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**THE SOCIAL AND DISCURSIVE
CONSTRUCTION OF ITINERANT FARM
WORKERS' CHILDREN AS
LITERACY LEARNERS**

Thesis submitted by

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Information derived from the published or unpublished works of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given.

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STATEMENT ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF OTHERS

The doctoral research reported and presented in this thesis was conducted under the supervision of Professor Pam Gilbert (until November, 2002), Associate Professor Annette Patterson and Professor Nola Alloway from the School of Education at James Cook University.

Financial support for this research was provided by the School of Education, in the form of a scholarship with stipend.

DECLARATION ON ETHICS

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted within the guidelines for research ethics outlined in the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans* (1999), the *Joint NHMRC/AVCC Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice* (1997), the *James Cook University Policy on Experimentation Ethics, Standard Practices and Guidelines* (2001), and the *James Cook University Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice* (2001).

The research methodology received clearance from the James Cook University Ethics Review Committee (Human Ethics Sub-Committee) – Approval Number H1098.

Signature

Date

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ABSTRACT

Using a case study approach, this study examined the social and discursive construction of itinerant farm workers' children as literacy learners within a North Queensland primary school. By focusing on six case study families who enrolled at the school during two winter harvesting seasons, the study analysed the narratives of teachers and of families in order to yield insights into the fields of educational itinerancy and literacy.

Defining literacy as a social practice, the study was framed within cultural-critical understandings of literacy, and critical discourse and poststructuralist theories. By using these to theorise the social world and literacy learning within it, the research examined the social and discursive constructions of the itinerant farm workers' children within the sociocultural contexts of the school and its local community. Drawing on Fairclough's (1989, 2001c) text-interaction-context model, the study used critical discourse analysis to conduct textual and social analyses of interview transcripts and selected documents.

The study found that teachers' narratives about itinerant farm workers' children were predominantly negative, constructing itinerant children, their families and their lifestyles in deficit and stereotypical terms. The taken-for-granted assumption that an itinerant lifestyle impacted negatively on children's literacy learning meant that teachers had low academic expectations of the children. In addition, the children's families were frequently viewed as culpable for the difficulties that their children experienced. Many of the teachers' narratives reflected community stories about farm workers and wider societal stories about families of low socio-economic status. Although there were some positive stories in circulation within both the school and community contexts, these were very much in the minority.

The families' narratives provided "another take" on the events and practices that were so often read as negative by those more permanently located in the school and community. In providing insights into what it meant to be itinerant, the families highlighted their attempts to balance education with lifestyle and to fit into the town

where they were residing temporarily. These stories demonstrated that the families' practices were often very different from the commonsense assumptions of teachers and community members.

The study concludes that a reconceptualisation of the literacy learning needs of itinerant farm workers' children should look beyond the school and take account of the social and cultural contexts of the children and their families. Such an approach should help to shift the focus away from deficits and stories of blame, towards an exploration of the literacy strengths that itinerant children bring to school. By disrupting deficit views, teachers should be better placed to focus on responsive and flexible pedagogies for enabling children to achieve demonstrable and sustainable learning outcomes in school literacy learning.

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PUBLICATIONS

The following published and in-press papers have been based on sections of this thesis and its data.

- Henderson, R. (2001). Student mobility: Moving beyond deficit views. *Australian Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 11(1), 121-129.
- Henderson, R. (2001, July 12-15). *Moving into a new community: Itinerant fruit pickers' children and literacy learning*. Paper presented at the joint national conference of (AATE) Australian Association for the Teaching of English and (ALEA) Australian Literacy Educators' Association, Hobart. Available from <http://www.leadingliteratelives.com.au>
- Henderson, R. (2002, December 1-5). *Disrupting homogeneity: When being different is breaking school rules*. Paper presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education Annual Conference: Problematic futures: Educational research in an era of ... uncertainty, Brisbane. Available from <http://www.aare.edu.au>
- Henderson, R. (2003). Taking heart: Looking beyond fear and blame. *Board of Teacher Registration Professional Exchange*, 10, 7.
- Henderson, R. (2003, 29 November-3 December). *Opening Pandora's Box: Ethical dilemmas in literacy research*. Paper presented at the NZARE/AARE Joint Conference: Educational risks and dilemmas, Auckland, NZ. Available from <http://www.aare.edu.au>
- Henderson, R. (2003). Living with itinerancy: Children of itinerant farm workers in Australia talk about moving and changing schools. Manuscript under review.
- Henderson, R. (2004). Educational issues for children of itinerant seasonal horticultural workers: A case study in an Australian context. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 8(3), 293-310.
- Henderson, R. (2004). Recognising difference: One of the challenges of using a multiliteracies approach? *Practically Primary*, 9(2), 11-14.
- Henderson, R. (2004). Words making a difference: What's in a name? *Practically Primary*, 9(3), 16-17.
- Henderson, R. (2005). A Faircloughian approach to CDA: Principled eclecticism or a method searching for a theory? *Melbourne Studies in Education*, 46(2), 9-24.

Henderson, R. (2005). "We'd better hide those tats": A transient family tries to fit in to school. In S. May, M. Franken & R. Barnard (Eds.), *LED2003: Refereed conference proceedings of the 1st International Conference on Language, Education and Diversity*. Hamilton, NZ: Wilf Malcolm Institute of Educational Research, University of Waikato.

Henderson, R. (in press). An invasion of green-stained farm workers from outer space(s)? Or a rural community struggling with issues of itinerancy. *Education in Rural Australia*.

Woods, A., Henderson, R., & Hirst, E. (2004). When deficit meets accountability. *WordsWorth*, 36(4), 48-51.

CHAPTER 1.

SOWING SEEDS: A PREAMBLE

CONTEXTUALISING THE RESEARCH

This research addresses issues that have intrigued me for many years. It interweaves a long-term interest in literacy education and social justice with a curiosity about a group of children who enrol annually and temporarily in a number of rural North Queensland schools. The children's parents are itinerant farm workers¹ who move from place to place, sometimes from state to state, as they follow summer and winter harvesting seasons. In travelling between North Queensland and the southern states of Victoria and New South Wales, their children change schools and education systems at approximately six monthly intervals.

I lived and worked in one of the towns where farm workers arrived for the harvesting season and I had experienced the annual transformation of a sleepy, deserted township in the hot summer months into a thriving farming community during the idyllic weather of the winter months. This metamorphosis was accompanied by the arrival of large numbers of itinerant seasonal farm workers who swelled the town's population. Yet their relationship with the community always seemed tenuous. As a resident of that community, I had seen the green-stained workers and had heard the stories that spurned "*those* seasonal fruit pickers who arrive in town, steal jobs from locals and increase the crime rate." As an educator working in many schools across the district, I had also heard the talk about "*those* children who get dragged around the countryside by uneducated and uncaring parents." At the same time, I was aware that the negative and, at times, ugly stories contrasted with other, ostensibly more positive, aspects of the itinerant farm workers' lives: their contribution to the local economy, their ability to do arduous physical field labour, and their mobile lifestyles that took them from place to place.

¹ The naming of *itinerant farm workers* was difficult. The use of the term *farm worker* was a deliberate choice. I wanted to use a term that, on the one hand, was general enough to encompass the spectrum of jobs available on farms (see Chapter 6), and on the other hand, did not seem to have the pejorative connotations of terms such as *fruit picker*. In Chapter 3, I discuss the use of the term *itinerant*.

This dichotomous picture was also evident in schools, where culturally diverse and well-travelled children, who should have been able to bring a wealth of lived experiences to their schooling, were seen by some teachers as demonstrating one of the “harsh realities” of an itinerant lifestyle, namely, low levels of school achievement. When working in primary schools across the district, I was aware that most teachers associated the arrival of itinerant farm workers’ children with increased class sizes, higher stress levels and greater-than-usual demands for learning support services. There also seemed to be a concern that “local” children – those who lived in the town all year round – “missed out” when there were more children enrolled in the school.

In my masters’ research, where I investigated teachers’ explanations of literacy success and failure, I found that many teachers I interviewed identified itinerant children as low achievers, often blaming parents for allowing their children to miss too much time at school, and therefore foregoing valuable classroom learning opportunities (Henderson, 2000). Many of the teachers in that study implied that school success was an impossibility for students who continued to move from school to school, and some teachers noted that there were itinerant parents who “struggle[d] academically with literacy and numeracy” and did not value education, reading or writing (p.186). These views of itinerant farm workers’ families, expressed by teachers who had been interviewed as part of that earlier research, provided a starting point for this study.

CONCEPTUALISING THE RESEARCH

In reflecting on those stories, I also thought about teachers’ concerns that the children’s itinerant lifestyles prevented access to certain types of educational support. Indeed, it appeared that many of the itinerant children “missed out” on specific types of government-funded literacy intervention. This was particularly the case for the funding sent to schools as part of the processes of the Queensland Year 2 Diagnostic Net (Department of Education, Queensland, 1996b), a mandated statewide assessment procedure that identified which children were progressing satisfactorily and provided funded literacy (and numeracy) intervention for those who were not (see Henderson, 2000). The problem was that this particular funding

arrived after the students' end-of-harvesting-season departure and had to be expended by a date that preceded their return.

Such issues, along with teachers' observations that the children of itinerant farm workers did not do well at school, prompted me to reflect on the literacy learning of this particular group of children and to question: Did the families' lifestyles impact on the children's school achievement? To what extent were the children disadvantaged by an education system that was seemingly predicated on residential stability? Could school structural and curricular issues be implicated? And what might the future hold for itinerant children when their success in school literacy learning appeared to be so limited?

Such questions were embedded in social justice issues. As Gilbert (2000) argued, "school is not the same place for all Australian children and it's important that we recognise this and see it for the problem that it is" (p.5). Certainly research (e.g. Ainley, 1997; Alloway, Freebody, Gilbert, & Muspratt, 2002; Brine, 2001; Lamb, 1997) has suggested that low levels of school literacy achievement do not augur well for students' later success/es in life. Lamb's report for the Australian Council for Educational Research, for example, concluded that

students who acquire sound mastery of literacy and numeracy during school tend to be successful academically and to be successful elsewhere.... While raising levels of literacy and numeracy will not necessarily guarantee young people well-paid jobs, it will help improve their chances of completing school and accessing a wider range of post-compulsory pathways, which, in the longer term, may help young people establish more secure livelihoods.

(Lamb, 1997, p.38)

These findings highlighted the importance of successful literacy learning and, by implication, have suggested the consequences for students who do not achieve. The nexus between itinerancy and literacy for itinerant farm workers' children, then, seemed to be a topic worthy of investigation. What was surprising was that I could not locate any Australian research that had focused on the literacy learning of this particular group of children.

In setting up this research project, I wanted to move beyond the issues that Luke (1995/1996) described as classical questions of educational sociology and

psychology – “Who is successful and who fails in schools? How and why?” (p.7) – to address, and perhaps realise, some of the broader issues that Bailey (1996) identified as possible starting points for research – “Do you want to make the world a better place to live in? Would you like to know about the everyday world of people who are a lot different from yourself?” (p.36). I also wanted to consider the issue that has been identified as a key challenge for schooling in the 21st century – How can we improve learning in schools, thus ensuring high quality learning outcomes for all students? (see Department of Education, Queensland, 1999; Luke, 1999, 2003; Martinez, 2000).

My intent, though, was neither to reproduce stereotypes about itinerant farm workers’ children nor to promote a “fascination with the exotic” (Comber & Hill, 2000, p.93). My interest was in investigating the social and discursive construction of itinerant farm workers’ children as literacy learners. To this end, I began with the following research questions:

- What social and discursive constructions manifested within the social and cultural contexts of a particular school and community to explain the literacy learning of itinerant farm workers’ children?
- How did the social and cultural conditions mediate teachers’ access to particular discourses and not to others? How did these compare to the discourses accessed by the children, their parents and community members?

AN OUTLINE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

As part of this study, I conducted case studies of six itinerant farm worker families whose children were enrolled in one North Queensland primary school for at least one harvesting season over a two-year period. The case study approach was chosen because it would allow an exploration of the diversity, complexities and idiosyncrasies that I predicted would be characteristic of the participant families (Burns, 2000; Wilson, 1998). This was particularly important in light of sociocultural understandings about literacy and its complexity as multiple social and cultural practices (e.g. Alloway & Gilbert, 1997a; Comber, Badger, Barnett, Nixon, & Pitt, 2001a; Hill, Comber, Loudon, Rivalland, & Reid, 1998a). By focusing on

an investigation of particular cases, I was able to provide detailed descriptions and interpretations of the complex issues surrounding the literacy learning of a small group of itinerant farm workers' children, thus utilising the "particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic" characteristics of qualitative case study research (Merriam, 2001, p.29).

In collecting data for this project, I interviewed the children, their parents, their teachers and school administrators on numerous occasions, observed some of the children in classrooms immediately after their arrival and enrolment (or re-enrolment) in the school, and collected a range of school documents and artefacts. To contextualise the case studies, I also collected data about the institutional context of the school and the context of the community within which the school was located.

The data are presented as narratives. It has been widely recognised that telling stories is a social and cultural practice that helps people to represent the world, to structure and explain their experiences, and to position themselves in relation to others (Cortazzi, 1993; Errante, 2000; Gilbert, 1993, 2000; Golden, 1997). As Gilbert (2000) argued, telling stories helps to "open out a discursive place within which new texts can be built and new readings made" (p.7). To this end, the data chapters offer accounts that are both descriptive and interpretive, interweaving the participants' stories and my analyses of their stories.

In drawing on critical discourse analysis and poststructuralist theories, I recognise that the educational experiences of itinerant farm workers' children have been opened up to critique. Although Luke (2002b) explained that educational researchers often engage in such critique but avoid getting their "hands dirty with the sticky matter of what educationally is to be done" (p.54), I take up the argument offered by Woods (2004). Her contention was that if we want to change schooling towards more positive experiences for students, then we must "engage with the 'sticky matter' of what is *getting done*, as much as with what needs to be done" (p.8, emphasis added).

This project, then, is like the beginning of a farming season. Only through sowing the seeds of curiosity can I begin the task of making sense of the school experiences and literacy learning of itinerant farm workers' children. In telling and analysing teachers' and families' narratives, I have been cognisant of the types of concerns that Thomson (2002) articulated, in particular, that participants, colleagues and friends might perceive that I set out to tell stories of blame or pity. That has not been my intention. What I hope, however, is that the stories in this thesis move our understandings towards working out how we might harvest success for all students.

AN OVERVIEW OF THIS THESIS

In this first chapter of the thesis, I have sowed the seeds of the current project by outlining my reasons for taking up this particular research topic, by contextualising it within my own experiences as a town resident, an educator and a researcher, and by identifying the research focus. The next four chapters provide the foundations of the thesis in terms of a theoretical framework, the location of the current research in the fields of educational itinerancy and literacy, and the construction of the project.

In Chapter 2, I discuss Chouliaraki and Fairclough's (1999) theory of the social world, how this relates to an investigation of literacy learning as a social practice, and how critical discourse analysis can be used as a theoretical, methodological and analytical framework. I then show how I have drawn on their theory and foreground additional theories that relate to my research project. At the end of Chapter 2, I focus on Fairclough's (1989, 1995a, 1995c, 2001c) text-interaction-context model, which has been used as an organisational framework to structure Chapters 6 to 11 and as an analytical frame for working with the data that were collected.

Chapters 3 and 4 are literature review chapters, focusing on educational itinerancy and literacy respectively. Both provide "big picture" overviews of the two fields. Chapter 3 demonstrates how educational itinerancy – in relation to specific groups of students whose parents are occupationally itinerant – has been taken up as a research issue and as an educational issue in England, Scotland, the Netherlands, the United States of America and Australia. Chapter 4 investigates three families or

clusters of approaches to literacy and highlights how particular views of literacy offer different ways of reading and constructing literacy learners.

Chapter 5 bridges the foundational chapters (Chapters 2 to 4) and the data chapters (Chapters 6 to 11). It outlines the construction of the current research, discussing the considerations that informed the study, the case study approach that was used, ethics, the tools and techniques of data collection and analysis, and my role as the researcher. It concludes with a description of the particular location of the study – the town of Harbourton and Harbourton State School – and the case study families who participated in the research.

Chapters 6 and 7 examine the broader sociocultural contexts of the study. These chapters contain an exploration of data that were collected about the community and institutional contexts of the case study families. Chapter 6 builds on the Chapter 5 description of the town of Harbourton, focusing particularly on stories about itinerant farm workers that circulated in the community and on the representations of farm workers that were printed in the town's biweekly newspaper. Chapter 7 examines the institutional context of one primary school in Harbourton, focusing on stories that circulated in the school community about the literacy achievements of itinerant farm workers' children.

Chapters 8, 9, 10 and 11 present the case study investigations of the literacy learning of six families of itinerant farm workers' children. Teachers' narratives about the families are explored in the first three of these chapters. Chapter 8 focuses on two Tongan families. Chapter 9 focuses on two Turkish families and a Maori family, whilst Chapter 10 focuses on one Anglo family from New Zealand. Chapter 11 concludes the data chapters. It draws on the families' narratives and offers another perspective from which to make sense of the school experiences and literacy learning of itinerant farm workers' children.

Chapter 12, which signals the end of this initial investigation into the literacy learning of itinerant farm workers' children, discusses the key findings of the project and suggests some possibilities for future research.

SUMMARY

The preamble has provided an introduction to the research project reported in this thesis – the social and discursive construction of itinerant farm workers’ children as literacy learners. It began by discussing the social and educational contexts that informed the project and providing a justification of the research topic. It then outlined the use of a case study approach, the presentation of data as narratives, and the framing of the study within critical discourse analysis and poststructuralist theories. The preamble concluded with an overview of the chapters that follow.

The next chapter, Chapter 2, investigates the theory that underpins this thesis and discusses my choice of critical discourse analysis as a theoretical framework and as a framework for data analysis. In drawing on a sociocultural view of literacy, I needed a theory of the social world that would enable me to conceptualise literacy as a social practice. As a result, I begin the chapter by discussing the theorisations that assisted me, and then go on to consider the application of that theory to the current research.

CHAPTER 2.

LITERACY, SOCIAL PRACTICE AND CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I explicate the assumptions underpinning the current research, position the research in a theoretical field, and discuss the theories that have informed my conceptualisation of the project, my discussion of relevant literature, and the approaches I employ in data collection and analysis. I begin with a discussion of literacy and its theorisation as a social practice rather than as a portable or unitary set of skills. I then locate this sociocultural view of literacy within a broader theory of the social world, by drawing on Chouliaraki and Fairclough's (1999) conceptualisation of social practice and its relationship to social structures and individual actions.

In the next section of the chapter, I discuss critical discourse analysis, focusing in particular on Fairclough's (1989, 1995a, 1995c, 2001c) text-interaction-context model, its accompanying theory and its application to the current study. The theoretical and methodological framework offered by Fairclough's work enabled me to synthesise multiple theoretical sources and to conceptualise discourse and its relationship with the social world. Fairclough's work also provided flexible guidelines for conducting critical discourse analysis and suggested an organisational framework for the chapters of this thesis.

A SOCIOCULTURAL VIEW OF LITERACY/LITERACIES

The term "literacy" and what it is to be literate, or to become literate, do not mean the same thing to everyone. As will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, a range of views about literacy co-exist in the broad community and in schools. More traditional views of literacy – that literacy is a set of skills learnt through drill and memorisation, or is a process of active meaning construction which may be enhanced by developing the psychological or cognitive processes of individuals – sit alongside the view that literacy is a cultural and social practice (Barton &

Hamilton, 1998; Luke & Freebody, 1997b). This latter view, a sociocultural view of literacy, challenges monolithic accounts of literacy as a set of neutral and transportable skills. Instead, literacy is understood as an active and interactive practice that always occurs within social situations and cultural contexts (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Luke, 1992; Teacher Education Working Party, 2001). As Barton and Hamilton (1998) explained, this view sees literacy as “something people do; it is an activity ... Like all human activity, literacy is essentially social, and it is located in the interaction between people” (p.3).

This perspective acknowledges the way that literacy is tied to social, cultural, moral and political relationships, and recognises “the local, variable, contingent and multiple nature of cultural, social and institutional literacy practices” (Freebody & Luke, 2003, p.55). Whilst not denying that cognitive, technical or behavioural characteristics and skills may be involved, this approach emphasises the importance of viewing literacy and literate practices with a “wide lens” (Hill et al., 1998a, p.13) rather than focusing on individuals. By taking into account the way that literacy is socially constructed, institutionally located, and “encapsulated within cultural wholes” (Hill et al., 1998a, p.13), investigations of literacy and literacy teaching in schools cannot be seen as

separate from understandings about students’ communities and languages, cultures and discourses, from broader, crucial decisions about curriculum, from complex everyday patterns and cycles of school renewal and reform, and from the dynamics of professional development and growth in the craft of teaching.

(Freebody & Luke, 2003, p.55)

Being literate is much more than knowing how to read and write in a standardised, unitary way. It is about being able to engage in particular literate practices, using the conventions that are regarded as appropriate for particular contexts (Anstey, 2003; Pennycook, 2001). Success or failure in literacy learning, then, is not independent of social, cultural, moral and political relationships and can be conceptualised in terms of access to and engagement in particular literate practices (Freebody & Luke, 2003; Teacher Education Working Party, 2001).

Literacy teaching, too, is a social practice and a political, not neutral, activity. Teachers play an instrumental role in the selection, construction and distribution of particular types of literacy, in socialising students into particular versions of the world, and in deciding what constitutes satisfactory literacy performance. As Luke (1994) argued, success is “contingent on the agendas and power relations of institutions and communities, governments and cultures” (p.2), raising significant questions about “Who gets what kinds of literate competence? Access to texts? Where and to what ends? Who can criticise? How? To what extent?” (Luke, 1994, p.2). Debate over what constitutes literacy, then, is

nothing less than a debate over the shape of a literate society, its normative relations of textual and discourse exchange, and the relative agency and power of the literate in its complex and diverse cultures and communities.

(Luke, 1997a, p.145)

MAKING SENSE OF SOCIAL PRACTICE

The theory of the social world presented by Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) is based on the assumption that individuals and groups use language to achieve a variety of social purposes, thereby complementing the sociocultural view of literacy that has been described. Their theorisation considers everyday social practices and their relationship to social structures.

In understanding social life as comprising networks of social practices, Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) used the term “social practice” ambiguously, referring to both an instance of a social action that occurs in a particular place and time and a way of acting that has become relatively permanent or habitual. They argued that the nature of social practices is due partly to the structures of society – the “long-term background conditions for social life” – and partly to the concrete social events through which people live their lives – “the individual, immediate happenings and occasions of social life” (p.22). Social practices are shaped, constrained and maintained by the “relative permanencies” of social structures (p.22), but they are also practices of production, with “particular people in particular relationships using particular resources” (p.23) and can therefore play a part in the transformation of social structures.

In focusing on social practices as “a point of connection” between social structures and individual actions, Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) acknowledged a structuralist-constructivist understanding of social life (p.21). This view recognises social life as constrained by social structures, but does not rule out agency or possibilities for creativity or transformation. Social life, then, is understood as constrained as well as “an active process of production” (p.1). In taking this position, Chouliaraki and Fairclough rejected “a structuralism which construes social life as an effect of structures and eliminates agency,” “a rationalism which views social life as entirely produced through the rational activity of agents” (p.25), “a determinism which puts all the emphasis on stabilised structures,” and “a voluntarism which puts all the emphasis on concrete activity” (p.22).

What Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) accepted was a dialectical relationship between structures and events. Drawing on the work of Harvey (1996), they argued for internal and dialectical relationships between the macro level of social structure and the micro level of social action, as well as within aspects of social practice. Harvey conceptualised social practice as comprising six diverse elements or “moments” – discourse/language, power, social relations, material practices, institutions/rituals, and beliefs/values/desires. Although the moments may be discussed as separate elements, they internalise each other dialectically, so that, for example,

discourse is a form of power, a mode of formation of beliefs/values/desire, an institution, a mode of social relating, a material practice. Conversely, power, social relations, material practices, institutions, beliefs, etc. are in part discourse.

(Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p.6)

Harvey (1996) acknowledged that the circularity of dialectical arguments is often regarded as problematic and that “the seeming slipperiness of dialectical concepts elicits a good deal of scepticism, impatience, and distrust” (p.58). Nevertheless, as will become apparent in the data chapters and conclusion of this thesis, Harvey’s conceptualisation of social practice, as taken up by Fairclough and Chouliaraki (e.g. see Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Fairclough, 2001b, 2003b), has useful application to an investigation of the social and literacy practices of schools.

THEORISING CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Chouliaraki and Fairclough's (1999) theorisation of social practice is located within their wider theorisation of critical discourse analysis (CDA), which has been recognised as a repertoire of theoretical, methodological and analytical tools for enabling the denaturalisation of language practices in social institutions (Luke, 1998a, 2002a; Meyer, 2001; van Dijk, 1993b, 2001). Critical discourse analysis has an explicitly sociopolitical stance and allows researchers to focus on social problems and how they are produced, legitimated, negotiated and contested (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Luke, 1995/1996; Meyer, 2001; Pennycook, 1994; van Dijk, 1993a, 1994).

By investigating questions of inequality and injustice and attempting to intervene on the side of the dominated and against those who are the dominators – through the traditions of critical theory and the Frankfurt School, Marxism and neo-Marxism – critical discourse analysis sets out to examine the “givenness” of the world (Calhoun, 1995; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; van Dijk, 2001; Widdowson, 1998). By studying and critiquing the role of discourse in the production and reproduction of social inequality and by attempting to make explicit the interconnections between language, social practice and sociocultural context, critical discourse analysis aspires to denaturalise commonsense assumptions that make the existing social order and power relations seem natural (Fairclough, 2001c; Meyer, 2001; Pennycook, 1994; van Dijk, 1993b; Wodak, 2001). In this way, critical discourse analysis fosters

principled reading positions and practices for the critical analysis of the place and force of language, discourse, text, and image in changing contemporary social, economic, and cultural conditions (Luke, 1997; van Dijk, 1993).

(Luke, 2002a, p.97)

Although there are numerous approaches to critical discourse analysis (see Fairclough, 1992a; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Luke, 2002a; Pennycook, 2001; van Dijk, 1993a, 1993b), I originally chose to draw on Fairclough's (1989, 1995a, 1995c, 2001c) version for pragmatic reasons. The initial appeal of Fairclough's model, which is shown in Figure 1, was that it not only offered a way of conceptualising relationships between sociocultural context, social action and

interaction, and texts, but it also provided a useful framework for analysing research data and for informing theory and method (Gilbert, 1992). I found that closer examination of the theoretical approach promoted by Fairclough and others highlighted other advantages, especially in relation to interdisciplinarity and the synthesis of multiple theoretical sources (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Weiss & Wodak, 2003). Fairclough's work, however, has not been free of criticism (e.g. see Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000; Pennycook, 1994, 2001; Widdowson, 1998) and later sections of this chapter will discuss some of the issues that have been raised.

Fairclough's text-interaction-context model

In discussing his version of critical discourse analysis, Fairclough (2001c) has been explicit about the political stance he takes, describing himself as "a socialist with a generally low opinion of the social relationships in society and a commitment to the emancipation of the people who are oppressed by them" (p.4). Not surprisingly, his work focuses on issues of domination, hegemony, inequality and oppression, and aims to show how language contributes to social relations of power. Fairclough argued that

critical analysis of discourse is nothing if it is not a resource for struggle against domination ... the whole point and purpose of critical discourse analysis is to provide those in social struggle with a resource for language critique in circumstances where the "turn to language" makes language critique an important part of such struggle.

(Fairclough, 2001c, p.216)

Fairclough's (1989, 1995a, 1995c, 2001c) model of discourse as text, interaction and context offers a useful starting point for discussing his approach to critical discourse analysis. His model is founded on an understanding that language use is a form of social practice. Whilst this understanding of discourse is similar to de Saussure's *parole*, Fairclough (1992a, 2001c) argued against the notion that language use is determined solely by individual choices, emphasising instead that language is a social practice. In recognising that language is part of society, that linguistic phenomena are a particular type of social phenomena, and that social phenomena are partly linguistic, the relationship between language and social structure is understood as a dialectical relationship and is realised in Fairclough's model through a focus on discourse (Fairclough, 1992a, 2001c).

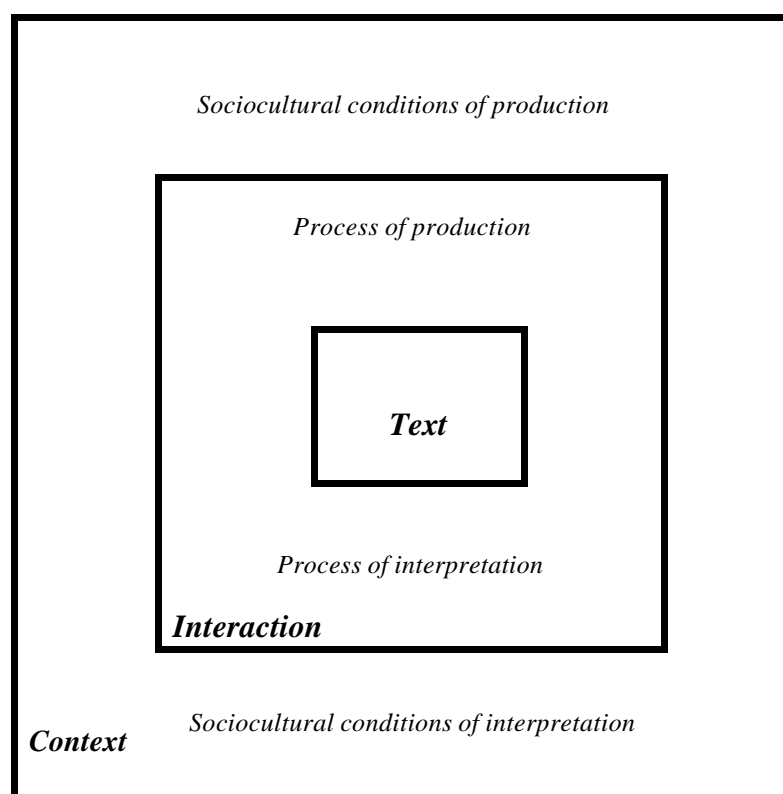


Figure 1. Fairclough's model of discourse as text, interaction and context (from Fairclough, 2001c, p.21)

Part of the appeal of Fairclough's model is that it interweaves social, discourse and linguistic theories. Fairclough (1992a) identified discourse as a three-dimensional concept and any discursive event is simultaneously a piece of text, an instance of discursive practice and an instance of social practice. This conceptualisation draws on Halliday's understanding of text as language in use (e.g. see Butt, Fahey, Feez, Spinks, & Yallop, 2000), thus integrating linguistic definitions of discourse (e.g. see Emmitt & Pollock, 1997; Pennycook, 1994; Poynton, 1993) with socio-theoretical understandings. For the latter, Fairclough utilised aspects of Foucault's work, particularly in relation to a constitutive view of discourse, the interdependency of discursive practices, the discursive nature of power and social change, and orders of discourse (see Fairclough, 1992a).

In Figure 1, Fairclough's (2001c) visual representation of his model, the three dimensions of discourse are shown as embedded, one inside the other, with the linguistic notion of discourse – text – located centrally. Fairclough used the term “text” to refer to spoken and written texts, including written transcriptions of spoken text, and to combinations of language with other forms of semiosis such as body language and visual images, all of which are products of the processes of text production (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Fairclough, 2000, 2001a). The interaction and context boxes of the diagram, which surround the centrally located text box, incorporate socio-theoretical understandings of discourse, with the interaction box referring to social (inter)actions and the processes of text production and interpretation, and the context box referring to the social conditions of those processes. The social conditions relate to various “levels” of social organisation: the immediate social environment (e.g. a school), the social institution (e.g. the institution of schooling) and society as a whole.

In drawing on multiple theories, including a range of linguistic and social theories, Fairclough's conception of discourse has been criticised for being eclectic (e.g. Pennycook, 2001), an issue that will be discussed further in a later section of this chapter. Although I do not see this as necessarily being problematic, I would agree that Fairclough's descriptions of the multidimensional nature of discourse are particularly complex. He has not only attempted to synthesise linguistic and social understandings and to conceptualise simultaneously occurring dimensions of

discourse, but he has also differentiated between discourse as action – “what people are doing on a particular occasion” – and convention – “what people habitually do given a certain sort of occasion” (Fairclough, 2001c, p.23). Fairclough (2001c), however, described this as a “felicitous ambiguity” which “helps underline the social nature of discourse and practice” by suggesting that any individual instance always implies social conventions (p.23).

