers (Queensland Studies Authority, 2007) and (under trial in 2009) the Year 1 Literacy Indicators (Queensland Studies Authority, 2009). Again, Anne indicated that this focus on teaching and learning of concepts was an advantage in integrating a new student into the classroom.

As noted by Laura's previous comments, reporting on the learning of students who arrive late in the reporting cycle, that is towards the end of Terms 2 and 4 was a vexed issue. It is Department policy that, twice yearly, students are issued with written reports. The format of these reports is mandated by the Department and teachers must provide an A to E grade for each Key Learning Area. Teachers in this study would not commit to providing anything more than a 'written statement of progress' for recently arrived students. Laura exemplified this reluctance when she said: "In this day and age I am not going to commit myself to a judgement without the evidence" (Laura, 3/11/09). It appeared that, for mobile students arriving in the latter part of Terms 2 and 4, very little information about their academic progress could/would be provided to parents/carers.

Oral reporting of assessment (or parent-teacher interview) also occurs twice yearly, usually towards the end of Terms 1 and 3. At the commencement of the CPAR,

the teachers indicated that they rarely saw the parents/carers of mobile Indigenous students at these reporting days. They (mis)took this reluctance to attend as another indicator of parent/carer's lack of 'value' for education. As part of the CPAR, the teachers made deliberate efforts to engage with this group of parents/carers (see Section 5.4.4), which resulted in a significant increase in the number of parents making appointments for interviews. I suggest that, while teachers perceived that they extended a welcoming invitation to parents/carers to attend parent-teacher interviews, the teachers had not considered that such an interview might be an intimidating experience for the parents/carers of mobile Indigenous children. That they came to realise that they needed to find innovative and non-threatening ways to reach out to families was an important shift in their ways of relating – as is exemplified by this comment by Kali:

I used to think parents didn't care but you don't realise how confronting it must be to come and talk to a teacher. You think, I'm welcoming why don't you come in? (Kali, 29/03/10)

The ways in which the teachers engaged deliberate strategies to reach out to the parents/carers of mobile Indigenous students is further discussed in the following section.

5.4.4 Working beyond the classroom

An important aspect of teachers' work is the ways they are able (or enabled) to work with support staff and with parents/carers. This section focuses on the impacts the CPAR had on this aspect of teachers' work. In particular, the ways the teachers worked with the parents/carers of mobile Indigenous students and with the Community Liaison Officer and with other Indigenous Education Workers at the school, is addressed here.

When we began this journey, the teachers expressed mixed views about working with parents/carers generally, and perceived that the parents/carers of mobile Indigenous children usually had no inclination to be involved in their children's education. At a CPAR meeting Kali commented:

You don't get the support in the classroom. The parents [of mobile Indigenous students] don't come up to help with reading, they don't come to parent-teacher, you just don't see them. (Kali, 12/08/09)

(The underpinning discourses evident in Kali's comment, and in the comments of the other teachers will be discussed in detail in Section 5.4.4.)

Each of the teachers had an individual position on the value of encouraging the involvement of families in classroom and school activities. While all three recognised that it was beneficial to both the students and the teacher to have parent/carer involvement at home – through attention to homework, requests for support (for example, providing materials for classroom activities and returning permission slips) and ensuring attendance – not all of the teachers saw that they had a role to play in facilitating this, and, as previously noted, each of them identified the families of mobile Indigenous students as the least likely to involved.

The least inclusive view was demonstrated by Laura. She perceived that it was “not her job” (Laura, 26/10/09) to facilitate parent involvement – rather, it was their job to come to her. Kali, on the other hand, made deliberate and sustained attempts to encourage family involvement both at home and in the classroom. Anne fell somewhere in between. She encouraged at home support but was somewhat reluctant to encourage all parents/carers into the classroom. Yet, in discussing the list of practices (see Appendix 4), all participants agreed on the fundamental importance of creating positive

school-home partnerships with mobile Indigenous families.

Following the 'self-audit', Laura chose to make communications with mobile Indigenous parents/carers the focus of one of her action research projects. In the CPAR, each of the teachers shared their strategies for engaging with families. In Term 4 of 2009 and Term 1 of 2010, Laura drew upon these shared discussions to implement a range of communication strategies to connect with both mobile and non-mobile families. In the case of children who joined the class after the first week, she made a point of telephoning parents within two weeks of the student's entry to the classroom to share some positive news of the student's progress and to seek feedback on the parent/carer's impressions of the transition. Each week she compiled a class newsletter that included a welcome to new students and their families, learning activities for parents and children (for example, using money when shopping, reading catalogues) and praise for students who had achieved in any domain or contributed to the classroom during the previous week (e.g., having read a number of books, shared an interesting story, exemplified Peacebuilder behaviours). In her written reflections about the effects of her changed practices Laura noted:

Parents of 2 new students have already come in to talk about items mentioned in the newsletter. Several parents have come to talk about their child and to find out how they are progressing. We have also had telephone contact with several parents about potential issues. Some parents have sent items in for our display about the theme we are doing, after they had read the newsletter. (Laura, 14/03/10)

Change was also evident in the ways Anne communicated with families:

I still use the message books but now I write more about kids' achievements

and work on the warm and fuzzies. (Anne, 29/03/10)

All three of the teachers identified a sharp increase in the take-up of appointments for their parent-teacher interviews. While this cannot be directly related to the changed practices or the CPAR, especially given the school's focus on community engagement, the increased numbers of appointments from Indigenous families (some of whom were new to the school) has given the teachers renewed purpose in their attempts to find innovative and multiple opportunities to connect with families that they previously perceived as too hard to reach.

While any improvement to the parent-teacher relationship is to be encouraged, the list of practices showed the many ways in which teachers were, in effect, seeking to shape parents into their preferred version of the 'ideal' parent. Current policies require teachers and schools to develop partnerships with Indigenous families, but teachers are seemingly working to (re)shape parents to match their own (unproblematized) middle class identities (Gewirtz, 2001). I contend that this further distances teachers from working at the cultural interface, and represents a dismissal of the values and lived realities of mobile Indigenous families in favour of 'mainstream' ways of being.

Indigenous Education Workers were held in high esteem by the teachers involved in this project. Initially, however, the relationship appeared to be hierarchical, with the teachers drawing upon the services of Sandi and her colleague to 'follow up' on children and families. This follow up included matters such as the returning of permission slips, collecting money for excursions/camps, following up on absences and on playground incidents. The work of IEWs was valued in the classroom, but more so for the IEW's capacity to 'control' Indigenous students than for their contribution to the teaching and learning program. As there were only two IEWs in the school, this placed

a heavy burden upon them as the 'Fixit' people for any situation that involved Indigenous students or families.

As the teachers came to view mobile Indigenous families differently, so too, they came to see the work of the IEWs differently, which threw light on new ways of working collegially with IEWs. In particular, they identified that they were now "building partnerships" (Anne, 29/03/10) with the IEWs. This contrasted with my observations early in the CPAR where it appeared that the teachers were 'outsourcing' a range of actions associated with mobile Indigenous students to either the MST or the ILO. In discussing the ways their involvement in the CPAR had impacted the ways they worked with others in the school, the teachers all indicated that they now saw the IEWs as being able to contribute to their professional capacity to meet the needs of mobile Indigenous students. This is demonstrated by the following comment from Anne: "Working with Sandi has really helped me in communicating with families" (Anne, 29/03/09).

5.4.5 Seeing the learner

The teachers in this study were accustomed to working in a school that served many families facing challenging circumstances. Laura and Anne had been members of staff at Riverside State School for many years and Kali, although new to the school and to teaching, had a serious commitment to equity and to ensuring all students received a 'quality' education. In outlining her personal vision for literacy teaching, for example, Kali wrote:

I aim for students to become competent, reflective, adaptable and critical users of language. I will provide the necessary skills to students for the pursuit of knowledge and achievement of their potential. (Kali, 22/02/10)

It was clear at the initial CPAR meeting that the participants in this project worked to the best of their capacity to support the literacy learning of all students. Their teaching discourse was replete with ‘positive’ terms such as ‘high expectations’, ‘individualised approach’ and ‘explicit teaching’. However, these positive words and their attendant pedagogic intentions masked the acceptance of stereotypes and taken-for granted assumption.

Throughout the CPAR process, these taken-for-granted assumptions were evident in a deficit discourse that deepened as poverty, Indigeneity and mobility intersected. This discourse conflated poverty with Indigeneity. It represented the perception that there exists a convergence between a ‘culture of poverty’ (Payne, 2003) and (an imagined) Indigenous culture that does not ‘value’ education – with mobility being one symptom of this convergence. The participants largely attributed this perceived lack of ‘value’ as an indication of the cultural mismatch between ‘mainstream’ Australia and Indigenous families.

The CPAR provided discursive resources that challenged this deficit discourse and unsettled teachers’ habitus which, in turn, led to a legitimation crisis (Habermas, 1972) that encouraged teachers to (re)consider their practice in the light of this new knowledge. Changes to the perceptions of teachers did not occur from the reading of one article or engaging in one conversation; rather, changes appeared to slowly develop as new understandings began to coalesce.

Through the CPAR process, knowledge about Indigenous mobility in general was introduced in the earliest activities, and this knowledge made visible an alternative understanding of Indigenous mobility and began unsettling the taken-for-granted notions that mobility was unpredictable and reactive rather than planned or reasoned. In

the cultural awareness sessions provided by the ISSU, the participants were presented with stories of the lived experiences of families in the immediate community for whom mobility was specifically motivated by cultural roles and obligations, as well as stories of families who experienced mobility as a result of the complex inter-relationships of socio-cultural and structural factors (Prout, 2008; Prout & Yap, 2010). The capacity to provide local examples of the motivations for mobility was fundamental to the participants' replacing previously held unsubstantiated beliefs with understandings that reflected a far more nuanced sense of the motivations for mobility.

Coming to understand Indigenous mobility also served to move teachers' sayings, doings and relatings towards the cultural interface. From this CPAR project, it became apparent that two main discourses – 'fairness as sameness' and Indigenous people as 'unknowable' others – demonstrated distance from the cultural interface.

Firstly, in step with prevailing policy discourses, is the 'belief' that all students are individuals and are, therefore, all different and require an individualised program. This belief was evident in comments from the teachers, including:

While they're still so young I tend to see one child is not much different to another (Anne, 29/07/09), and

So we don't need to separate them we just need to look at (pause) they're children and what are their needs? (Laura, 29/07/09)

This stance appeared to lead to a homogenising of background, that, in effect, reflected the background of the teacher – in this case a white, middle class woman. This 'backgrounding' of background was identified as a practice architecture stemming from the practices of the leadership at the time the project commenced.

However, this stance was not limited to the teachers at Riverside State School. During a conversation with the ISSU Manager, he observed that in the district generally, teachers “have an ‘I teach all children the same’ approach which they regard as a very positive quality”, but he also noted that, if teachers don’t see children as Indigenous, “they don’t see the whole person, they don’t see who they truly are” (ISSU Manager, 25/05/09).

Secondly, an almost contradictory discourse that constructed Indigenous People as ‘unknowable’ others also indicated distance from the cultural interface. Teachers’ discourse contained a range of binaries that distanced them from Indigenous families and portrayed engaging with Indigeneity as ‘dangerous’ ground. This was seen in notions of ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘mainstream’ and ‘non-mainstream’. These binaries not only separated Indigenous people from non-Indigenous people but also separated Indigenous people from each other through constructions such as ‘urban’ and ‘traditional’, somehow conferring degrees of Indigeneity.

Some Indigenous families were perceived as ‘mainstream’ and, therefore, somehow ‘less’ Indigenous or less in touch with ‘real’ Indigenous culture. This is exemplified in the comment of one participant, who, when discussing students’ Indigenous identities, remarked:

When we have NAIDOC Week and they realise they are a part of this culture. It depends how close to mainstream the family is. I’ve had a lot of families who have come through who probably really don’t talk a great deal openly about their identity. They want to fit in and they want their kids to fit in and in doing that they just want them to be a part of what is happening rather than from an Indigenous ... [sentence left unfinished by Anne].

(Anne, 29/07/09)

Returning to the notion of ‘dangerous ground’, the teachers indicated a strong concern that to engage with Indigenous knowledges and perspectives in the classroom could do harm. Laura remarked:

You don’t want to be politically incorrect, you don’t want to do it wrong and you don’t want to insult anyone. (Laura, 12/08/09)

This anxiety is consistent with the research findings of Yunkaporta (2010) who identified fear of the unfamiliar, or of giving offense or violating Aboriginal protocols, as key sources of teachers’ anxieties around engagement with Indigenous knowledge and culture.

As Henderson (2002) notes with regard to mobility, deficit approaches often have a reductive influence on pedagogy with a focus on ‘fixing up’ the problem – be it with the child or the family. Her research has shown that “stereotypical views often went hand in hand with low expectations for mobile students” (p. 6). Although the school Principal(s) actively promoted a culture of ‘high expectations’ and there was evidence that this was applied to the majority of students, it appeared not to be extended to mobile Indigenous students. Low expectations were evident in the following comments from participants, as specifically related to mobile Indigenous students:

Generally speaking most of the highly mobile kids have gaps in their learning because they move from one school to another. (Nadya, 04/08/09)

I usually find children that come in and out and in and out have a lot of problems - a lot of gaps . . . like they might have their initial sounds or most of them, but then they’ve missed the blends or something – nothing links.

(Kali, 12/08/09)

If the child is moving constantly you are going to have to make some sort of decision about what's going to be best for them to try to bridge the gaps.

(Laura, 12/08/09)

You actually have to modify your programme depending on how low these [mobile Indigenous students] are. My new ones, I've had to go back and do programming again for this child because they're just so different from the rest of the class because they're so low and I've actually had to go back and almost do an IEP (Individual Education Plan as used in Special Education).

(Kali, 12/08/09)

In the early stages of the project, during discussions focussed on identifying the opportunities and challenges in developing a literacy teaching program that supported the literacy learning of mobile Indigenous students, it became clear that while outwardly committed to this cohort of students, a strongly deficit discourse located the 'problem' with mobile Indigenous families who, it appeared to the teachers, did not value schooling or the school's hard work with students. This is demonstrated by comments that included:

A lot of my [mobile Indigenous] parents come into an interview and they just have no idea if their child can even read. (Kali, 12/08/09)

[Indigenous families'] values are on other things rather than education so literacy and numeracy is not seen as being high priority. (Anne, 12/08/09)

They [students] want to learn but it's out of their hands that they keep moving. (Kali, 12/08/09)

Homework is another big thing. They're [Indigenous parents/carers] not real big on getting that done. (Laura, 12/08/09)

The teachers in this study, and those interviewed in the larger project, indicated that prior to their involvement in these projects, they had, at times, had a dismissive attitude towards creating a classroom climate that deliberately acknowledged the high prevalence of mobility. As Anne noted:

Let's face it, a few years ago you would say that wouldn't you, you'd go oh well there's nothing I can do about that [teaching short stay mobile Indigenous students] but our thinking has changed . . . and it is our responsibility . . . and once they move on again maybe they're that bit further ahead . . . once upon a time we did say oh well they're only here for a week or so, I won't worry too much, they'll be back again. You can't pick and choose who you teach. (Anne, 29/03/10)

Through Riverside State School's involvement in the larger project, and through the involvement of this group of educators in this project, these attitudes shifted. The sense of 'helplessness' that existed prior to illuminating the action possibilities, has become (the beginnings of) a sense of confidence in their capacity to create a classroom and a pedagogy that takes into account the complexities of the mobility, poverty and Indigeneity without unsubstantiated connotations and misconceptions.

At the final meeting, the participants reflected on what had changed about their thinking throughout the CPAR. Their responses identified a localised and multilayered awareness of the motivations for Indigenous mobility as the most significant change they had experienced. Anne, who had consistently indicated that Indigenous identity was an irrelevant factor in understanding mobile Indigenous learners, said:

The stuff with [ISSU presenter] made me realise a lot. It's just your attitude that changes, that's what changes and your understanding of who they are and where they're coming from. It made a huge difference to me, I didn't think that it would, but it did. After that so many things made sense. (Anne, 29/03/10)

Laura, who had previously noted that she had 'done' Cultural Awareness training many times over the years, identified her key learning as follows:

The thing I learned . . . about families and how they are structured and why they are mobile and why they move . . . that gave me a better background then to understand my kids. (Laura, 29/03/10)

Kali, the least experienced teacher, who had previously expressed her concerns about how having undertaken teacher education in Western Australia left her feeling disadvantaged when it came to working with Indigenous students in this school, said:

It wasn't until I understood why they were mobile, and even the roles within the families. I have a little girl who doesn't come [to school] and now I realise her mother does all the funerals in her like clan or family so she's away a lot and moving around, and it's not until you understand that [pause] I used to just think they were lazy about coming to school. (Kali, 29/03/09)

I contend that the temporal and discursive space afforded by the CPAR (and Disciplined Dialogue) in combination with locally meaningful stories of history, dislocation and their impacts on education provided by the ISSU, made visible to the teachers the lived experience of mobile Indigenous students. In doing so, teachers were

able to develop an understanding of the importance of place and identity as elements of a culturally responsive pedagogy. The changed understanding coupled with a focus on explicit literacy teaching, underpinned the participants' capacity to develop more responsive literacy programs for this previously invisible group of students.

5.5 Maintaining Momentum

As identified previously, the CPAR provided the temporal and discursive space in which the participants engaged in Disciplined Dialogue in an effort to understand their practice and the situations in which they practice. At the time the project commenced, Principal 1 had made mobility a highly visible issue in the school, and the work of Sarah (MST 1) had focussed on supporting classroom teachers – thereby positioning teachers as required to respond to the needs of mobile students. However, Principal 1's approach to equity served to 'flatten' notions of background. So, while mobility was a highly visible characteristic of the school population, Indigeneity as a consideration in teachers' planning and classroom practice remained in the shadows. As new Principals came and went, their priorities served to shade or illuminate the primary considerations for teachers' work.

While the CPAR had brought the literacy learning needs of this particular and significant cohort of students to the foreground for this group of teachers, it was a challenge for teachers to maintain this focus in light of the competing demands of what was, and remains, a highly complex workplace. Principal 1 had offered highly visible support for the project, attending the first meeting and promoting the involvement of the participants in the CPAR among staff at a staff meeting. Principal 2, while not directly involved, maintained a level of support by managing teachers' schedules to allow TRS. Principal 3 continued the support of the project by allowing teachers'

continued participation; however, she did not engage with the project beyond this. Invitations to attend the CPAR meetings (from both myself and the research participants) went unanswered. At the completion of the Project, Principal 4 had assumed the position. In July 2010, I convened a celebratory morning tea, during which the participants outlined to their colleagues the key outcomes of the CPAR as they saw them. Although invited and present in the school, Principal 4 did not attend the celebration event.

This diminishing sense of relevance to the administration of the project meant that the work teachers had undertaken remained within the group and was not actively promoted across the school. By the time the CPAR was completed, the priorities of the school had ‘moved on’. This meant that other priorities had begun to compete with the focus on mobile Indigenous students, making it difficult for the participants to maintain their momentum – regardless of the significance of the changes that had resulted from their participation. Where this work was once highly valued by the administration of the time, it was now pushed to the margins.

Further, the momentum of the CPAR was stalled, and even derailed at times, by the accountability regimes that exert a strong influence on teachers’ work with all students, and in particular with mobile Indigenous students. The need to ‘succeed’ in NAPLAN compromised teachers’ beliefs and values about providing ‘quality’ education and about building positive teacher-student relationships. The need to implement tests to provide ‘data’ overrode the need to accurately assess students’ learning needs and to act to deliver a program that addressed those learning needs.

Competing curriculum demands potentially overshadowed teachers’ capacity to ensure that mobile Indigenous students (for whom the language of the curriculum can

often be an additional language or dialect) are able to build discipline knowledge and knowledge about producing and comprehending texts of different modes within those disciplines. Through the CPAR, teachers had determined that there existed a need to provide mobile Indigenous students with transportable literacy learning strategies to ensure that students could build a repertoire of learning strategies that facilitated their capacity to engage with the curriculum however it might be provided at their next destination. The tension in providing a curriculum that builds discipline literacies *and* ensures that students are developing literate practices that can be universally applied is particularly relevant in Year 3 as students move towards a more discipline based curriculum in the following years. This is of particular concern in Queensland where there is a move away from integrated curriculum towards differentiated discipline areas (Department of Education and Training, 2011d).

The personal beliefs of each teacher exert a powerful influence over the messages she/he sends about student identity, what counts as literacy and what constitutes 'success' (Comber & Cormack, 1997). Teachers in this study had assembled a range of pedagogic strategies drawn from a range of sources over the course of their professional careers, as well as from their personal experiences as learners. The influence of current Department of Education and Training professional development was clearly reflected in teachers' classroom practices. Although this project had begun to interrupt/disrupt the habitus of the teachers involved, it had yet to penetrate the deeply held ideological positions of the participants. From what has come to pass, I imagine that to do so would require a sustained and deeply trusting relationship between the participants and a facilitator – much beyond the scope of this time-limited doctoral project.

This project was just one of several underway in this school at the time. The long term sustainability of the learnings from any short term project is fragile at the best of times. While I was present in the school, working to ensure a focus on mobile Indigenous students for this group of teachers, and providing release time in which to engage in substantive conversations and keep alive the public sphere we had developed, the needs of this cohort of students remained in the spotlight for these teachers. However, with the withdrawal of the temporal and discursive space, the public sphere was eroded.