Whilst I thought that those aspects of the multifaceted nature of discourse were useful and manageable, I found some of Fairclough’s other differentiations to be less effective. His distinction between “discourse” as a count noun and as an abstract noun (see Chiapello & Fairclough, 2002; Fairclough, 2001b, 2003a, 2003b), for example, puts pressure on the readers of his work to make sense of a grammatical labelling with which they may not be familiar. Similarly, his attempts to differentiate a variety of meanings, by including or excluding the article “the,” using different adjectival forms (e.g. see below – “discourse types” and “discursive practices”; and “discoursal perspective” in Fairclough 2001c, p.24), or singular or plural nouns (e.g. see below – a “practice” and “practices”), can be quite demanding on readers. The following excerpt from his book *Discourse and social change* demonstrates some of the grammatical distinctions that Fairclough makes:

I shall use the term “discourse” without an article to refer to language use seen in the above three-dimensional way (e.g. “the positioning of social subjects is achieved in discourse”), and I shall also refer to “discourse types” which are drawn upon when people engage in discourse, meaning conventions such as genres and styles. In chapter 4 I shall also begin using the term “discourse” with an article (“a discourse”, “discourses”, “the discourse of biology”) in something like the social-theoretical sense for a particular class of discourse types or conventions. I shall also refer to the “discourse practices” of particular institutions, organizations or societies (in contrast to “discursive practice” as one analytically distinguishable dimension of discourse).

(Fairclough, 1992a, pp.4-5)

Despite the complexities of some of Fairclough’s explanations, however, the three dimensions of discourse, as shown in his model, are particularly useful for thinking about discourse as a social practice. Although “text,” for example, is one dimension of discourse, it can never be conceptualised simply as an object independent of the other dimensions. Even when it is foregrounded, it is simultaneously a product of

the discursive practices of text production and interpretation as well as part of a social practice that occurs within particular sociocultural conditions.

In explaining the relationship between the three dimensions of his model, Fairclough (2001c) tended to focus on the way that the outer boxes influence the inner ones, that is, on the way that social conditions shape the types of resources that are brought to social interactions, which in turn affect the texts that are produced (see p.21). This emphasis highlights the way that language use is conditioned by social factors and non-linguistic parts of society (Fairclough, 2001c). Such top-down relationships have been noted as a bias in some critical discourse analyses (van Dijk, 1993b). However, Fairclough stressed that the three components of the model – text, interaction and context – are different, but are not discrete or fully separate from each other, and that the relationships between them can operate in both directions (Chiapello & Fairclough, 2002; Fairclough, 1992a, 2000; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). On the one hand,

discourse is shaped and constrained by social structure in the widest sense and at all levels: by class and other social relations at a societal level, by the relations specific to particular institutions such as law or education, by systems of classification, by various norms and conventions of both a discursive and a non-discursive nature, and so forth.

(Fairclough, 1992a, p.64)

On the other hand, discourse is socially constitutive and

contributes first of all to the construction of what are variously referred to as “social identities” and “subject positions” ... Secondly, discourse helps construct social relationships between people. And thirdly, discourse contributes to the construction of systems of knowledge and belief.

(Fairclough, 1992a, p.64)

Discourse, then, is understood as both socially shaped and socially constitutive, helping to “sustain and reproduce the social status quo” as well as contributing to its transformation (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p.259). This potential for transformative social action is a relevant issue for considering how change might occur within schools and school systems, a matter that is discussed further in Chapter 12.

Janks (1997) argued that she preferred to conceptualise Fairclough’s (1989) model three-dimensionally rather than two-dimensionally – “as boxes nesting one inside

the other” – as a way of capturing the interdependence between text, interaction and context (p.330). However, I prefer a different three-dimensional conceptualisation. A few years ago, I attended a stage performance, where one section of the stage was composed of concentric circles that could move upwards and downwards, either together or independently of each other. For me, that movable stage provided a visualisation of Fairclough’s model, where each of the rectangles of Figure 1 may be raised or foregrounded, or lowered or backgrounded – or all three may appear on the same plane at one time. This visualisation allows for each of the three dimensions to be considered separately from the others, yet never totally detached. It also allows a consideration of the way that the interplay between context and interaction can either constrain the text dimension (a concave formation) or be transformed by individual action (a convex formation).

Despite the potential two-way relationship, it is the “relative permanencies” (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p.22) in the social conditions of production and interpretation at various levels – including the immediate social environment, the social institution, and the society as a whole – and how they constrain the processes of production and interpretation, that are particularly relevant to understanding the field of education and its valorisation of particular practices. Fairclough (2003b) argued that these relative permanencies – which include the “internal rigidities” of institutions, organisations and structures as well as the habitus or “dispositions, stances, know-hows” of individuals – develop over time and tend to resist change (p.24).

Although Fairclough (2001c) drew on the example of a gynaecological examination to explain how such constraints work, educational institutions, like the school in this research project, operate in similar ways. A rewording of Fairclough’s example demonstrates how social action is constrained by

what can legitimately be undertaken only in “medical space” [school space] ... which implies the presence of a whole range of medical [school] paraphernalia which help to legitimise the encounter. There are also constraints on the *subjects* who can take part: there is a restricted set of legitimate subject positions, those of the doctor [teacher], the nurse [teacher aide], and the patient [student], and strict limitations on who can occupy them. There are requirements for modes of dress which reinforce properties of the setting in defining the encounter as medical [educational]

... There are constraints on *topic* ... The sequence of activities ... is highly routinized, following a standard procedure, and this routine property extends also to the verbal and non-verbal aspects of the ways in which medical staff [teachers] relate to patients [students].

(Fairclough, 2001c, pp.49-50)

Fairclough concluded, therefore, that

people are enabled through being constrained: they are able to act on condition that they act within the constraints of types of practice – or of discourse. However, this makes social practice sound more rigid than it is ... being socially constrained does not preclude being creative.

(Fairclough, 2001c, pp.23-24)

Theoretical underpinnings of Fairclough's approach to CDA

Initially, Fairclough identified his approach to language as CLS or “critical language study” and reviewed a range of mainstream approaches to language study, including linguistics, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, cognitive psychology, artificial intelligence, conversation analysis and discourse analysis (see Fairclough, 1989, 1992a). He argued that, although these areas all had something to offer language study, they also presented limitations for a critical perspective (Fairclough, 1989, 1995c, 2001c). His criticisms included, for example, positivist aspects of sociolinguistics, the individualism promoted in pragmatics, and the lack of consideration for context in conversation analysis. In attempting to overcome such limitations, Fairclough (1989) identified his approach, not as just another approach to language study, but as “an alternative orientation” (p.10). What he called “a social theory of discourse” (see Chapter 3 in Fairclough, 1992a), therefore, was an attempt to “bring together linguistically-oriented discourse analysis and social and political thought relevant to discourse and language” (Fairclough, 1992a, p.62).

Fairclough's earlier work (e.g. 1989) focused primarily on methodology and “doing” critical analyses of discourse samples. However, some of his more recent work has set out to develop “a method of language analysis, which is both theoretically adequate and practically usable” (Fairclough, 1992a, p.1), thus resulting in detailed explications of the theoretical bases for critical discourse analysis (e.g. Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Fairclough, 1992a).

Problematising Fairclough's approach to CDA

Although Fairclough's theory and model (e.g. see Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Fairclough, 2001c, 2003a) present a range of useful features for conducting critical discourse analysis, this work has not been without criticism. In particular, the integration of critical, poststructuralist and linguistic theories has been considered problematic, especially at the nexus of theories where apparent contradictions have become obvious.

Indeed, Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) set out to theoretically "ground" CDA, because its theories had not been "as explicitly and systematically spelt out" as they might have been, and to present "a coherent rationale" for their theorisations and analyses of language (pp. 1, 19). Such moves, however, have been criticised for their post hoc nature. Blommaert and Bulcaen (2000), for example, suggested that some of Fairclough's recent theoretical explanations have had a bias towards making the theory sound logical and coherent rather than showing how it developed within a "historical network of influences" (p.6).

It would certainly appear that Chouliaraki and Fairclough's (1999) efforts to locate critical discourse analysis, within both a traditional field of critical research and a contemporary late modern field, have resulted in a rather complex theoretical position, that incorporates a plethora of theories, both structuralist and poststructuralist. Although one purpose for such a dense explication may have been to counter claims that critical work has had an "animosity to theory" (Pennycook, 2001, p.25) and appears "essentially unprincipled" (Widdowson, 1998, p.149), the diversity of theories used by Fairclough seems to have left itself open to other criticisms. Pennycook (2001), for example, argued that critical discourse analysts, including Fairclough, were engaging in "a strange mixture of theoretical eclecticism and unreflexive modernism" (p.87). Whilst Pennycook's comment was directed mainly at "contradictory positions in apparently similar approaches to CDA" in the work of Fairclough and Wodak (p.87), Widdowson (1998) accused critical discourse analysts of "a kind of *ad hoc* bricolage which takes from theory whatever concept comes usefully to hand" (p.137).

Fairclough (2000), however, advocated theoretical diversity, suggesting that researchers should be “open to a wide range of theory” (p.163) and should allow critical discourse analysis to mediate interdisciplinary dialogue between social theories and methods (see Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Fairclough, 2000, 2001a). In arguing this case, Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) emphasised that the theory of critical discourse analysis is “a shifting synthesis of other theories, though what it itself theorises in particular is the mediation between the social and the linguistic” (p.16). They explained that theory cannot be separated from method, with the two components mutually informing and developing each other, so that

the ways of analysing “operationalise” – make practical – theoretical constructions of discourse in (late modern) social life, and the analyses contribute to the development and elaboration of these theoretical constructions.

(Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p.17)

In this way, Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) regarded critical discourse analysis as an example of “the social structuring of semiotic hybridity (interdiscursivity)” (p.16) and they opposed the stabilisation of theory or method because it would

compromise the developing capacity of CDA to shed light on the dialectic of the semiotic and the social in a wide variety of social practices by bringing to bear shifting sets of theoretical resources and shifting operationalisations of them.

(Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p.17)

In bringing together a range of theories, this flexibility offers what Weiss and Wodak (2003) called “a theoretical synthesis of conceptual tools” for examining the interrelationships between the social and the linguistic (p.7). Although Weiss and Wodak acknowledged that such an approach might appear unsystematic and eclectic, they argued that the plurality of theory and method does not have to be considered negatively. Instead, it can be understood as a specific strength of critical discourse analysis and provides opportunities for “innovative and productive theory formation” (p.9).

By conceptualising multiple theories as sets of “thinking tools” which can be used to work with the practical problems generated as part of research (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.160), researchers are able to focus on the question of “What

conceptual tools are relevant for this or that problem and for this and that context?” (Weiss & Wodak, 2003, p.7). Theory, then, is not conceived in terms of a “vacuous metadiscourse around concepts treated as intellectual totems” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.161) or, as Webb, Schirato and Danaher (2002) explained, “a kind of language game almost exclusively involved in and for itself” (p.47). Instead, it is “something (a ‘tool’) that enables you to understand and deal with problems and difficulties” (Webb et al., 2002, p.47), thus ensuring close links between theory formation and the particular problem/s being investigated (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Webb et al., 2002; Weiss & Wodak, 2003).

In offering opportunities for a principled eclecticism, critical discourse analysis has not been without criticism. This would appear to be due, at least in part, to the difficulties of making consistent statements about its underlying theories (Weiss & Wodak, 2003). As Weiss and Wodak (2003) pointed out, however, the “synthesis of theories is by no means a monistic theory model and it does not claim to be ‘more true’ than the individual theories from which conceptual ideas are drawn” (p.7). Nevertheless, critique has taken many forms.

Pennycook (2001), for instance, critiqued the way that critical discourse analysts have taken a political view of society but have not necessarily taken a similar stance on the nature of knowledge. He pointed to the “modelling and systematizing” in Fairclough’s work as an attempt to construct “a scientific edifice” around CDA, and argued that such contradictions demonstrated “a blindness to the politics of knowledge” (pp.84 & 85). Although Fairclough described his work as a “scientific investigation of social matters” (Fairclough, 2001c, p.4) and identified critical social science as “motivated by the aim of providing a scientific basis for a critical questioning of social life in moral and political terms” (Fairclough, 2003a, p.15), he defined “scientific” in terms of rational and evidence-based arguments (e.g. see Fairclough, 2001c). As he explained, “being committed does not excuse you from arguing rationally or producing evidence for your statements” (Fairclough, 2001c, p.4).

To this end, Fairclough and Wodak (1997, p.259) argued that critical discourse analysis should be scholarly and that “standards of careful, rigorous and systematic

analysis apply with equal force to CDA as to other approaches” (p.259). Even though Fairclough (2001c) described two of the chapters of *Language and power* as “a systematic presentation of a procedure for critical analysis” (p.12), he neither supported the “systemisation” of CDA (see p.22, this chapter) nor promoted positivist truth or knowledge claims, as Pennycook (2001) suggested. Instead, Fairclough emphasised that his approach was a set of guidelines that can be used flexibly (Fairclough, 2001c) for a critical discourse analysis that can never be objective, is always based in “particular interests and perspectives,” and proffers insights that are always partial, incomplete and provisional (Fairclough, 2003a, p.15).

Fairclough has appeared to take a fairly conventional critical theoretical approach, whereby language is understood as “always loaded, and objectivity depends on where you happen to be standing” in the social world (see Gibson, 1986, p.4). He has tended to declare his standpoint, such as his commitment to emancipation (see p.14, this chapter), thus acknowledging the way that his “reading” or analysis of data is made from a particular position. He has also recognised the necessity for a reflexive understanding of the researcher’s historical and social positioning (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999).

Although Fairclough allowed for multiple readings of data, he did not usually offer them. In the first chapter of *Language and power*, for example, Fairclough (2001c) suggested that different readings should not be regarded as “grounds for consternation” but were instead “worth exploring” (pp.11-12). However, in suggesting that “differences in the MR [members’ resources] brought to the task of interpreting the text” might be responsible for different readings (p.12) and identifying members’ resources as “socially determined and ideologically shaped” (p.9), he raised issues that might jar with poststructuralist understandings of subjectivity and power. Whilst poststructuralist theories make it possible to understand how individuals are positioned and position themselves within multiple subjectivities and thus take up multiple and “necessarily contradictory” subject positions (Davies, 2000, p.57; see also Davies, 1989, 1994), Fairclough did not seem to give a sense of that fluidity.

This is particularly evident in his treatment of power relations. Poststructuralist theories see individuals as positioned within complex sets of power relations, which are “constantly shifting, rendering them at one moment powerful and at another powerless” (Walkerdine, 1981, cited in Jones & Brown, 2001, p.717). Fairclough, however, has appeared to have a reasonably inflexible understanding of power, focusing on its repressive nature and linking it to ideology and domination, despite his recognition of the notion of networks of power relations. With Chouliaraki, he explained that

We agree with the post-structuralist view that all social practice is embedded in networks of power relations, and potentially subordinates the social subjects that engage in it, even those with “internal” power. At the same time, we believe that the view of modern power as invisible, self-regulating and inevitably subjecting (“bio-power”, Foucault 1977) needs to be complemented with a view of power as domination, i.e., a view of power that acknowledges the overdetermination between “internal” and “external” practices, and establishes causal links between institutional social practices and the positions of subjects in the wider social field.

(Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p.24)

Indeed, the nexus between Fairclough’s work and poststructuralist thought has been a point of contention and critique, even though Fairclough has regarded his work as being located – albeit a qualified position – “within a post-structuralist perspective, but without adopting either post-structuralist reductions of the whole of social life to discourse, or post-structuralist judgemental relativism” (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p.32). Nevertheless, Fairclough has attempted to address some of the problems that have been identified. In the preface to the book he co-authored with Chouliaraki, for example, he acknowledged that critical discourse analysis has had theoretical problems, especially regarding the relationship between critical discourse analysis and critical and poststructuralist social theories, and in relation to the theorisation of discourse and ideology (see Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p.viii).

Fairclough’s focus on repressive power, domination and ideology has been especially controversial. His conceptualisation of power recognises that power can be exercised through coercion in various ways, including physical violence, and through the manufacture of consent, whereby “those who have power can exercise it and keep it: through coercing others to go along with them” (Fairclough, 2001c,

pp.27-28). Fairclough's interest has been in the role of language in producing, maintaining and transforming unequal power relations and, in discussing the relationship between power and language, he distinguished between power "in" and "behind" discourse. "Power in discourse" refers to any exercise and enactment of power that occurs during communicative events, both spoken and written. For example, Fairclough (1989) argued that, during face-to-face interactions, it is possible for the "contributions of non-powerful participants" to be constrained through what is said or done, the social relations that are entered into, and the subject positions that are available (p.46). Fairclough used "power behind discourse" to refer to the way that "the whole social order of discourse is put together and held together as a hidden effect of power" (p.46). He identified this form of power as working ideologically through language, understanding ideologies as the commonsense assumptions that make differential power relations appear universal and natural.

It is this notion of "ideology," and the concomitant assumption that discourse or language carry ideological assumptions or power relations, that Patterson (1997) and Pennycook (1994, 2001) questioned. The suggestion that ideological critique can uncover what is hidden and thereby reveal "the truth" about repressive power relations contradicts understandings about the constructed nature of reality. As Patterson pointed out, "the idea that something resides in texts awaiting extraction, or revelation, by the application of the correct means of interpretation is precisely the assumption that poststructuralism sets out to problematise" (p.427). Such contradictions are evident in Fairclough's work. In *Language and power*, for instance, Fairclough (2001c) promoted the "unveiling" and "demystification" of ideological assumptions through critical discourse analysis (p.118), whilst arguing that power and ideologies are linked neither to particular groups of people or linguistic forms nor to a "permanent and undisputed attribute of any one person or social group" (p.57).

However, Fairclough's conceptualisations of ideology have modified over time (e.g. see Fairclough, 1995a, p.26). His earlier Marxist interpretations – which presented "a 'pejorative' view of ideology through which social relations of power are reproduced" (Fairclough, 1995a, p.17) and identified power relations as "always

relations of struggle,” linked to class struggle but not reducible to class struggle (Fairclough, 1989, p.34) – have been replaced by a view of ideologies as discursive constructions (e.g. Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Fairclough, 2003b). In noting that “the system of social classes defined primarily by social relations within economic production has lost its potency” as the key influence on social identities and differences, Fairclough’s (2003b, p.19) recent work has linked the question of ideology to discourse and the other moments of social practices (e.g. Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999). Ideologies, therefore, are identified as

constructions of practices from particular perspectives (and in that sense “one-sided”) which “iron out” the contradictions, dilemmas and antagonisms of practices in ways which accord with the interests and projects of domination.

(Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p.26)

In taking this position, Fairclough has retained his focus on domination, but has moved away from a view of domination as tied to social class domination. With Chouliaraki, he has acknowledged that,

since theory is itself a practice, there is the question of ideological knowledges within the reflexive self-representations of a theory, which is ... linked to the question of how the particular theoretical practice is networked with other practices.

(Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p.27)

Whilst I continue to be challenged by the interweaving of theories that inform CDA, and can be used to inform CDA, I found Chouliaraki and Fairclough’s (1999) conceptualisation of theory as a social practice to be useful. Their argument that theory is “like other practices ... caught up in networks of relations with economic, political and cultural practices which determine its internal constitution and can have ideological effects within it” (p.29), enhanced my understanding of the “shifting synthesis” of theories that were mentioned earlier and enabled the use of multiple theoretical sources for the current research.

USING CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

The current research draws on critical discourse analysis for its conceptualisations of social life and the relationship between individual actions and social structures, and for its analytical framework. Fairclough's theorisation of a dialectical relationship between language use and social practice (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Fairclough, 1992a, 2001b, 2001c) and his model of discourse as text, interaction and context (Fairclough, 1989, 1995a, 1995c, 2001c) addressed social and linguistic issues, complemented the sociocultural view of literacy underpinning this study, and provided an analytical framework that merges three traditions of analysis. His guidelines for data analysis combine close textual analysis from linguistics with macroanalysis and microanalysis from sociology (Fairclough, 1992a). In this way, Fairclough's approach draws on the strengths of other approaches to language study whilst addressing some of their limitations (see discussion on p.20, this chapter).

Fairclough's version of critical discourse analysis also enabled the examination of all "texts" within one conceptual framework. As will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 5, data collection for this study involved a range of texts, including written transcriptions of spoken texts (interviews), field notes, newspaper articles and school documents, all of which involved language use and were thus the products of social interactions of various types. All could be considered as texts, as examples of discursive practice and as instances of social practice, as conceptualised by Fairclough's model (see Figure 1).

According to Luke (1997b), critical discourse analysis is a useful tool to examine educational questions – about "the normative contents of curriculum and official knowledge, and about the cultural assumptions and economic consequences of prevailing approaches to pedagogy and schooling" – and to enable the tracking of "the governmental, institutional and professional construction of deficit, disadvantage and deviance" (pp.343, 347). Thus Fairclough's work offered a way of investigating aspects of the social justice issues raised in Chapter 1.

In this section of the chapter, I discuss the application of Fairclough's work to the current study. To do this, I expand on the theory that has already been discussed,

describe Fairclough's guidelines for critical discourse analysis, and outline their application to this research project.

Using multiple theoretical sources

I draw on multiple theoretical sources which are anchored by Fairclough's (1989, 1995a, 1995c, 2001c) model of discourse as text, interaction and context (see Figure 1). In choosing to use Fairclough's version of critical discourse analysis, I recognise that I am drawing on the theoretical bases that he has utilised. However, I wish to foreground two sets of theories that have been particularly important in informing my research. Such a move is in keeping with Chouliaraki and Fairclough's (1999) advocacy for a synthesis of theoretical positions.

Firstly, I want to highlight the use of poststructuralist theories of textuality to release the plurality of textual meaning. In recognising that meaning is not fixed and that it is constituted within language rather than being reflected by it, these theories allow meaning, truth and knowledge to be conceptualised as sociocultural and historical productions (Alloway & Gilbert, 1997b; Best & Kellner, 1991; Pennycook, 2001). As a result, there can be "no 'single' truth, only different constructions, different representations" which temporarily stabilise meaning (Threadgold, 1990, p.3). For researchers, this means being sceptical about taken-for-granted assumptions and adopting

a less dogmatic, more tentative approach to their own, as well as to one another's truth claims – to see how knowledge is constructed within particular discursive sites at particular historical moments, rather than existing independently of the knower.

(Alloway & Gilbert, 1997b, p.60)

This approach not only opens up data to multiple readings. It also draws attention to the way that research is "not about capturing the real already out there" but considers how particular versions of "truth" are constructed (Britzman, 2000, p.38). For the current research, this is of particular importance. In investigating the ways that itinerant farm workers' children are constructed as literacy learners, this study focuses on the types of issues that Weedon (1987) identified – "how and where knowledge is produced and by whom, and what counts as knowledge" (p.7). Such

considerations help to problematise commonsense assumptions and to stimulate the constant questioning of truth claims (Pennycook, 2001).

The integration of these understandings, with Chouliaraki and Fairclough's (1999) theorisation of social practice and Fairclough's (1989, 1995a, 1995c, 2001c) model, facilitates the potential for different, resistant or "critical" readings of research data. However, in considering that each text, or piece of data collected for this study, could be located at the centre of Fairclough's model, it became apparent that neither the model in its diagrammatic form (see Figure 1), nor other conceptualisations of the model (see the discussion on p.19), could capture the complexities of the three dimensions of discourse, particularly at text level.

School policy documents illustrate this point. For example, the state educational authority provides over-arching policy documents (e.g. Department of Education, Queensland, 1998 – *Student management: SM-06: Management of behaviour in a supportive school environment*), which are interpreted at school level and are transformed into a school policy or strategy (e.g. Harbourton State School, 2000 – Harbourton State School's *Student behaviour management strategy*), which is, in turn, interpreted by all school staff. Although Fairclough's model is able to conceptualise different "readings" of a single text – in terms of differing processes of production and interpretation, the variety of members' resources brought to these processes, and different sociocultural conditions of production and interpretation – text is not necessarily a straightforward or uncomplicated "object" that can be described easily. Indeed, one text can be interpreted, re-interpreted and re-produced on many occasions, including "the reconstructed interpretations" that are produced in interviews (Gilbert, 1992, p.55). Thus, poststructuralist theories of textuality, within a critical discourse framework, offered a way of conceptualising and problematising the multiple constructions of itinerant farm workers' children that were evident in the data collected during this research.

I also wish to foreground theories that focus on the body as a surface of signification (Braidotti, 1992; Grosz, 1990; Kamler, 1997). Although Fairclough (1992a, 2001c) concentrated his discussion and analysis on verbal elements of text, arguing that his focus is on language, he also encouraged "broad and nonrestrictive

notions of discourse and text” (Fairclough, 2001c, p.23). In this way, he included visual images, body language such as gestures, facial expressions, posture and movement, and “any cultural artifact – a picture, a building, a piece of music” (Fairclough, 1995a, p.4) as examples of other forms of semiotics that can be incorporated into critical discourse analysis (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Fairclough, 1995a, 2000, 2001a). However, I wish to argue that the human body is also a “text” and that people “read” the body like they read other types of text. Such readings are socially constructed and incorporate assumptions about the internal body and subjectivity (Grosz, 1987). As Grosz (1990) explained,

The metaphor of the *textualised* body affirms the body as a page or material surface on which messages may be inscribed. The analogy between bodies and texts is a close one: tools of body-engraving – social, surgical, epistemic or disciplinary – mark bodies in culturally specific ways; writing instruments – the pen, stylus, or laser beam – inscribe the blank page of the body.
(Grosz, 1990, p.62)

Schooling regulates, classifies and normalises bodily appearance through requirements for school uniforms and particular bodily demeanors (Kamler, 1997; Kamler, Maclean, Reid, & Simpson, 1994; Luke, 1992; Meadmore, 2000). Whilst children’s bodies are generally recognised as central to the process of gendering (Davies, 1989; Kamler, 1997), research has also investigated how the body contributes to other social understandings. Kamler, Maclean, Reid and Simpson (1994) and Malin (1990a), for example, examined how some bodies are invisible and others visible in classrooms. Similarly, Davies and Hunt (2000) investigated “readings” of students’ bodies as competent or incompetent using the concept of marking – the tendency in binary logic for the “marked,” out-of-the-normal, or deviant category of a binary pair (e.g. white/*black*, good behaviour/*bad behaviour*) to be recognised by its difference from the unmarked category.

It appears, therefore that the treatment of individuals as embodied beings often depends on how the external body is read (Cowan, 1990; Stanley & Wise, 1993). Kamler’s (1997) report of two research projects demonstrated how particular discourses were made available to students through a process of bodily inscription and how the everyday practices of schools and universities operated to discipline students’ bodies. In the current research, teachers’ readings of students’ bodies

seemed to influence how particular students were understood within the school context, showing how the body can be considered as “text” in Fairclough’s model.

Applying Fairclough’s model

Fairclough’s (1989, 1995a, 1995c, 2001c) three dimensions of discourse, shown in Figure 1, are complemented by three dimensions of critical discourse analysis. In recognising discourse simultaneously as text, discursive practice and social practice, Fairclough argued that

one is committing oneself not just to analysing texts, nor just to analysing processes of production and interpretation, but to analysing the relationship between texts, processes, and their social conditions, both the immediate conditions of the situational context and the more remote conditions of institutional social structures.

(Fairclough, 2001c, p.21)

He thus incorporated three dimensions of analysis, with each dimension requiring a different type of analytical process: description of the formal properties of the text, interpretation of the relationship between text and interaction, and explanation of the relationship between interaction and sociocultural contexts, including situational, institutional and societal contexts. The three dimensions are shown in Figure 2.

Fairclough’s (2001c) focus on the formal properties of text, which lies at the centre of Figure 2, is based on the assumption that these properties are traces of the processes of text production as well as cues that are used in the processes of text interpretation. Fairclough thus linked the textual dimension of discourse to the interactional and contextual dimensions, as indicated by the embedded boxes of Figure 1 and Figure 2. The social, then, is understood as “built into the grammatical tissue of language” which “constructs the social world ... while enacting social relations between its producers and others who inhabit that world” (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p.140). Textual analysis is seen as strengthening discourse analysis, by helping to ground claims about social structures, relations and processes (Fairclough, 1992b, 1999; Poynton, 1993).

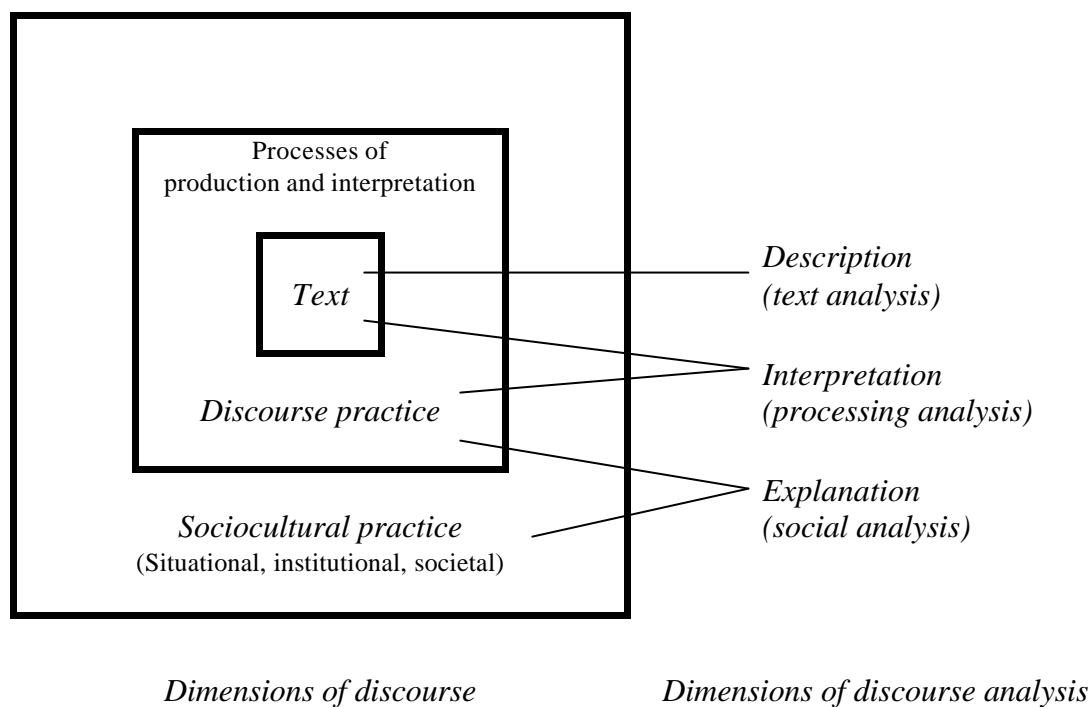


Figure 2. Fairclough's model of discourse and the three dimensions of critical discourse analysis (from Fairclough, 1995a, p.98).

Fairclough (2001c) offered a series of ten questions and accompanying sub-questions, described as “a guide not a blueprint,” for investigating the properties of texts (p.92). These questions draw on Halliday’s functional view of language and its understandings that language users make conscious and unconscious language choices, in representing experience, in interacting and expressing a point of view, and in presenting a coherent meaning (Butt et al., 2000; Fairclough, 1992a, 1995a, 2001a, 2001c; Poynton, 2000). Fairclough (2001c) argued that the formal features of text “can be regarded as particular choices from among the options (e.g. of vocabulary or grammar) available in the discourse types which the text draws upon” (p.92). Because choice includes exclusions as well as inclusions, he also recommended that analysis should consider the absences and silences as well as what is present in the text (Fairclough, 1995a).

Fairclough’s (2001c) guidelines for critical discourse analysis incorporate an investigation of vocabulary, grammar, and textual structures as a way of identifying the experiential, relational, expressive and connective values of text. As he explained,

A formal feature with *experiential* value is a trace of and a cue to the way in which the text producer’s experience of the natural or social world is represented. Experiential value is to do with *contents* and knowledge and beliefs ... A formal feature with *relational* value is a trace of and a cue to the social relationships which are enacted ... to do with *relations* and social relationships. And, finally, a formal feature with *expressive* value is a trace of and a cue to the producer’s evaluation (in the widest sense) of the bit of the reality it relates to. Expressive value is to do with *subjects* and social identities ... In addition, a formal feature may have *connective value*, i.e. in connecting together parts of a text.