Another factor relevant to the sustainability of this project is the withdrawal of a facilitator, in this case, myself. For me, the successful implementation of this action research project was the focus of my working life for many years and I spent considerable time and effort establishing relationships, identifying productive activities and analysing the data as it was generated and collected. The teachers, on the other hand, had a range of professional priorities competing for their time and attention. On top of their everyday classroom responsibilities, for example, Laura was working with other teachers to implement *Primary Connections* across the school, Kali was part of a school committee redesigning the school's spelling program and Anne was among a group of teachers trialling the QSA P-3 literacy and numeracy indicators. Anne was also learning Auslan, Kali and Laura had undertaken the *Language and Literacy* course offered by the school, and all teachers were involved in the school's triennial school review. All three teachers were working at reshaping their existing units to meet the demands of the Australian Curriculum. That they gave generously of their time and were willing to trial and report upon the success of changed practices for this cohort of students, spoke to their willingness to grow professionally as well as to their determination to ensure all students were positioned for success.

5.6 Reasons for Hope

While sustaining the project was indeed problematic, there were reasons for hope. The teachers involved in the project take their changed understandings forward into the many professional duties they performed within the school. As noted in the previous section, each of the participating teachers had an active role in whole school and year level curriculum committees. As discussed in 5.4.1, both Kali and Laura had already been proactive in making adjustments to curriculum and assessment that acknowledge the needs of mobile Indigenous students as derived from their involvement in this project. Anne had made a submission to the resource committee for texts that represent a range of Indigenous identities.

At the celebration morning tea, Kali, as she outlined her view of the project said:

It felt good to have the time to come together, to talk through stuff and reflect on what we do. ... I keep looking at that list and thinking am I doing this – really? (Kali, 23/11/10)

For Kali, Laura and Anne, the production of the list of practices had provided them with an ongoing tool – one of their ‘own’ creation and that recognised their professional contribution to this school and others.

The reflective tool continued to evolve beyond Riverside State School. In a later conversation (December 2010) with the MST from an adjoining school, I was informed that this document now formed the basis of their induction program for new teachers and was to be used as part of whole school literacy planning. In 2011, at a forum for the participants in the larger project, the MST from a metropolitan school discussed how

they had ‘customised’ the tool, made their own changes and additions and made it available to teachers through the school’s intranet.

Several months after the completion of the project, I met Kali and Laura at a professional development workshop. We reminisced about the CPAR project and discussed the arrival of yet another Principal at the school. While I didn’t write down the conversation verbatim, one comment from Kali still resonates with me today, she said: “I learned a lot from that project, a lot about teaching”. As Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) stated:

These people may not have changed the world, but they have changed their worlds. Is that not the same thing? They may not have changed everything everywhere, but they have improved things for particular people in particular places and in many other places where their stories have travelled.
(p. 600)

5.7 Summary

In this chapter I have presented the findings from the CPAR process organised around four major themes: action research as a meta-practice, the practice architectures that shaped teachers’ work with mobile Indigenous students, making practice visible, and maintaining the momentum. This research project made visible the highly complex situation in which these teachers, in this public school, practise.

Their work was enabled and constrained by a range of practice architectures within the school. These practice architectures were inextricably linked to the ways in which the Principal interpreted policy and acted upon his/her key priorities. In this school, a relatively stable period of leadership had served to entrench a view of equity

that positioned teachers to adopt a ‘sameness as fairness’ approach that, in effect, ‘backgrounded’ background and marginalised Indigeneity as a student (and school) characteristic. Pushing Indigeneity to the background served to distance teachers from working at the cultural interface. This impacted upon the ways teachers’ constructed their understanding of mobile Indigenous students and their literacy learning needs. Teachers appeared to conflate poverty and Indigeneity, perceiving a convergence between a ‘culture of poverty’ (Payne, 2003) and (an imagined) Indigenous culture that does not ‘value’ education – with mobility being one symptom of this convergence. The participants largely attributed this perceived lack of ‘value’ as an indication of the cultural mismatch between ‘mainstream’ Australia and Indigenous families.

Central to constructing a pedagogy that supports mobile Indigenous students was the rejection of deficit discourses based on the acceptance of these unsubstantiated stereotypes and binary notions of ‘culture’. In this research project, teachers were exposed to a range of discourses that unsettled these misconceptions, culminating in a localised rendition of our shared history that shed light on the effects of dislocation and the implications this has for schooling and for literacy teaching/learning more specifically.

These ‘new’ understandings focussed teachers’ attention on the particular, yet diverse, needs of this previously invisible cohort of students. With this new visibility came a sharper recognition of the home language of students and the need for an accurate assessment of each student’s literacy and language learning needs. The teachers in this study drew on a range of resources to inform their literacy program, but at the time of this research (2009-2010), the functional model of language underpinning current professional learning provided by Education Queensland was a dominating

resource.

CPAR, incorporating Disciplined Dialogue, provided teachers with both the resources and the temporal and discursive space to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions and, in doing so, begin to reshape their habitus. Experienced teachers, who had been involved in several Cultural Awareness professional learning events over the course of their careers, were able to problematise their practice and begin to actively move their practice to include recognition of the diverse lived experiences of mobile Indigenous students – to work at the cultural interface when previously they had accepted binary notions of ‘culture’.

Chapter 6, following, will draw together the main findings of this research project as well as suggest further research. In doing so, it will highlight the generative and professionalising nature of CPAR and Disciplined Dialogue as a platform for professional learning and relate this to the ways teachers can negotiate universalised policy demands and the demands of local contexts. Additionally, it will identify ways in which teachers can begin to move their practice to the cultural interface. Finally, future possibilities for research will be canvassed.

Chapter 6 Conclusions and Implications

As researchers, we are encouraged to make original contributions to knowledge; as *action researchers*, let us hope to do that but also to do something far more important. Let us hope to *make history* by living well, individually and collectively, and by living well *in and for* a world worth living in [original italics]. (Kemmis, 2010, p. 426)

The education revolution begins and ends with people: teaching them, giving them skills; and with those skills, the confidence and wherewithal to do their very best for them selves and their communities. We need more investment in teachers and in their professional development so that we can reasonably expect them to be good teachers . . . and more teachers will believe in the worth of their vocation and in the potential of every child they teach. (Dodson, 2010, p. 25-26).

6.1 Introduction

This thesis has addressed a range of important educational issues through an analysis of teachers' evolving practice and the situation in which they practise. The research presented in the preceding chapters has explored teachers' work with mobile Indigenous students – a cohort of students largely invisible in previous research into both policy and practice. The work generated by and through this doctoral thesis has created public spheres (Habermas, 1996) in which discussion and sharing of understandings about the ways in which teachers can be enabled and constrained in their work at the cultural interface (Nakata, 2007a, 2007b).

This chapter begins with a brief review of the research reported in this thesis. I then identify the understandings that this study offers about practices that support the literacy learning needs of mobile Indigenous students, framing the findings within an understanding that changing teachers' literacy teaching practice requires not only

changing the knowledge and action of individual practitioners but also changing the practice architectures that serve to prefigure and shape practices across the socio-political, cultural-discursive and material-economic domains (Kemmis, 2007). Finally, the chapter closes with a consideration of the research's limitations and a discussion of the potential research opportunities that build on the insights provided by this study.

It is to be noted that this research occurred within a particular policy moment in Australia. At the time of writing this thesis, Australia is four years into a so-called 'education revolution' following the re-election of a federal Labor government that offered the promise of a return to social justice principles (Comber & Nixon, 2009; Smyth, 2010). In effect, Australia has seen a 'reform' agenda that is a hybridisation of neoliberal managerial policies and social democratic principles (Lingard, 2011) where high stakes national testing has assumed primacy and a national curriculum is in the early stages of implementation. The result in Queensland, is a state schooling system in which "staff morale is low [and] teaching to the test has begun in earnest" (Luke, 2011, p. 373).

The national education policy agenda is driven by the Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) *Agenda for Productivity Reform*, which, in line with global policy trends (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Taylor, 2007), sees human capital theory as the dominant policy paradigm. The Indigenous reform agenda, known as *Closing the Gap*, lies within the COAG's *Agenda for Productivity Reform* and, for Indigenous education, the goals are identified and defined through the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan* at the Federal level and the *Closing the Gap Education Strategy* at the State level. These policies push responsibility for enacting policy to schools and teachers, with 'success' measured in multiple but narrow accountability measures

(Dodson, 2010; Doyle & Prout, 2011; Hill & Prout, 2011) such as averaged NAPLAN scores and attendance data. Within this globalised, human capital policy framework, the work of teachers has become both the problem and the solution (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010), thus, giving rise to an increasingly technicist model of teachers' work where literacy is seen as the resolution to structural inequalities (Luke, 2008). Rizvi and Lingard (2010) sum up the current situation in the following way:

Governments would prefer to see teachers and schools and their practices as being the sole solution to a whole range of social problems, including improving the quality of outcomes and the issue of the equality of educational opportunity. However, as Bernstein observed a long time ago, education cannot compensate for society. (p. 105)

6.2 Overview of the Research

This study utilised critical participatory action research (CPAR) as a framework to take this doctoral project beyond describing, analysing and theorising about literacy teaching practices, to working in partnership with practitioners (Somekh, 2006) in public spheres. It was my intention as a researcher, to establish a communicative space in which teachers' literacy teaching practices could be understood, reframed and transformed as positive social action. I have been guided throughout the process by my orientation to critical theory and emancipatory action and a deep respect for the work of state school teachers who do the 'heavy lifting' in an increasingly 'residualised' public education system that does not always recognise the need to resource state schools in ways that take account of the lived realities of the students attending those schools (Keating, 2009; Reid, 2009; Teese & Lamb, 2007).

With respect to the education of Indigenous students, Fordham and Schwab

(2007) identify a demographic shift currently occurring within Indigenous populations where the “continuing relocation of Indigenous young people to particular regional centres and to a limited number of low socioeconomic neighbourhoods in capital cities will create demographic ‘hot spots’, and place added demand on existing education and training provision” (p. 10). The school in which this research was conducted is one such regional centre where the proportion of Indigenous students has increased steadily in recent years (Principal 1, personal communication, 29/03/09).

This study was conducted at Riverside State School, a suburban state primary school in regional Queensland, Australia in which more than 40% of the students identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. The school is located in an area characterised by low socio-economic indicators and, in 2009, 96% of the student population were represented in the most disadvantaged quartile (Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority, 2010b) The level of student mobility in the school was extraordinary when benchmarked against international measures (Dobson, Henthorne & Lynas, 2000), with the mobility for the Indigenous cohort at 94.7 (in 2006), representing a previously undocumented level of student mobility. It was in this highly complex situation that the research participants practised.

The research was framed by the following research questions:

1. What knowledge about mobile Indigenous students assists teachers to engage positively?
2. How do teachers make decisions about the literacy teaching practices they employ for mobile Indigenous students?
3. Which literacy teaching practices support literacy learning for mobile

Indigenous students?