(Fairclough, 2001c, p.93)

Such an approach is underpinned by the assumption that people use language to accomplish a variety of social goals. By combining textual and social analysis, critical discourse analysis enables examinations of the connections between social contexts, institutions and discourse practices and the relationship between language and power (Bloome & Talwalkar, 1997; Fairclough, 1989, 2001c).

Although description of the formal features of text sounds straightforward, Fairclough (2001c) pointed out that “text” should not be considered as an

unproblematic object that can be described through the identification and labelling of its formal properties. He argued that “what one ‘sees’ in a text, what one regards as worth describing, and what one chooses to emphasize in a description, are all dependent on how one interprets a text” (p.22). Not everyone agrees with this position. Widdowson (1998), for example, has critiqued critical discourse analysis for what he perceived as its “disregard of inconvenient textual features” (p.145). However, in presenting alternative analyses of Fairclough’s data, Widdowson managed to illustrate, perhaps ironically, the way that a critical approach can offer different or resistant readings.

Whilst Fairclough (1995b) regarded the description of the formal features of text as an important element of critical discourse analysis, he also emphasised that the text and its features should be “framed” by the other two dimensions of analysis – interpretation (of the relationship between text and interaction) and explanation (of the relationship between interaction and sociocultural contexts). These are important because the relationship between text and social structures is an indirect one, mediated by discourse and social context (Fairclough, 1992b, 1999, 2001c; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). As a result, the values of textual features “only become real, socially operative, if they are embedded in social interaction,” and discourses “only become real, socially operative, as parts of institutional and societal processes” (Fairclough, 2001c, p.117).

In particular, Fairclough (1992b, 1999) recommended that textual analysis should include both linguistic analysis and intertextual analysis. Drawing on the work of Bakhtin, he argued that intertextual analysis shows how texts rely on what he called “*orders of discourse* – the particular configurations of conventionalized practices (genres, discourses, narrative, etc.) which are available to text producers and interpreters in particular social circumstances” (Fairclough, 1999, p.184). Just as Fairclough identified the formal features of text as particular choices from the available options, he also regarded “the available repertoires of genres, discourses and narratives” as providing the “intertextual potential of an order of discourse” (p.205). As he explained, “what is ‘said’ in a text is always said against the background of what is ‘unsaid’” (Fairclough, 2003a, p.17).

Fairclough (2001c, 2003a), however, noted the difficulties of the interpretation and explanation dimensions of analysis, especially since the discourse processes of production and interpretation involve unobservable cognitive processes. In recognising the inferential nature of this approach, Fairclough (2001c) encouraged theorised explanations, researcher reflexivity and “self-consciousness about the rootedness of discourse in common-sense assumptions” (Fairclough, 2001c, p.139).

Chouliaraki and Fairclough also advocated strengthening critical discourse analysis through associations with other methodologies, such as ethnography (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Fairclough, 2003a). They argued that, in particular, the fieldwork of ethnography can help to

establish precisely the sort of knowledge that CDA often extrapolates from text, that is, knowledge about the different moments of a social practice: its material aspects (for example, locational arrangements in space), its social relationships and processes, as well as the beliefs, values and desires of its participants.

(Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p.62)

Other researchers, including Kamler (1997) and Poynton (2000), have also supported the use of critical discourse analysis in tandem with other methodologies. As Poynton (2000) explained, such an approach allows researchers to “make strategic selections of analytic focus, informed by other kinds of understandings of texts, context and their possible relations” (p.36). In the current research, ethnographic techniques under a case study umbrella provided a way of accessing such insights.

Fairclough (2001c) argued that his guidelines for critical discourse analysis should be used flexibly. In Janks’ (1997) opinion, an advantage of Fairclough’s approach is that it offers “multiple points of analytic entry,” thereby allowing the critical discourse analyst to focus on the interconnections between the dimensions of discourse and the “interesting patterns and disjunctions that need to be described, interpreted and explained” (p.329). Analysis, therefore, does not have to be sequential, but can move backwards and forwards from one type of analysis to another or can work simultaneously across the different dimensions (Janks, 1997). Luke (2002a) argued that “this orchestrated and recursive analytic movement between text and context” allows critical discourse analysis “to capture the dynamic

relationships between discourse and society, between the micropolitics of everyday texts and the macropolitical landscape of ideological forces and power relations, capital exchange, and material historical conditions” (p.100). These attributes provided ways of dealing with the complex sets of data that were collected for this project.

The current research

The current study draws on a range of ethnographic data collection techniques within a series of case studies. Whilst underpinned by Fairclough’s theorisation of a dialectical relationship between language use and social practice, as outlined in this chapter, this research also uses Fairclough’s text-interaction-context model as an analytical and organisational framework. As will be further discussed in Chapter 5, critical discourse analysis was used to analyse the data collected for this research and focuses particularly on interpreting and explaining context-text relationships through linguistic, intertextual and social analyses of a range of “texts.”

Chapters 6 to 11, which are the data and data analysis chapters of this thesis, are organised as context-text chapters. Chapters 6 and 7 – the “context chapters” – provide insights into the sociocultural contexts of the research. The former examines the wider societal context of the town (Harbourton) and community where the study was located, whilst the latter investigates the institutional context of the government educational authority (Education Queensland) and the local context of a specific school within the community (Harbourton State School). For each context, a range of texts was collected and analysed, thus allowing critical readings of how itinerant farm workers and their families were perceived and positioned in those contexts. These readings were particularly useful for identifying intertextual links between the narratives circulating in the community and school contexts and the stories that were told about the case study children and their families.

Chapters 8 to 11 – the “text chapters” – present the case studies of the six families of itinerant farm workers. Like all discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis generates “texts about texts” (Luke, 1997b, p.346). The texts of these chapters are narrative in nature, interweaving the stories of teachers, parents and children with my readings and interpretations of those stories. They assemble information from a

range of data sources, including interviews with teachers about their perceptions of the children's literacy learning, teachers' readings of the children's "textualised" bodies, interviews with the children and their parents, and school documents.

SUMMARY

This chapter located the current research within a theoretical framework that includes critical discourse analysis, critical literacy theories and poststructuralist theories relating to the plurality of textual meaning and to the body. Chouliaraki and Fairclough's (1999) theorisation of the social world and Fairclough's (1989, 1995a, 1995c, 2001c) text-interaction-context model provided specific frames for conceptualising the social world and understanding relationships between social structures and social action and between text and context. In conceptualising literacy as a social practice and accepting a dialectical relationship between social structures and events, the study uses critical discourse analysis to examine text within its interactional, social and cultural contexts.

The next two chapters, Chapters 3 and 4, provide reviews of the literature that relate to the research. Chapter 3 explores the field of educational itinerancy and examines how educational systems in a range of countries have addressed issues of itinerancy. Chapter 4 extends the idea of literacy as a social practice, as presented at the beginning of this chapter, and examines specific studies of literacy and their relevance to an investigation of the literacy learning of itinerant farm workers' children.

CHAPTER 3.

THE FIELD:

EXAMINING EDUCATIONAL ITINERANCY

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is the first of two literature review chapters and focuses on the field of educational itinerancy, which Danaher, Hallinan, Kindt, Moriarty, Rose, Thompson and Wyr (1998) described as “the insights and challenges that derive from providing formal education for students who follow an itinerant lifestyle” (p.2). As this chapter will show, this is a diverse field, itinerancy is a plural concept and the term itinerancy is but one of a number of ways of naming the field.

The chapter begins by discussing issues relating to the defining and naming of itinerancy and mobility. It then explores some of the available research that has investigated the relationship between mobility and educational achievement, and studies that have focused on identifiable groups of mobile or itinerant students. The chapter concludes with an overview of special educational provisions that have been established in the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Australia.

EXPLAINING EDUCATIONAL ITINERANCY

Current status of the field

Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] (1999, 2001b, 2003a, 2003b) suggest that residential mobility is a feature of contemporary Australian society, with approximately 43% (6.6 million people) and 42.4% of the population aged five years and over (6.8 million people) moving residence at least once during the 1991-1996 and 1996-2001 census periods respectively. In Queensland, the state where the current research was conducted, 1,078,500 persons aged 18 years and above moved during the three years prior to October 2000. Couples with children and single parents with children accounted for 44.2 per cent of these (ABS, 2001a). Indeed, *The longitudinal study of Australian children* (Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services, 2004) identified the high rate of movement of

Australian families as a research difficulty. Not only did they find that 19% of families were not at the address recorded in the federal government's Health Insurance Commission database, their initial data from 1,000 surveys of Australian families indicated that 19% of respondents reported that they were "likely to move" within the next two years (p.4).

Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (1999, 2001b, 2003a, 2003b) also indicate that the mobility of many families extends across state borders. During the ten years prior to June 2002, an average of 364,600 people per year moved interstate and approximately 12 or 13% of these were children between the ages of 5 and 14 years (ABS, 2001b, 2003b). The latter figure, however, would appear to understate the extent of student mobility, because it includes neither students over 14 years of age nor students who move intrastate.

Despite the available statistics, student mobility – which sometimes comes under other labels including itinerancy and transience – does not yet seem to have attracted the attention it deserves from research or from Australian school systems. There is, however, growing recognition of mobility as an issue for schools. In Queensland where the current research was undertaken, for example, discussion of mobility can be found in a number of educational documents (Department of Education, Queensland, 2000a, 2001a) and itinerant students are identified as a target group in some policies (e.g. Department of Education, Queensland, 1998). Nevertheless, educational policy in relation to student mobility still seems formative.

Population trends such as those produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics tend to homogenise mobility, only occasionally highlighting the diversity of circumstances in which mobility occurs or the differences amongst mobile families. It appears, however, that some families are forced by economic conditions into relocating,² sometimes using mobility as "short-term responses to economic fluctuations" (ABS, 2001b), that some move by choice or for family reasons, and

² In a supplement to the Monthly Population Survey conducted in Queensland during October 2000, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001a) found that 20% of those who had moved residence in Queensland during the previous three years identified better employment prospects as a consideration for their relocation.

that others, including itinerant seasonal workers, defence force personnel, teachers, and show and circus families, make frequent moves for occupational reasons. Yet, despite the current tendency in Australian society for mobility and some families having long histories of moving, research into the educational implications of mobility is surprisingly limited.

Although a number of researchers (Fields, 1995; Moriarty & Danaher, 1998; Rumberger & Larson, 1998) have commented on the dearth of research about mobility in the field of education, the situation has probably been exacerbated by the assortment of terms – including mobile, itinerant, transient, nomadic, Traveller³ and peripatetic – that has been used to label and categorise people who move. The range of naming practices and the diversity of those who are described by these terms highlight the complexity of the issues involved, and an array of associated factors, including socio-economic status, ethnicity and family history, seems to confuse matters even further. Moreover, it has been suggested that the field has remained underdeveloped in education because mobile students are “less visible than more permanently located groups to the gaze of educational policy makers and researchers” (Danaher, Tahir, Danaher, & Umar, 1999, p.1).

Defining and naming the field

An investigation of what this study has called educational itinerancy requires some understanding of the naming practices that are in use and the difficulties of comparing studies that have utilised different definitions for mobility, itinerancy or transience. Whilst some researchers in the USA (e.g. Astone & McLanahan, 1994; Evans, 1996; Glick, 1993; Settles, 1993; Walls, 2003) seem to prefer the word *mobility*⁴ – with occasional variations, such as *children in motion* (Alexander,

³ The use of the term *Traveller* with a capital *T* is an accepted convention when referring to “an ethnic minority committed to nomadism as a central element of their cultural identity” (Reynolds, McCartan, & Knipe, 2003, p.404). The term is often used in reference to the Gypsy, Bargee, Circus and Fairground people of Western Europe. As Danaher (2000a) explained, the capital is used “to denote respect for the groups’ self-identification as a distinct cultural and in some ways ethnic community” (p.223). In the Australian context, the terms *circus*, *show* and *fairground* tend to be used without capital letters.

⁴ In this section and the next, particular terms have been italicised to indicate discussion about their usage and perceived meaning/s. Elsewhere throughout this thesis, the terms have been used without italics, except in situations where discussion has returned to usage issues or new terms have been introduced.

Entwisle, & Dauber, 1996, p.3) – Australian researchers have mostly investigated *itinerancy* and *transience*. However, these terms are at times used interchangeably, and at other times they carry their own variations of meaning. In general, though, *mobility* is used as a generic term, referring to geographical, physical and social movement, as well as to the more specific geographical relocation of students from one school to another. In contrast, *itinerancy* is often linked to occupational mobility, where people move from place to place in the course of their business or occupation, whilst *transience* tends to imply a relatively short sojourn at any one place.

Other terms also appear in the literature. The term *nomadic* is found mostly in studies about groups of traditionally mobile peoples who have no fixed place of abode. These include the Nigerian nomadic pastoralists who are the major focus of the *Journal of Nomadic Studies* (e.g. see Danaher, Tahir et al., 1999; Umar & Tahir, 2000) and the pastoralist Rabaris of western India (e.g. see Dyer, 2000). Occasionally the term *peripatetic* is used to describe mobile groups of people (e.g. Danaher, Wyer, & Bartlett, 1998). In European studies, the generic terms *Traveller*, *Travelling communities*, *Travelling persons* and *Travelling children* – and the associated term *Traveller education* instead of educational itinerancy (Moriarty & Danaher, 1998) – cover a broad range of

identifiable groups, some of which have minority ethnic status, who either are, or have been, traditionally associated with a nomadic lifestyle, and include Gypsy Travellers, Fairground families (or Showpeople), Circus families, New Travellers, Bargees and other families living on boats.

(Office for Standards in Education, 1996, p.8)

Even the term *student mobility* has a range of meanings. Although student mobility is usually considered in terms of “the total movement in and out of schools by pupils other than at the usual times of joining and leaving” (Office for Standards in Education, 2002, p.3), some researchers (e.g. Audette, Algozzine, & Warden, 1993) have examined mobility as a characteristic of schools while others (e.g. Birch & Lally, 1994) have investigated it as a characteristic of students. The situation has been complicated by the use of the term *mobility* to describe both routine moves (such as the move from primary to secondary school) and non-routine moves and by the inclusion of the term *transfer students* in some research (see Lash &

Kirkpatrick, 1994). Further complexities have come from attempts to distinguish levels of mobility and to differentiate between highly mobile and less mobile students (see Audette et al., 1993; Walls, 2003; Whalen & Fried, 1973).

Indeed, definitional variations and attempts to quantify mobility have made comparisons across studies quite difficult. Audette, Algozzine and Warden (1993), for example, used a mathematical formula to measure mobility as a school factor. They calculated “the ratio of students entering and leaving the school to the total number of students enrolled during the school year” to decide which schools were low and high in mobility (p.701). In contrast, some research has attempted to categorise students by setting up a binary between mobile or non-mobile, often as part of an effort to measure the effect/s of mobility on students or to identify a relationship between mobility and educational achievement. As a result, research studies offer a plethora of descriptors for mobile students – such as “had changed schools at least once since their first enrolment” (Birch & Lally, 1994, p.6), “attended three or more schools in the past two years” (Fields, 1995, p.29), or “moved three or more times prior to the completion of Year 4” (Mills, 1986, p.12).

Some researchers (e.g. Alexander et al., 1996; Bracey, 1999; Swanson & Schneider, 1999) have argued that it could be useful to distinguish between *residential* and *school mobility*, because school students may move home without changing school, change school whilst living at the same residence, or change residence as well as school. Swanson and Schneider (1999) categorised these students as *movers*, *changers* and *leavers*, and referred to non-mobile students as *stayers*. However, as Alexander et al. (1996) explained, it is rare for studies to make these types of distinctions, even though the challenges experienced by students in adjusting to these different moves may be different in “kind and character” (p.4).

Clarifying naming in the current research

As has been shown in the previous section, the naming of mobility or itinerancy is complex. It seems important, therefore, to clarify what terms will be used in the current research. I have decided to use the terms *mobility* and *mobile*, and *itinerancy* and *itinerant*, to describe children and their families who move from place to place. I use *mobility/mobile* when a general term is required and

itinerancy/itinerant for situations that imply mobility for occupational reasons. However, when discussing research studies that use other terms, such as *transient* or *nomadic*, I use the terms that the researcher/s selected. Following the lead of Patrick Danaher and his colleagues at Central Queensland University (e.g. Danaher, 1998a, 2000c; Moriarty & Danaher, 1998), I have adopted the term *educational itinerancy* to refer to students' movement from school to school and to refer to the educational implications of an itinerant lifestyle.

RESEARCH INTO EDUCATIONAL ITINERANCY

In Australia, research into educational itinerancy has been surprisingly limited, even though there is evidence that mobility is a characteristic of the Australian population and interstate mobility has steadily increased since 1984 (ABS, 1999, 2001a, 2001b, 2003b). Even though the ABS data have not indicated the specific numbers of children who moved residences (see p.39, this chapter), the family data suggest that mobility may very well be an issue for schools. It seems, then, that an understanding of mobility and its relationship to schooling and school achievement is essential if schools are to ensure equitable learning opportunities and appropriate planning and pedagogy for mobile students as well as for *residentially-stable*⁵ students.

Research about mobility can be clustered under two headings. One cluster focuses on mobile students in general and attempts to identify the impact of mobility on learning by comparing mobile and residentially-stable students (e.g. Duffy, 1987; Fields, 1997a; Mills, 1986; Welch, 1987). The other cluster of research investigates the mobility of identifiable groups of children. Much of this research is qualitative, offering descriptions of the lives and school experiences of groups of mobile students. The following sections provide overviews of these two clusters, drawing on both Australian and overseas research.

⁵ The naming of groups of students was difficult. Although *residentially-stable* is a hyphenated and lengthy term, it seemed preferable to other options (e.g. *stable*, *sedentary*, *non-movers*, *stayers*).

Comparing mobile and residentially-stable student

Most of the research that attempts to identify or measure the effects of mobility on educational achievement juxtaposes mobile and residentially-stable students, usually linking residential stability to educational success and linking a lack of residential stability to poor academic results (e.g. see Birch & Lally, 1994; Bolinger & Gilman, 1997; Lee, 2000). In this way, an image of schooling, that shows class groups changing little over the course of an academic year, tends to be maintained (e.g. Fields, 1995; Lash & Kirkpatrick, 1990). The identification of mobility and residential stability as binary oppositions has helped to produce negative conceptualisations of educational itinerancy, placing it outside a normative view of schools (Bracey, 1991; Rahmani, 1985). This is particularly evident when the term *turbulence* is used to describe high student turnover in schools (Office for Standards in Education, 2002; Rahmani, 1985; Thornton, 1999).

Attempts to determine the educational ramifications of mobility have generally contrasted the academic achievements of mobile and residentially-stable students. Some comparative studies have concluded that mobility results in lower student achievement (Audette et al., 1993; Birch & Lally, 1994; Hefner, 1994; Ingersoll, Scamman, & Eckerling, 1988), has a detrimental effect on children's progression from one year level to the next (Rahmani, 1985; Straits, 1987), and increases the risk of high school dropout (Rumberger, 1995; Rumberger & Larson, 1998).

Children's movement from one school to another, which sometimes involves movement across educational systems and often requires adjustment to new or different curricula, has been identified as problematic for teachers as well as for students (Lash & Kirkpatrick, 1994; Mills, 1986; Paik & Phillips, 2002; Rahmani, 1985; Rumberger & Larson, 1998). Unpredictable enrolments, speculative resourcing and a "perception of chaos" have been noted as contributing to these perceived problems (Lash & Kirkpatrick, 1990, p.187; see also Birch & Lally, 1994). Lash and Kirkpatrick (1994) found that teachers did not usually know in advance about the arrival of new students, that information was generally slow in coming from students' previous schools, and that teachers' planning was based on the assumption that students would be in the class for the whole year. They

concluded that teachers and educational systems tend to assume that student populations are residentially-stable and explained that

Teacher workload is defined by the class size, or the maximum number of students in the class, without recognizing that teachers might work with much larger numbers of students over the course of the school year. Decisions about curricula and staffing are made under the assumption that student populations do not change even in schools where they do.

(Lash & Kirkpatrick, 1994, p.840)

In Mills' (1986) study, teachers' perceptions of additional workload were supported by case study evidence that mobile children placed "considerable strain" on school materials and resources (p.16).

However, research on the effects of mobility on students' academic achievement present inconsistent findings, even though mobility is usually considered negatively. Bolinger and Gilman (1997), for example, attempted to assess possible relationships between a range of demographic variables, including mobility, and aptitude and achievement. On the battery of tests used in this study, only the language subtest where mobile students scored low results (and not the mathematics subtest, reading subtest and total battery scores) showed a negative correlation between mobility and achievement. Birch and Lally (1994), whose findings showed a difference between the scores of mobile and residentially-stable students on a range of language and number tests, acknowledged that the mobile children performed only "marginally lower" than their peers (p.9), whilst Evans (1996) found no significant difference between the reading and mathematics achievement scores of mobile and residentially-stable sixth graders.

The inconsistency of these results can be read and interpreted in a number of ways. Terminological and definitional variations, along with different measures or tests of educational achievement, indicate that different studies measure different things across different groups of students. The assessment instruments employed to measure mobile students' achievements in literacy and language, for example, include tests of alphabet knowledge (e.g. Birch & Lally, 1994), phonological awareness (e.g. Birch & Lally, 1994), reading achievement (e.g. Evans, 1996; Hefner, 1994), vocabulary (e.g. Birch & Lally, 1994) and basic skills (e.g. Ingersoll et al., 1988; Lash & Kirkpatrick, 1990; Paredes, 1993), as well as teachers'

perceptions of students' achievements in the subject English (e.g. Fields, 1995; Mills, 1986). Such diverse measures, across groups of students who have been differently defined as mobile, make comparisons both difficult and tenuous.

Another consideration is the interaction of mobility and other factors such as poverty, history of unemployment, family history and family composition. Indeed, some research has attempted to isolate mobility from other factors. In selecting research participants, Fields (1995), for example, decided to choose students who were "relatively free" of a range of other influences, including "divorce, single parent status, economic disadvantage, physical and sexual abuse, and drug abuse" (p.29). His argument was that

It is difficult to causally link student mobility to problems in development and achievement when so many other potentially adverse variables are impacting on children.

(Fields, 1995, p.29)

Other researchers have concluded that the effects of mobility work in conjunction with other factors. As Wright (1999) indicated, mobility should be "considered as part of a complex of risk factors" (p.6). According to Rumberger (2002), this complex might include factors such as the number and timing of school changes, the reasons for the changes, and students' personal and family situations.

For examining the effects of mobility on schools, Fowler-Finn (2001) suggested that an assessment of student mobility should also investigate residentially-stable students – the number of students who stay in a particular school for the whole of a school year. He advocated calculating a mobility rate – the total of new student entries and withdrawals during the year, divided by the total enrolment from the first day of school, as well as a stability rate – the number of residentially-stable students as a percentage of the first day of school enrolment.

In attempting to quantify the effects of mobility on students' educational achievements, it appears that many studies have ignored the wide range of reasons for students' mobility and have not taken into account the possibility that the term mobility may represent a diverse range of *mobilities*. Indeed, many of the studies cited seem to have assumed that mobility affects a homogeneous group of students

and that there is an identifiable cause-effect relationship between mobility and educational achievement. Assumptions like these tend to skim over the multiple factors that may be involved. As will be shown in the next section of this chapter, the terms *mobility* or *itinerancy* represent “a set of widely divergent experiences and opportunities” (Danaher, 2000a, p.223) and the interrelationships amongst a multiplicity of factors and education seem worthy of investigation.

Focusing on different groups of mobile children

A second and growing body of research on mobility explores a range of groups who are itinerant for occupational reasons. These include

- Fairground, Show and Circus children in Australia, the United Kingdom and Venezuela (e.g. Anteliz & Danaher, 2000; Danaher, 1995, 1999; Danaher & Danaher, 2000; Danaher, Hallinan et al., 1998; Danaher, Hallinan, & Moriarty, 1999; Danaher, Hallinan, Moriarty, & Danaher, 2000; Jordan, 2000a; Kiddle, 2000; Moriarty, 2000; Moriarty, Danaher, & Hallinan, 1996; St Leon, 2000; Wyer, Danaher, Kindt, & Moriarty, 1997),
- African pastoral nomads (e.g. Muhammad, 2001; Umar & Tahir, 2000),
- defence force children in Australia and the United States (e.g. McCarthy, 1991; Rahmani, 1985; Walls, 2003),
- Gypsy and Traveller children in Europe, the United Kingdom and Australia (e.g. Jordan, 2000b; Lloyd & Norris, 1998; Office for Standards in Education, 1996; Smith, 1997),
- Bargee⁶ children in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom (e.g. Bowen, 2001; Scholten, 2000), and
- seasonal agricultural and fishing industry workers’ children in the USA (e.g. Flores & Hammer, 1996; Heiderson & Leon, 1996; Martin, 1996; Martinez, Scott, Cranston-Gingras, & Platt, 1994; Montavon & Kinser, 1996; Romo, 1996).

⁶ Bargee children live on boats or ships.

Much of the literature on these particular groups has a different focus from the comparative studies cited earlier. Rather than questioning whether itinerancy is a factor that influences educational achievement or trying to measure the effects of itinerancy, this research is often premised on beliefs that “itinerant groups are amongst the most marginalized communities in the world, and their educational provision remains a low priority in most countries” (Danaher, 2000b, p.218). From such a viewpoint,

Sedentarism is the norm from which itinerancy is constructed as deviant. People who take their home with them, instead of living in settled communities, are regarded as outcasts who have no commitment, and who therefore constitute a recurring threat to the stability of those communities.
(Danaher, 2000a, p.222)

Many groups of occupational travellers belong to particular ethnic or minority groups and their traditionally itinerant lifestyles are connected to a range of cultural attributes that mark them as being distinctive from the residentially-stable population. This has been noted particularly in descriptions of the Traveller populations of the United Kingdom, where Gypsy communities have “always maintained an identity which has been markedly different from the rest of the settled population” (Office for Standards in Education, 1996, p.9) and

have been subjected to extensive racial repression and discrimination over many centuries throughout the UK and, as a modern minority ethnic group, continue to experience both overt and institutional racism in their daily lives.
(Jordan, 2000a, p.3)

Gypsy/Traveller communities have been described as possessing a “strong sense of independence” and close family bonds, with family events and other cultural traditions playing a prominent role in their social lives (Office for Standards in Education, 1996, p.9). The Office for Standards in Education reported a number of school practices that seemed to conflict with the social practices of Gypsy/Traveller communities. For example, school expectations for secondary schooling can conflict with parental expectations that adolescents will take on economic roles and child-care responsibilities, resulting in “a strongly felt suspicion of education at the secondary phase,” with some parents viewing “prolonged secondary schooling as an impediment to maturity” (Office for Standards in Education, 1996, p.11). Similarly, Reynolds, McCartan and Knipe (2003), in their study of Traveller children in

Northern Ireland, found that the approach to education taken by Traveller children and their parents, their prevailing culture and their semi-nomadic way of life had significant effects on educational progress and achievement.

In a similar fashion, Smith (1997), whilst acknowledging a wide diversity amongst Romani Gypsy families in Australia, identified disjunctions between family socialisation practices, where learning involves watching, listening and observing the economic, social, linguistic, political and moral codes of the community, and the structured, competitive and regulated environments of mainstream education. Smith also reported that Romani Gypsy children are encouraged to demonstrate initiative and independence at any early age, because

This prepares them for the social and economic responsibilities of adolescence when they will be expected to marry, work full-time, and raise a family of their own.... This makes the transition from a Romani childhood to adolescence to adulthood relatively easy. In addition to this, Romani children from an early age are encouraged to listen, imitate, observe, co-operate and attempt adult tasks.

(Smith, 1997, pp.245, 248)

Although the research of Smith (1997), Jordan (2000a, 2000b), Reynolds et al. (2003) and the Office for Standards in Education (1996) was conducted in different countries – Australia, Scotland, Northern Ireland and England respectively – there are a number of similarities amongst the findings. They include differences between the social practices of Traveller communities and mainstream schooling, experiences of racial discrimination, and the inability of school systems to always “respond positively and appropriately” to the needs of Traveller students (Office for Standards in Education, 1996, p.19).

Jordan (2000a, 2000b) and Smith (1997) identified a range of “historical, political, cultural and social processes which influence the access Romani children have to equitable education” (Smith, 1997, p.244), including the sedentary nature of schooling, poverty, racism, family literacy levels, and different knowledge and value systems. However, whilst emphasising that Traveller parents are keen for their children to have a solid grounding in mainstream literacy practices, they highlighted the difficulties in trying to achieve this goal, arguing that current educational systems seem unable to support children’s learning during the period of

time when the children are not attending regular schools. Jordan (2000b) also argued that expecting Traveller students to take up distance learning when they are unable to attend mainstream schools is a suggestion fraught with difficulties, because

Distance learning is traditionally a sophisticated means of supporting independent learning, based on high levels of literacy, higher-order study skills, motivation and adequate space and facilities for study. None of these are guaranteed in mobile Traveller communities. Family literacy levels are low, with few adults having achieved a full education, and while Travellers say they value literacy and academic achievement, they demonstrate a value system based on practical skills and a motivational drive to be economically self-sufficient within the self-employed market.

(Jordan, 2000b, p.4)

Similar themes pervade some of the research on migrant⁷ children in the USA. Many migratory seasonal workers begin their travel from Haiti, Mexico or countries in Central America. More than 70% are Hispanic and others are African American, Asian, Indigenous and West Indian (Davis, 1997; University of Texas Health Center, n.d.; Watkins, Larson, Harlan, & Young, 1990). Thus linguistic and cultural differences, along with poverty and perceptions of poverty, bring a whole range of challenges for educators (Center for Migration Studies of New York, 1998; O'Malley, Brown, Tate, Hertzler, & Rojas, 1991; Steffens, 1985; University of Texas Health Center, n.d.; Velázquez, 1994).

McGilvra (n.d.) argued that, although migrant farm workers are a diverse group, they share a culture of “migrancy,” a “distinctive culture that relates to similarities in employment patterns and lifestyle” (p.1). This lifestyle is linked inextricably to the weather and other conditions that affect the growing of field crops, thus

They live a transient lifestyle, packing everything they own into the family truck or van and moving on to the next destination, often with only a few hours notice. All aspects of life are affected by this continual uprooting.

(McGilvra, n.d., p.2)

Comments like these emphasise the plural challenges for schools in catering for students who experience educational itinerancy.

⁷ The term *migrant* is used in the USA to refer to itinerant (or migratory) seasonal agricultural and fishing industry workers and their children.

Negative connotations

In some of the research that has been described, mobility has been conceptualised negatively and in opposition to residentially-stable lifestyles. Many studies identify mobility as a factor that has both social and educational ramifications for children (e.g. Audette et al., 1993; Fields, 1997b; Lee, 2000; Long, 1975; Mantzicopoulos & Knutson, 2000; Paredes, 1993; Straits, 1987). At the extreme, mobility has been described as “a mental health challenge” with undesirable consequences for children’s health and social functioning (Holland, Kaplan, & Davis, 1974, p.74). Indeed, of all the studies investigated, not one suggested that it was expecting a positive relationship between mobility and educational achievement and many concluded that mobility has detrimental effects. Audette, Algozzine and Warden (1993), for example, argued that “continued concern for students who transfer schools frequently is clearly warranted” (p.702), and Owen (1997) raised the point that educational risks for mobile children are often not acknowledged or, even worse, “treated in a victim blaming way” (p.3).

Mobility has also been described as a factor that is likely to cause trauma and other social and emotional difficulties for children. It has been perceived as the cause of disruptions to social development, intellectual development and personal adjustment (Birch & Lally, 1994; Duffy, 1987), as well as contributing to a range of personal problems, including low self-esteem, insecurity and poor peer relations (Audette et al., 1993; Welch, 1987). Crabbs and Crabbs (1981) focused on the emotional effects of mobility on children, arguing that

these children, confronted with new friends, a different environment (and perhaps climate), and the trauma of the move itself, frequently become anxious and fearful of attending school, in this new location. In these circumstances, it is not unusual for children to withdraw, become dependent on their parents, feign illness and manifest a variety of other defensive behaviors.

(Crabbs & Crabbs, 1981, p.319)

It has been pointed out that mobile children have to cope with changing from familiar to unfamiliar surroundings, leaving old friends, making new friends and making other social adjustments (Duffy, 1987; Rahmani, 1985), and that these changes may be accompanied by secondary stressors, such as an increase in

isolation and a loss of social support (Eckenrode, Rowe, Laird, & Braithwaite, 1995). Hammons and Olson (1988) suggested that the social and friendship dynamics that occur as new students arrive are sometimes problematic, because children arriving at a new school often become friends with “the ‘losers’” because “no other group has fewer requirements for membership” (p.138).