4. How do teachers meaningfully assess mobile Indigenous students' literacy practices on arrival?

Utilising an analytical and theoretical framework that drew upon emancipatory critical theories and through the legitimisation processes of CPAR, the many factors that served to shape the literacy teaching practices of this group of teachers in their work with mobile Indigenous students were made visible.

6.3 Transforming Practice with Mobile Indigenous Students Through Increased Visibility

This research contributes to a small but growing body of international research literature that highlights educational considerations for mobile populations. In particular, it focuses on teachers supporting the literacy learning of mobile Indigenous students in a regional Queensland state school – and as such, is among the first attempts to examine the ways in which teachers can focus their practice to support this diverse cohort of students. Additionally, this research draws attention to the ways in which the neoliberal state impacts teachers' capacity to meet the needs of this historically underserved cohort of students and shows the possibilities for transformed practice when the complexity of Indigenous mobility as a historically, culturally and structurally constructed phenomenon is made visible to teachers.

In Australia, neoliberalism is evident in the 'reform' agenda currently underway. Within this policy frame, National Partnerships arrangements are positioned as the vehicles of reform. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 4, The National Partnership agreements rely heavily on NAPLAN targets and other test scores as indicators for

success. Among some educational researchers (Fullan, 2011; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Smyth, 2010), there are serious concerns about the consequences for marginalised or disadvantaged students when systems adopt a ‘policy as numbers’ (Rose, 1999) approach. In Australia, as in many other Western countries, an increasing reliance on testing as accountability and as practice is impacting on teachers’ work in significant ways (see Doyle & Prout, 2011; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). This study illuminates the ways in which teachers navigate the competing and different logics of systemic policy and professional practice (Bourdieu, 1998) in the current policy moment.

In doing so, this research demonstrates that practice architectures, generated by the current Australian government’s hybridisation of the neoliberal state with social democratic aspiration (Lingard, 2010) and driven through National Partnership Agreements, can serve as both a barrier to teachers’ work with mobile Indigenous students as well as a source of funding flexibility to support mobile Indigenous students. As suggested by Bernstein (1975), the three message systems that form the core of teachers’ work and inform their logics of practice (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010) – pedagogy, curriculum and evaluation – sit in a symbiotic relationship, with changes in one message system effecting the others. The universalising demands of policy sit in juxtaposition to localised pedagogic practice and create tensions in teachers’ day-to-day activities. It is this juxtaposition and subsequent tensions that this research has made visible.

6.3.1 Practice architectures generated by policy

A focus on testing as accountability has seen the school year at Riverside State School become structured into ‘testing’ terms and ‘teaching’ terms, with the curriculum becoming increasingly driven by test preparation and test taking. For mobile Indigenous

students arriving during the testing terms, their transition into a new school can be characterised by assessment pressures with the potential to reinforce negative self-efficacy in relation to schooling (Dodson, 2010).

The accountability pressures pushed to classrooms by initiatives such as National Partnerships in addition to the need to have demonstrably data-driven school programs, as experienced by the teachers in this study, can contribute to teachers' growing sense of de-professionalisation. Concerns that summative assessments, such as those used as benchmarking instruments, are steering practice away from judicious assessment *for* learning in favour of data collected for purposes unrelated to student needs, prevail (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). These high stakes, summative assessments, although treated sceptically by the teachers in this study, create very real pressures to 'teach to the test' (Lingard, 2011), regardless of the strengths and needs of the student. For mobile Indigenous students, some of whom remain in locations for short periods of time, this focus can reduce teachers' capacity to progress students' learning during their enrolment. Additionally, in terms of teachers' work more generally, as noted by Fullan (2011), "the net result of excessive testing is that, instead of teachers being swept up to ride waves of successful reform, they will be crushed by a veritable tsunami of standards and assessments" (p. 9).

In addition, equity policies that ignore the complexities of disadvantage and locate both the problem and the solution in the 'quality' of teaching can create practice architectures that have unintended effects for mobile Indigenous students. In this school, where Principal 1 (the Principal at the commencement of the CPAR) adopted an approach to equity that 'backgrounded' background, Indigeneity was not 'seen' as an element of student identity. This 'no excuses' approach was an effort to avoid

stereotyping and enact high expectations of all students. However, it resulted in a ‘fairness as sameness’ (Gutiérrez, 2006) approach that, as noted previously, can lead to the cultural practices of the dominant group being accepted as the norm and “obscuring the link between economic disparities, asymmetrical power relations, and historically racialized schooling practices” (Gutiérrez, 2006, p. 46).

‘Fairness as sameness’ had effects for both curriculum and pedagogy, normalising the invisibility of Indigeniety and providing space for sayings, doings and relatings that engaged with unproductive and unsubstantiated binary understandings of the lived realities of mobile Indigenous students. As Nakata (2007a, 2007b) has suggested, in such a space, the intersections and differences of the cultural interface are difficult to ‘see’.

6.3.2 Teachers’ work at the cultural interface

The findings of this research offer insights into supporting teachers’ work at the cultural interface. As professional development for teachers becomes more individualistic and technicist (Day & Sachs, 2004), there is a growing need to identify effective, professionalising in-service learning that (re)focuses on the moral purpose of schooling – that is, providing equitable education for all students. In foregrounding their work as morally committed professionals, teachers in this study have been able to move away from technicist constructions of their work evident in current accountability discourses (Cochrane-Smith & Lytle, 2009). These insights into professional development relate not only to ‘what’ is delivered to teachers, but also ‘how’ it is delivered.

In particular, they highlight the potential of appropriately designed and delivered professional development, based on facilitated Disciplined Dialogue and

individual and collective critical reflection, to transform teachers' practice with mobile Indigenous students. Through engagement with this form of professional learning, the teachers in this study were able to build 'local knowledge' (Cochrane-Smith & Lytle, 2009) about teaching literacy *and* about the students they teach. This innovated model of professional development gave teachers a 'safe' space (Comber & Nixon, 2009) in which to ethically examine their professional practice in relation to this group of students and to engage with discursive resources that unsettled their habitus by competing with, complementing and/or confirming the prevailing discourses of the school site. At times, this process drew stark attention to specious perceptions of Indigenous mobility and of mobile Indigenous students and their families and, as such, could be confronting and disconcerting for the participants.

In this study, the discourses that circulated around teachers' work with mobile Indigenous students seemed to evolve over time and appeared to remain largely uncontested, settling as 'common-sense', 'taken-for-granted' assumptions. As has been demonstrated by the late career teachers, to dislodge these from teachers' habitus would seem to take much more than the currently preferred one-off workshop approach (Hardy, 2010) involving teachers as passive recipients of information on Cultural Awareness. I suggest that the nature of one-off, large group, knowledge transmission style Cultural Awareness PD, while a source of necessary and relevant information, silences the opportunities for teachers to voice or raise their 'fears' or 'nervousness' about their capacity to engage with Indigenous perspectives and knowledges (Martin, 2009; Yunkaporta, 2010). This project shows that exposure over time to discursive resources that unsettle taken-for-granted assumptions, together with the temporal and discursive space to take exploratory actions, demonstrate to teachers the possibilities for positive practice.

This research suggests that with appropriate resources and the time to engage in individual and collective dialectical exploration of practice as praxis (Kemmis, 2008b), teachers can come to a nuanced understanding of mobility – one in which mobility may be (re)conceptualised as a consequence of our shared history (of government sanctioned racist practices of disenfranchisement and dislocation) *and* a legitimate cultural practice derived from a different, not deficit, settlement ideology, *and* (potentially) the result of the effects of poverty. It is not a simple matter and it cannot be simply explained or understood.

The Cultural Awareness training developed by ISSU staff across Queensland is attempting to provide teachers and other school staff with an understanding of the policies and Acts that impacted Indigenous culture (Department of Education and Training, 2008a). In the version of this workshop provided to teachers at Riverside State School, a highly localised perspective of history with a focus on the factors that lie beneath Indigenous mobility was provided (as a result of the ISSU's involvement in the larger mobility project). While information such as this is important, this study would suggest that while the workshops are necessary they are not sufficient if a deep understanding is to be developed. Participation in these workshops is “encouraged” (Department of Education and Training, 2008a, para. 2) but not required. And, as identified in the report *Indigenous Education – Everybody's Business* (Working Party on Indigenous Studies in Teacher Education, 2004):

As decisions about non-mandatory inservice education are made at the school level, Indigenous education has to compete for attention with all other curriculum areas, is often given low priority, and has not been adequately funded to effect change. (p. 4)

In schools such as Riverside State School, where Principals are turning over every six months and there are multiple and changing priorities competing for finite and stretched temporal and financial resources (Angus et al., 2007), the need to ensure that all teachers have a deep understanding of local history can pose a significant management challenge. And, while there is a body of research literature that assists educators and policy makers to understand causes and effects of turbulence in the teaching staff of low socio-economic schools (Thomson, 2002), there appears to be very little literature that explores the effects of extreme levels of turbulence of school leaders and what this may mean for sustaining school based initiatives. In the case of Riverside State School, maintaining a focus on the needs of mobile students proved a challenge in light of extreme leadership turbulence.

While there is no shortage of policy ‘directing’ the actions of teachers in their work with Indigenous students, there appears to be little recognition of mobility within these documents with the strategies proposed for improving outcomes for Indigenous students predicated upon students remaining in a school for the full school year (Prout & Hill, 2011). As well, there is little recognition of the challenges faced in implementing policies in a schooling environment in which additional resources are tied to ‘accountability’ measures that trump professional judgement and moral purpose and offer no acknowledgement of potential mobility.

Nakata’s conceptualisation of the cultural interface provides a powerful tool for examining and (re)framing professional practice. While policy initiatives that provide generic Cultural Awareness are necessary, this research suggests that they are not sufficient to dislodge tenacious (mis)conceptions that can lower expectations. However, when localised knowledge is provided and temporal and discursive space is made

available for teachers to examine their understandings and to “think pedagogically” (Banks et al., 2005) about the action possibilities, then it is possible to make visible the tensions that exist at the cultural interface and to respond in positive ways.

6.3.3 Literacy Teaching

Literacy teaching, and more specifically literacy teaching for Indigenous students is a deeply contentious issue. A very public debate between prominent Indigenous advocates Noel Pearson and Chris Sarra about the ‘right’ way to teach literacy for Indigenous students continues to play out in the pages of national newspapers (Pearson, 2011; Sarra, 2011a).