Pribesh and Downey (1999) used a social capital explanation to account for the consequences of mobility, explaining that “moving negatively affects school performance because within-family ties are stressed and within-community ties with teacher, administrators, and other community members are often lost” (p.522). However, according to Miller and Cherry (1991), some children cope with a change in schools better than others do, with “those with the least resources to cope with change – the poor and the least educated” experiencing the most difficulty (p.7).

Some research has tried to identify the types of academic changes that mobile children experience. Different curricula, methods of instruction, assessment procedures, subject offerings and stages at which material is taught have been identified as likely factors to impede children’s transitions into new schools (Arbor & Stover, 2000; Curriculum Corporation, 1998; Jordan, 2000b; Rahmani, 1985). Even the different handwriting styles promoted by different state education systems in Australia have been identified as problematic for mobile students (Curriculum Corporation, 1998).

In studies that have avoided a direct focus on the residentially-stable–mobile binary, there has still been a tendency to describe mobile groups in terms of “their deviation from the ‘norm’ of fixed residence” (Danaher, 1999, p.24). In this way, mobile groups have been identified as different from the mainstream population and negative characteristics have been associated with them. In referring to Queensland show people, who move from town to town on an annual circuit, Moriarty and Danaher (1998) pointed out that

People whose homes move with them differ from the “norm” of fixed residence. They are perceived as, at best, a minority group and, at worst, marginalised from the physical, intellectual and spiritual resources available to the less transient populace. The stereotyped images conjured up by terms

such as “gipsy,” “nomad” and “traveller” are vivid and exotic, and more often than not pejorative. (This is even more true of descriptors such as “hobo” and “tramp.”)

(Moriarty & Danaher, 1998, p.7)

Mobile students, especially those with an itinerant lifestyle, are no exception. It appears that talk in schools often draws from deficit discourses (Danaher, 2000a) and contains negative assumptions and stereotypes (Moriarty & Danaher, 1998). Danaher (2000a) expressed concern at the persistence of deficit views about itinerant students:

Certainly a major issue of concern is the resilience of the deficit model that constructs itinerancy as different, and deviant, from the norm of settled residence, with the corollary assumption that the education of itinerant people is inherently a problem needing “remediation.”

(Danaher, 2000a, p.224)

Caravan park dwellers seem to be similarly stigmatised. Despite relocatable dwellings in caravan parks being recognised as a category of permanent residence for census purposes in 1986, negative associations with mobile accommodation and “general community stigma” (Hogarth, Geggie, & Eddy, 1994, p.6) continue to exist. Hogarth et al. argued that families living in caravan parks are often denied access to equitable life opportunities, with the negative effects of mobility as contributing factors. Restricted access to community services and the continual need to break down barriers in new locations were identified as issues that need to be addressed.

For many migratory seasonal workers in the USA, poverty is an issue that is not only viewed negatively, but is seen as influencing children’s lifestyles, living conditions and nutrition (Center for Migration Studies of New York, 1998; Martin, Gordon, & Kupersmidt, 1995). Some researchers have argued that poverty “makes hard choices for many farmworkers” (Nixon, 1996, p.3) and that some families have no choice but to require older children to look after younger children or to have children working with them in the fields (Ferguson, 2000; McGilvra, n.d.). Child labour, however, has been recognised as being hazardous (Davis, 1997; Nixon, 1996; Rust, 1990), increasing children’s exposure to pesticides (Center for Migration Studies of New York, 1998) and contributing to low levels of school achievement. As Nixon (1996) explained:

Children who work in agricultural jobs face more serious problems than dirty hands. Farmworker children are often two or more years below grade level in reading and math skills, and their dropout rate is 45 percent, compared with 29 percent for non-farmworkers.

(Nixon, 1996, p.3)

It certainly appears that few researchers have examined positive effects of being mobile. In fact, Pribesh and Downey (1999) could not identify any group of students for whom moving proved to be consistently beneficial and Lash and Kirkpatrick (1990) reported that the teachers they interviewed did not expect generally to be questioned about the positive effects of working with mobile children:

When asked if there were any benefits to working with mobile students, teachers were generally surprised by the question. About one-third of the teachers simply responded that there were no benefits to working with children who move (eight teachers), and two teachers did not provide any response. For four other teachers, the only benefit was the possibility that a disruptive student would leave the class, but they were quick to point out that “that would not be a benefit for the child.”

(Lash & Kirkpatrick, 1990, p.186)

There have been some attempts to problematise the negative focus on mobility and itinerancy. Settles (1993) argued that some beliefs about “stability” – that it leads to success and harmonious family relationships – are social myths. He emphasised that “families are forever on the move” because change and mobility are fundamental to family units (p.26). Similarly, Danaher and others (e.g. Danaher, 1994, 1995, 1998b, 1998c; Moriarty et al., 1996; Moriarty, Danaher, & Rose, 1998; Rose, Danaher, & Wyer, 1998; Wyer et al., 1997; Wyer, Danaher, Rowan, & Hallinan, 1998; Wyer, Thompson et al., 1998) have attempted to highlight positive aspects of being itinerant in relation to Queensland show children. They argue that show children “visit places, see events and live in ways that most children only ever read about or in some other ways experience vicariously” and “live the ‘inside story’ of the travelling show person and they know all the intricacies that such a life entails” (Moriarty et al., 1996, p.2).

EDUCATIONAL PROVISIONS FOR ITINERANT STUDENTS

Historically and internationally, the children of those who are occupationally itinerant have had limited educational opportunities (Bowen, 2001; Danaher, 2000a). In many situations, it appears that the requirements of compulsory education, which is generally premised on students being residentially-stable, sometimes conflict with family commitments and economic issues that necessitate the on-going input of all family members into the family's employment (Botke & Willems, 1996; Bowen, 2001; Office for Standards in Education, 1996). As Danaher argued (2000a), it has generally only been those with "some kind of political clout" who have been able to convince educational authorities of the need for special considerations (p.224). This has certainly been the case in Australia, where extensive lobbying by the small but apparently influential Showmen's Guild resulted in the establishment of the Queensland School for Travelling Show children ("Show time for travelling school," 2000).

In the United Kingdom, other Western European countries, the USA and Australia, the introduction of special educational provisions for the children of itinerant families has been a fairly recent development, with a mixture of government and non-governmental initiatives. The USA's Migrant Education Program was established in the 1960s following a television screening of E.R. Murrow's *Harvest of Shame*, a documentary that highlighted the poverty and hardships experienced by migrant and seasonal farm workers (National Association of State Directors of Migrant Education [NASDME], 2000). Extensive government programs were set up to address health, housing and educational issues. With current annual federal funding of 380 million American dollars, the Migrant Education Program now caters specifically for more than half a million children of migratory seasonal workers in fifty states, Puerto Rico and Washington DC (NASDME, 2000).

In Europe, a series of resolutions by the Council of Ministers of Education of the European Union in the 1980s resulted in the establishment of the European Federation for the Education of the Children of Occupational Travellers [EFECOT]

(EFECOT, 2002b). This organisation, which operated until December 2003,⁸ worked to optimise the education of four main groups of occupational travellers – Bargee, Circus, Fairground and seasonal workers’ families⁹ – by promoting the needs of Traveller students, providing opportunities for networking with government and non-government organisations, and supporting a range of projects and research across a number of countries in Western Europe. Despite the closure of EFECOT, education systems within those countries continue to make special provisions for Traveller students, through the Traveller Education Support Services [TESS] in England, the Scottish Traveller Education Project [STEP], and Landelijke Stichting Onderwijs Varende Kleuters [National Foundation of Education for Young Children of Bargee Families] which is funded by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.

Australian efforts to provide educational services for itinerant students are limited, despite the existence of many groups of children for whom mobility is a way of life. Currently, it appears that only two groups receive special consideration: the children of defence force personnel, whose support comes from the Defence Community Organisation which operates separately from, but in liaison with, state education systems, and travelling show children, whose provisions have resulted from extensive parental lobbying. Although the numbers of itinerant students in Australia may be small in comparison to other countries, it does seem that itinerant children are generally less visible than residentially-stable children within our education systems (Danaher, Tahir et al., 1999).

Until recently (e.g. Henderson, 2001a, 2001b, 2003, 2004a, 2005), there had been no particular research focus on itinerant farm workers’ children in Australia, even though this group had often rated a mention in conjunction with “other seasonal

⁸ In March 2004, a press release on EFECOT’s website announced that “since the 1st of December 2003 our organisation EFECOT is dissolved.” Accompanying documentation identified ongoing political and financial issues as problems that had been preventing the organisation from continuing to achieve its goals (see EFECOT, 2002a). The web site also announced that the Stichting Rijdende School in the Netherlands would continue to maintain the EFECOT website as a resource for teachers working with Traveller children.

⁹ Even though seasonal workers’ children were one of the four groups targeted by EFECOT, they appeared to be an invisible group on the organisation’s website. Information about the organisation and its programs focused on the other three target groups.

employees” (Moriarty & Danaher, 1998, p.8; also see Danaher, 2000a; Fields, 1997a; Welch, 1987). The Australian situation contrasts dramatically with that of the USA where educational provisions for the children of seasonal agricultural and fishing industry workers have become part of accepted educational practice.

INTERNATIONAL PROVISIONS

Traveller education in England

In England, Traveller Education Support Services [TESS], as part of local educational authorities, cater specifically for the educational needs of Traveller students from Gypsy Traveller, Fairground, Circus, Bargee and New Traveller¹⁰ families. They provide the services of teachers, education welfare officers, classroom assistants and nursery nurses (Kiddle, 2000; Office for Standards in Education, 1996). Although the school attendance of primary school Traveller students has improved, the Office for Standards in Education (1996) reported concerns that standards of student achievement, particularly in English, were low, that possibly 10,000 secondary school-aged Traveller children were not registered with any school, and that secondary school students’ results were “very variable, but on the whole unsatisfactory” (p.8).

Kiddle (2000) pointed out that Gypsy Traveller parents are often resistant to continued schooling for their children beyond the age of 11, when children would usually make the transition to secondary schooling. She explained that,

If the children have achieved basic literacy by this point, many parents feel that formal education has given their children the most useful skills it has to offer and it has little relevance beyond this. Indeed the influence of a non-Traveller peer group and the secondary school curriculum is sometimes seen as potentially harmful during adolescence.

(Kiddle, 2000, p.4)

¹⁰ According to the Office for Standards in Education (1996), New Travellers are hippies or “New Age Travellers,” who have taken up a nomadic lifestyle in recent times.

Traveller education in Scotland

In Scotland, the Scottish Traveller Education Project [STEP], funded by the Scottish Executive Education Department, caters for Traveller students by aiming to

promote awareness of the unique situation of Travellers in Scotland and a respect for their right to preserve their own distinctive lifestyles within our pluralist society; to assist in developing equity for Travellers and other interrupted learners in accessing education and other public services; and to liaise with similar organizations in the UK, the EU and beyond.

(Jordan, 2000b, p.8)

Jordan (2000b) reported that the school attendance patterns of Traveller students varied widely, creating a number of frustrations for schools that tried to accommodate these students. Whilst many Gypsy Traveller children presented variable patterns of enrolment, Show children were found to attend school regularly during winter. According to Lloyd and Norris (1998), these enrolment patterns are partly due to the still current Education Act (Scotland) of 1937, which recognises the seasonal nature of some work and reduces the school attendance requirements of Traveller children to half of what is expected of other students. Jordan (2000b) found that, even though some schools have accepted that Traveller students' absences are valid and legal, they acknowledge difficulties in justifying to school boards why funding was required for "absent" students.

As with Traveller students in England, Scottish Traveller students have been reported by schools to be underachieving (Jordan, 2000b). However, Jordan found that schools generally attributed the underachievement of Gypsy Traveller students to a "lack of curriculum continuity and coherence in their education" (p.4), whilst schools with Show Travellers reported that, in the early year levels, children's results were similar to their peers. Nevertheless, as Jordan pointed out there was "a higher than average incidence of dyslexic-type difficulties reported in some families" and "these, compounded with receiving significantly less teaching than their non-travelling peers, did lead to underachievement in the reading and writing elements of language" (p.4).

Traveller education in the Netherlands

Scholten (2000) explained that, in the Netherlands, the Landelijke Stichting Onderwijs Varende Kleuters [National Foundation of Education for Young Children of Bargee Families] offers extensive early childhood educational provisions for the children of Dutch Bargees – that is, for children who live on ships. These provisions include berth schools which children can attend while their ship is in six ports, mobile teachers who provide individual education for children on board ship in other ports, publications for parents, and the sharing of assessment information across this network and with the primary schools that children attend after the age of seven.

Migrant education in the USA

The Migrant Education Program in the USA offers a range of support mechanisms “to meet the unique needs” of the children of migratory agricultural or fishing industry workers (The Office of Migrant Education, 1998b). The program is founded on beliefs that “migrant children, although affected by poverty and the migrant lifestyle can and should have the opportunity to realize their full academic potential” (The Office of Migrant Education, 1998a) and that there is a need to “overcome barriers arising from mobility and educational disruption” (NASDME, 2000). To be eligible for the program, seasonal employment has to be the principal means of livelihood for the family and students must have moved within the preceding three years (Region XI Education Service Center, n.d.; Washington State Migrant Education Program, 1999; Wright, 1995).

Although school districts across all states are expected to identify and recruit migrant students, regional and state educational authorities co-ordinate services and programs across districts and states and in relation to a range of government legislations (Heartland Educational Consortium, n.d.; The Office of Migrant Education, 1998e, 1998f, 1998h). Co-ordinated efforts, especially where states form consortia, are given additional funds that are supposed to ensure both high standards and assistance for students to carry educational credit with them as they move from state to state (The Office of Migrant Education, 1998c, 1998d; Wright, 1995). The PASS (Portable Assisted and Study Sequence) and the Mini-PASS

Programs, for example, provide self-contained units of study that parallel regular course offerings, to enable students to gain full or partial credit or to make up credit deficiencies that have resulted from their interrupted secondary schooling (Californian Department of Education, 2000; Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2001).

The Migrant Education Program offers a broad range of programs and grants, which provide services for young children, elementary and high school students, and students in postsecondary education (The Office of Migrant Education, 1998g). It also supports a binational program with Mexico (Flores, 1996; Flores & Hammer, 1996; Johnson & Hernández, 2000; Seymour & Gzesh, 2000), which was set up to help educators cater for students who move between the education systems of the two countries and to facilitate information exchange about individual students (Davis, 1997; Flores, 1996).

These attempts to enhance the educational successes of migratory children and youth provide academic and compensatory instruction. However, as Walls (2003) argued, the “problems” tend to extend beyond education and include issues of poverty and health. He explained that

Despite the fact that most migrant children have parents who work full-time, three-fifths of them live in poverty. These students also have inadequate health care, which contributes to school absences. Migratory children have linguistic and cultural differences, as well as work responsibilities, which tend to isolate them from their school peers.

(Walls, 2003, p.1)

Walls’ comments highlight the complexities of investigating itinerancy and its interactions with other factors.

A large corpus of research is associated with the Migrant Education Program. Possibly because the program has existed for so long and its goals are widely recognised, most of this research appears to accept the premises underpinning the program and does not critically examine the approach taken by it. The research falls generally into three broad categories: collections of demographic data or descriptions of migrant characteristics that are or are not being addressed by the operations of the program (e.g. Henderson, 1998; Lawless, 1986; Perry, 1997;

Texas Education Agency, 1997; Velázquez, 1994); information about program design, strategies and schools' responses to migrant children's needs (e.g. Ascher, 1991; Gonzales et al., 1998; Lawless, 1986; R. Miller, 1996; Montavon & Kinser, 1996; Morse, 1997), and program evaluations (e.g. Florida Department of Education, 1998; Heiderson & Leon, 1996). In other words, most of the research on the program appears to be focused on tracking patterns and trends in migrant education, providing opportunities to share resources, and evaluating programs that are in use.

Some research, however, does raise important questions about the ways that the children of migratory seasonal workers are perceived and about some of the barriers to their educational success. A U.S. Department of Education report (2002, cited in Walls, 2003), for example, found that "schools with a large proportion of limited English proficient migrant students had lower expectations of student performance, less consistent standards and assessments, and less experienced teachers than other schools" (p.1). Walls (2003) argued that the broadening of the Migrant Education Program, to provide "support for parental involvement, bilingual and multicultural instruction, vocational instruction, career education services, special guidance counselling and testing services, as well as health and preschool services," has demonstrated attempts to counter such problems (p.1).

AUSTRALIAN PROVISIONS

Recent Australian research into educational provisions for mobile students

In Australia, mobility has only recently been put on the federal government's agenda as an educational issue worthy of investigation. A scoping study (hereafter called the *Changing schools* project), conducted by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training in conjunction with the Department of Defence (2002), recognised that mobility is "a complex issue with multiple causes and effects and interconnected relationships, which are not always easy to determine" (p.1). It highlighted the inconsistency of research literature about the effects of mobility, acknowledging that they "can be seen as negative, neutral or even beneficial" (p.2).

Like a number of the studies that were cited earlier in this chapter, the *Changing schools* research project attempted to identify the impact of “frequent family relocation” on children’s learning outcomes (Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training, & Department of Defence, 2002, p.1). This approach implied that “mobility” is a unitary factor with measurable effects, and failed to consider the multiplicity of factors that family mobility can entail. Although the study attempted to include a range of “categories of mobility” (p.11), the survey data that were collected indicated a distinct bias towards families of defence force personnel, a point noted in the research report. Of the 369 surveys completed by “mobile” parents, 208 were from parents employed by the Australian defence forces, and 130 of the 312 teachers’ responses were from teachers who had taught the children of Australian Defence Force personnel at their current school. This information, however, was probably not surprising, as the Department of Defence was one of the corporate authors of the report.

The *Changing schools* project appeared to generate considerable interest with schools and families. Of the 75 schools that were identified by educational authorities as having high levels of mobility, 34 responded to the project’s survey, with an additional 68 schools represented by responses from parents or teachers who had accessed the survey from other sources. However, a weakness of the project’s report was that it did not provide information about the locations of the schools, the number/s of mobile students in each school, or the number/s of parents’ or teachers’ responses from each school. Although the report provided information about the spread of survey responses from each of the Australian states and territories, this information did not inform the analysis of survey data.

Although the *Changing schools* research report stated that mobility was a complex issue and that it was difficult to synthesise previous research, there was little evidence that these factors had been taken into consideration in relation to the data collected. Despite the report’s assurances that the data were valid and reliable, it identified some data sets that were insufficient to provide reliable analyses and acknowledged potential bias due to the number of defence force respondents (see Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training, & Department of Defence, 2002, pp.18-19). Indeed, it appeared that the report provided little more

than a collation of parental and teacher opinions about student mobility. Additionally, some groups of itinerant students, such as the children of itinerant farm workers, had not been included in the research.¹¹

The *Changing schools* research report recommended further research and advocated the minimisation of “the potential negative impact of high levels of student mobility” (p.4). In response, the federal government announced an allocation of \$300,000 to two projects:

The first project will identify the most useful data needed when students move to another school and establish a best practice approach to transferring it.

The second project will identify practical ways to help children better adjust socially and emotionally to a new school environment.

(Nelson & Vale, 2002)

In a parallel move, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA] has since endorsed nationally consistent curriculum outcomes across the four curriculum areas of English, mathematics, science, and civics and citizenship (Bligh, 2003a; Holt, 2003). This proposed convergence of curriculum has been promoted as directly impacting on mobile families (Holt, 2003), because it

will give Australian parents who move between States greater confidence that what is being taught at their child’s new school is similar to what they learnt at their old one.

(Bligh, 2003a)

¹¹ The *Changing schools* project conducted three stakeholder workshops (in Melbourne, Perth and Townsville) before submitting the final research report to the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training. At the workshop I attended, one of the researchers advised that there had been an attempt to include itinerant fruit pickers in the research and a particular school in Victoria had been selected as a research site. However, contact with the school was made during the non-harvesting season when no itinerant fruit pickers’ children were enrolled. According to the researcher, no further attempts were made to include this particular group of students.

The Queensland show school

In the state of Queensland, where the current research was undertaken, educational policy relating to mobile or itinerant students still seems formative. It appears that the government educational authority, Education Queensland, recognises mobility as an issue – as evidenced by the discussion of mobility in a number of educational documents (e.g. Department of Education, Queensland, 2000a, 2001a) and the identification of itinerant students as a target group in some policies (e.g. Department of Education, Queensland, 1998). Nevertheless, there appears, as yet, to have been little in the way of policy enactment. The establishment of the Queensland School for Travelling Show Children which caters for a very specific group of students, however, has been an exception.

Special considerations for Australian show children began in 1989 with a program organised by the Brisbane School of Distance Education. This program combined conventional distance education – where the children worked on school exercises as they travelled with their parents and sent in their work to the School of Distance Education for marking (Danaher, 2000a) – with teacher visits to show circuit sites for on-site lessons. According to Danaher (1994), the program allowed parents to be actively involved in their children's education, encouraged close contact between parents and teachers, and brought the children into contact with role models that would normally have been unavailable.

In 2000, a mobile Queensland School for Travelling Show Children was established, using federal government funding.¹² Consisting of two semi-trailer classrooms, two prime movers and mobile accommodation for teachers (Hughes, 2002; "Show time for Australia's first travelling school," 2002), this "community school on wheels" (Currie, 2000) travels with show families to 87 locations across four Australian states and two territories, providing pre-school to Year 7 education for approximately 70 students (Mitchell, 2004; Murray, 2002; Raston, 2002). The school, which has a principal, four teachers and three support staff, is maintained and staffed by Education Queensland.

¹² Ongoing funding for the Queensland School for Travelling Show Children is provided by the Queensland Government (Mitchell, 2004).

Whilst the establishment of this school was clearly an attempt to provide access to mainstream schooling for one group of itinerant students, it created a parallel school rather than dealing with the issues of providing schooling within already existing mainstream schools. Although the reports cited above indicate the success of the school, it would appear that this approach works well when students travel en masse from place to place.

Services for Australian defence force children

When families of Australian defence force personnel relocate geographically, they are able to access educational and other forms of assistance through the Defence Community Organisation. For school-aged children and their parents, the service offers educational support in a number of forms, including information about changing schools, advice about how to minimise difficulties associated with moving, access to a regional education liaison officer, brochures (e.g. Defence Community Organisation, 1999a, 1999b, n.d.), other publications (e.g. Curriculum Corporation, 1998; Linke, 2000), and individual tutoring for students. The service recently provided teacher aide time for ten primary schools in Townsville, a north Queensland regional centre with a large army base. These “transition aides” provide in-school support for defence force children in schools that experience high rates of mobility.

South Australia’s Transient Students Project

In South Australia, a Transient and Mobile Schools (TAMS) network was established in 1989, in an attempt to provide “a coordinated approach to meeting the needs of students, schools and the system” (Department of Education, Training and Employment, South Australia, 1998, p.21). From 1994 to 1996, the Transient Students Project, established by the South Australian Department of Education, Training and Employment, developed and trialled a database and an electronic mail system, which enabled network schools to monitor the attendance and location of transient students, many of whom were Aboriginal, and to electronically share student profiles (Edwards, 2003).

The project resulted in a publication, *Student transience: Moving frequently between schools in South Australia* (Department of Education, Training and Employment, South Australia, 1998), which was distributed to schools across the state. The report identified strategies that had been used by schools to support the education of transient students. These included enrolment and induction practices, ways of enhancing the attendance and participation of transient students in schooling, and strategies for supporting the equitable monitoring of student achievement. The project was an example of a localised school-based project that was taken up at the system level.

SUMMARY

This chapter identified the field of educational itinerancy, or the provision of formal education for itinerant students, as a current educational issue. The increasingly mobile nature of the Australian population and increasing numbers of students who change schools suggest that more needs to be known about the interactions between mobility or itinerancy and educational success.

The beginning of the chapter focused on national and international research that has investigated mobility in relation to schooling. Although a range of names and definitions for identifying and describing mobility have made comparisons amongst studies difficult, this section of the chapter demonstrated that mobility is often conceptualised negatively, as outside of the normalised practices of residentially-stable society. Similarly, the educational experiences of mobile school students are often regarded as outside the normalised practices of schooling. This appears to have been the case in numerous studies that have compared mobile with residentially-stable students or have examined specific groups with itinerant lifestyles.

The chapter also investigated educational provisions for itinerant students in a number of overseas countries and in Australia. In general, such provisions have been a recent educational development and, particularly in Australia, have been rather limited. Many of the educational provisions for mobile and itinerant students have attempted to find ways to “fit” itinerant students into mainstream schooling. The Migrant Education Program in the USA, for example, offers compensatory

measures that allow students to “catch up” to students in the mainstream. The Queensland School for Travelling Show Children, however, has provided an alternative approach by offering a parallel form of schooling that travels with the children.

The following chapter examines the other field relevant to the current research. It investigates literacy and ways of accounting for differences amongst students. The chapter begins by examining different accounts of what literacy is, before presenting a review of literacy research that provides ways of explaining and “reading” students’ literacy learning.

CHAPTER 4.

THE FIELD: RESEARCHING LITERACY AND ACCOUNTING FOR DIFFERENCE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter continues the investigation of literature relevant to the current study by focusing on literacy research. As explained in the beginning of Chapter 2, views that identify literacy learning as the acquisition of neutral and transportable skills co-exist, in schools and in the wider community, with understandings of literacy as social and cultural practice (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Luke, 2000; Luke & Freebody, 1997b). Whilst Chapter 2 highlighted an understanding of literacy as a social practice – the view of literacy underpinning this study – this chapter briefly examines a range of conceptualisations of literacy and considers how each constructs literacy learners.

This chapter then examines a selection of literacy research, from the plethora that is available, that exemplifies sociocultural understandings of literacy. These studies have influenced my understandings of literacy and provide ways of thinking about the literacy learning of the itinerant farm workers' children who participated in the current study.

LITERACY PERSPECTIVES

The interweaving of a diverse range of fields and disciplines, including psychology, linguistics, sociology, anthropology, history, politics, English literature, educational assessment and human development, has resulted in what Stahl and Miller (1989) called a “continuous evolution” of literacy perspectives, beliefs and pedagogical practices (p.89). Although this variability and complexity have been conceptualised in different ways (e.g. Anstey & Bull, 2004; Comber & Cormack, 1995; Freebody & Gilbert, 1999; Freebody, Ludwig, & Gunn, 1995; Ivanic, 2004; Luke, 2000; Luke & Freebody, 1997b; Phillips & Walker, 1987; Reid & Comber, 2002; Welch & Freebody, 1993), I draw on an organisational framework that I have used previously (see Henderson, 2000, 2002).

This framework, where approaches to literacy are clustered into three groups – traditional skills-based, progressivist child-centred, and cultural-critical approaches – is based on the work of Luke and Freebody (1997b). I have chosen to develop this conceptualisation because of its ability to account for the accumulation and co-existence of multiple and varied literacy beliefs and pedagogical practices within an historical framework. Although the framework suggests a shift from psychological to sociological models, I am not suggesting that literacy perspectives can be organised into a tidy, sequential order or that more recent perspectives have replaced older ones.

As Freebody and Gilbert's (1999) examination of the methodological and theoretical diversity of Australian language and literacy research from 1965 to 1998 demonstrated, new approaches in research and educational practice tend to join, rather than replace, existing perspectives. Indeed, as Luke and Freebody (1997b) have pointed out, teaching practices are often based on aspects of all three approaches and, as a result, "remnants from all of these models are sustained in most contemporary classrooms and lessons" (p.191). Teachers' practices often appear to be eclectic (Ivanic, 2004; Luke & Freebody, 1997b), drawing heterogeneously from a range of perspectives in ways that "sometimes resolve, sometimes maintain, the tensions and contradictions among them" (Ivanic, 2004, p.240).

At times, it seems that "new" approaches to literacy education foreground aspects of already existing approaches. Genre approaches, for example, recognise social and class issues in relation to literacy learning, thus showing cultural and critical understandings about literacy. However, they also advocate explicit instruction in how to understand and compose particular text forms or genres – a form of skills instruction – and draw on the modelling, drafting, revising and editing components of process writing, which fit within progressivist child-centred approaches (for further details, see Anstey & Bull, 2004; Comber & Cormack, 1995; Freebody et al., 1995). Thus, whilst fitting historically within the family of cultural-critical approaches (see later in this chapter), genre approaches could arguably be aligned with both of the other two families of approaches as well.

I recognise, therefore, that the framework I have used is but one of many possibilities and that teachers may very well draw on more than one approach or “hybrid instantiations” of various approaches (Ivanic, 2004, p.240). This section of the chapter, then, offers one way of framing the types or families of literacy beliefs, values and practices that are available to teachers.

Traditional skills-based approaches

Luke and Freebody (1997b) identified a two-stage model that underpinned the traditional skills-based approach to literacy education which existed in Australia in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The approach involved

“the basics,” entailing word recognition, hand writing, spelling, and reading aloud, followed by “the classics,” entailing exposure to a canon of valued literature. These versions of reading education related directly and sequentially to the production of two kinds of literate students: One group who managed the first stage of reading development, and the other group who managed both stages.

(Luke & Freebody, 1997b, p.186)

This “basics plus classics model of literacy education” taught students about the use of a single authorised system of language, incorporated morality and citizenship training, and drew on a cultural canon that set out “who and what was to count as diasporic, exotic, and indeed Oriental in relation to a European cultural and textual center” (Luke & Freebody, 1997b, p.188).

Despite shifts in reading pedagogy in the 1950s – where ideas about reading readiness and the valuing of the individual experiences of readers seemed to parallel demographic and socio-economic developments and a growing interest in behavioural psychology – reading continued to be conceived as a transportable set of skills “developed within an apparently value-neutral pedagogical and curriculum environment” (Luke & Freebody, 1997b, p.188). Such changes, however, moved the focus away from moral and citizenship training towards a view of the reader “as a psychological entity with a set of (nonetheless normative and ‘western’) mental capacities” (Luke & Freebody, 1997b, p.188). Reading was identified as the mastery of sequences and hierarchies of skills, with basal readers for beginners providing controlled vocabulary and increasing levels of textual difficulty (Allington, 1995; Stahl & Miller, 1989; Teale & Sulzby, 1986). Similarly, learning

to write involved a focus on “the autonomous linguistic ‘skills’ of correct handwriting, spelling, punctuation and sentence structure” (Ivanic, 2004, p.228).

In pedagogical terms, skills-based approaches to literacy education tended to utilise activities such as direct and prescriptive teaching, “chalk and talk” and “drilling” exercises (Comber & Cormack, 1995; Ivanic, 2004). The teaching of reading and the teaching of writing tended to be separate activities, with both requiring correctness, accuracy and memorisation of information and skills (Ivanic, 2004; Kulieke & Jones, 1993; Luke & Freebody, 1997b).

Progressivist child-centred approaches

From the 1960s, new understandings, particularly from cognitive and developmental psychology, influenced the theorisation of reading and writing. This resulted in a move away from skills-based approaches and their preoccupation with “the breaking down of the language into its various parts” (Christie, 1990, p.15) towards conceptualisations of reading as “the construction of meaning in the internal cognitive space of the reader” (Luke & Freebody, 1997b, p.189). This family, identified here as progressivist and child-centred, encompasses experiential, whole language, process writing, growth, language-experience and cultural heritage approaches (e.g. see Atwell, 1987; Calkins, 1983; Goodman, 1986; Graves, 1981; Smith, 1983). In general, these approaches are said to involve

an apparently more active and oral construction of ideas that relate to a text, and pedagogies that aim to develop the individual’s meaning making capabilities through talk, and to allow the individual to respond to works of literature at a personal level.

(Luke & Freebody, 1997b, p.188)

In educational psychology, there was a shift away from behaviourist models of reading towards models that incorporated cognitive, developmental and psycholinguistic perspectives. According to Freebody et al. (1995), literacy instruction focused on “meaning over structure, on the liberation of classroom lessons from decontextualised and repetitive drills, and ... on incidental learnings that are available in genuine engagement with the personal meanings of written texts” (p.43). With the fields of cognitive psychology and linguistics supporting the belief that meaning involved a transaction between reader and writer, a major focus

was on making meaning in authentic meaningful contexts (Goodman, 1986; Taylor & Hiebert, 1994). Reading and writing, then, were understood to involve “an orchestrated set of psychological processes, highlighting internal mental operations acquired in childhood” (Luke & Freebody, 1997b, p.188).

From this perspective, children’s background knowledge and oral language competencies are regarded as starting points for instruction, thus contrasting with the sequenced approaches typical of traditional skills teaching and learning (Phillips & Walker, 1987). Instead of identifying reading as a set of skills to be learned, these approaches tend to be based on the understanding that reading is a “natural” process whereby children infer rules from their experiences with language (Goodman, 1986). In other words, children are understood to learn to read by reading, and to learn to write by writing and by reading “good” writing by others (Atwell, 1987; Calkins, 1983; Goodman, 1986; Graves, 1981; Smith, 1982, 1983).

Such approaches emphasised that children should be immersed in language and print resources. As Ivanic (2004) explained, “learning about how to write and what counts as good writing is implicit in the acts of writing and reading, rather than having to be taught explicitly” (p.229). What is interesting, however, is that teachers who take up progressivist child-centred approaches sometimes see a need for “direct instruction in the code aspects” of reading and writing (Luke & Freebody, 1997b, p.190). This has particularly been the case for students experiencing difficulties (Henderson, 2002; Luke & Freebody, 1997b) and demonstrates the way that teachers often draw simultaneously on more than one approach to literacy and literacy pedagogy.

Cultural-critical approaches

In recent times, understandings about literacy have taken a sociological perspective, identifying literacy as a social practice (e.g. Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Gee, 1996; Luke, 1991, 1994; Luke, Comber, & Grant, 2003; Luke & Freebody, 1997b). With increased interest in the ways literacy is used in different contexts and recognition that literacy involves more than cognitive processes within individuals, literacy has come to be defined in terms of socially and culturally constructed practices.

This family of approaches emphasises the sociocultural contexts of literacy and highlights its “political” aspects. Literacy always involves people conducting social activities and, as Luke and Freebody (1997b) explained, “all language, all text, all discourse ... ‘refracts’ the world; bending, shaping, constructing particular versions and visions of the social and natural world” (p.193). In understanding language and sociocultural processes as inextricably linked, this view recognises that literacy practices always take place in cultural contexts and social situations and always involve cultural knowledge, ideologies and social power (Freebody et al., 1995; Ivanic, 2004; Lankshear, 1998; Luke et al., 2003; Luke & Freebody, 1997b). Rather than conceptualising literacy as “a purely psychological issue of mental ability, skills, individual motivation and effort,” cultural-critical views consider “how texts and everyday textual and language practices materially construct social power and knowledge, cultural, gender and class identity” (Luke et al., 2003, p.17).

Literacy, then, refers “to the extent to which people and communities can take part, fluently, effectively and critically, in the various text- and discourse-based events that characterise contemporary semiotic societies and economies” (Freebody & Luke, 2003, p.53). As a result, literacy cannot be understood as something “done to” individuals or as something “done solely by” individuals, but is instead conceptualised as “an intersection of individual agency and social conditions. It is at once a tool for individuals and a tool for society” (Rogers, 2003).

From a cultural-critical perspective, literacy is a plural concept; learning is about access to, and participation in, particular social and cultural practices; and school literacy “success” is influenced by the extent to which students display culturally-preferred ways of talking, listening, behaving, reading and writing (Cairney & Ruge, 1997; Comber & Cormack, 1995; Luke & Freebody, 1997b, 1999a). Thus group membership – in terms of gender, social class, socio-economic status, ethnicity, geographical location or combinations of these factors – can determine the types of literacy that are accessed and can influence the successes that children achieve in school literacy learning. As Luke (1994) explained, “children come to schools with different world-views and values, beliefs and practices” and these “varying cultural, linguistic and background knowledges and competences are

picked up by teachers, tests and systems and transformed into differential patterns of success and failure” (pp.14-15).

In support of understandings about the plurality of literacy, the singular term *literacy* has been transformed into a range of pluralised forms – “literacy practices” (Luke & Freebody, 1999a; Welch & Freebody, 1993), “a plural set of social practices” (Gee, 1996, p.46), “a multiplicity of literacies” (Street, 1997, p.136), “multiple literacies” (Street, 1999, p.37), and “multiliteracies” (The New London Group, 1996), to name a few. This move away from unidimensional definitions of literacy has been accompanied by recognition that literacy education draws on selective traditions of what is accepted as “literacy-for-that-culture” (Alloway et al., 2002, p.28). Not only do different domains of life utilise different literacy practices, but some literacies are “more dominant, visible and influential than others” (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p.12). School contexts are no exception (Alloway & Gilbert, 1998; Anstey & Bull, 2004).

Like the other approaches to literacy already described, a cultural-critical approach represents a family of approaches, including those that have a genre (e.g. Knapp & Callaghan, 1989; Rothery, 1984) or critical literacy focus (e.g. Comber, 2002; Lankshear, 1994; Morgan, Gilbert, Lankshear, Werba, & Williams, 1996). These approaches acknowledge that some literacies are privileged over others in different contexts and some literacies can therefore be more powerful than others in particular contexts.

From these perspectives, the work of literacy teachers is perceived in particular ways (Gee, 2001; Jones Diaz & Makin, 2002; Street, 1997). Literacy teaching is “about building access to literate practices and discourse resources, about setting the enabling pedagogic conditions for students to use their existing and new discourse resources for exchange in the social fields where texts and discourses matter” (Luke, 2000, p.449). In this way, literacy education is recognised as a “normative social and cultural project” that constructs particular versions of the literate student (Luke & Freebody, 1997a, p.6).

Continuing debates

With the co-existence of these three broad families of approaches to literacy learning, and hence a wide range of different and hybrid understandings about what literacy is, there has been ongoing debate about how literacy should be best taught. Polarised views and a plethora of oppositional binaries – including meaning or whole language versus skills, genre versus process, and phonics versus word recognition – have been significant points of discussion in schools and the media (Freebody & Luke, 2003; Luke, 1998b, 2000, 2003; Luke & Freebody, 1997a; Street, 1999; Welch & Freebody, 1993).

Despite understandings about balanced literacy programs that develop code-breaking, semantic, pragmatic as well as critical analytical practices (Freebody & Luke, 1990, 2003; Luke, 2003; Luke & Freebody, 1999b) and recent endorsement of sociocultural understandings by education systems, such as in the state of Queensland where the current research was undertaken, literacy and literacy pedagogy remain contested domains. There is evidence (e.g. Freebody et al., 1995; Henderson, 2002; Luke, 2003) that teachers continue to draw on a range of literacy perspectives, including what Kamler (1994) described as “traditional and older theoretical and discursive positions” (p.130).

What is of concern, however, is that deficit discourses often seem to accompany approaches that identify literacy as an individual attribute. Indeed, some research (e.g. see Hatton, Munns, & Nicklin Dent, 1996; Henderson, 2002; Nicklin Dent & Hatton, 1996) has concluded that the explanatory frameworks accessed by teachers are often quite limited and that deficit discourses feature strongly in explanations of students’ literacy successes and failures.

Luke (2003) has argued that there is “no instructional holy grail that is universally effective for all kids” and that effective literacy programs are ones where schools have

thoughtfully exchanged information, audited their staff expertise, enlisted external help and critical friends where needed, and balanced their program in relationship to what they know are the needs of the kids.

(Luke, 2003, p.79)

The persistence of discourses that result in deficit views of students and their families and imply that students are incapable of becoming “literate,” then, is a current and critical issue for literacy educators (Comber & Kamler, 2004; Luke, 2003).

MAKING SENSE OF LITERACY LEARNERS

Although the descriptions of the three families of approaches provide a base from which to consider teachers’ constructions of literacy learners and allow the current research data to be located within the “big picture” of literacy education, they do not present detailed accounts of research from which to “read” and make sense of teachers’ constructions of itinerant children’s literacy learning. This section of the chapter, then, highlights some of the research that has informed my thinking about literacy and has impacted on the way I read the research data that is presented in later chapters of this thesis.

As I have already noted, I view literacy as a sociocultural practice and this informs not only my understanding of literacy but also my understanding of the social world (see Chapter 2). The notion that “literacy is not first and foremost an individuated and individual competence or skill, but consists of socially constructed and locally negotiated practices” (Luke, 1997a, pp.144-145) broadens the focus of discussion about literacy, moving outwards from the individual towards a consideration of the contexts within which literate practices occur. Such a view fits well with two of the topics of discussion in Chapter 2 – Fairclough’s (1989) text-interaction-context model, and the “wide lens” metaphor used by Hill et al. (1998a) to incorporate “the general cultural ways of using and valuing differential literacies” (p.13).

As Comber (1998) argued, a consideration of contextual factors foregrounds what is generally understood as the “background,” including “socio-economic *background*, family *background*, poor *background*, cultural *background*, minority *background*, linguistic *background*, and so on” (p.3). Comber’s assertion that “young people’s life-worlds and experiences are by no means ‘background’ in their access to and take up of educational provision and school literacies” (Comber, 1998, p.3), along with an acceptance of the complexity of students’ lived experiences, underpins the following discussion.

Making sense of difference

In schools, achievement in literacy learning is valorised and there is long-term evidence, both nationally and internationally, that different social groups achieve differentially (e.g. see Alloway & Gilbert, 1998; Comber et al., 2001a; Department of Education, Queensland, 2000a; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2001). Results of statewide tests in Queensland have reflected national findings that the students most likely to be at-risk of underachievement in literacy learning are Indigenous Australian students, socio-economically disadvantaged students, disabled students, those with language backgrounds other than English, and those living in isolated or remote areas (see Department of Education, Queensland, 2000a; House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training, 2002; Masters & Forster, 1997; Meiers & Forster, 1999; MCEETYA, 2003; Queensland Studies Authority, 2004; Rothman & McMillan, 2003).

There has been a tendency for results such as these to be aired in political arenas as supposedly irrefutable evidence of a general literacy crisis (see discussion in Alloway & Gilbert, 1998; Dooley, 2004b) or as “overwhelming” evidence that a particular group, boys for example, is “falling behind in our education system” (Nelson, 2004a). However, many (e.g. Alloway et al., 2002; Dyson & The San Francisco East Bay Teacher Study Group, 1997; Masters & Forster, 1997; MCEETYA, 2003) have cautioned against simplistic readings of relationships between social or demographic characteristics and literacy results, emphasising that such relationships tend to be complex. As the writers of the *National report on schooling in Australia 2000* (MCEETYA, 2003) explained, despite evidence of a “moderately strong relationship” between student socio-economic status (SES) and achievement in reading literacy, “a large number of low SES students achieved very high scores and ... some students with a high SES achieved low scores” (Section 6, By Student Subgroup, para. 2).

Alloway et al. (2002) emphasised the need for students’ literacy data to be disaggregated. In relation to the literacy results of boys, they argued that gender was not the only factor involved and that national literacy results showed “very

clearly that not all boys are doing equally poorly and that some girls are scoring at lower levels than are some boys” (p.45). They explained that

These national results not only identify the association between gender and literacy achievement, but clearly indicate that other factors such as students’ socio-economic background, language background and Indigenous identity may be equally or even more powerfully associated than is gender, as single-factor variables affecting literacy outcomes.

(Alloway et al., 2002, pp.42-43)

Similarly, Dyson and her teacher colleagues (1997) in the USA argued that “the complexity of interrelated differences” amongst children should be considered, as a way of avoiding stereotypical reduction of “complex individuals to simplistic examples of one kind of difference” (p.10). To make sense of difference, then, the interactions of a range of factors, including culture, language and gender, need to be considered (Alloway & Gilbert, 1997a; Lewis, 2001).

Literacy failure as deficit

Although traditional skills-based and progressivist child-centred approaches conceptualise literacy learning differently, they both highlight students’ psychological, cognitive and social capabilities and differences. As a result, literacy success and failure in school settings are conceptualised as located in individual children or in their home backgrounds – described by Alloway and Gilbert (1998) as “intellectual deficit” and “social deficit” conditions (p.254). In terms of the literacy data discussed above – which indicate that students from low socio-economic, Indigenous and non-English speaking language backgrounds, and boys are likely to be amongst those students underachieving – low literacy performances can come to be seen as “natural” and commonsense outcomes from those particular social groups.

Conceptualisations such as these lead easily to deficit discourses, with children or their parents being blamed for individual learning problems, knowledge gaps, or impoverished home or social backgrounds (e.g. see Freebody et al., 1995; Henderson, 2002; Hill & Crevola, 1998; Tancock, 1997). In this way, children’s or parents’ deviations from what are considered mainstream practices may be understood as deficiencies. Children or their families may be deemed to lack

valued attributes and attitudes, and therefore are regarded as disorganised, unmotivated or unstable, or as exhibiting unacceptable attributes and attitudes such as violence (Lubeck, 1994).

In their study of *Everyday literacy practices in and out of schools in low socio-economic and urban communities*, Freebody, Ludwig and Gunn (1995) reported that many teachers “clearly and persistently” interpreted students’ literacy achievement on the basis of socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity and perceived home backgrounds (p.x). In using these factors as points of reference, teachers regarded poor parents as non-supportive, irresponsible and lacking financial security, intelligence and knowledge. In contrast,

homes designated as middle class were regarded in highly favourable terms. They were seen to provide the cultural and intellectual capital, including literacy instruction and modelling, and material and emotional resources which allowed students to succeed at school.

(Freebody et al., 1995, p.x)

In conducting research in three rural schools, I found that teachers told similar stories to those reported in Freebody et al.’s (1995) research (see Henderson, 2002). Teachers attributed school literacy success to home support and reading to children by parents, and literacy failure to a lack of parental support and no reading to children, thus setting up binary oppositions between “good” and “bad” parents and “good” and “bad” homes. Issues of economic status and social class also seemed to thread through teachers’ discussions, with bad homes appearing to be those of poorer families and good homes equating with middle class possessions, values and attitudes. Through these stereotypical stories, the teachers linked poverty and low socio-economic status with unsatisfactory parenting behaviours and lack of responsibility for children’s literacy learning.

In her study of a fifth-sixth grade elementary classroom, Lewis (2001) identified the construction of students’ social class as occurring in relation to a range of factors, including parents’ income, occupation, education and lifestyle. However, the relationship between these attributes and social class appeared to be “ambiguous” (p.5) and it seemed that students were classified as belonging to one social class or the other, even when some characteristics suggested a misclassification. Lewis

found, for example, that the teacher in the study viewed one student, Jason, as working class, even though his family's income was probably in excess of that of families regarded as middle class. Lewis noted that, even though "the shaping influence of social class" was clearly noticeable in the data she collected, it was not discussed as directly as were age, gender and ability (p.86). Nevertheless, it was apparent to Lewis that the students identified as middle class were those who were socially and academically successful in the classroom, whilst those identified as working class were identified as unsuccessful.

Many studies have shown how low socio-economic status families are perceived by teachers as deficient in caring for their children and preparing them for school literacy learning (Carrington & Luke, 2003; Comber, 1998; Henderson, 2002; Hicks, 2002; Lewis, 2001). As Carrington and Luke (2003) explained, these perceptions usually rely on

a particular normative view of the family – generally the Anglo-European nuclear family. Such a family stereotypically has one working parent, is heterosexual, relatively demographically stable, and possessed of sufficient surplus income, education, and leisure time to engage in print-rich socialization and English-as-a-first-language verbal play.

(Carrington & Luke, 2003, pp.232-233)

In schools, the consequences of such perceptions are narratives of blame that focus on "*these* children whom my lessons do not reach, and who fail their proficiency tests at such high rates; *these* parents who do not support my professional work or share my values; *this* community – and so on" (Hicks, 2002, p.152). Mothers, in particular, are often blamed for not doing the "work" that schools valorise (Dudley-Marling, 2001; Griffith & Smith, 1987; Kolar & Soriano, 2000; D. E. Smith, 1987; Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989) and for a range of other social issues, including family dysfunction and lack of cleanliness (Comber, 1998). According to Standing (1999), "certain normalising images of mothers and mothering practices become built into educational discourse, which provide a standard against which all mothers are judged" (p.62). Such responses are not because teachers are uncaring and unsympathetic to the life experiences of some families, but because their available discursive resources make deficit judgements seem commonsensical (Comber, 1998; Henderson, 2000).

Deficit stories often go beyond classroom literacy learning and suggest that particular types of families are culpable for a whole range of social problems. According to Comber (1997a), deficit discourse “often becomes pervasive, conflating illiteracy, poverty and crime,” thereby constructing poor children as “lacking” and

effectively blaming their parents not only for their poverty, but also for their poor behaviour, language and literacy. According to these accounts, poor = poor literacy, an equation which lays the blame with the child and the family.

(Comber, 1997a, p.23)

Comber (1998) found that deficit accounts of children in disadvantaged schools tended to mask the material effects of poverty, focusing instead on “educational problems with literacy learning *within* the child or the child’s home” (p.6). Despite such stories, however, most parents seem to want the “best” for their children, even though they may not appear to be visibly involved in their children’s schooling and their ideas may not always be in keeping with the expectations of school personnel (Henderson, 2002; Kolar & Soriano, 2000; Standing, 1999). Schools’ expectations of parents, however, can become so taken-for-granted, so part of what happens on a daily basis, that they become almost invisible (Gregory & Williams, 2000; Heath & Mangiola, 1991; Kolar & Soriano, 2000; D. E. Smith, 1987). As Heath and Mangiola (1991) explained,

It is difficult to penetrate such “natural” events and examine them as they might appear to children from families and communities that do not experience routinely in their everyday lives the school’s ways of seeing, knowing and telling.

(Heath & Mangiola, 1991, p.15)

Within deficit discourses, where narratives of failure and blame attribute children’s lack of achievement in school literacy learning to child and parental characteristics, the solution to literacy problems is generally provided by offering compensatory measures to “fix up” the child. Cambourne (1992) explained this approach as taking steps “to ensure that the learners who are deficient are given a large dose of whatever it is that they’re deficient in” (p.61). For children experiencing difficulties in literacy learning, for example, this has often meant additional training in so-

called basic skills, rather than a consideration of the range of possible reasons for underachievement.

In effect, this approach offers a distributive (or re-distributive) social justice, whereby the “disadvantaged” are “regarded as lacking what society deems to be the educational, social and cultural basics” (Gale, 2000, p.255). In the case of school literacy learning, those who are underachieving might be provided with remedial instruction or intervention programs. Whilst this solution might very well be successful for some children some of the time, it does not question the efficacy of school processes, curriculum or pedagogy. As Alloway and Gilbert (1998) explained,

the processes of schooling that enfranchise particular groups while disenfranchising others escape interrogation and are understood to be innocuous, impartial and beyond suspicion. The impetus is to reform the child rather than the curriculum, since the source of the trouble is seen to lie outside of the parameters of “schooling as usual”.

(Alloway & Gilbert, 1998, p.254)

In arguing for teachers to “‘get out of deficit’ by designing pedagogies of reconnection” with children’s lifeworlds, Comber and Kamler (2004) highlighted the persistence of discourses which give rise to deficit views of students and their families. They argued that “pervasive deficit discourses are still so dominant,” not only in the talk of classrooms and staffrooms but also in a range of texts, including student files, educational journals and conference proceedings (p.293). The problem is that deficit discourses help to limit the options available to teachers for working with children who are experiencing difficulties with literacy learning.

Deficit discourses in the broader community

Such narratives, however, are not only found in school contexts. Similar stories also circulate in the broader community, blaming those who are culturally and linguistically different for not fitting perceived social norms. People in poverty, for example, are often blamed for their material and social circumstances. As Peel (2003) explained, some stories

insist that people don’t have to be poor and that they have brought it upon themselves. People will say the poor refuse to better themselves, that they

are lazy and won't pull themselves up by their boot-straps; that they don't really want a job; that they always have cigarettes and beer and a colour television, perhaps these days even a mobile phone. They get themselves pregnant so they can get the single parent pension. They aren't stupid, they're clever and fraudulent and they tell lies.

(Peel, 2003, pp.9-10)

The “negative effects of poverty on the personal, social and economic well-being” of families are sometimes understood in terms of the association of poverty with characteristics such as family instability, school dropout and teenage pregnancy (Shobe, 2002, p.35). As Bessant (1995) pointed out, the idea of poverty as “a self-reproducing condition in which ‘the underclass’ is responsible for its own condition” has had a long history in research, politics and the media (p.41). She cited studies that blamed the poor for “a lack of thrift, deficient linguistic codes, dysfunctional families and deficient life-skills, and a culture of violence and unemployment” (p.42), and media characterisations that identified poor people by a range of observable traits, including

low standards of literacy, numeracy, poor attitudes to work ... a propensity to commit crime, the use of body tattoos, and a life-style which is inherently threatening to the wider society.

(Bessant, 1995, p.39).

Media representations like these continue to contribute to public acceptance of negative assumptions and stereotypes in the broader community (Compton-Lilly, 2003). Indeed, in Australia, recent media reports have demonstrated how readily available such stories and constructions are. The Australian government's announcement of a \$3,000 “baby bonus” payment to mothers on the birth of a child (see Patterson, 2004a, 2004b), for example, was followed by a rash of media coverage (e.g. *Aussie baby bonus could spark teenage births*, 2004; *Baby bonus sparking teenage births*, 2004; Cassidy, 2004; Heath, 2004). One line of reasoning taken by the media focused on supposed comments by teenagers from low socio-economic backgrounds that they would “fall pregnant just for the cash” (Cassidy, 2004).

Even though media representations tend to name only one or two individuals, Thomson (2002) argued that schools in low socio-economic areas are often “part of the background reportage of events,” particularly in the case of neighbourhood

tragedies such as suicide or murder (p.91). She explained that schools can become “forever narratively linked with events” and have to work hard to present school, students and neighbourhood “in another and more positive light” (p.91). It appears, then, that the media can play a powerful role in the public’s perceptions of schools.

Comber (1998) demonstrated how teachers sometimes turn to explanations from the media to rationalise classroom and school actions. In describing one teacher’s interpretations of the social interactions and behaviours of the children in her classroom, Comber argued that

It is not that the teacher is not well meaning or caring of these children, but that the discursive resources available to her construct the child, family and community as chaotic, violent and threatening. In her search for an explanation of her students’ perceived differences, she slips easily from judgements about literacy in the home to violence in the home. Such a response is not unique to this teacher nor this school, but rather is part of a wider “poverty discourse that conceals economic and educational inequalities, state induced destitution” (Polakow, 1993, p.146).

(Comber, 1998, p.16)

Deficit discourses, however, not only focus on those living in poverty. Ethnicity and associated traits, including “language, customs, beliefs, religion or generally those characteristics which create and reproduce a cultural identity,” have also been targeted and are often tied to incidents of racism and social exclusion (Tsolidis, 2001, p.13). Tsolidis (2001) explained how the concept of ethnicity has been used to

exclude Australian ethnic minorities from “legitimate Australianess” and often, the economic and social power associated with it. While ethnic majority Australians, ethnic minority Australians and Indigenous Australians are distinguished by a wide range of languages and “countries”, all have an ethnicity, but it is only the members of Australia’s ethnic minorities who are generally conceived of as “ethnics”. Terms such as “new Australians”, “migrants” or “ethnics” have been used to differentiate between “real” and “non-real” Australians.

(Tsolidis, 2001, p.14)

Talking from a personal perspective, Tsolidis discussed the way that ethnicity is used to construct cultural difference as a problematic characteristic rather than as a positive one. Her own experience of being told “to go back to where I came from,” a comment apparently based on her “Greek” appearance, had reinforced the notion

that second- and third-generation migrants¹³ are in a state of “perpetual transience” (p.6).

Such stories, however, are not new. Australia has a history of “othering” particular ethnic groups, especially those who are not “White,” and of using its immigration policy to exclude the unwanted (Singh, 2000; Tsolidis, 2001). Debates about immigration tend to focus on

inclusion and exclusion and assume that the desired end-point is successful integration into the existing population which is understood in hegemonic terms. Appearance and cultural practices are used to highlight the non-belonging of the groups to be excluded.

(Tsolidis, 2001, p.17)

Singh (2000) argued that the view that “Whiteness plus nationality” equals “Australianness” is still alive and well in Australia and serves to maintain a “continuing antagonism” to the immigration of particular ethnic groups (p.115). Although Singh focused on the way that this understanding maintains “Australian” and “Asian” as mutually exclusive categories, thereby marginalising Asian-Australians, his argument could also be applied to other ethnic groups in Australia.

In recent years, numerous political and media stories have focused on illegal immigrants (e.g. Cable News Network, 2002; Whitmont, 2001), the “Tampa affair” and “children overboard” (e.g. Jennett, 2002; Lehmann, 2001, 2002), and the possibility of terrorists in Australia (e.g. Abetz, 2003; Giles, 2003; Heywood, 2004). Many of these stories have highlighted ostensible deficits of particular groups of people – for instance, the deficient parenting of those who allegedly threw their children overboard – and have raised suspicions about those who appear culturally or linguistically different.

¹³ Tsolidis (2001) noted that these terms are “self-contradictory” (p.14).

Focusing on difference rather than deficit

In contrast to the conceptualisation of literacy taken up by traditional skills-based and progressivist child-centred approaches, cultural-critical perspectives recognise literacies as multiple social practices which vary from context to context (Beecher & Arthur, 2001; Hill et al., 1998a). Because literacy is understood as “including repertoires of specific practices that are socially, culturally, geographically and historically situated,” literacy learning is regarded as “a cumulative project that is assembled across different sites over time” (Comber & Barnett, 2003, p.7). From this perspective, diverse literacy practices and the privileging of particular literacies in particular contexts are acknowledged. School literacy is thus but one of many literacies and school literacy success is understood as “demonstrated competence in the context of literacy as it is done and evaluated in schools” (Alloway & Gilbert, 1998, p.255).

Instead of pathologising children and families when school literacy learning is not going well, cultural-critical “readings” shift the focus away from “what is wrong with individual children” towards considerations of the ways that children are franchised or disenfranchised according to a range of social and cultural constructions, including gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status and home background (Alloway & Gilbert, 1998, p.255). This view opens the way for children experiencing difficulties in literacy learning to not be regarded as deficient, but instead to be considered as “differently literate, not as deprived of literacy experience, but possessing different literacy experiences” (Dudley-Marling & Murphy, 1997, p.464).

This shift in understanding is particularly significant in the light of research findings that children’s take-up of school literacy practices, particularly in early childhood, is “inextricably connected to the repertoires of practices and knowledge that they already had from their home and community experiences” (Comber & Barnett, 2003, p.5). From this perspective, children’s home literacy experiences are conceptualised as resources that can be used for developing and extending students’ literacy competences.

Numerous studies have identified the diversity of literacy practices in society and the selective tradition operating in schools. Heath's (1982, 1983) seminal study of Roadville and Trackton, two small working-class communities located on the edge of a middle-class cotton milling town in the Piedmont Carolinas, for example, demonstrated how children's socialisation at home influenced their success or otherwise at school. She found that children from the town were more successful than children from either of the small communities, with Roadville children experiencing some initial success and Trackton children falling "quickly into a pattern of failure" (Heath, 1983, p.349). This occurred even though Roadville and Trackton were literate communities where the residents could "read printed and written materials in their daily lives, and on occasion they [could] produce written messages as part of the total pattern of communication in the community" (Heath, 1982, p.57).

Although the communities could be compared and contrasted on the basis of racial and class differences, Heath (1983) argued that these characteristics did not explain the lack of school success for the children from the small communities. By examining the types of talk and socialisation activities in which the children and parents engaged at home, Heath identified that these were determining factors of success at school. With regard to the townspeople, she found that they

bring with them to school linguistic and cultural capital accumulated through hundreds of thousands of occasions for practising the skills and espousing the values the schools transmit. Long before reaching school, children of the townspeople have made the transition from home to the larger societal institutions which share the values, skills, and knowledge bases of the school.

(Heath, 1983, pp.367-368)

In contrast, the children of the smaller communities had not had opportunities to engage with the particular social practices and "ways" of schools and institutions (Heath, 1982, p.50).

In their study of the literacy practices of different generations of communities in inner city London, Gregory and Williams (2000) documented the diverse and multiple home literacy practices of a range of families, including monolingual English and multilingual Bangladeshi-British families. Although the literacy

practices of many families did not fit within what Gregory and Williams referred to as “the officially recognised paradigm of preparation for school literacy” – parents reading stories to children using a “good book” – literacy success was evident (p.179). Gregory and Williams identified a “wealth of literacy practices in the lives of those often considered by the educational establishment to be ‘deprived’ of literacy” (p.203) and acknowledged ways in which families provided “*different* opportunities for learning from those officially recognised” (p.xvii).

In a similar way, Carrington and Luke’s (2003) case studies of two children, Eve and James, demonstrated how children might be literate in electronic forms of literacy, including email, CD-ROMs and the internet, yet be identified as “at risk” in school contexts. Carrington and Luke explained that 6-year-old Eve, a middle class child living with her dad, did not fit

into any of the traditional literacy “risk” categories: she is not male, she is not Indigenous or from a marginalized socio-economic group, she is not the child of recent immigrants, nor is she living in an isolated, rural area.

(Carrington & Luke, 2003, p.245)

However, despite Eve’s accomplished use of multimodal, digital texts at home, teachers identified her as “at risk of early literacy failure in terms of her capacity to use *school* literacies” (p.245). Likewise, the other case study child, James, was an “enthusiastic techno-kid out of school” who came from a “new” poverty, semi-rural community on the edge of a large city (p.248). At school, he appeared unmotivated, disinterested in the texts and activities of school literacy learning. He also displayed disinterest in computers in the classroom context, despite his love of game-playing and web-surfing at home. For both children, Carrington and Luke identified “a mismatch between the school’s approach to literacy and the emergent information economies and knowledge environments where kids and adults increasingly live and work” (p.249). As with Heath’s (1982, 1983) and Gregory and Williams’ (2000) research, this study suggested that school literacy practices “assume the existence of, and in some ways measure and reward, a certain set of family and personal attributes” (Gilbert, 2000, p.10).

Other social, cultural and linguistic practices of families, apart from those traditionally regarded as part of literacy learning, can also impact on teachers' social constructions of literacy learners and on the ease with which children "take up the institutional ethos, culture and pedagogic routines" (Hill et al., 1998a, p.13). Because particular social and literate practices are privileged within school settings, students whose home practices are "different" may be disadvantaged in school contexts (Dooley, 2004a; Nakata, 2003; Phillips & Healy, 2004; Phillips, Lampert, & Healy, 2004).

The use of a standard dialect of English in schools, for example, is a practice that socialises children into a particular view of the world and may help to marginalise some children (Comber et al., 2001a; Phillips & Healy, 2004). In Australia, Standard Australian English is the dialect used in education, government and the media, and competence in this dialect is required for academic success (Barnett, 2001; Emmitt & Pollock, 1997). Students who enter school speaking non-standard dialects of English, including Australian English and Indigenous and diasporic dialects, may very well be disadvantaged in comparison to peers who are already using Standard Australian English competently (Barnett, 2001; Dooley, 2004a; Nakata, 2003; Phillips & Healy, 2004).

Dialectical differences are particularly pertinent to situations where success in literacy learning is equated with achievement on "a measurable set of literate practices in Standard Australian English" (Lo Bianco, 1999, p.40). Even though students' difficulties in such situations can be conceptualised in terms of insufficient language development or poor home practices, they can also be considered the result of what Dunn (2001) described as "the inadequate response" of schools to the conditions that disadvantage some children (p.679). From personal experience, Davison (1998) reported how her own children, both of whom were performing well in an Australian school, were assessed as "failures" after moving to a Canadian school. Davison's experience – where "deficit constructions about my children's literacy learning had a devastating effect on their self-esteem, their socialisation, their attitude to reading and writing and their actual literacy use" (p.5) – raises significant questions about what is taken for granted as school language and literacy practices.

Children learning English as an additional language¹⁴ to their home language may also experience disadvantage in some school settings. As Dooley (2004b) noted, a normative view of literacy learning and development means that students from non-English speaking backgrounds are more likely than their monolingual peers to fail to meet measures such as benchmark testing. Even though some students who are learning English as an additional language might appear to be not doing particularly well against national literacy outcomes, they may in fact be

successfully learning both spoken and written modes of English (which is their second or perhaps third or fourth language) while at the same time often negotiating between the cultural expectations of school and those of their families.