Pearson continues his search for a ‘silver bullet’ – having previously espoused the virtues of the Israeli Literacy Scheme (Yachad Accelerated Learning Project, 2010) then later Multilit (Multilit, 2010), he is now an equally passionate advocate for Engelmann’s Direct Instruction (Pearson, 2009, 2011). As researchers (Freebody, 2007; LoBianco & Freebody, 2001) have postulated, different conceptualisations of literacy provide distinctive views of the ‘problem’ of literacy and of the required ‘solutions’. Each of the programs Pearson has advocated represents a reductive, skills based conceptualisation of literacy, which would indicate his perception of the ‘problem’ – teachers who lack the capacity to meet the needs of students, and the ‘solution’ – a ‘teacher-proof’ prescribed teaching method. As discussed in Chapter 2, this approach to improving literacy outcomes for Indigenous students conforms to Luke and Woods’ characterisation of the ‘standardised curriculum hypothesis’ and leaves no space for “informed professionalism” (Schleicher, 2008). Englemann’s Direct Instruction relies on scripted lessons that disrespect the intellectual capacity of both students and teachers. I concur with Rizvi and Lingard (2010) when they write:

It seems to us that in respect of improving pedagogical practice, some level of trust of teachers and their professionalism is needed within a supportive professional development framework and the creation of teacher professional learning communities within schools. This demands investment in teacher professional development. However, a lack of trust has been central to relationships with professional practices in . . . education. (p.103)

Sarra's (2008, 2010, 2011) position essentialises high expectations as the precursor of improved literacy outcomes for Indigenous students. Yet this research project has shown that even in a school culture that actively promotes high expectations, as Indigeneity, mobility and poverty intersect, deficit discourses seemingly deepen. As discussed in Section 5.4.5, while the markers of a high expectations discourse were evident in teachers' discussion about literacy teaching (at the commencement of the project), expressions such as 'high expectations' and 'individualised approach' masked a deficit discourse that positioned mobile Indigenous students as 'low achievers' and their families as 'hard to reach' families who don't 'value' education. Research (Henderson, 2002) has shown that deficit views of mobile students can lead to a reductive influence on pedagogy. However, when teachers were able to problematise their practice through CPAR with Disciplined Dialogue within a professionally respectful, democratic communicative space they began to move away from deficit views and binary notions of mobile Indigenous students and their families.

The co-generation of the reflective tool (see Appendix 4) provided both a structure and language for teachers to draw together their evolving understandings of literacy teaching practices that, legitimated through intersubjective agreement, 'made a

difference' for mobile Indigenous students. As the participants began to engage with the cultural interface, they began to see the action possibilities for their literacy teaching practices – the ways in which their sayings, doings and relatings could be (re)shaped to recognise the schooling experiences of mobile Indigenous students. Within the communicative space, the participants actively drew on existing literature and their individual and collective professional knowledge to engage with action possibilities that recognise the potentially 'fractured' literacy learning of mobile Indigenous students. They began to articulate theory-practice connections that previously had been difficult to enunciate. They drew upon the theoretical frameworks identified in the Department of Education and Training literacy professional development, and made connections to the need to provide mobile Indigenous students with transportable literacy learning strategies as well as an understanding of 'content'.

However, for mobile Indigenous students there is an additional element for consideration. The differences between their home language(s) and the language of instruction must be identified and acknowledged in pedagogy. Teachers in this study had 'flimsy' understandings of the continuum of Indigenous languages and what this meant for classroom practice. However, within the CPAR process, the teachers were able to draw upon the literature and their own collective professional knowledge to reframe their practice and respond to the language learning needs of mobile Indigenous students. This noted, much more needs to be understood about the ways in which teachers conceptualise home language and the pedagogic responses this understanding (or lack of understanding) generates. Additionally, policy makers need to understand the ways in which they can provide 'informed prescription' (Schleicher, 2008) that supports teachers to meet the language learning needs of Indigenous students.

A move to ‘informed prescription’ would, at the very least I suggest, require a coherent literacy policy. Such a policy would go some way to providing school leaders with direction when constructing whole school programs that support teachers in teaching literacy – not only for mobile Indigenous students, but for students generally. The *Literacy the key to learning: Framework for action 2006-2008* (Education Queensland, 2006) document which purports to provide direction at systemic, regional and school levels ‘expired’ in 2008. This document for all intents and purposes underpins the teaching of literacy in Queensland schools, yet, as identified previously, makes no mention of Indigeneity, referring only to ‘diversity’ as a challenge faced by teachers.

The *Literacy Framework* has, in effect, been supplanted by the Queensland government’s response (Department of Education and Training, 2009b) to the recommendations of the *Masters Review* (Masters, 2009). A highly reductive reading of the *Masters Review* recommendations has led to the production of prescribed units of study complete with lesson plans to be implemented as part of the move to the Australian Curriculum across Queensland Schools in 2012. This initiative, known as *Curriculum into the Classroom* or *C2C* has caused some consternation among teachers’ professional Associations. At the time of writing this thesis, the Queensland Department of Educational Training has yet to clarify key concerns expressed by both the Queensland Teachers’ Union (Queensland Teachers' Union, 2011) and the English Teachers’ Association of Queensland (Collins, 2011, August 10) about the level of autonomy schools will be afforded in the adoption of the *C2C* programs. Not only is the curriculum prescribed, but this agenda is also accompanied by ‘recommended’ teaching strategies – again, as noted by both the aforementioned Associations, demonstrating a lack of trust by the State of teachers.

The *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Language Statement*, which elucidates the Department of Education and Training's position on Indigenous languages, was released late in 2011. This stand-alone document positions the language of Indigenous students as 'outside' the literacy teaching framework as it makes no reference to existing literacy policies. The *Languages Statement* adopts a socio-linguistic approach to understanding language, promoting a "three way strong approach" (Department of Education and Training, 2011a) that clearly prioritises Standard Australian English as the language of instruction. However, this document does not offer schools or teachers any clear vision for literacy instruction beyond instructing teachers to "teach Standard Australian English explicitly, actively and meaningfully" (Department of Education and Training, 2011a, p. 5)

Researchers have cautioned about this 'bolted-on' notion of Indigenous education over many years – but yet it persists. Each of these policy factors – expired framework, prescribed teaching and 'bolted-on' notions of Indigenous literacy teaching – do not serve to support schools and teachers in constructing a literacy program for mobile Indigenous students. But as this study has shown, through facilitated CPAR, teachers can begin to move away from the rhetoric of 'high expectations' towards articulating a 'pedagogised' approach to progressing the learning of mobile Indigenous students regardless of the duration of their enrolment. Again, within the communicative space, teachers can take the universalised logics of the state-wide literacy PD policy initiative and situate their responses within the local context – reclaiming their sense of professionalism and agency.

By engaging in this professionalising experience in which a localised, Indigenous perspective of our shared history and more nuanced sense of Indigenous

mobility underpins the (re)framing of pedagogy, teachers involved in this study took the first steps towards a pedagogy of place built upon an expanded notion of literacy. This expanded notion of literacy encompasses a sense of belonging (Nixon et al., 2009) that provides discursive and textual space for mobile Indigenous students to exercise agency as they navigate the cultural interface (Nakata, 2007a). Additionally, this expanded notion of literacy gives space for students to develop their identities as Indigenous learners, connect with country and with their peers.

Gruenewald (2008) suggests that:

A critical pedagogy of place posits two fundamental goals for education: decolonization and reinhabitation. Decolonization roughly equates with the deeper agenda of culturally responsive teaching: to undo the damage done by multiple forms of oppression. Reinhabitation roughly equates with the deeper agenda of many environmental educators: to learn how to live well together in a place without doing damage to others, human and nonhuman. (p. 149)

In this study, a critical pedagogy of place was beginning to emerge. Through the CPAR process, the teachers involved took action towards decolonisation, to address the symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1990) that resulted from the invisibility of mobile Indigenous students in curriculum and pedagogy. The consequences of a lack of visibility at system, school and individual practitioner level were seen in each of Bernstein's message systems, that is, curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation. By beginning to understand an Indigenous perspective on Country and a relational way of being (Martin, 2008), the teachers opened the possibility for reinhabitation as described by Gruenewald (2008). Although the participants had begun to initiate changes to the

curriculum to better reflect mobile Indigenous students' (possible) literacy learning and life experiences, there was still much to be done to move practice to the cultural interface, not all within the 'control' of teachers – this project was a first step in that journey.

6.4 Returning to the Questions

Returning to the questions that underpinned this research project, it can be seen that although the questions may appear to generate prescriptive responses for teachers and policy makers, the responses are embedded in a sense of teacher professionalism that recognises that “‘good’ teachers combine, meld and weave (Luke, Cazden, Lin & Freebody, 2004) pedagogical approach, content and method in ways that have local logic and based on contextual knowledge” (Luke & Woods, 2008, p. 17).

1. What knowledge about mobile Indigenous students assists teachers to engage positively?

In considering what knowledge about mobile Indigenous students assists teachers to engage positively, this research suggests that Nakata's conceptualisation of the cultural interface provides a useful vehicle to (re)construct professional learning and practice. What is needed is a deep understanding of *shared* history and of the impacts this history has had on Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Additionally, teachers need to come to grips with the role mobility can play in maintaining and enhancing cultural and family ties for Indigenous Australians.

When teachers have access to localised Cultural Awareness training that reflects the historically constructed lived realities of the community *they serve*, coupled with a nuanced understanding of the sociocultural and structural push and pull factors that

motivate Indigenous mobility *and*, when this is accompanied by the discursive and temporal space to integrate this new knowledge into their habitus – then it is possible to refocus pedagogy in positive ways that engage with students and their families at the cultural interface. This pedagogy takes on the characteristics of a critical place-based pedagogy as defined by Greunewald (2008). This does not happen uniformly for all educators, but without this addition to their knowledge base, educators are left with prevailing deficit discourses about mobility, poverty and Indigeneity and this shapes their practice.

2. How do teachers make decisions about the literacy teaching practices they employ for mobile Indigenous students?

Previous research has shown that teachers make their decisions about the literacy teaching practices they employ based on a complex amalgam of personal and professional beliefs and understandings about literacy (Wray et al., 2002). And, as previously discussed, deficit views of mobile students can underpin a reduced pedagogy that focuses on ‘fixing’ students or their families (Henderson, 2002). At Riverside State School (at the commencement of this project), there existed a ‘no excuses’ school culture that left little space for Indigeneity as a consideration when planning for teaching/learning literacy and addressed mobility through technical and practical actions (Habermas, 1972). In this situation, the participating teachers’ decisions about literacy teaching for mobile Indigenous students focussed on meeting curriculum outcomes within an explicit teaching approach. However, their dispositions to act were seemingly underpinned by low expectations and the conflation of poverty and Indigeneity. This resulted in a pedagogy that displayed limited engagement with the language learning needs of (some) mobile Indigenous students and little or no

engagement with lived experiences of mobile Indigenous students.

But, when these deficit views were unpacked and unpicked, the teachers in this study were able to refocus their pedagogy based on a deeper understanding of the need to engage at the cultural interface. This transformed their pedagogy in that decision making was underpinned by a more emancipatory disposition that recognised language differences (rather than language deficits) and the implications this had for teaching/learning literacy. Additionally, ‘gaps’ in students’ learning were seen as a possible consequence of mobility rather than a lack of capacity. This meant that their focus moved to personalising learning in recognition of potentially interrupted schooling rather than remediating ‘gaps’ in learning.

While this shift in thinking and practice was evident, the incursion of system priorities into the classroom however meant that, at times, teachers’ capacity to engage in emancipatory practices underpinned by critical reasoning could be compromised and possibly overwhelmed. At such times, the teachers’ decisions appeared to default to a technical response in which conforming to requirements became the priority.