(Hammond & Derewianka, 1999, p.28)

Luke and Kale's (1997) case study of Elsey illustrated the way that a preschool-aged bilingual child was operating fluently in Torres Strait Creole, developing competence in English and participating in a range of literacy events at home and at kindergarten. Despite extensive evidence that Elsey was not deficient in language and literacy learning, Luke and Kale predicted that her chances of success at school were limited. They argued that, without the reconstruction and shaping of classroom literacy materials and practices to enable a match with Elsey's knowledge and skills, "we may set out the conditions for her to fail even before she begins" (p.26).

It is important to remember, however, that children learning English as an additional language will always be a diverse group, from a wide range of cultural, socio-economic and linguistic backgrounds, with varying degrees of competency in their home language and in English, and with different experiences of what counts as literacy and literacy instruction (Davison, 1998; Gibbons, 1991, 1992). Whilst research suggests that many bilingual students, compared to their monolingual peers, have enhanced problem-solving skills, superior cognitive flexibility and

¹⁴ In this discussion, the terms English as an additional language (EAL) and bilingualism have been used in preference to the many others that are available but are sometimes regarded as pejorative – e.g. English as a second language (ESL), limited English proficiency (LEP), language background other than English (LBOTE), and non-English speaking background (NESB) (Henderson, 2004b). At times, however, other terms are used as appropriate to the particular research being cited or to the situation (e.g. ESL is used in Chapter 7, because it is the "official" term used by Harbourton State School and the education system).

creativity, and better developed capacity for learning other languages (Gibbons, 1992; Jones Diaz & Harvey, 2002), it has also been noted that attendance at a school that operates only in English can signal the gradual replacement of a child's home language (Gibbons, 1991; Jones Diaz & Harvey, 2002; Kocatepe, 2004).

The problems that derive from trying to learn about English and in and through English, by simultaneously learning spoken and written language and curricular knowledge, are often understood as deficit (Dooley, 2004b; Gibbons, 1998; Hammond & Derewianka, 1999; Martin, 1999). There is considerable evidence in Australia, particularly in political and policy arenas, that issues related to bilingualism and the learning of English as an additional language have been subordinated to initiatives that prioritise "literacy" within the school curriculum (Dooley, 2004b; Hammond & Derewianka, 1999; Lo Bianco, 1999). This move has not only assisted the construction of bilingualism as an educational liability (Dooley, 2004b; Hoddinott, 1998), but it has also worked towards homogenising students' literacy needs. In effect, the specific needs of EAL learners and the minimum of five years that it takes to achieve proficiency in English (as discussed by Collier, 1989; Dooley, 2004b; Gibbons, 1998; Hammond & Derewianka, 1999; Hoddinott, 1998; Lo Bianco & Freebody, 1997; Rosowsky, 2001) are understood as of lesser importance than the need to provide literacy remediation to deficit individuals. In this way, the positive attributes of bilingualism are masked from view (Conteh, 2000; Hammond & Derewianka, 1999; Leung, 2001). Biggs and Edwards (1994) described what is perhaps a worst-case scenario, where "the systematic obliteration of any traces of the home language is seen as the panacea for the child's supposed problems at school" (p.96).

The knowledge that students bring to school is indeed sometimes invisible to teachers. Although not focusing specifically on literacy learning, Malin's (1990a, 1990b) research in an Australian urban context demonstrated how the normalisation of particular practices can result in other practices becoming invisible. Malin's study showed that

three Aboriginal students were visible to their teacher and peers almost exclusively when being spotlighted for “doing the wrong thing”. In addition, they were largely invisible to the class when demonstrating the considerable competence which they had developed in their previous four years at home.

(Malin, 1990a, p.312)

Thomson’s (2002) metaphor of the virtual schoolbag offers a useful conceptualisation of this. She argued that all students bring to school a bag “full of things they have already learned at home, with their friends, and in and from the world in which they live,” but only some children are able to unpack the contents for use in the classroom (p.1). Kocatepe (2004) provided specific examples of the types of textual knowledge that Turkish students have in their virtual schoolbags, including an awareness of letter-sound combinations and diacritical marks, and knowledge of complex morphological rules that are non-existent in English.

Furthermore, recognising students for whom English is an additional language and understanding their needs is not always straightforward. On the one hand, teachers might assume that students’ levels of competency in English are better than they actually are, especially if they do not realise that interpersonal communicative competence does not necessarily signify proficiency with the context-reduced and more cognitively demanding academic language of the classroom (Cummins, 2000; Drucker, 2003; Gibbons, 1991; Williams, 2001). On the other hand, research has pointed to examples where the labelling of children as “ESL” (English as a second language) has lowered expectations of children’s capabilities (e.g. Toohey, 2000).

Labelling like this tends to focus attention on children’s deficiencies with the English language and with school literacy practices, thereby foregrounding the deficits and backgrounding the cultural and linguistic resources that children bring to school. A normative perspective that emphasises what children cannot do and what children “should be able to do” does not seem to be a particularly productive approach (New & Mallory, 1994). However, as Lo Bianco (2003) acknowledged, “to speak of difference requires us to speak of the norm from which practices diverge, from which difference arises” (p.5). This, perhaps, is one of the conundrums of Western thought and raises questions about whether it is possible to avoid the oppositional logic that a normative perspective produces (Gilbert, 2000). Gilbert (2000) suggested that, nonetheless, it is important to recognise the

limitations of that perspective and to consider “how it predisposes us to look for simple oppositional solutions; how it slides over differences and ambiguities; how it leads to the construction of narratives of blame” (p.2).

For literacy educators, the issue of how to pedagogically embrace children’s diversity has been a challenging one, particularly in the face of persistent “counter-productive discourses that constitute certain students as ‘deficit’” (Comber & Kamler, 2004, p.293). However, there is a growing body of research-teaching projects (e.g. see Alloway et al., 2002; Comber & Kamler, 2004; Dyson, 2003; Gutiérrez, Asato, Santos, & Gotanda, 2002; Hill et al., 1998a) that have taken up the challenge of working with diversity and finding ways to enable teachers to regard diversity and difference as resources for learning and to

recognize children’s resources, to see where they are coming from, so that they can establish the common ground necessary to help children differentiate and gain control over a wealth of symbolic tools and communicative practices.

(Dyson, 2003, p.107)

Thomson’s (2002) virtual schoolbags and Moll, Amanti, Neff and Gonzales’ (1992) “funds of knowledge,” for example, offer ways of conceptualising children’s resources positively, and Heath and Mangiola (1991) suggested that teachers should not think “of students of diverse backgrounds as bringing ‘differences’ to school, but instead as offering classroom ‘expansions’ of background knowledge and ways of using language” (p.17). Instead of using a “lens” that focuses narrowly on the putative deficits of culturally and linguistically diverse students, these approaches offer ways of perceiving students’ differences as cultural and linguistic resources that can be used productively for school literacy learning.

This shift in thinking, from understanding differences-as-deficits to identifying differences-as-productive-resources, expands the pedagogical possibilities for working with students from diverse backgrounds (Gutiérrez et al., 2002; Janks, 2004; Volk & de Acosta, 2001). It relies on the assumption that children will “*always* bring relevant resources to school literacy” (Dyson, 2003, p.101, emphasis added) and opens up opportunities for a recognitive social justice whereby “difference is differently valued” and all students are able to participate in and

contribute to school literacy learning (Gale, 2000, p.262).¹⁵ A focus on difference, then, allows alternative readings of children's literacy learning in preference to the deficit discourses that appear to be so readily on offer.

Complexity and itinerancy

Recent Australian literacy research (Hill et al., 1998a; Hill, Comber, Loudon, Rivalland, & Reid, 2002) has found that children arrive at school with diverse home and community experiences, take up school literacy learning in different ways, and develop in directions that are not always predictable, linear or sequential. In addition, students are constructed as literacy learners – by teachers, students, parents and researchers – within complex webs of diverse discursive contexts. Gender, ethnicity, social class, economic advantage or disadvantage, ethnicity, geographical location, and the cultural and linguistic characteristics of students' family and community backgrounds feature in the social and cultural constructions that are used to make sense of literacy learning. Yet none of these factors can be readily separated or considered a single category (Gilbert, 2001; Lewis, 2001; Martinez, 2000; Nichols & Broadhurst, 2002). Instead, they intersect, “blend and mix,” interacting with each other in complex ways (Luke, 1999, p.2).

However, these complexities extend beyond the characteristics that children bring to school. In relation to gender, for example, Alloway et al. (2002) found that particular ways of thinking about these factors were prevalent among teachers and parents, and were also “widely available in the culture and readily evident in the popular media and in many folk and professional accounts” (p.5). They also found that differences amongst teachers, including gender and years of teaching experience, affected the types of accounts that they offered about students' literacy achievement. In other words, making sense of literacy learning is a complex business.

¹⁵ In offering an overview of three social justice perspectives, Gale (2000) argued that a recognitive social justice – with “its expanded understanding of social justice that includes a positive regard for social difference and the centrality of socially democratic processes in working towards its achievement” – does not deny that “material conditions and distributive matters are unrelated to or are unimportant in defining and practising social justice” (p.267).

The numerous longitudinal case studies that have been produced as part of research projects conducted by Comber and others (e.g. see Comber et al., 2001a; Comber & Barnett, 2003; Hill et al., 1998a, 2002) demonstrate the complex interactions of factors that are involved in the construction of literacy learning. The case study of Sam (Comber, 2003; Comber et al., 2001a; Comber, Badger, Barnett, Nixon, & Pitt, 2001b), for example, illustrates this complexity. Sam's literacy development appeared "uneven and limited," having been interrupted by family relocations and his attendance at seven schools by the middle of Year 6, as well as by his exclusion from the classroom and apparent disengagement due to diagnosed attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (Comber, 2003, p.24). The interplay of these risk factors, along with his being "a working-class male child, growing up in poverty" (p.32), appeared to create challenges for Sam's teachers.

Comber (2003) highlighted the importance of a particular teacher in Sam's learning, arguing that "if Sam had been able to enjoy continuity with a teacher like Emma, in a school like Westridge, his relationship to literacy and schooling may have been less fragile" (p.32). This comment not only underscores the need for teachers to recognise the difficulties of students' movement from school to school and the consequent interruptions to school literacy learning, but it also emphasises the potentials for success when hegemonic discourses are disrupted and teachers have high, positive and consistent expectations of students. Comber argued that

Schools that have many transient students like Sam need to plan for extra resources, both human and material, to ensure that the temporary stays of these students are as educationally productive and socially satisfying as possible. They have to work fast to learn about the students' cultural and linguistic resources, repertoires of literacy practices and gaps in academic experience and knowledge. They have to work fast to connect these students with the social and cultural domain of the classroom, as well as its intellectual pursuits.

(Comber, 2003, p.32)

The ramifications of school absences on students' literacy achievement, often occurring in relation to family mobility, were identified as issues in several of the case studies referenced above. Like the case study of Sam, the case studies of Reena (Hill, Comber, Loudon, Rivalland, & Reid, 1998b; Loudon & Hunter, 2003), Korbyn (Hill et al., 1998b) and Aston (Hill et al., 1998b) demonstrated the way that

multiple factors – Aboriginality and cultural difference, poverty, social class, gender and transience – impacted on school literacy learning. Such studies draw attention to the complexity of the “mixture of enabling and constraining factors” (Nichols & Broadhurst, 2002, p.51), again highlighting the importance of taking the intersections between student mobility (or itinerancy or transience) and other factors into consideration.

SUMMARY

This chapter focused on the field of literacy relevant to this research project. It began by identifying and describing three clusters or families of approaches to literacy: traditional skills-based, progressivist child-centred and cultural-critical. Although these can be considered within a historical framework, I explained that new approaches to literacy tend to join, not replace, those already existing. Hence all three families of approaches are generally evident in teaching practices.

Different approaches, however, conceptualise literacy learners in different ways. Traditional skills-based and progressivist child-centred approaches, although understanding literacy differently, both identify literacy as an attribute of individuals, a perspective that leads easily to deficit discourses. In contrast, cultural-critical approaches understand literacy as socially and culturally constructed practices that always occur in social situations and cultural contexts. This understanding of literacy recognises its plurality and makes sense of differential literacy achievements in terms of difference rather than deficit.

The second part of the chapter focused on a range of literacy studies that have conceptualised literacy within a cultural-critical perspective and provide ways of “reading” the data presented as part of this research project. These studies demonstrated that a shift, away from deficit approaches towards thinking about literacy differences as productive resources, is an enabling move that opens up the pedagogical possibilities for working with diverse groups of students. The chapter finished with a discussion of recent Australian research that has highlighted some of the difficulties experienced by mobile children in school literacy learning.

Chapters 1 to 4 have set the scene for this research project, having focused on a rationale, underlying theories, and literature from the fields of educational itinerancy and literacy. The next chapter, Chapter 5, will describe the construction of the study: its overall plan, the tools and techniques of data collection, data analysis, access and ethical issues, and my role as researcher. The chapter also introduces the research site and participants.

CHAPTER 5.

CONSTRUCTING THE RESEARCH

INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the setting up of the current research project which investigates the social and discursive construction of itinerant farm workers' children as literacy learners. In drawing on the theory of the social world offered by Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999; see also Fairclough, 1989, 2001c), I was not only interested in particular families, but was also interested in the social and cultural contexts into which they moved. I thus recognised that my project would be dealing with a range of complex social issues (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; M. L. Smith, 1987) within the contexts of the town of Harbourton and within the context of one of its primary schools, Harbourton State School.

This chapter, then, begins by describing my conceptualisation of the research, how I planned to investigate the institutional and broader community contexts into which the children moved, and the case study approach that I employed. I then explain the tools and techniques that I used for data collection and analysis, issues surrounding permission, access and ethics, my role as researcher, and my concerns about reciprocity and reflexivity. From these general research issues, I move to my choice of a specific research location, discussing the community of Harbourton, Harbourton State School and my selection of case study families.

PLANNING THE RESEARCH

The planning of the current research was framed by Fairclough's (1989, 2001c) context-interaction-text model, which conceptualises textual and discursive practices as occurring within a range of contexts (see Figure 1, Chapter 2). To investigate the school literacy learning of a particular group of students, I was interested in the community context into which the families moved as temporary residents and the institutional context of Harbourton State School where the children enrolled.

Investigating the community context

To examine the community context of Harbourton, I planned a media study and a series of interviews with community personnel. I hoped that these would enable me to investigate the way that itinerant farm workers were constructed by the community of the town that became “home” to many itinerant families during the annual winter harvesting season.

For the media study, I kept a scrapbook of cuttings from Harbourton’s only newspaper, *The Harbourton Bulletin* (a pseudonym), which was published twice each week. Over a two-year period, I collected all of the items that referred to farm workers directly, indirectly or obliquely. These included news articles, the court news, advertisements and letters to the editor. For the interviews, I selected community personnel from a range of businesses and services that came into contact with itinerant workers and, as will be discussed further in the next chapter, this resulted in nine interviews.

Investigating the school context

For examining the institutional context, I planned fieldwork within the context of Harbourton State School, the larger of the two primary schools in the town of Harbourton. I also planned six family case studies to provide detailed information about specific families, their itinerant lifestyles, the children’s experiences of school literacy learning, and the parents’ and teachers’ perceptions of the children’s learning.

To gather information about the context of the school, I knew that I would need to spend time undertaking fieldwork on site. The sources of some information that I wanted to collect, such as the school’s enrolments, the arrival and departure dates of itinerant farm workers’ children, and their school reports, could be pre-specified. However, I realised that an investigation of strategies used by the school to cope with the annual arrival of itinerant children, for example, was going to be a less predictable and more time-consuming activity. I did not know in advance what type of information I was going to find or where I was going to find it. As LeCompte and Preissle (1993) explained, this aspect of research can be considered “a developmental, ad hoc procedure rather than an a priori parameter” (p.66).

I was able to plan, however, for interviews with school personnel whom I expected would play a key role in the enrolment, placement and educational management of at least some of the itinerant farm workers' children. Across the two years of data collection, I interviewed the teachers of the case study children, the school principal, the deputy principal, the learning support teacher, a literacy co-ordinator and the English as a Second Language [ESL] teachers.

Using a case study approach

Researchers in a range of educational and literacy fields have discussed and demonstrated the usefulness of case studies for examining interrelationships between language-literacy learning and social contexts (e.g. Knobel, 2001; J. Miller, 1996, 1997, 1999) and for foregrounding the experiences and voices of those not always heard in research literature (e.g. Noll, 1998). This suggested that a similar approach would be useful to my project. Although there has been some discussion about how to define case study research (e.g. Denscombe, 1998; Merriam, 2001), I have adopted Stake's (1994) stance that case study is "not a methodological choice, but a choice of object to be studied" (p.236). In the current study, the "objects" of study are six itinerant families.

To be recognised as a case study, the case should be a "bounded system" (Merriam, 2001, p.27; see also Burns, 1994; Stake, 1994). Yet it would appear that the boundaries of a case are not always easy to define. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that a study is bounded by the nature of the research problem, whilst others have focused on boundaries produced by time and space (Creswell, 1998). According to Merriam (2001), a case may be conceptualised as "a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries," allowing the researcher to "fence in" the object of study (p.27). In the current project, the case study families were bounded by time (the two winter harvesting seasons during which I collected data) and by place (the town of Harbourton and Harbourton State School).

It has also been argued that the boundedness of a case study can be assured by a finite number of interviewees or by limitations on who is involved (Asmussen & Creswell, 1995; Merriam, 2001). Initially, this seemed to be the case as the selection of six particular families determined which parents, children and school

personnel were interviewed. However, over time it became apparent that the “boundaries” of the cases were in fact quite elastic. Over the two years of data collection, each child who spent two harvesting seasons in Harbourton had at least two teachers at Harbourton State School, sometimes more, and interacted with numerous school personnel. As time passed, my knowledge of the children increased, as did the possible sources of data. The boundedness of the case studies, therefore, was flexible, reflecting comments by Adelman, Jenkins and Kemmis (1980) that case study boundaries become “increasingly permeable” as a case progresses (p.51). They argued that all cases are embedded in real world situations and that case boundaries are problematic because of this embeddedness.

In the current research, I began with the intention of focusing on children in Years 4 and 5. However, it was virtually impossible to separate the children from their family contexts and to avoid collecting information about siblings. Similarly, teachers at Harbourton State School sometimes talked generally about itinerant children and related issues, again demonstrating the difficulties of trying to separate the case study children from the school context. Rather than assuming this was a disadvantage of the case study approach, I regarded the complexity as one of its strengths. I thus used some of the additional information to enhance the descriptions of the school and home contexts and I extended the focus of the case studies to include all of the primary school-aged children in the families.

Case study has been advocated as a useful research approach because it enables researchers to provide in-depth accounts of the “richness, uniqueness and contextuality” of particular cases (Burns, 1994, p.325). The case study approach thus allows the study of individuals (Janesick, 1994), along with the complexities of their contextual embeddedness. This offers

a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon. Anchored in real-life situations, the case study results in a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon.

(Merriam, 2001, p.41)

In choosing the case study approach for the current research, my intention was to offer a detailed investigation of a small group of itinerant children and their

families, thereby fostering exploration of the complexities and idiosyncrasies that exist (Burns, 1994; Denscombe, 1998; Sikes, 1999; Wilson, 1998). This approach contrasts with the way that some research has focused on the impact of itinerancy on academic achievement, including literacy achievement, by comparing the results of mobile and residentially-stable children (e.g. Audette et al., 1993; Birch & Lally, 1994; Evans, 1996). Although the clustering of children into the binary oppositions of mobility and residential stability is a useful technique for showing general trends, it overlooks individual differences amongst students and loses the richness and diversity that would be expected amongst any group of families (Duffy, 1987). As Duffy explained,

When a typical study finds that there is no significant difference between an itinerant and a stable group of children on some criterion or another, the acute educational and social handicaps experienced by an individual child can too easily become submerged in the research findings for the group as a whole.

(Duffy, 1987, p.544)

However, the advantages of using case studies to ‘*deal with the subtleties and intricacies* of complex social situations’ (Denscombe, 1998, p.39) are sometimes perceived as disadvantages. Denscombe discussed the vulnerability of the case study approach to criticism, particularly in relation to generalising the findings. Whilst he suggested that case study researchers should indicate the extent to which a particular case is similar to or different from other cases, it also seems that an acknowledgement of diversity might itself be an important finding. As Faltis (1997) pointed out, interpretive research does not set out to generalise knowledge, but readers of case studies are free to use the evidence that is presented for making links with their own knowledge of other situations.

Several classifications of case studies have been suggested (e.g. Bassey, 1999; Borg & Gall, 1989; Burns, 1994; Knobel & Lankshear, 1999; Robson, 1993; Stake, 1994, 1995, 1998). Stake (1994, 1995) identified three types: intrinsic case study which enhances understanding of a particular case; instrumental case study which provides insight into an issue or theory, and collective case study that is an instrumental study across a number of cases. Using Stake’s classification, the current research is a collective case study, using a collection of cases to provide insights into the issues

of educational itinerancy and literacy learning. Stake (1994) argued that, in instrumental case study, and hence collective case study as well, the case is of secondary interest to the issue. In the current research, however, there is also much of intrinsic interest within each case.

Research time-frame

Data collection for the current research was conducted during 2000 and 2001. Whilst the media study occurred systematically over the full two years, from January 1, 2000 until December 31, 2001, other aspects of data collection were dependent on the timing of the harvesting season and families' arrivals in Harbourton. Most of the case study data were collected in the May-November period of each year.

To a certain extent, data collection was contingent upon the uncertain nature of farm work and its relationship to market prices, fuel prices and weather fluctuations. I was concerned initially that this uncertainty would affect my research. For example, it was possible that none of the case study families from 2000 would return to Harbourton in 2001. Although this did not happen, as three of the four case study families did return, I realised, in hindsight, that such an occurrence would not have been a disadvantage, but would simply have provided an avenue for investigating other aspects of educational itinerancy.

TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES OF DATA COLLECTION

As already discussed, the case study is not regarded as a methodology. Instead, it is considered an umbrella term that encompasses multiple methods of data collection from qualitative research. It also makes use of various tools and techniques from field research traditions, particularly ethnography (Adelman et al., 1980; Borg & Gall, 1989; Denscombe, 1998). In the current research, a range of ethnographic techniques were used, including interviews, discussions, artefact collection, observations and field notes (Cohen & Manion, 1989; Creswell, 1998; Faltis, 1997; Knobel & Lankshear, 1999), to investigate the three components of the project – the community context, the school context, and the case study families.

Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were a major source of data, providing opportunities for in-depth discussions with children, parents, teachers and community personnel. Whilst I always prepared a list of issues or questions for the interviews, this type of interviewing meant that I had the flexibility to move into unplanned areas of discussion as they arose. As a result, I could follow leads from participants as well as vary the order and wording of my plan in accordance with what was discussed.

Although Wengraf (2001) argued that semi-structured interviewing is a “high-preparation, high-risk, high-gain, and high-analysis” operation (p.5), my experiences suggested that the need for “high-preparation” and the effect of “high-risk” were diminished by being able to interview the same people on a number of occasions. Subsequent interviews with children, parents and teachers allowed topics of discussion to be revisited and points to be clarified.

Semi-structured interviews tend to be conversational, whilst serving a specific purpose in focusing on the interviewer’s research interests (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, & Alexander, 1990; Wengraf, 2001). In my experience, conducting interviews with adults was easier than with children. In general, the adults talked, answering my questions but also directing their talk towards events and experiences that they thought I should know about. In contrast, the children, especially the younger ones, often gave short answers without elaboration to the questions that I asked. As a result, I had to probe for further information by asking follow-up questions and I was not always successful in getting children to expand on their one- or two-word answers. For example, several of the children told me that they did not like moving from school to school, but they seemed unable to articulate their reasons. It seemed that I needed to create a space that would allow them to talk in more depth about their experiences.

In trying to create such a space, I tested Glesne and Peshkin’s (1992) suggestion that “some young people need company to be emboldened to talk” (pp.63-64). I decided to interview groups of students and to start the interviews by sharing a children’s book about family mobility. I chose *Collect your favourite things! We’re moving again!* (Oliver & Oborn, 1995), a book that presented both positive and

negative views of moving. The group interview strategy was so successful in getting the children talking that I elected to conduct all subsequent children's interviews in groups and ensured that there were opportunities for them to return to the topics of previous interviews, as recommended by LeCompte and Preissle (1993).

For later interviews with two of the younger children, one in Year 2 and the other in Year 3, I continued to work on the idea of using a discussion starter. One of the children told me that she could draw pictures of moving like the ones in the book that we had read. From then on, drawing became a focal point of interviews with the two children and their drawings and the accompanying talk became another potential source of data.

I recognised that I played a role in the construction of interview texts. Interviews are not neutral tools in the process of data gathering, but are interactive social events, with both interviewer and interviewee involved in the construction and interpretation of meaning (Fontana & Frey, 2000; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Not only did I help to facilitate the construction of narratives (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995), but I was involved in talk that was situated in a social context (Baker & Johnson, 1998; Bevan & Bevan, 1999; Fairclough, 2001c). Throughout all stages of the research, it was important that I was aware of the joint construction that occurs during the collection of interview data.

I audio-taped all interviews with teachers, parents, children and community personnel. I had discussed this procedure with all participants in my initial meeting with them and no one seemed concerned by the presence of the tape-recorder, which was palm-sized and unobtrusive. I transcribed each audiotape as soon as was practically possible after each interview, following Fairclough's (1992a) recommendation for a minimalist approach to transcription.

However, I was mindful that the process of transcription, which is often talked about as if it is an atheoretical, neutral process, was dependent on my own filtering and reading of the data (Devault, 1990; Fairclough, 2001c; Ochs, 1999) and that different placements of punctuation can affect meaning (Swann, 1994). On the

whole, the transcripts demonstrate the “messiness” of interview talk, with its “inelegant” features and “ums,” “ahs” and “you knows” (Devault, 1990, p.109).

All participants were aware that they would receive a word-processed transcript of their interviews and that they had the opportunity to discuss any aspect that they thought needed further or amended explanation. In general, the children’s parents seemed to look forward to the transcripts of their interviews and they expressed particular enjoyment in reading the transcripts of their children’s interviews. I felt that it was important that the parents knew what the children and I had discussed during interviews, especially since one parent had expressed concern initially that my study may have been collecting evidence against her abilities as a parent. Only one participant, a teacher, talked negatively about a transcript of an interview, complaining that “I was disgusted with myself. I read the transcript and thought I sounded like a Year 3 student” (Field notes, 10.12.01).

Throughout this thesis, I have used two formats for presenting transcript excerpts. Short excerpts have been placed within the text as indented quotations. Longer excerpts have been labelled with a caption (*Interview transcript*) and number, and are listed in the beginning section of this thesis along with the tables and figures. Within these longer transcript excerpts, line numbers have been provided, to facilitate discussion of particular aspects and to assist the reader with finding specific sections of the transcripts.

Discussions with participants

Over time, I found that short and impromptu discussions were valuable opportunities to collect data, especially at Harbourton State School. Arranging interview times with teachers was not easy, as I was trying to squeeze an additional task into their busy timetables. Some teachers preferred to use lunch times, whilst others preferred to talk during their non-contact time. On many occasions, however, teachers apologised that they needed to do other things and interviews were cancelled.

With some teachers, my walking past their classroom before school was enough to initiate a conversation about our shared interest – a particular itinerant child. On

some occasions, teachers sought me out to talk about issues that they thought were important. It was not unusual to hear, “I’ve thought of something else that might be useful” or “I’m heading out on to the oval to do playground duty. Would you like to come and talk out there?”

In general, I tended to make field notes about my discussions with teachers rather than use the tape-recorder. There were times when I felt that the tape-recorder may have inhibited conversation or have had a negative effect on the relationship I had built with particular teachers. One of these situations was when one of the itinerant children was suspended from school and was involved in the school’s behaviour management process. This ongoing incident, which is discussed in Chapter 10, continued over a school term and was a fairly sensitive issue with the teachers involved. However, both teachers were willing to talk to me about the issue and to keep me informed about what was happening. It seemed, though, that the use of a tape-recorder was inappropriate.

Participant observation and field notes

Whilst observation has been identified as central to all case study work (Cohen & Manion, 1989), Stake (1994) emphasised the importance of reflection “in the thick of what is going on” (p.242). Observations in natural settings are generally described as being either participant observations or non-participant observations (Burns, 1994; Cohen & Manion, 1989), even though it would seem preferable to consider a continuum with non-participant observations at one end and complete involvement of the researcher in the research site at the other.

Over the data collection period, my position on that continuum not only varied according to the type of data that I was collecting, but also altered over time. Whilst interviews offered opportunities for direct associations with children, parents and teachers, I thought that I would be able to keep a much lower profile during classroom observations, even though I was aware that I could never be a neutral observer and that my presence was likely to have some effect on the classroom. Over time, though, it became more and more difficult to sit in a classroom unobtrusively, as illustrated by the following entry in my field notes during the second year of data collection:

Today I observed a literacy session in the Year 3/2 composite class. On arriving at the room, I quickly discovered that I could not be an unobtrusive observer. As soon they saw me, Lexie and Ebru started jumping up and down, hugging each other and saying, “She’s here! She’s here!” The teacher was standing at the door. She looked at the girls, then turned towards me with a smile on her face and said, “They love you, don’t they?”

(Field notes, 23.08.01)

This event highlighted the importance of reflecting on my role in data collection. As Tedlock (2000) suggested, ethnographic techniques should involve “observation of participation” or opportunities for researchers to “observe their own and others’ coparticipation” in research events (p.464).

During the harvesting seasons, I visited the school for two or three consecutive days every two or three weeks. Although interviews were the major source of data, in 2001 I conducted classroom observations of the case study children (who had participated in the research in 2000) during the two weeks following their re-enrolment. On the days that I collected data, I generally wandered around the school grounds before school and during morning tea and lunch breaks, talking to students and teachers. I always attended school parades, because they informed me about past, present and future school events and about students’ successes and awards. Unless I was doing classroom observations, I tended to use the time when children were in class for accessing school records, talking to the principal, the deputy principal or to teachers who had non-contact time.

I carried a notebook with me at all times. This notebook, which eventually became a set of notebooks, contained my field notes, reflections and ideas, as well as information from school records.

Artefact collection

The collection of artefacts was an important aspect of all three components of the current research. The media study, which was part of the investigation of the community context, drew exclusively on newspaper cuttings from Harbourton’s local newspaper, *The Harbourton Bulletin*. At times, however, other newspapers (e.g. *The Sunday Mail*) and documents distributed to Harbourton residents (e.g. materials produced by political parties and distributed via letter box deliveries) provided additional artefacts that were relevant to the community context. The

investigation into the school context drew on documents generated by the school and by the education system, including the school's *Annual Reports*, students' school report cards and other documents that were kept in the school's office files. I also collected a range of artefacts as part of the data about the children in the case study families. These included children's work samples and drawings, their school report cards and test results from the school's files.

DATA ANALYSIS

As already explained, a range of data was collected in three sets, corresponding to the community context (Chapter 6), the school context (Chapter 7), and the family case studies (Chapters 8 to 11). Initially, I thought that I would analyse the family case study data on a family-by-family basis and present six separate case studies. However, after multiple readings of the interview data (through listening to the audio-tapes and reading the transcripts on numerous occasions) and talking about and reflecting on the themes that were emerging, I decided to use an alternative arrangement. Because the teachers' and families' stories came from different standpoints and were providing different readings of itinerant farm workers' children, I decided to separate them, assigning the teachers' stories to Chapters 8, 9 and 10, and the families' stories to Chapter 11.

As will become apparent in the data chapters, the teachers' stories were organised into chapters according to two features: whether the families were in Harbourton during one or two winter harvesting seasons whilst I was collecting data, and the extent to which ethnicity was used as a point of reference by teachers when talking about the case study families. Following this initial "cut," I conducted more detailed analyses using the framework and guidelines provided by Fairclough's (1989, 1995a, 1995c, 2001c) approach to critical discourse analysis, as described in Chapter 2.

Even though this framework was common to all of the data analysis, variations occurred within and between the data sets. Some variations occurred as a result of the range of texts collected, the different contexts within which the texts were produced, and whether they were being used to provide contextual information for Chapters 6 and 7 or to support the case studies presented in Chapters 8 to 11. Other

variations were determined by the extent to which the analysis involved the three dimensions described by Fairclough (1989, 1995a, 1995c, 2001c): description of text, interpretation of discursive practice, and explanation of social practice.

Fairclough's model enabled an interweaving of textual, discursive and social analysis. As I moved backwards and forwards across the three dimensions, I focused on the ways that teachers' and families' narratives positioned itinerant farm workers' children within school and community contexts and in relation to other children. As Rogers (2003) pointed out, such a process "links together the individual with the broader social forces and structures" (p.33).

Textual analysis

Textual analysis in the current study is one aspect of the data analysis that needs explanation beyond the discussion provided in Chapter 2. Drawing on the work of Fairclough (1989, 1995c, 2001c, 2002) and Hallidayan systemic functional grammar, which offers "a set of resources for describing, interpreting and making meaning," this form of analysis is underpinned by understandings that language achieves social purposes and always involves lexical and grammatical choices in order to realise meaning (Butt et al., 2000, p.3). This focus on language in use, not just language, and the relationship between context and text, offers ways of understanding how texts work to construct meaning (Butt et al., 2000; Gerot & Wignell, 1994). Three meanings – ideational, interpersonal and textual – are simultaneously carried by text, and function to represent experience, to describe interpersonal meanings, and to organise ideas into coherent texts (Butt et al., 2000). These meanings reflect the three parameters of context of situation – namely field (what is talked or written about), tenor (the relationship between speaker and hearer or writer and reader), and mode (the type of text that is being produced).

The formal features of text, then, are traces of text production and the text producer's understandings of the world, as well as cues for text interpretation (Fairclough, 2001c). Analysis of these features thus allows a reconstruction of context and offers insights into the relationships between a text and the discursive and social world (Butt et al., 2000; Gerot & Wignell, 1994, 1995). In this way, the description of linguistic and intertextual features of text helps to ground and

strengthen the interpretation and explanation of discursive and social practices and their relationships to social structures, processes and relations (Fairclough, 1992b, 1999; Poynton, 1993). However, as Fairclough (2003a) warned, textual analysis should be used in conjunction with, not as an alternative to, social analysis. He argued that “textual description and analysis should not be seen as prior to or independent of social analysis and critique,” and that “what we are able to see” in a text “depends upon the perspective from which we approach it, including the particular social issues in focus, and the social theory and discourse theory that we draw upon” (p.16).

Across the data chapters of the current project, textual analysis is used in different ways. In Chapter 6, I have drawn specifically on Fairclough’s (1995c) suggestions for analysing media discourse. I have assumed that texts are representations that will have a range of consequences and effects, which Fairclough (2002) argued may be social, political, cognitive, moral or material. In particular, I was interested in the social effects of community stories and wanted to find out what social constructions of farm workers, who were temporary inhabitants of the community, were evident in the voices of permanent residents. I also wanted to know what commonsense or taken-for-granted assumptions accompanied those constructions.

In describing and analysing texts from *The Harbourn Bulletin*, I have incorporated a quantitative analysis of some textual features. The information provided by the newspaper’s court news during 2000 and 2001 was entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet under date, name, age, occupation and crime. Although some data are presented in Chapter 6 in tabular and graphic forms, which are quite different from the prose format of the newspaper, I wanted to be able to demonstrate the frequency with which particular representations of farm workers were presented to newspaper readers. Because newspaper representations carry assumptions and are given currency through being published, it is not only what is said and what is not said that are important (Fairclough, 2002), but also how often particular representations are presented.

I needed to find out how often farm workers were mentioned in the newspaper, in what sections of the newspaper those references appeared, and how often particular

constructions were presented to the public. Some of this information was gained through quantitative measures, such as counting the number of times that farm workers were named in the newspaper's court news. Other information required textual analysis that focused on particular linguistic features of texts, such as the Participants¹⁶ that were used to identify or "name" offenders in newspaper headlines. To assist readers who are not familiar with the terminology of systemic functional grammar, Table 1 provides a glossary of the specific terms that have been used. Explanations are also provided when the terms appear in later chapters.

The textual analysis of the media study in Chapter 6 was aimed specifically at identifying the explicit and implicit stories that the newspaper presented to its readers as the "truth." This, however, is not typical of the rest of the thesis. In most sections of the data chapters, textual analysis is embedded within the overall analysis, thus working in tandem with social analysis and weaving together descriptive, interpretative and explanatory analysis.

Intertextuality

Intertextuality, "the property texts have of being full of snatches of other texts, which may be explicitly demarcated or merged in, and which the text may assimilate, contradict, ironically echo, and so forth" (Fairclough, 1992a, p.84), also provided a useful focus for analysis. In many of the teachers' narratives about itinerant children and their families (see Chapters 8, 9 and 10), for example, experiential meanings paralleled deficit accounts of itinerant farm workers circulating in the wider community of Harbourn (see Chapter 6). As will be discussed in the data chapters, these examples offered evidence of intertextual and interdiscursive links and suggested the types of social constraints that appeared to be operating on those within the school context.

¹⁶ The term *Participant* is part of the metalanguage of systemic functional grammar and has been capitalised so that its use as a functional grammar term is distinguished from general usage of the word (see Butt et al., 2000).

Table 1. A glossary of the metalanguage used in the textual analysis of the current research

Language functions:	representational, interpersonal and textual functions realise experiential, interpersonal and textual meanings respectively
Mood (of a clause):	<p>indicates the type of exchange that is occurring. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Declarative mood – A speaker/writer gives information by making a statement. • Interrogative mood – A speaker/writer demands information by asking questions. • Imperative mood – A speaker/writer demands goods or services by giving a command.
Modality:	<p>allows speakers/writers to signal that they are not definite about their message (e.g. Bill <i>might</i> ...; The team <i>probably</i> couldn't ...; I <i>think</i> ...; They <i>could</i> have ...)</p>
Participant:	<p>can be a person, a place or an object and is realised by nominal groups or prepositional phrases (e.g. the chair, he, your expression of anger)</p>
Process:	<p>an expression of happening, doing, being, saying and thinking and is realised by a verb or verbal group (e.g. collapsed, kicked, might come, remembered, said, must have convinced, are, were)</p>
Theme:	<p>the first element in a clause (e.g. <i>The boy</i> ran to the shop; <i>On Sunday morning</i>, the house fell down.) (The rest of the clause is called the Rheme.)</p>

(from Butt et al., 2000, pp.39, 47-51, 88, 94-99, 113-115, 135-137)

PERMISSION, ACCESS AND ETHICS

Permission

In setting up the current study, I had to gain both permission and access. As outlined by McGinty (1999), these two processes are separate and should not be considered as unified.

Permission is getting approval to be on a research site – for example, a school. Access is the path taken once inside the door. The more complicated elements of access are gaining the trust and confidence of students and faculty members so that they can feel comfortable in the researcher's presence and are willing to share that part of their lives that speak to the study.

(McGinty, 1999, p.150)

To conduct a study at Harbourton State School, I required permission from the principal. Gaining that was straightforward. Over the previous couple of years, I had worked in a consultancy role at both that school and at the principal's previous school. Thus I was known by the principal, as well as by the deputy principal and many of the teachers. It also helped that educational itinerancy was an issue with which Harbourton State School staff had been grappling for many years and, as a result, the school staff could see advantages for the school in supporting research on that topic.

Accessing potential participants

Whilst gaining permission to conduct the research at Harbourton State School was an easy process, gaining access to families, teachers and particular classrooms was a much more complex process that continued throughout the two years of data collection. In planning the study, I wanted to include the voices of itinerant children as well as the voices of their parents and teachers and this meant that I would have to seek access to all three groups. I decided, therefore, that I would select a pool of children who would be potential participants and then I would approach their families, and finally their teachers. However, I also knew that negotiating access to teachers and their classrooms would be an ongoing task, as I wanted to track the children over a period of two years.

In starting with the identification of a possible pool of itinerant children, I decided on a pragmatic approach. I felt that the children should be old enough to be able to talk about their experiences of educational itinerancy, but at the same time be young enough to still be at primary school at the end of the data collection period in 2001. This resulted in my decision to focus on itinerant children who were enrolled in Years 4 and 5 during 2000. This offered me a pool of nine families.

Whilst I could easily identify this pool of families from the information made available by the school, making contact with these families raised an ethical issue. As I was an outsider to the education system, I knew that I could not ethically access the families' home information, such as addresses and telephone numbers, even though the principal thought that his approval of the study included a go-ahead to access that information. After much discussion, the principal and I agreed that school personnel would make initial contact with the families of potential participants and I would make follow-up visits to those who indicated a willingness to be involved.

However, as luck would have it, my first attempt to identify itinerant children in Years 4 and 5 occurred on the day of the school's annual fancy dress ball. The school principal and I realised that a public function such as this provided the perfect opportunity for me to access parents at the one time, without going through the two stage process that we had planned.

As a result, I attended the 2000 fancy dress ball at Harbourton State School with a notebook and a list of children's names. With the help of the teachers of Years 4 and 5, who were able to identify and introduce me to the itinerant children in their classes, I was able to meet children's parents. By the end of the evening, I had the names, addresses and phone numbers of four families who were willing to be involved and invitations to visit them over the next couple of days.

Although I had a letter to explain my research (see Appendix A) and this was given to the parents when I visited them, the opportunity to speak directly to parents had seemed to make my task much easier. In hindsight, I have to acknowledge that the friendly, happy and social atmosphere of the fancy dress ball worked in my favour, by providing a non-threatening environment in which to meet and talk to parents.

Accessing teachers, classrooms and students

LeCompte and Preissle (1993) recommended that researchers identify gate-keepers who can facilitate access to a particular group of people. Although the principal assisted initially with access to Harbourton State School by discussing my proposed research with the staff, my previous work at the school meant that I was a “known” person rather than a stranger to many of the teachers. This worked to my advantage. However, I was also mindful that over two years I would be seeking access to many teachers and their classrooms. For this reason, I tried to maintain a visible but unobtrusive profile within the school.

Ethics

Although I applied for ethical clearance as per university requirements and was obligated to abide by protocols in relation to consent forms, safe storage of data and so on, ethical issues were an ongoing consideration throughout the research. Because I was interviewing children, parents and teachers, and wanted to include the voices of all three groups, I was always mindful of the potential sensitivity of the material that I collected, as well as of my responsibility to maintain the confidentiality and the anonymity of all the participants in my research. In particular, I was cognisant of the ethics of working with children and the importance of protecting their information and ensuring that they did not come to any harm during the research.

Specific ethical issues were raised when case study families allowed me to be privy to insights that had not been offered to school personnel, or teachers disclosed information or beliefs that had not been shared with others within the school. Although the use of pseudonyms provides protection against identification of the location and participants by those outside of the research, it does not ensure that one participant cannot identify another. This was a crucial issue, because I was committed to keeping the school informed about my research and its findings, by providing copies of journal articles and conference papers, but needed to ensure that I had not broken participants’ confidentiality. My approach was to discuss each issue with the participants who may have been affected and to be guided by whether

they thought the information could be used, whether it could be filtered in such a way as to preserve anonymity, or whether it should not be used at all.

In some situations, families decided that they were comfortable for particular information to be shared with others. The Neilsen family, for example, showed me their tattoos, which they usually kept hidden, and talked at length about the negative associations that are sometimes made about those with tattoos. Although they provided useful material for my research (see Chapter 11), I was aware that my writing about the tattoos would reveal their existence to teachers who had no previous knowledge of them and, under usual circumstances, would never know about them. In discussing this issue with the Neilsens, they indicated that I could use the information:

RH: It's something that the school never knows about.

Lisa: I don't care. I don't care. It wouldn't bother me at all.

Dave: That's all right with the tattoos.

(Lisa and Dave Neilsen, interview transcript, 24.10.01)

In some cases, particular familial characteristics prevented anonymity within the school context. The Moala family, for example, was a Tongan family with twin boys and those characteristics applied to no other family in the school. Through discussion with the Moalas about what I had written and what I was planning to write, they decided that there was no reason to filter any of the information and that the use of pseudonyms was enough.

In another situation, however, I had to filter information. One family, for example, openly discussed information that lay on the interface between legal and illegal activity. For example, I was told by one of the 11-year-old children that, "They [school personnel] don't know that I didn't go to school for six months" (Student, interview transcript, 11.06.01). Although the student was happy for me to talk about this with the family, I was aware that I had become privy to a family secret. In subsequent discussions with the family, I was given insights into the reasons underpinning the parents' decision to allow their child to work instead of attending school (For further details, see Chapter 11). However, whilst the parents were comfortable with sharing the story, they did not want repercussions from the current school. As a result, the information has been filtered, using non-gendered

descriptors and general statements regarding family relationships, to prevent the student's identification.

Some of the interviews with community personnel raised similar dilemmas. However, in those situations, careful naming of the participants was generally enough to ensure anonymity. For example, referring to a bank representative, rather than to a bank manager, teller, clerk or loans officer, along with the non-identification of the particular bank where the person was employed, guaranteed that the individual could not be identified. There were times, however, when I was not able to attribute specific words to a particular interviewee, because anonymity would not have been assured (For an example, see Footnote 30, Chapter 6). Issues such as these ensured that ethical considerations were reflected upon at all stages of the research process.

THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

Reciprocity

When the research began, I felt that there was an imbalance between what I would gain out of doing the research and what the participants would gain. I was in awe of the willingness of families to open their lives to inspection, with no apparent gains for themselves. However, as time went on, I began to realise that the benefits for the families were the “intangibles” that were described by LeCompte and Preissle (1993):

Attentiveness, empathy, and the documentation of individual or group life ways are often far more compelling rewards than goods or services exchanged.

(LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p.112)

The families seemed to enjoy talking about their lives. If I saw members of the families at the school or in the supermarket, for example, it was not unusual to be asked, “When are you coming back to talk to us?” Their focus on my talking was an interesting one, especially since I tried to assume a listening role. However, the members of one family offered a possible explanation when they discussed their work, especially the long hours, its physical nature, and the way that it was not conducive to making new friends:

Lisa: We're missing them [their friends] more now, aren't we? ... Yeah, and we've met a few people. Yeah, we're working all the time. It's too hard to go out.

Dave: We don't have time to go out and meet new people.

Lisa: You're so exhausted.

Dave: We don't meet new people because we're just working all the time.

(Dave and Lisa, interview transcript, 15.10.00)

Ironically, there seemed to be some similarities between the families' itinerant lifestyles and my research role. As Punch (1994) pointed out, "the researcher is essentially a transient who at some stage will abandon the field" (p.93).

At Harbourton State School, the potential advantages of my research seemed more apparent. Some members of the staff, particularly the principal, were hopeful that my research would strengthen the school's case for enhanced support from Education Queensland. Whenever I had written an article or presented a conference paper, I used to leave copies with the principal and the deputy principal and, on subsequent visits, I was generally offered some feedback. Sometimes it was the principal saying, "I've been thinking about something you said in that article" or "Is it okay for us to use some information from your article? I promise to reference it." At other times, it was a teacher asking for a copy of an article because the principal had suggested it was worth reading. For me, this feedback was an indication that members of the school community believed that my research was benefitting their school.

Reflexivity

In discussing case study research, Kemmis (1980) pointed out that "the 'observed' ... simply cannot exist independently of the observer" and that a researcher always brings theoretical, ethical and ideological knowledge to any piece of research (p.108). Using feminist understandings about research, I acknowledge that my involvement in the field would have had some impact on the field itself and that my values and biases are an intrinsic part of this study (Janesick, 1994; Lather, 1992).

Because I staged data collection over a two-year period, I recognise that my discussions and sharing of findings with teachers and families would have played a part in the construction of what happened next. This was particularly obvious at the school, where the principal often provided feedback and reflection on aspects of my

papers, indicating that the research was not separate from the workings of the school. My foregrounding of the case study students within the school setting, for example, no doubt influenced the type of information that teachers thought was important to tell me. Similarly, there were times when families alluded to previous discussions and to points in those discussions. One family, for example, said, “Since you were here last time, we’ve given it [the plans they had told me about] a lot of thought, haven’t we?” and proceeded to explain why their plans had changed (Dave Neilsen, interview transcript, 24.10.01).

However, I also recognise that my embodied experiences have shaped this research in particular ways and that these are often difficult to specify. As Naples and Sachs (2000) explained,

Researchers’ social positions, such as gender, race, ethnicity, class, and residence, influence what questions we ask, whom we approach in the field, how we make sense of our fieldwork experience, and how we analyze and report our findings.

(Naples and Sachs, 2000, p.209)

Although my discussion of social justice issues at the beginning and end of this thesis (see Chapters 1 and 12) and my decisions to use critical discourse analysis and polyvocality offer partial insights into my viewpoints, I am mindful of the power that I may have as a researcher “over those who share their lives, struggles and visions” (Naples & Sachs, 2000, p.210).

THE RESEARCH LOCATION AND PARTICIPANTS

A rural community

This research was conducted in Harbourton, a small town in a rural area on the coast of North Queensland. The town had a permanent population of approximately 8,000 (ABS, 2002). As explained in Chapter 1, Harbourton underwent a transformation every winter as the harvesting season began. At that time of year, the population increased by up to 3,000 people¹⁷ and the town was provided with a much-needed kick-start to its economy. In general, there were three groups of visitors: retirees who migrated north to holiday at the beach for the winter months;

¹⁷ Chapter 6 provides further information about the population of Harbourton.

back-packers, mostly young international visitors on a working holiday, who became involved in farm work for a short period of time; and itinerant seasonal farm workers who arrived to pick vegetables on the local farms.

Some itinerant farm workers arrived in Harbourton from March¹⁸ onwards and others continued to arrive until the harvesting season peaked around August or September. From October, the farm workers began to move out of the town, generally either to Victoria to pick tomatoes or tree fruit such as apricots and oranges, or to southern New South Wales to pick apples. A smaller number travelled further north to work on banana plantations or to pick mangoes.

The arrival of itinerant workers in Harbourton impacted on many of the town's businesses. In particular, rental accommodation, supermarkets, food outlets, hotels and service stations benefitted from the increased population. Schools also experienced increased enrolments, as many farm workers travelled with their families. Approximately 100 itinerant farm workers' children enrolled in Harbourton's high school and two primary schools during the harvesting season of each year and attended school for between four and eight months. Many of these children returned to the same school in Harbourton year after year.

The school

This study focused on Harbourton State School, the larger of the two primary schools in the town of Harbourton. Located close to the centre of the town, the school was well over 100 years old and had expanded to fill the relatively small block of land on which it was situated. Over recent years, teachers and parents had complained that the school grounds were too small for the size of the school population.

At the time of the research, the school staff included a principal, a deputy principal, 22 teachers and six teacher aides, as well as seven specialist teachers who worked in the areas of literacy, Reading Recovery, learning difficulties, music, physical education, LOTE [Languages Other Than English] and ESL [English as a Second

¹⁸ At this early stage of the season, when crops are being planted, only limited farm work is available. However, the availability of work increases as the growing season progresses.

Language]. Other specialists, including special education advisers, a guidance officer and a speech language pathologist, also visited the school on a regular basis.

The student population

Harbourton State School drew its student population from the town and the surrounding rural district, experiencing enrolment fluctuations in line with the farming season and the availability of farm work for itinerant workers. Figure 3 shows the school's average monthly enrolments over a five-year period (1997-2001), thus indicating monthly variations in the student population. Figure 4 shows the monthly enrolments for each of those years, demonstrating how the trend shown in Figure 3 occurred annually despite marked differences from year to year.

Harbourton State School's monthly enrolments fluctuated in line with the annual harvesting season. Figure 4 shows that enrolments in the compulsory years of primary schooling (Years 1 to 7)¹⁹ were at their lowest – between 510 and 550 students – when the school year began in late January or early February. Student numbers started to increase at the beginning of the farming season (April-May), reached a maximum at the peak of the season (August-October), then decreased during November and December as farms shut down for the summer months. Because some children of itinerant farm workers remained at the school until the school year finished, December enrolments tended to be higher than those at the beginning of the school year.

Whilst it is recognised that the children of itinerant farm workers were not the only children who enrolled or departed during a school year, it appears that itinerant farm workers' children did make a substantial difference to the size of the student population at Harbourton State School. During 2000 and 2001, 40 itinerant children from 27 families and 59 children from 36 families respectively were enrolled. However, families stayed for varying lengths of time, with some residing in Harbourton for as little as one month and others staying for seven or eight months.

¹⁹ Like most Queensland state schools, Harbourton State School also offered a non-compulsory pre-school year. Because the pre-school campus was separate from the rest of the primary school, pre-school numbers have not been included in the enrolment figures.

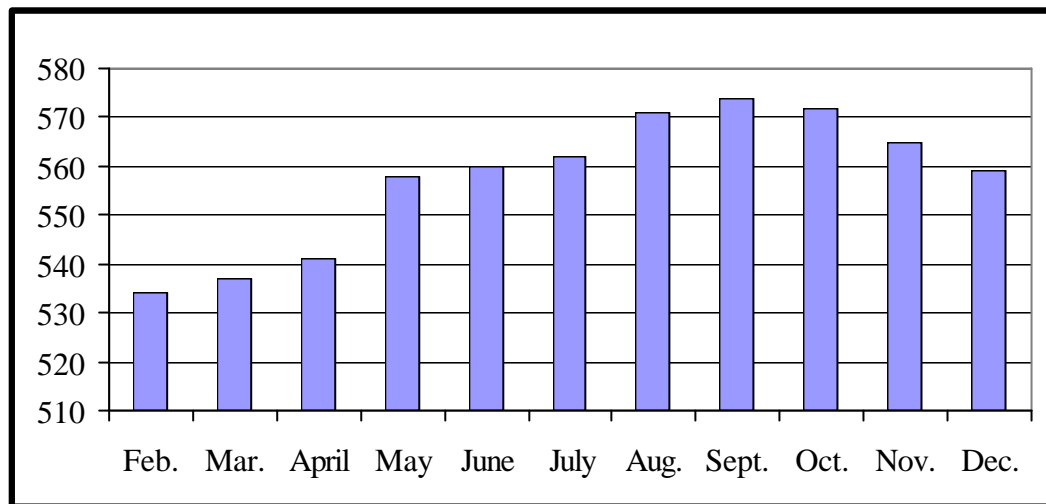


Figure 3. Average monthly student enrolments at Harbourton State School: 1997-2001

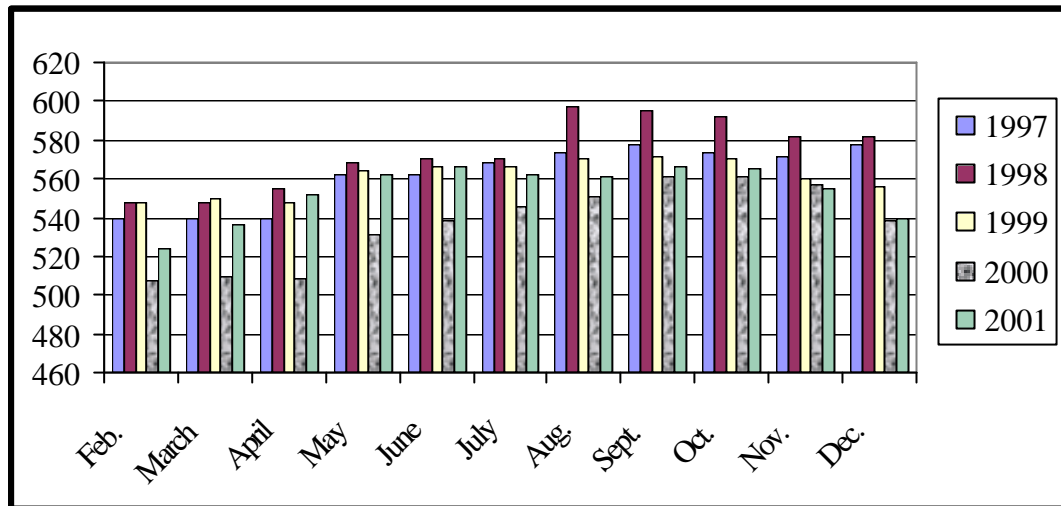


Figure 4. Monthly student enrolments at Harbourton State School: 1997-2001

Figure 5 shows the numbers of itinerant farm workers' children who were enrolled during each month of 2000 and 2001.²⁰ As in Figure 4, annual variations are evident, reflecting some of the uncertainties of fieldwork that were discussed earlier in this chapter. Despite these variations, the children of itinerant farm workers usually represented between 7 and 10% of the school's population at the peak of the harvesting season.

The school population was culturally and linguistically diverse and this was particularly so during the harvesting season. The school's *Annual Reports* (Harbourton State School, 2001a, 2002) identified 12 to 13% of the students as Indigenous and explained that there was "an influx of ESL [English as a Second Language] students in the picking season" (Harbourton State School, 2001a, p.2). Although approximately 70 to 80% of the itinerant farm workers' children came from language backgrounds other than English and were learning English as an additional language [EAL], the students identified by the school as ESL²¹ were not exclusively the children of itinerant farm workers.

Table 2 shows the ethnic backgrounds of the itinerant farm workers' children who were enrolled at Harbourton State School during 2000 and 2001, as identified by the children's parents. When families completed school enrolment forms, they were asked to indicate the nationality and language backgrounds of parents and children.²² Although this appeared to give parents an opportunity to identify the ethnic and language backgrounds that they wanted the school to recognise, the form

²⁰ Identification of itinerant farm workers' children was not always easy. Although all were "late arrivals" at the school, only some parents identified their occupation/s on the children's enrolment forms. Some parents nominated their occupation as "unemployed," which was often an accurate descriptor at that particular point in time as the family had just arrived in Harbourton. The identification of itinerant farm workers' children, therefore, occurred throughout the time they were enrolled at Harbourton State School. Teachers and students assisted me in this task.

²¹ The term English as a Second Language (ESL) is used here, because it is the term used by the school to identify students who are learning English as an additional language. The identification of ESL students brings additional funding to the school (see Footnote 22).

²² Queensland schools can access additional funding for ESL students. Federal "ESL new arrivals" funding is disseminated to schools by state education systems and can only be accessed if students have provided evidence of their Australian citizenship or permanent residency status. Harbourton State School took this task seriously because it helped to maximise incoming funding.

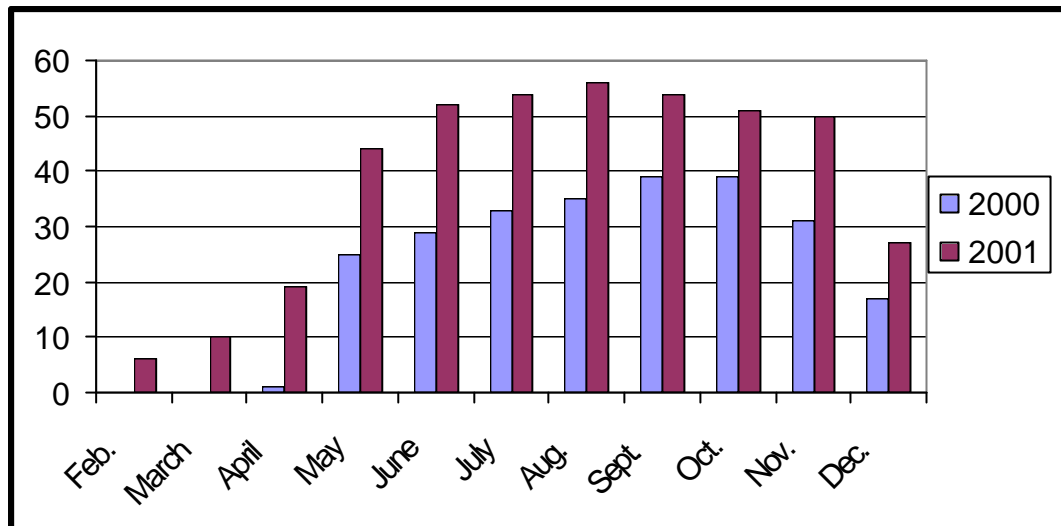


Figure 5. Monthly enrolments of itinerant farm workers' children at Harbourton State School: 2000-2001

Table 2. Ethnic backgrounds of itinerant farm workers' children enrolled at Harbourton State School during 2000 and 2001, as identified by the families

Ethnic background	Number of children enrolled	
	2000	2001
Anglo	9	12
Indigenous	1	5
Maori	2	8
Samoan	6	10
Tongan	12	15
Turkish	9	6
Vietnamese	1	3
TOTAL	40	59

did not allow for some of the complexities that occurred.²³ However, of the children listed in Table 2, all of the Samoan, Tongan, Turkish and Vietnamese children and most of the Maori children were identified by their parents as ESL students.

Although in 2000 and 2001, the majority of the itinerant children came from Pacific Island backgrounds (e.g. Maori, Tongan, Samoan – see Table 2), school personnel who had lived in Harbourton for some time provided anecdotal evidence that the ethnic backgrounds of farm workers had changed over the years. They explained that, until the late 1980s, most farm workers' children appeared to come from Anglo backgrounds but since then the school had seen significant numbers of Turkish students,²⁴ an increasing number of Pacific Island students, and the recent arrival of Vietnamese students.

Harbourton State School's *Annual Reports* (Harbourton State School, 2001a, 2002) highlighted low academic achievements, by pointing out that approximately 30% of the student population "require and receive additional educational support and intervention programs" (Harbourton State School, 2001a, p.3; 2002, p.3). The reports also asserted that the school provided support for students with intellectual, sensory and physical impairments, learning difficulties and "students with deprived experiential backgrounds" (p.3).

The school was located in a low socio-economic area with high unemployment (see "Jobless increase. Harbourton's figures almost double national average," 2001) and received additional government funding for the community's low socio-economic

²³ In some families who had migrated from Tonga or Samoa, nationality and citizenship issues were complex. In the case of one family, for example, the parents were born in Tonga, some children in New Zealand and the other children in Australia. Although the family identified itself as Tongan and all family members spoke both Tongan and English, there were variations as to the extent to which English and Tongan were used. The complexity of this example illustrates how difficult it was to capture all of these details on the school's enrolment form, which provided space for a one word answer to questions about nationality and home language.

²⁴ The number of Turkish students enrolled at Harbourton State School apparently peaked in the mid 1990s and had been decreasing since 1998 and 1999. Local opinion was that the decreased number of Turkish students had followed a dispute between a family of growers and approximately 30 Turkish pickers, with some pickers apparently fearing that they would not be re-employed in Harbourton. These events were reported in the local newspaper (see Douglas, 1998, 1999).

index (through the Special Program Schools Scheme) and for its isolation (through the Priority Country Area Program).

The case study families

I began the current research project with four case study families in 2000. Although I planned to collect data over a two-year period, I was aware that seasonal work was influenced by a number of factors, including weather fluctuations, the market price of vegetables, and fuel costs, all of which were out of my control. This meant that there was no guarantee that the case study families would return to Harbourton in 2001 and there was no way of knowing the date/s of their likely return. As a result, I decided to commence two additional case studies in the second year of data collection. Even if none of the four families returned, the minimum data would comprise information on six families for one harvesting season each.

As it turned out, three of the four families who participated in 2000 returned to Harbourton in 2001 and they were willing to continue participating in the research. Thus, three families were involved in the research for two years and the other three families were involved for one of the two years.

Table 3 provides an outline of the six case study families: their pseudonyms, their ethnic or family backgrounds, and the year/s of their involvement in the research. Detailed descriptions of each family are provided in each of the relevant data chapters: the Moala and Potai families in Chapter 8; the Ata, Ozturk and Russell families in Chapter 9; and the Neilsen family in Chapter 10.

Table 3. The six case study families, their background and year/s of involvement in the research

Family	Background	Involvement in the research	
		2000	2001
Moala family	Tongan	✓	✓
Potai family	Tongan	✓	✓
Neilsen family	Anglo (New Zealand)	✓	✓
Ata family	Turkish	✓	
Ozturk family	Turkish		✓
Russell family	Maori		✓

SUMMARY

This chapter described the construction of the current study. It described the tools and techniques of data collection and data analysis that were used to inform the later chapters of this thesis, as well as introducing the research location and the participants. This chapter also discussed the framing of the research within Fairclough's (1989, 2001c) text-interaction-context model, thus setting up the organisational framework for the chapters that follow: an examination of the community context in Chapter 6, the school context in Chapter 7, and the case studies in Chapters 8 to 11.

The following chapter, Chapter 6, begins the section of the thesis that describes, analyses and interprets the contextual data that were collected. By offering descriptive and interpretative information about the community of Harbourton, it helps to contextualise the research project and provides some specific information about the community that became a temporary home for many itinerant farm workers and their families. A media study and a series of interviews with community personnel signal some of the stories about itinerant farm workers that circulated in the community.

CHAPTER 6.