3. Which literacy teaching practices support literacy learning for mobile Indigenous students?

For classroom teachers, ensuring that literacy programs recognise and respond to the needs of mobile Indigenous students is complex work. As discussed previously, in contemplating which literacy teaching practices support literacy learning for mobile Indigenous students – the answer lies not in a list that identifies the merits of one ‘program’ over another, but rather with explicit teaching practices that recognise the whole student and the potentially ‘fragmented’ literacy learning history of that student. I concur with the views expressed by Nakata (2007a, p.11) when he suggests that:

It is effective teachers who make the difference [for Indigenous students] rather than the program in use. That is, good teachers can produce good results using, or even despite, any program if they fully understand the goals and processes of literacy learning and the children they teach. . . . Effective teachers are always thinking about and reviewing what they are doing and evaluating how well strategies are working even when they have long years of experience.

Such practices attempt to engage learners at the cultural interface. They recognise and respect the literate practices of the student and build engagement with the literate practices that are valued in schools and enable access to the curriculum and powerful ways of finding out about the world. As well as explicit teaching of ‘school’ literate practices, including the development of transportable literacy learning strategies and metalanguage, these practices should also provide space for mobile Indigenous students to navigate the cultural interface, to come to understand the tensions that exist at the interface and to develop their own literate identities in this contested space.

This research shows that when the teachers involved in this project were given the opportunity to disrupt deficit views of mobile Indigenous students, to work collaboratively in a team and to actively make links between theory and practice, they were able to access a wider repertoire of literacy teaching practices. Within this professional space they were able to discuss what works, what doesn’t work and why. Sharing their practice in a democratic space – supported by a co-generated ‘list’ of ideal practices (see Appendix 4) was an important element in coming to see which literacy teaching practices support literacy learning for this cohort of students.

4. How do teachers meaningfully assess mobile Indigenous students' literacy practices on arrival?

In this research site, meaningful assessment of mobile Indigenous students' literacy practices on arrival was supported and enhanced by the provision of the Mobility Support Teacher (MST). Research (Timperley, 2009) clearly identifies that constructing an effective literacy program starts with an assessment of what the learner can do – in terms of the literate practices they bring to the classroom and the practices they need to acquire – in order to successfully engage with literate practices valued in schools. In the school involved in this study, delays in the transfer of existing data commonly experienced by schools (KPMG Consulting et al., 2002) were mitigated by the presence of a dedicated MST, who collated and collected available information on the students' academic and social backgrounds. This service was highly valued by teachers as it enabled them to plan for an incoming student to experience 'success' immediately upon entering the classroom. It also allowed teachers to move from data collection to data driven teaching actions – removing one barrier to transition for mobile Indigenous students.

But this information was not the only data teachers drew upon. In assessing students' literacy practices, teachers in the study drew on a range of understandings from a variety of available sources. However, the most valued assessment strategy – as reported by the participating teachers – was time to spend talking with and observing students as they engaged in their day-to-day schoolwork. In doing so, teachers rejected the seemingly endless collection of standardised test data in favour of informal informed professional judgements. This time, as provided by the MST, gave a rich resource from which to plan for individualised learning and again demonstrates the

schism between accountability by numbers and the legitimate accountability teachers have to their students.

6.5 Considering the Limitations

While this research project represents an important first step in coming to understand the action possibilities in schools experiencing high levels of mobility within the Indigenous cohort, it is just that – a first step in an under-researched field. As such, this project signals the need for a scholarly ‘conversation’ that engages all stakeholders in an effort to present the ‘story’ from as many perspectives as possible.

This study has focussed sharply on the work of teachers of mobile Indigenous students, which has meant that the stories of students and families fell outside the immediate scope of this research project. This is not to suggest that the stories of mobile Indigenous families and students have no bearing on the work of teachers – to suggest so would be absurd. A next step should be the investigation of these stories as ‘voiced’ by Indigenous students and their families. An exploration of the continuum of mobilities as experienced by Indigenous families within and through urban environments would shed further light on possible policy provisions. Such research would require the establishment of trusting and respectful relationships with mobile Indigenous families – who, by definition, are likely to relocate – making data collection problematic, but not impossible.

Another limitation is the small scale of the study. In the beginning, I had commitments from five teachers (three classroom teachers, the MST and the CC) and the Community Liaison Officer (CLO) to become involved. However, as discussed previously, the CLO chose to limit her involvement to informal discussions and a formal interview and over time, the MST and the CC both left the school and their

replacements chose not to be involved. This reduced the perspectives able to be included in the study to those of the classrooms teachers. Also, that Principal 1 invited the participation of particular teachers, meant that other teachers who may have chosen to be involved were not offered an opportunity to participate, and they may have had different stories to tell. So, while this particular group of participants provided a rich source of data, I recognise that fewer participants also acted to shape the overall research findings.

Further, I am aware that my choices about how to tell these stories depended upon multiple decisions made during the course of the research, thereby shaping the research process and the findings in particular ways. However, through the use of the participants' own words, member checking and sharing of the analysis as it unfolded, I have attempted to portray the situations and the practices with integrity. I have tried to represent the messiness of the CPAR process and of the data by including the many contradictions and disjunctions that rose to the surface but, in the retelling, perhaps some of the gnarliness and complexity of the situation have been smoothed over. The CPAR was not an 'easy' process and I have tried to portray the tensions and social practices honestly – but I nonetheless acknowledge that my biases and subjectivities influenced my methodological and analytical decisions.

6.6 Seeking Visibility: Future Research Possibilities

By making mobile Indigenous students visible to the participants in this study, this research project has gone some way to signalling and unravelling the complexities faced by teachers in supporting the literacy learning of mobile Indigenous students. However, it is clear that further research is required in order for policy makers and educators to come to grips with the needs of mobile populations generally, and mobile

Indigenous students in particular.

A logical next step from this project is to explore the ways in which place-based pedagogies can be drawn upon to inform teaching and learning at the cultural interface. What do critical place-based pedagogies 'look' like when teachers have a deep knowledge of local histories to draw upon when planning teaching/learning experiences? How can critical place-based pedagogies provide space for the development of both positive cultural and learner identities and support (mobile) Indigenous students as they navigate the tensions and inconsistencies of the cultural interface? In what ways can an expanded notion of literacy as social practice – one that recognises the complex meaning making and communication practices (Nixon et al., 2009) that occur as teachers and students interact at the cultural interface – support all students in the reconciliation of our (shared) histories and our (shared) futures. Coming to understand the responses to questions such as these would add to the repertoire of teaching practices available to teachers in their work in complex situations.

This research project has also revealed other issues that require consideration in order to support teachers in their work with mobile Indigenous students. As discussed previously, the exploration of the experiences and perspectives of mobile Indigenous students and their families would provide a valuable insight into to the continuum of mobilities (Prout & Hill, 2011). In doing so, policy makers could find ways of delivering services such as education in ways that accommodate the lived realities of mobile Indigenous families. Additionally, identifying the ways in which teachers conceptualise home language and the implications this has for teaching and learning would assist teachers and policy makers to provide professional learning that responds to taken-for-granted understandings about the differences between home languages and

Standard Australian English. Finally, this research project has shown that there is much to learn about the nexus between mobility and attendance. Future research might uncover ways in which schools and systems can measure both mobility and attendance to provide more accurate information to stakeholders about the movements of mobile Indigenous families and their reasons for non-attendance.

6.7 Last Words

My work at Riverside State School indicates that there is no simple way to ‘make a difference’ for the literacy teaching/learning of mobile Indigenous students. For practice to become more inclusive and responsive, attention must be given to the metapractices and practice architectures at the policy and school level as well as to the individual professional practice of teachers. The visibility (or invisibility) of mobile Indigenous students within policy – Indigenous education policy, literacy policy and broader equity policy – has significant implications for the ways Principals enact policy priorities and ‘construct’ local practice situations. So too, the tenure of Principals in disadvantaged schools impacts local practice situations. These factors, in turn, have significant implications for the classroom practice of individual teachers. In light of the data presented in this thesis, a ‘quick fix’ is both unreasonable and unsustainable.

However, it is not my intention to suggest that change is ‘too hard’. This research shows that when teachers are provided with resources – knowledge, time and space – change is possible. I suggest that when such changes in practice occur, the benefits are not only for the teachers involved and the students they work with – but that this visible change contributes to the shaping of a world worth living in (Kemmis, 2010). As noted in the introduction to this thesis, Sarra (2011c) characterises this work as follows:

Engaging Indigenous children in quality schooling, and delivering quality education outcomes, is hard and tiring work. For many teachers it is also perhaps the most rewarding work they will do. What makes it so rewarding is that as teachers we can do more than just getting children to read and write, and do their sums. As we deliver quality education for Indigenous children we each play our part in contributing to a transformed future. (p. 114)

Finally, studies such as the work of this thesis, supporting educators in their actions at the 'chalkface' and contributing to the incremental changes that make a transformed future possible, are worthwhile and critical work.

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Appendices

- Appendix 1 Mobility Support Teacher Position Description
- Appendix 2 Sample Interview Guide
- Appendix 3 NVivo Coding Sample
- Appendix 4 Co-generated 'list' of practices

Appendix 1 Mobility Support Teacher Position Description

EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

Position Title:	Mobility Support Teacher
Closing date:	XXXXXXXXXX
Mandatory Requirements:	Full Registration or eligibility for full registration as a teacher in Queensland. Information on registration requirements is available at enquiries@qct.edu.au or on toll free 1300 720 944.
Position:	Location: xxxx FTE:
Description	<p>The role of the Mobility Support Teacher is to work with a wide range of stakeholders, under the direction of the school principal, to improve learning outcomes for students by implementing innovative practices and strategies that REDUCE student mobility and RESPOND to the needs of highly mobile students and their families, with a particular focus on Indigenous students and their families. The role requires a highly motivated, experienced and adaptable teacher able to build and sustain professional and community networks that support mobile students and their families.</p> <p>To ensure the successful applicant is able to undertake the role in an appropriate manner, respectful of the privacy of students and families, a private workspace will be provided (including computer and secure document storage).</p>
Salary	As per teaching award
Key Duties	<p>Professional</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Enrol, induct and integrate new arrivals and manage any associated administrative tasks.• Conduct holistic learning needs assessment as part of enrolment process.• Contribute to the development of a culturally appropriate network, both within and outside the school), to foster a whole school culture that is inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families, especially, mobile families• Liaise with Learning Support staff, and other specialist staff (eg Advisory Visiting Teachers) to ensure timely intervention if required.• Advise teachers on specific academic, social and emotional needs of new arrivals.• Work collaboratively with classroom teachers to ensure effective integration of additional enrolling students, including providing release for initial meeting of classroom teacher and student/family.• Monitor progress (social and academic) of additional enrolments; ensuring on-going liaison with class teachers.• Lead staff professional development and training.• Work collaboratively with JCU researchers to:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ collect data required to comprehensively evaluate effectiveness of the initiative at key stages,○ provide reports as required by the project manager, and○ actively participate in the action research process.

Partnerships

- Work with students in innovative and positive ways to ensure a smooth transition to a new learning environment.
- Meet with parents/carers of additional enrolments prior to and during enrolment procedure.
- Establish trusting, respectful partnerships through meeting with parents/carers as required, with a particular focus on building educational partnerships with Indigenous families.
- Meet with parents/carers of exiting students prior to and during exit procedure.
- Liaise with external agencies (particularly Indigenous support agencies) to support new arrivals and their families integrating into the new environment.
- Actively promote the 'Let's Stay Put' message with students, parent/carers and members of the wider community.

Selection Criteria:

Professional

- Demonstrated successful teaching experience with range of learners and in a variety of school contexts, particularly the prompt identification of holistic learner needs and establishment of priority learning goals.
- Demonstrated ability to positively influence peers and progress change in educational settings.
- Demonstrated cross-cultural understanding, especially related to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families.

Personal

- Demonstrated high level negotiation, consultation and communication skills and the demonstrated ability to liaise with a wide range of stakeholders (including students and families from diverse backgrounds, colleagues, community agencies, management etc).
- Demonstrated high level problem solving skills with a demonstrated ability to generate and implement innovative solutions.

Partnerships

- Demonstrated ability to work in a variety of professional teams in both formal and informal settings.
- Demonstrated ability to work collaboratively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and networks that support Indigenous people
- Demonstrated understanding of Education Queensland's privacy policy (in relation to the likely demands of this position).

Application Process

Written application addressing the criteria.

1 x A4 page.

font must be Times New Roman no less than 10pt.

Application should be emailed to xxxx using the subject heading: Mobility Support Teacher - Application

Further Information

Please email xxxx using the subject heading: Mobility Support Teacher - Inquiry

Appendix 2 Sample Interview Guide

Interview questions

Classroom teachers

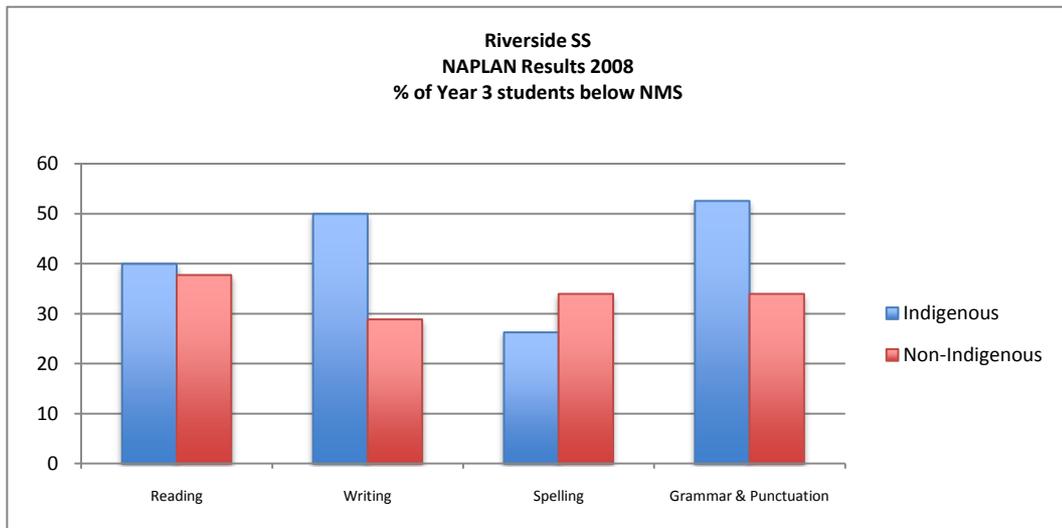
Thinking about a mobile Indigenous student that has recently joined your class...

1. What information was made available when he/she joined your class?
2. What information did you need to find for yourself? How did you do this?
3. In what ways did this information shape your literacy teaching for this student?
4. Describe your first impressions of this student as a literacy learner.
5. What were the challenges (if any) in ensuring this student was actively engaged as a literacy learner in your classroom?
6. In what ways has this student changed/developed as a literacy learner during their time in your classroom? What do you attribute this to?

More generally...

7. What do you think are the factors that ensure literacy learning success for mobile Indigenous students?
 - a. In the classroom
 - b. Outside the classroom
8. What are the barriers to this group of students achieving their full potential?

9. Are there teaching strategies that are more successful than others with Indigenous students? What is it that makes them effective? What are they attending to?
10. Looking at the graph (see next page) – What do you attribute the gap in results between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students to? What do *you* think it will take to ‘close the gap’ for Indigenous students in this school?
11. Thinking back through our conversation, if you were to give advice to a beginning teacher in this school, what do you think are the three most important considerations when working with mobile Indigenous students?



Appendix 3 NVivo Coding Sample

The screenshot displays the NVivo interface with a transcript on the left and a node tree on the right. The transcript text is as follows:

So my philosophy and understanding that underpin my work... First of all I want to Riverside believing that every child could achieve and there could be no excuses offered about why children couldn't learn and improve and become quite functioning members of the little society that is the school, so I guess my philosophy is that my expectations really frame everything we do around here - curriculum and behaviour and about the culture of the school. My philosophy also is that every piece of the school context works together and improvement in one area can't happen unless there's? ... and the way I have explained it to my staff is that my job is in a helicopter looking down on getting a helicopter view over patchwork that is the school environment and that patchwork has many pieces that fit together seamlessly and work together to give order for the place to be a place of learning for everybody including staff.

Teachers have talked about the high expectations culture and how they sometimes didn't really grasp what that meant until it was modeled for them as having high expectations for them as well. So that was a deliberate strategic decision?

Absolutely and I do remember saying specifically that I have high expectations of myself as well in my work and I had feedback from them about my work because I believe strongly that if I want something to happen I have to model it so that the model I had high expectations of myself effectively had high expectations of them as well

When you talk about no excuses how do you enact that

In talking about it explicitly?

Yes

Well there was some rhetoric I guess around the fact that our kids at Riverside are poor kids what do you expect their home it was don't support school, education, they don't come to school with food so what we did was actually put physical things into place to remove a lot of those barriers. For example, we make sure that the kids were fed when they came to school. There was no excuse about not having school uniforms because we would provide school uniforms. There are no excuses about them not being able to learn because culture or background or socio-economic side of things, don't indicate what can be achieved so the view was very much that these are little members of society they have value and they deserve the best education we can give them

The node tree on the right shows a hierarchical structure:

- Nodes
 - Recon
 - Practice Architectures
 - Curriculum
 - Resourcing
 - Indigenous Ed
 - Equity
 - Pedagogy
 - Turbulence
 - System
 - Teachers' Practice
 - Assess - Eval
 - Pedagogy
 - Curriculum
 - Result of OPAR
 - Curriculum
 - Assess Eval
 - Pedagogy
 - work with others

At the bottom of the transcript window, there is a 'Coding Density' bar chart showing segments of text highlighted in blue, pink, and purple. An arrow points from the text 'Colour coding of transcript' to this bar chart.

At the bottom of the node tree window, there is a 'Sample of Tree Nodes' section with a list of nodes:

- Nodes
- Sources
- Nodes
- Classifications
- Collections
- Queries
- Reports
- Models
- Folders

Appendix 4 Co-generated ‘list’ of practices

Moving to learning: Next practice in a highly mobile context.

Section 1 (School organisation and leadership) can be used to reflect upon what it is **your school** is doing well and what changes could be made to better meet the needs of mobile students generally, and mobile Indigenous students particularly.

As a whole school, identify items that could be tried or improved, then collaboratively create an action plan for change. Each week use **Reflection Sheet 1** to reflect upon and evaluate the progress of the action plan. Each term review and replan.

The empty cells at the end of this table can be used to include actions you currently employ that are not listed here and could assist other schools serving highly mobile communities.

School organisation and leadership	Doing well	Could improve	Not doing at present	Could be tried
Our school provides a structured induction program for all staff members (including teachers, Indigenous support workers, visiting specialist teachers [eg ESL, special needs], teacher aides and volunteers) new to this context. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Induction includes locally relevant cultural awareness training, demographic information- including mobility data, information about the role of the MST, support services available (both internal and external to the school) for students, families and staff.</i> 				
Enrolment and exit procedures ensure that all new families are welcomed and supported in their transition into their new school, <i>e.g. on enrolment parents/carers and students are fully informed about:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>exit procedures, including an exit interview,</i> • <i>the Behaviour Management Plan and the tools and reward systems used in this school (eg Peacebuilders, Go for Gold, A+),</i> • <i>the curriculum and specific programs used in this school eg Deadly Maths, Words their Way, THRASS, cued articulation, etc,</i> • <i>support agencies available in the school/community,</i> • <i>assessment for, and of, learning (both initial and ongoing),</i> • <i>attendance requirements.</i> 				
This school has a clearly framed strategy for building and sustaining relationships with parents/carers new to the school community and for those leaving the school community.				

School organisation and leadership	Doing well	Could improve	Not doing at present	Could be tried
<p><i>eg each month a morning tea is held to introduce new parents/carers into the school community</i> <i>families leaving the school are appropriately acknowledged eg farewell cards, mementos, class ceremonies.</i></p>				
<p>This school requires teachers of enrolling students to be released by the Mobility Support Teacher to meet with new families within two weeks of enrolment.</p>				
<p>Team teaching and co-teaching is encouraged and supported. <i>eg teachers are able to create more finely tuned groups to better respond to students' learning needs</i></p>				
<p>Regular opportunities for teachers to share their practice are built into our whole school plan. <i>eg</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Teachers are released from class to observe their colleagues' good practice in teaching mobile students</i> • <i>Staff meetings include teachers showcasing innovative practices and sharing 'tips'</i> 				
<p>All staff (new and existing) participate in ongoing professional development in cross-cultural awareness relevant to this context.</p>				
<p>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are genuinely embedded in school programs and staff capacity is supported through ongoing professional development. The knowledge of Indigenous education workers is visibly valued and shared within the school and wider community. <i>eg</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The school leadership works closely with the local community to build effective partnerships including establishing and supporting an Indigenous Education Committee (IEC) with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives to progress Indigenous perspectives within the school.</i> • <i>Work programs, unit designs, assessment tasks and lesson plans explicitly detail Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives.</i> 				
<p>Procedures are in place to ensure that appropriate furniture etc is supplied to classrooms prior to new students joining the class.</p>				
<p>This school has a range of assistance packages to ensure students and their families are made feel welcome and supported. <i>eg</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A basic stationery pack is available to new students free of charge should they require one.</i> • <i>A uniform loan scheme ensures students are immediately able to wear the appropriate uniform.</i> 				

School organisation and leadership	Doing well	Could improve	Not doing at present	Could be tried
Administrative staff are provided with professional development regarding welcoming new families, the policy and procedures around exits and entries to the school, and the role of the MST.				
Curriculum planning is responsive to a mobile context. <i>eg</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Shorter units</i> • <i>Strategies to meet the dual tensions of providing an engaging, sequenced curriculum and ensuring new students have the prior knowledge needed to successfully progress their academic understandings.</i> 				

Moving to learning: Next practice in a highly mobile context.

Section 2 (classroom organisation) provides the opportunity to consider a range of actions that work to meet the needs of mobile students and position them for learning.

Review your current classroom organisation and consider what, if any, changes you might make to your classroom organisation for mobile students generally, and mobile Indigenous students in particular.

Use reflection sheet 2 to identify items to be tried in your classroom and to monitor the effectiveness of these actions.

The empty cells at the end of this table can be used to include actions you currently employ that are not listed here and could assist other teachers.

Classroom organization	Doing well	Could improve	Not doing at present	Could be tried
My classroom routines are clearly and prominently displayed, using both text and images. <i>eg all work groups are current and easily found; new students are immediately added to 'job' lists; a daily schedule is visible</i>				
In my absence, lesson plans (including pertinent information re: mobile students) is present/available to the replacement/relief teacher.				
Detailed information is provided to parents about my classroom routines, daily/weekly timetables and assessment schedules. <i>eg</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I provide all parents/carers with an overview of routines and timetables and information is posted on my front door or window</i> • <i>Parents and carers are aware of the timing of summative assessments and their relation to reporting and other purposes.</i> • <i>Parents and carers are provided with 'tips' about fostering their child's success (ie achieving to their potential)</i> 				
A record of students' learning activities is kept, to ensure incoming students can be quickly orientated to work in progress. <i>eg maintaining exemplar books with a sequenced selection of work samples (colour photocopies of actual student work) and handouts</i>				
I ensure incoming students have a sound understanding of behaviour management tools used in this classroom eg Peacebuilder, 'Go for Gold' and 'A+' rewards program <i>eg I discuss these tools with students and parents/carers at the initial meeting.</i>				

Classroom organization	Doing well	Could improve	Not doing at present	Could be tried
Assessment records are current and available to be discussed with/provided to teachers of exiting students.				
I utilise the services of the Mobility Support Teacher to meet with an incoming student and his/her family within two weeks of enrolment.				
I maintain regular communications with parents/carers in a variety of ways. <i>eg weekly class newsletter, message books, informal chats before/ after school</i>				
I use a variety of groupings and a range of cooperative learning strategies. I have a range of strategies (eg role cards, games) to scaffold group work skills for new students.				
I ensure my expectations (learning behaviours, quality of work etc) are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clearly explained • consistent • constantly restated • explicitly modelled • displayed visually 				
My classroom resources connect with and reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of my students and the community. <i>eg posters, games, readers' corner resources reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of my students</i>				
I am aware of the health status of students in my class and make strategic decisions where appropriate. <i>eg I understand the impacts of conductive hearing loss and have a range of strategies to assist students in their learning.</i>				
I have a strong understanding of the motivations for Indigenous mobility and my classroom organisation recognises this phenomenon. <i>eg I keep students' work safe in the event they return to the school, I follow up with previous and following teachers to ensure continuity of programs, I monitor attendance and report continued absences immediately to the MST or attendance support personnel.</i>				
I have a range of strategies to ensure incoming students are emotionally supported and 'ready to learn'. <i>eg</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I use the information provided by the MST on students' interests to develop positive relationships • I familiarise myself with relevant information on family circumstances and their reasons for moving. • Students are 'trained' as buddies and are formally recognised for their work with incoming students • If required, I liaise with the MST to ensure timely referrals to support services 				

Classroom organization	Doing well	Could improve	Not doing at present	Could be tried
<p>I am (gently) persistent in encouraging parents and carers to visit the classroom and participate in classroom (and school) events and activities.</p> <p><i>eg I recognise that parents/carers may have work and/or family commitments or unhappy memories of their own schooling, so I find innovative and non-threatening ways in which to encourage their involvement in whatever ways they are comfortable.</i></p>				

Moving to learning: Next practice in a highly mobile context.

Section 3 (practice and pedagogy) provides the opportunity to consider a range of practices that work to meet the literacy learning needs of mobile students.

Review your current practices and pedagogy and consider what, if any, changes you might make to improve literacy learning for mobile students generally, and mobile Indigenous students in particular.

Use **Reflection Sheet 3** to identify items you perceive could be tried in your classroom and to monitor the effectiveness of these practices.

The empty cells at the end of this table can be used to include practices you currently employ that are not listed here and could assist other teachers.

Practice & Pedagogy	Doing well	Could improve	Not doing at present	Could be tried
My practices and pedagogy reflect high expectations for all students and students groups.				
My programs embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives. <i>eg</i> <i>Where appropriate I include Indigenous knowledges and ways of learning eg</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>In a unit on space and astronomy I include alternative explanations of astronomical bodies (including those of Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders) as well as western explanations.</i> • <i>I include a range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of learning in my teaching strategies eg, learning circles.</i> <i>My program recognises both traditional and current Indigenous cultures and languages</i>				
I recognise that children's literacy development is not always linear, predictable or sequential and my literacy program is flexible and responsive to students' literacy development. <i>eg where required I develop individualised learning programs that respond to strengths and needs in students' literacy learning.</i>				
I regularly reflect on my understandings of language and literacy and reshape and regenerate my pedagogy based on new or changed understandings. <i>eg</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I set aside time for professional reading and integrate innovative ideas into my planning and pedagogy</i> • <i>I maintain a professional learning journal and reflect on how new or changed understandings impact my practice</i> 				
I understand and utilise explicit teaching practices. <i>eg</i> Classroom talk is explicit and focuses students on the cognitive and metacognitive aspects of a task (ie the 'how to do it' and				

Practice & Pedagogy	Doing well	Could improve	Not doing at present	Could be tried
<p>'why do it') rather than describing the 'doing' of the task.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>At the beginning of a lesson I orientate students by explaining how to engage in the literacy skill or strategy, why the skill or strategy should be learned, and the situations in which it might be useful.</i> • <i>My lessons maintain the literacy focus without diverging into talk about other 'related' topics.</i> • <i>I use appropriate metalanguage</i> 				
<p>I do not make assumptions about students' literacy backgrounds <i>eg not all students have experiences with strategies such as Shared Book and may be unfamiliar with the expectations, behaviours and learning intentions.</i></p>				
<p>I actively and continually monitor my teaching strategies for effectiveness and to ensure they match the range of backgrounds and abilities in the class. <i>eg I evaluate my lessons/units and critically reflect on their effectiveness for all learners</i></p>				
<p>My literacy lessons make use of language, processes, genres, concepts, information and media familiar to my students whilst introducing new practices that match those valued in the school context.</p>				
<p>I have a strong understanding of the theoretical and practical knowledge required for teaching Standard Australian English as an additional language or dialect. <i>eg</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I ensure I am aware of the student's home language and the implications this has for teaching and learning Standard Australian English.</i> • <i>I use gestures and visuals (photographs, pictures, objects) to develop vocabulary both generally and for comprehension of various texts. I review vocabulary frequently.</i> • <i>As a class, we create vocabulary posters</i> 				
<p>I seek expert advice when I am unsure of how to meet a new student's learning needs. <i>eg</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Indigenous Schooling Support Unit staff</i> • <i>Visiting advisory specialists eg ESL teachers, speech language pathologists</i> • <i>Senior teachers</i> • <i>Curriculum leaders</i> 				
<p>I share my successful strategies with other staff members.</p>				

Practice & Pedagogy	Doing well	Could improve	Not doing at present	Could be tried
<p>My planning is underpinned by the understanding that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • students' oral language is the foundation for learning to use language and using language to learn • a balanced and integrated approach to teaching literacy is essential • learning experiences, while not necessarily linear, must be sequenced and cumulative and focussed on highly portable and transferable literacy learning strategies, rather than 'fun' activities that may become disconnected from the pedagogical and curriculum intent. • planning (and teaching) must be data-driven, diagnostic and responsive • the learners are at the centre of curriculum planning • assessment must be culturally fair, reliable and valid 				
<p>I provide appropriate and effective feedback to all students <i>ie feedback goes beyond praise and assists students to understand whether they have learnt what was intended, what they have done well and ways they could have worked differently to be (more) successful.</i></p>				
<p>I have a range of informal strategies to gauge students' learning needs. <i>eg strategic conversation to determine oral language development, appropriate reading texts, etc</i></p>				
<p>I modify assessment tasks to recognise the time available for completion and the teaching and learning experiences the student has participated in.</p>				
<p>As soon as is reasonable I work in partnership with incoming students to set short and medium term literacy learning goals and explicitly model and teach strategies to meet these goals. <i>eg I routinely conference with students to discuss their goals and the ways we can work together to achieve success.</i></p>				

Reflection Sheet 1 Template SCHOOL ORGANISATION AND LEADERSHIP

- A. **copy and paste item for change here**
- B. **copy and paste action to generate change here**

Week 1:

	Response	What evidence do I have to support this view?
Is this action generating change?		
Is this change positive?		
What does this mean for mobile Indigenous students and/or their families?		
What does this mean for ALL students		
What does this mean for teachers and other staff?		
What does this mean for the school leadership?		
What does this mean for the school as an organisation?		

Week 2:

	Response	What evidence do I have to support this view?
Is this action generating change?		
Is this change positive?		
What does this mean for mobile students and their families?		
What does this mean for teachers and other staff?		
What does this mean for the school leadership?		
What does this mean for the school as an organisation?		

Copy and paste additional weekly tables as required.

Reflection Sheet 2 Template CLASSROOM ORGANISATION

Item:

Copy and paste item to try here

Describe the situation in which you trialled this action:

Enter description here

Reflection:

	Response	What evidence do I have to support this?
Is this action assisting mobile Indigenous students?		
Is this action assisting non-mobile students		

Other comments or observations

Enter additional comments here

Item:

Copy and paste item to try here

Describe the situation in which you trialled this action:

Enter description here

Reflection:

	Response	What evidence do I have to support this?
Is this action assisting mobile Indigenous students?		
Is this action assisting non-mobile students		

Other comments or observations?

Enter additional comments here

Copy and paste additional tables as required

Reflection Sheet 3 Template PRACTICE AND PEDAGOGY

Item:

Copy and paste item to try here

Describe the situation in which you trialled this action:

Enter description here

Reflection:

	Response	What evidence do I have to support this?
Is this practice resulting in improved literacy learning for mobile Indigenous students?		
Is this practice resulting in improved literacy learning for non-mobile students		

Other comments or observations

Enter additional comments here

Item:

Copy and paste item to try here

Describe the situation in which you trialled this action:

Enter description here

Reflection:

	Response	What evidence do I have to support this?
Is this action assisting mobile Indigenous students?		
Is this action assisting non-mobile students		

Other comments or observations?

Enter additional comments here

Copy and paste additional tables as required