CONTEXTUALISING THE STUDY: THE COMMUNITY OF HARBOURTON

INTRODUCTION

When itinerant families arrived in the town of Harbourton, they took up residence in a rural community that had a history of population growth at the beginning of the winter harvesting season and population decrease as the season finished. Although the families entered a range of social and cultural contexts in and around the town, I wanted to investigate two particular contexts that I thought might play a significant role in the teachers' and parents' perceptions of the children and their experiences of school literacy learning. This chapter is about the first of these contexts: the town community where the school is located and where the families lived. The other context, the institutional context of the school that the students attended, is addressed in the next chapter.

This chapter aims to contextualise the current research by investigating some of the stories that were circulating in the community of Harbourton. As part of this investigation, I conducted a media study of the only newspaper produced in the district, *The Harbourton Bulletin*. The residents of Harbourton appear to regard this biweekly newspaper as essential reading for those who want to be informed about news and events that took place in the community. The media study thus provided an opportunity to see how itinerant farm workers were constructed and presented to the community by the local press.

In addition, I interviewed nine people from the business community of Harbourton, to identify some of the community's perceptions about itinerant farm workers. The two sets of data offer insights into the stories about itinerant farm workers that were in circulation. This chapter tells some of those stories, thus demonstrating some of the ways that the community perceived and positioned itinerant farm workers.

INVESTIGATING THE COMMUNITY CONTEXT

The media study

For the media study, I collected all references to itinerant and/or seasonal farm workers²⁵ that appeared in *The Harbourton Bulletin* from the beginning of 2000 through to the end of 2001. During the two-year period, newspaper references to farm workers were limited, particularly in terms of scope. Direct references appeared mostly in the court news²⁶ (163 crimes attributed to farm workers), with a further eight references in items about illegal immigration (five articles), employment (one letter to the editor), crime (one letter to the editor) and education (one letter to the editor).²⁷ A small number of indirect references appeared in items about farming (three articles), illegal immigration and a proposed detention centre (five articles, two letters to the editor, one cartoon), and a small number of oblique references in items about crime (one article), illegal camping (two articles) and visitors to the town (one letter to the editor). These references are listed in Appendix B.

Overall, the items in *The Harbourton Bulletin* portrayed farm workers negatively, especially since the majority of references were in the court news, a section of the newspaper that outlined who had appeared in court, what crimes had been committed, and the outcomes of court appearances. Although the court news was an unofficial record of court proceedings, it was the account that was presented to the readers of the paper – and they seemed to represent a large proportion of the town's residents.²⁸ In some editions of *The Harbourton Bulletin*, the court news

²⁵ The newspaper used a range of terms to describe farm workers, including *seasonal worker*, *picker* and *farm hand*, but rarely distinguished between itinerant and non-itinerant farm workers.

²⁶ The generic term *court news* has been used throughout this chapter to refer to *The Harbourton Bulletin*'s coverage of proceedings of the Magistrate's Court, the only court that convened in Harbourton. The term reflected usage by community members, but was not used by the newspaper itself. The newspaper generally used headlines that indicated the content of the article e.g. *Drink-drivers in Harbourton court*, *Drug offenders front court*, *Guilty of dishonest purchase*.

²⁷ Further discussion of some of these items appears later in this chapter and in Chapter 7.

²⁸ Although readership of the newspaper was difficult to determine, approximately 4,000 papers were printed and sold biweekly during the period of the research. The Shire of Harbourton (the town and rural area), with a population of 11,000 (ABS, 2002), more or less corresponded to the newspaper's distribution area. It would appear, therefore, that a copy of the newspaper probably went into most households in the shire.

section indicated that it was reporting only limited details of court proceedings. One headline, for example, announced that 70 people had appeared in court, but the article gave details of only eight of the cases (“70 people on range of charges appear in court,” 2000). The public’s perception of court proceedings on this occasion, therefore, was dependent on both the headline (which implied perhaps that crime was rife in Harbourton, or that the police were efficient in bringing law-breakers to justice) and the descriptions of particular cases (which may have been representative of the day’s court proceedings or may have been selected because of their newsworthiness). In other editions of the paper, however, the selective nature of reporting was not explicit and there was no way of knowing whether the court news recounted all or only some of the court proceedings.

Because of the role of the media in constructing, reproducing and legitimating social beliefs and values (Smitherman-Donaldson & van Dijk, 1988; van Dijk, 1988, 1999; van Dijk, Ting-Toomey, Smitherman, & Troutman, 1997; Weedon, 1987), it appeared that the particular constructions of community life and the frequency with which those constructions were presented to newspaper readers would be significant. Whether they were accurate was not the issue.

Interviews with community personnel

As well as examining media representations, I also wanted to gain insights into community perceptions of farm workers. To do this, I interviewed members of the community of Harbourton who interacted with farm workers in the course of their business activities. I contacted fifteen businesses and nine people representing eight businesses agreed to be interviewed: a shire councillor, two growers,²⁹ a publican, a real estate agent, and one representative each of the police, the post office, a bank and a supermarket. Every person who declined explained that they were too busy to spend the time doing an interview. Since there was no identifiable benefit to the businesses from participation in the research, these rejections were probably not surprising.

²⁹ I have used the term *grower* in preference to *farmer* as it is the term used by the residents of Harbourton and those working in the farming industry.

MEDIA AND COMMUNITY STORIES

In exploring some of the stories that were circulating in the community of Harbourton, I recognise that interviews with nine people, in a town with a population of approximately eight thousand, might seem fairly limited. My aim, however, was not to map a definitive picture of community stories, but to simply tap into some of the stories that were circulating in the community.

It appeared that many of Harbourton's residents had few opportunities to interact with itinerant farm workers. Several of the business people who were interviewed commented that they had little or no contact with itinerant workers except through their businesses, and attributed this to the long hours worked on farms:

Socially I might speak to a couple at the pubs ... If the prices are high and they're [the growers] working them all, then it's seven days a week. And there's just no time for socialising and they just congregate amongst themselves in their actual backpacker hostels or in the back of a house.

(Shire councillor, interview transcript, 08.10.00)

Socially I have little to do with them ... I think when they do finish work they have a cold beer and have a feed and go to bed.

(Bank representative, interview transcript, 07.12.00)

In the interviews of community personnel, it was not unusual for the interviewees to link interdiscursively to the voices of others, especially members of their families. As the following interview excerpts indicate, the interviewees often drew on the experiences of family members to substantiate or to extend their stories, thus drawing on examples from outside their own experiences:

Josephine works down there at the day care centre ... and she tells me of a few families ...

(Interview transcript, 01.12.00)³⁰

My sister-in-law works at one of the schools and she notices ...

(Interview transcript, 07.12.00)

My daughter's little one goes to [name of childcare centre] and she was commenting that ...

(Real estate agent, interview transcript, 22.12.00)

³⁰ This is one of the situations described in the *Ethics* section of Chapter 5. The interviewee has not been identified as the content of the interview transcript may have negated anonymity.

Farm workers break the law

An implied message that appeared regularly in the court news section of *The Harbourton Bulletin* was that farm workers were law-breakers. My initial analysis of the court news,³¹ which classified the reported court appearances by occupation, identified 1,093³² people who had appeared in court over the two-year period. As shown in Table 4, the 163 court appearances attributed to farm workers (14.91% of the total reported number) were far in excess of those attributed to any other occupational group, except the unemployed (16.3%).³³

Although 163 (14.91%) court appearances have been categorised under the label “farm worker,” this generic term comprises the range of specific occupational descriptors³⁴ used by farm workers and evident in the court news reported by *The Harbourton Bulletin*. Table 5 lists the specific descriptors that appeared in the newspaper. Discussions and interviews with farm workers, however, indicated that some farm workers used the more general term “labourer” to describe their occupation. In a town where the most readily available labouring was farm work, it seems likely that at least some, if not most, of the 42 people who identified themselves as labourers would have been farm workers (see Table 4). If readers of *The Harbourton Bulletin* recognised the full range of occupations – those listed in Table 5 as well as the term “labourer” – as referring to people who worked on farms, then farm workers may have represented up to 18.75% of those appearing in court over the two-year period. It would seem natural, then, that many readers would link farm workers with crime, an association that was probably reinforced by the lack of references, particularly positive ones, to farm workers in other sections of the newspaper.

³¹ As explained earlier, information from *The Harbourton Bulletin*’s court news was entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet under date, name, age, occupation and crime.

³² This figure represents the number of court appearances that were identified in the court news section of *The Harbourton Bulletin* and, as already explained, does not represent the total number of court appearances for the two-year period.

³³ I recognise that no occupation was recorded for 444 people who appeared in court and that this represented 40.6% of court appearances.

³⁴ These occupational descriptors name and differentiate particular jobs within the farming industry.

Table 4. Numbers and percentages of court appearances, classified by occupation, in Harbourton between 01.01.00 and 31.12.01

Occupation	Number of court appearances	Percentage of total court appearances
Apprentice	10	0.92
Boilermaker	4	0.36
Chef/cook	5	0.45
Cleaner	5	0.45
Electrician	5	0.45
Farm worker ^a	163	14.91
Fisherman	58	5.31
Labourer	42	3.84
Pensioner	24	2.2
Plumber	4	0.36
Railway worker	4	0.36
Self-employed	7	0.64
Shop assistant	6	0.55
Student	6	0.55
Truck driver	8	0.73
Other occupations ^b	120	10.98
SUB-TOTAL	471	43.1
Unemployed	178	16.3
No occupation reported	444	40.6
TOTAL	1093	100

^a This term encompasses a range of occupations that involve farm work. The full list of occupational descriptors for farm work, as reported in the court news, is shown in Table 5.

^b These include 78 occupations, each of which was recorded for fewer than four people.

Table 5. Numbers of court appearances by different categories of farm workers in Harbourton between 01.01.00 and 31.12.01

Farm workers	Number
Carter	1
Farm labourer	10
Farmhand	51
Farm worker	3
Fruit picker	12
Packer	1
Picker	26
Seasonal picker	3
Seasonal worker	50
Shedhand	5
Tomato picker	1
TOTAL	163

To investigate whether the court news reported by *The Harbourton Bulletin* showed an increase in crime during the harvesting season and to consider whether farm workers were over-represented in relation to the overall population of Harbourton, I tallied the average monthly court appearances of farm workers,³⁵ the unemployed and other workers³⁶ during 2000 and 2001. These are shown graphically in Figure 6. The graph indicates that the highest monthly averages of the court appearances reported in the newspaper occurred during May, July, August and October, all of which were months when itinerant farm workers were in Harbourton. The graph also shows that the average monthly court appearances of farm workers were higher during August, September and October than during the other months of the year. During these three months, farm workers' court appearances represented 28.4%, 38.3% and 24.3% respectively of the total court appearances that were reported.

Although a reading of the court news data might conclude that farm workers accounted for a considerable percentage of the crime committed in some months of the year, any conclusions linking itinerant farm workers and crime should be considered with caution. Firstly, as has already been discussed, *The Harbourton Bulletin* provided only a partial record of court appearances, with some editions of the newspaper providing the details of only a limited number of court appearances. Secondly, the linking of court appearances to the beginning, peak or end of the harvesting season could be misleading. Even though the newspaper reported the court news as it happened, there was no indication of the time that had elapsed between someone being charged with an offence and their court appearance. Since most itinerant farm workers had departed from Harbourton by early to mid-December, the least likely months of the year for itinerant farm workers to be in the town were January and February. Yet, the February average for farm workers' court appearances was higher than for the months of May and July when many

³⁵ In keeping with the terms used in the community of Harbourton, the numbers of farm workers' court appearances include those who specified one of the job descriptors shown in Table 5 and those who nominated the more general term *labourer*.

³⁶ The category "other workers" also included the large number of people whose occupation was not recorded in the court news. Although I recognise that these numbers could very well belong to any of three categories, I decided that their placement in "other workers" would not affect the discussion and commentary that is presented in this chapter.

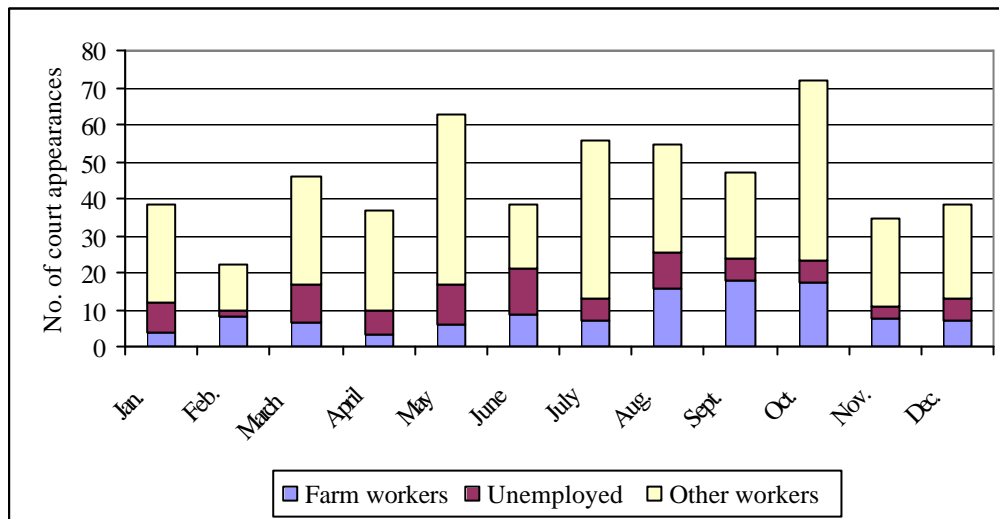


Figure 6. Average court appearances of farm workers, the unemployed and other workers in Harbourton during 2000 and 2001

itinerant farm workers would have been resident. This may be evidence of court cases being carried over from the previous year.

Thirdly, the court news of *The Harbourton Bulletin* generally did not distinguish between “local” farm workers and those who were visitors to Harbourton. As a result, any extrapolation of the data to only those who were itinerant would be of a dubious nature. Fourthly, in light of estimates by business people in Harbourton – that the town’s population increased by approximately 30% during the harvesting season³⁷ – the percentages of court appearances attributed to farm workers during August, September and October might, in fact, be considered as representative of the number of itinerant workers in the town. This reading, however, might contradict suggestions that farm workers were over-represented in court in the months of February and September when 36.3% and 38.3% of reported court appearances were attributed to farm workers.

Indeed, multiple readings of the court news are possible. Another way of making sense of the information, for example, is to consider the possibility that more residents of Harbourton called themselves farm workers during the harvesting season than at other times of the year and that this could account for the increased number of farm workers’ court appearances during particular months. The collation of the court news over the two-year period indicated that 26 people,³⁸ who had appeared in court on one occasion and nominated farm work as their occupation, had another court appearance where they either did not nominate an occupation or said that they were unemployed. Being employed at some times of the year and unemployed at others is a likely scenario for farm workers whose work is seasonal. This is particularly the case for those who reside in Harbourton all year round, as

³⁷ Although there is no official measure of fluctuations in Harbourton’s population, anecdotal evidence from business people (Field notes, 08.10.00) and from reports in *The Harbourton Bulletin* about accommodation shortages (e.g. Cepulis, 2001a; 2001b; “House full signs are up already,” 2002) suggest that the population probably increases by as much as 30% during the peak of the harvesting season – August to October.

³⁸ These people were tracked by name and age through the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet records that were compiled from the court news of *The Harbourton Bulletin*.

only small numbers of farmhands³⁹ are employed to do maintenance work during the off-season.

Even though other readings of the court news were possible, readings that identified farm workers as perpetrators of criminal activity, thus implying a causal link between the influx of itinerant farm workers and the increased number of court appearances, appeared to be strengthened by many of *The Harbourton Bulletin's* headlines.⁴⁰ As illustrated by the examples shown in Table 6, the newspaper informed the public on a fairly regular basis during the harvesting seasons of 2000 and 2001 that large numbers of people were appearing in court, that crime such as house-breaking and theft was prevalent, and that farm workers were key players in crime.

During the two years of the media study, the majority of headlines about crime referred to court proceedings in Harbourton's Magistrates Court. Of the 306 court news headlines, 183 made specific reference to the perpetrators of crime and an analysis of these references has been summarised in Table 7. The table identifies the Participants⁴¹ that were used to identify or "name" offenders in headlines and how often they were used. It also categorises the Participants and shows how often such categories were utilised. As the table demonstrates, 48.1% of the court news headlines named offenders by describing them in terms of the illegal actions that led to their court appearances (e.g. drink-driver, drug offender, traffic offender). Even

³⁹ The occupational descriptors listed in Table 5 offer some insights into the types of farm work that were available. As a general rule, once the harvesting season was finished, those who identified their occupations as "seasonal" (e.g. seasonal workers, seasonal pickers) and those who specified jobs available only during the harvesting season (e.g. picker, fruit picker, tomato picker, packer, carter) would have either moved to places where work was available (i.e. would be itinerant) or remained in town as unemployed.

⁴⁰ These headlines were on articles as well as on the section of the paper that Harbourton residents called the "court news." As already noted, the majority of references to farm workers were in the latter. All other references to farm workers appeared in the items listed in Appendix B.

⁴¹ As explained in Chapter 5, the textual analysis used here is based on the work of Fairclough (1989, 2001c) and uses Hallidayan systemic functional grammar, a system of grammar that is based around the clause complex (see Butt et al., 2000). The term *Participant* is part of the metalanguage of systemic functional grammar. It can refer to a person, a place or an object, and is realised by nominal groups or prepositional phrases. The term has been capitalised so that its usage as a functional grammar term is distinguished from general usage of the word. This is in keeping with the convention discussed by Butt et al. (2000, p.47).

Table 6. A selection of crime headlines from *The Harbourton Bulletin* during 2000 and 2001

Year	Headlines
2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Police probe break-ins” (Harbourton Police, 2000a, June 7, p.5) • “Man jailed for break and enters” (2000, July 12, p.5) • “20 arrested in drug raids” (2000, August 2, p.3) • “19 offenders fined \$13,000” (2000, August 25, p.5) • “Crackdown on illegal campers” (2000, August 25, p.7) • “Drink-drivers fined \$4000” (2000, September 6, p.3) • “70 people on range of charges appear in court” (2000, October 6, p.3) • “Seasonal workers apologise for bike theft” (2000, November 3, p.5)
2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Farmhand loses gun and drive licences” (Watson, 2001, p.7) • “Lock it or lose it, warn police” (2001, May 2, p.5) • “Farm hand blew 0.196 court told” (2001, May 2, p.6) • “Seasonal worker jailed” (2001, July 6, p.5) • “10ft tinnie for a carton of beer a bit suspect, admits farm hand” (2000, August 1, p.3) • “Mini-crimewave” (2001, August 15, p.6) • “Make sure you lock up: police” (2001, August 22, p.6) • “Farmhand’s tiff proves expensive” (2001, August 31, p.3) • “Lock it or lose it warning” (2001, September 7, p.3) • “August busy for police” (2001, September 7, p.3) • “Lock up, warn Harbourton police as thieves target homes and cars” (2001, September 12, p.3) • “Seasonal worker fined \$1000 for DUI” (2001, September 26, p.9) • “Damaging sign costs picker \$700” (2001, October 12, p.5) • “Traffic blitz sees 41 notices issued” (2001, October 24, p.5)

Table 7. Analysis of the Participants used by *The Harbourton Bulletin* to identify offenders in court news headlines, 01.01.00 to 31.12.01

Participant	No.	Category	No. (%)
People	1	People	29 (15.85%)
None [Ellipsed term ^a]	28		
Person's last name	2	Name	2 (1.1%)
Boy	1	Gender	29 (15.85%)
Man	27		
Woman	1		
Youth	3	Age	3 (1.6%)
Brother	1	Family relationship	2 (1.1%)
Mum	1		
Vietnamese	1	Nationality	1 (0.6%)
Assailant	1	Illegal actor	88 (48.1%)
Banned/disqualified driver	3		
Crash driver	1		
Drinker	1		
Drink-driver/s	19		
Driver/s or motorist/s	14		
Drug-driver	1		
Drug and drink offender	1		
Drug offender/addict	16		
Fishing offenders	5		
"Oinker"	1		
Puppy-death pair	1		
Semi-nude	1		
Speedster	2		
Thief/thieves	2		
Traffic offender/s	12		
Tyre slasher	1		
Unlicensed driver	3		
Vandal, window smasher	3		
Bar attendant	1	Occupation	26 (14.2%)
Caravan park operator	1		
Cleaner	1		
Farmhand	5		
Fisherman	6		
Labourer	1		
Pensioner	1		
Picker	1		
Plumber	1		
Seasonal worker	3		
Truck driver/truckie	5		
Backpacker	1	Other	3 (1.6%)
Dog owner	2		
		TOTAL	183 (100%)

^a A specified number of people (or men) were identified, but the terms were omitted.
e.g. "Four on drug charges," "20 arrested," "Six in court over behaviour."

though the newspaper seemed restrained in its identification of occupation in court news headlines, with only 26 of the 183 referring to occupation, it appeared that farm workers (named in a variety of ways, e.g. farmhand, seasonal worker, picker) were more likely to be singled out than other occupations. Nine of the 26 references, 10 if the labourer is included, identified farm workers.

As shown in Table 7, nationality was used only once in the court news headlines and ethnicity was not used at all. On the occasion that nationality was identified, the court news reported that, “Three Vietnamese nationals have been fined a total of \$900 after appearing in the Harbourton Magistrates Court on drug-related charges” (“Vietnamese fined”, 2001, May 30, p.17). Whilst there was no mention in the article of the offenders’ occupations, permanent residents of Harbourton may have assumed that the three men were itinerant farm workers, as they were described as having “recently come to Harbourton” from a southern state (p.17). Indeed, several in-text references in both the court news and other sections of the paper (see Appendix B) helped to link “nationals” from Turkey, Samoa and Vietnam, for example, with a range of illegal activities and with the occupation that brought many “outsiders” into Harbourton – namely, farm work. One article, for example, stated,

Harbourton’s a haven for illegal workers

Twenty-three people from Samoa, Korea, Turkey and Vietnam have been arrested ...

Yesterday a Harbourton magistrate was told the town was a haven for backpackers working illegally in Australia.

(“Harbourton’s a haven for illegal workers,”
2001, p.1)

Even when neither ethnicity nor nationality were mentioned, some names that appeared in the court news – both family names (e.g. Akatapuria, Mafi, Nguyen, Okcuoglu, Pauga) and first names (e.g. Ahmet, Mohammed, Salik, Tamate, Van Chau) – were likely to have been recognised by Harbourton residents as those of visitors to the town (see Douglas, 2001b; “Driver never held licence,” 2001; “Drug offender fined \$2600,” 2000; “Six in court over behaviour,” 2000). Whilst links to ethnicity were rarely made explicit by the newspaper, it seems possible that newspaper readers may have inferred ethnicity from names like these, thus

reinforcing implied messages of links between ethnicity or nationality, farm work and crime. It is feasible that such associations may have been accepted by residents of Harbourton as commonsensical.

The Harbourton Bulletin's court news rarely distinguished between residentially-stable and itinerant farm workers. However, other sections of the newspaper sometimes gave credibility to the idea that the perpetrators of crime were not local residents. A Crime File article submitted to the newspaper by Harbourton Police and printed in June 2000 reported that, "Officer-in-charge of Harbourton police, Senior Sergeant [name] said people should be more security conscious at this time of year" (Harbourton Police, 2000b, p.3). Although not directly naming or blaming itinerant workers, the reference to "this time of year" seemed to imply a link between the harvesting season – the annual winter event that impacted on the town in multiple ways – and crime. A letter to the editor that appeared in the newspaper the following week, however, was more direct. The author of the letter argued:

I'm writing in regard to the current crime wave hitting Harbourton. The town seems under siege by an untrustworthy, unscrupulous, well-organised sector of the community. The culprits seem to be non-locals and downright un-Aussie.

(Williams, 2000, p.2)

Even though the letter did not identify itinerant farm workers specifically, it alluded to characteristics that residents of Harbourton may very well have associated with them. Despite its tentative tone (through the use of the Process "seems"), the letter linked crime and a range of undesirable attributes (e.g. "untrustworthy," "unscrupulous") to "non-locals," a term readily associated with itinerant workers. Even the reference to "downright un-Aussie" may have been an allusion to the ethnicity of the itinerant farm workers⁴² who were residing in Harbourton. Recent writing about cultural discrimination in Australia has suggested that a "new racist

⁴² Although the cultural and linguistic diversity of farm workers cannot be verified officially, records at Harbourton State School indicated that 70 to 80% of the itinerant farm workers' children were learning English as an additional language (see Chapter 7). Community events, such as Harbourton's annual Multicultural Festival (see "Harbourton Multicultural Festival," 2000; "Lagoon a scene of delight: The Harbourton 2001 Multicultural Festival," 2001), and articles in *The Harbourton Bulletin* about immigration issues (e.g. "Growers concerned at immigration role," 2000; "Harbourton's a haven for illegal workers," 2001) also provided evidence of the culturally diverse population that lived in Harbourton during the annual harvesting season.

discourse” has emerged in response to anti-discrimination laws which have made overt racism illegal (Burnett, 2004, p.106). In focusing on culture rather than ethnicity or race, this discourse is said to identify the culture of “others” – described in the letter to the editor as “downright un-Aussie” – as a threat to a perceived and essentialised “Australian” way of life (Burnett, 2004, p.106).

Tramps, thieves and racially different

Within the context of the town of Harbourton, it appeared that it was possible for readers of *The Harbourton Bulletin* to associate itinerant farm workers with crime, even though many of the links were either implied or inferred. However, other narratives, including stories about the untrustworthiness of itinerant people and the racial disharmony that itinerant farm workers brought to the community, also appeared to be in circulation.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the officer-in-charge of the local police station issued a warning in the Crime File column of *The Harbourton Bulletin*, reminding residents that “people should be more security conscious at this time of the year” (Harbourton Police, 2000b, p.3). Numerous thefts had been reported in the newspaper two weeks earlier (Harbourton Police, 2000a) and the officer’s statement was at the end of an article that listed a series of thefts that had occurred in Harbourton that week. The statement implied a link between crime and the town’s increased population during the harvesting season. This reference may have been to the large numbers of “outsiders” who were in town at that time of the year, rather than to farm workers in particular. However, farm workers were the largest and most obvious group of visitors – easily distinguished as they worked in the fields on the outskirts of the town during the day and visibly “marked” by green stain from tomato plants, dust and sun exposure when they returned to town in the afternoons (see Davies & Hunt, 2000). Thus the linking of the officer’s comment to a group of people who could be easily recognised would appear to be a commonsense conclusion for those living in that context.

Some of the business people I interviewed expressed concern about people who came from outside the local area and had itinerant lifestyles, a view that has been reported extensively in the literature on itinerant peoples, particularly occupational travellers (e.g. Moriarty & Danaher, 1998). This concern was expressed in a number of ways, but several interviewees seemed to think of itinerant farm workers as “tramps and thieves” who could not be trusted, thus placing itinerant, temporary residents in binary opposition to residentially-stable, permanent residents. The itinerant, temporary residents were marked by their association with a range of negative activities, including theft, alcohol consumption and drug-use, and negative characteristics such as untrustworthiness and dishonesty. Whilst the extent to which these stories derived from, or contributed to, the representations presented by *The Harbourton Bulletin* is a matter of conjecture, these types of stories were prevalent.

According to the police representative, the presence of itinerant workers in Harbourton was associated with increased police work related to theft, drug and alcohol offences:

Mainly for the police it [the arrival of itinerant workers] increases the volume of stealings, drugs, and just normal arrests, street offences, just generally just probably from an overindulgence of alcohol and drugs after working hours.

(Police representative, interview transcript, 01.12.00)

Although an increase in crime might be expected in a town where the population grows so dramatically during particular months of the year, the police representative did not link the perceived increase in crime to population size. Instead, he linked what he considered to be undesirable social behaviours, both legal and illegal – overindulgence, drinking, drug use and theft – to the newcomers, thus implying a link between these characteristics and itinerant farm workers. Indeed, the court news printed in *The Harbourton Bulletin* provided support for this view, with 16.9% of court appearances for theft, 23.1% for drink driving and 24% for drugs offences attributed to farm workers, as well as similar percentages for obstructing police and for disorderly behaviour. Full details are shown in Table 8.

Table 8. Criminal offences reported in *The Harbourton Bulletin* from 01.01.00 to 31.12.01 and the numbers attributed to farm workers

Offence	Total Number	Number (%) attributed to farm workers
Allowed dog to attack or cruelty to animals	7	0 (0%)
Assault or grievous bodily harm	32	3 (9.4%)
Being in dwelling without lawful excuse	5	0 (0%)
Breached domestic violence order	19	3 (15.8%)
Breached community service order	4	0 (0%)
Damaged property	31	4 (12.9%)
Disorderly behaviour, or used insulting or threatening words	81	15 (18.5%)
Drink driving	242	56 (23.1%)
Drugs	275	66 (24%)
Failure to appear in court	16	0 (0%)
Fishing or boating offences	27	0 (0%)
Fraud	10	2 (20%)
Infringements of Weapons' Act	24	2 (8.3%)
Indecent behaviour	46	5 (10.9%)
Miscellaneous (Offences not included in other categories)	19	4 (21%)
Obstructed police or contravened police directions	78	18 (23.1%)
Theft	65	11 (16.9%)
Traffic offences (excluding drink driving)	201	26 (12.9%)

The police representative did, however, attempt to temper his comments by using a good-bad binary to describe itinerant workers:

It's just like any population, any transient population, there's the good and the bad in there ... we deal with mainly the bad element of it, but there is a very good element amongst them – people who, you know, come up and work, make their money in the season here and then have the rest of the year on holidays. We have very little dealings with them. Most of them probably live and work on the same farm that they, that they're working on.

(Police representative, interview transcript, 01.12.00)

In using this binary, the police representative described the “good element” as those who were able to holiday for all the year but Harbourton's harvesting season, and those who had some measure of residential stability, defined as living and working on the same farm. What was not said was that lifestyles like that are not available to most people, let alone to farm workers who are often working to make ends meet, to bring up their families and to pay off bank loans. For most of the farm workers who resided temporarily in Harbourton, their choice of occupation involved travel between locations in search of work and included periods of unemployment.

The employers of farm workers, the growers, told contradictory stories, juxtaposing their economic reliance on fruit pickers (as described later in this chapter) against stories that described farm workers as untrustworthy employees, opportunistic thieves and creators of racial tensions. The following interview excerpts focus on issues of theft, racial tension and deceitful behaviours:

We do have a little bit of difficulty sometimes with, they sometimes set up their own groups within the community ... I suppose it's stealing from farms. It is from ours because we have a policy written ... that they can only take home what they could eat that evening. So if they have – for example, they might take home four tomatoes – that's fine. But they can't take home, you know, four shopping bags full of tomatoes, which they quite like to do. And then we'd find out, talking to other farmers, that what they do is they set up their own little green grocers' store ... from our place they'll take capsicums, from Joe's they'll take tomatoes, and from somebody else they'll take corn and from somebody else they'll take something else, and they'll pool it all and they'll divide it up between families.

(Grower A, interview transcript, 08.12.00)

We found that a lot of the Turkish people don't get along with other races. When we have our picking crews going, we tend to keep them together, just in their own small group. We find the Turkish people to be very demanding and they'll try and fleece you for whatever they can.

(Grower B, interview transcript, 21.12.00)

Grower B continued his story by talking about the procedures he used to ensure quality produce and the way that this procedure linked to the picking counts of the workers, again highlighting the untrustworthiness of some farm workers:

Every picker has a coloured tag they have to tag the bucket with, and at the end of the day they give us their score and we match that with what we've brought into the shed ... and if there's a significant difference then we have to count all of the tags to find out who's cheating. And you very soon learn which ones to count first, because it tends to be the same people all the time. And the Turkish people are very good at that.

(Grower B, interview transcript, 21.12.00)

Although these stories may have been founded on a single case or on a small number of cases, they demonstrate the way that individual stories became generalisations about groups – about farm workers who “quite like to” steal produce, or about Turkish people who will “fleece you for whatever they can.” These slippages helped to construct farm workers as untrustworthy and implied that some were a disparate, racially problematic group.

Stories about theft and racial differences had in fact spread from farm to farm. Grower A, for example, told me about events on Grower B's farm, where a team of pickers who were picking a tomato field removed all fruit from the fruit trees beside the grower's house:

They [Grower B and his partner] have teams. We don't have teams because we're not big enough, but they have teams ... and they try to keep their nationalities together, all in the same team rather than mix them up, because of their different cultural backgrounds. And one afternoon, their Asian teams were fine – they don't have any problem with them – but it was their Turkish team, I think it was their Turkish team, and they had to pick near the house. Well they stripped the whole garden near the house, every banana, green, ripe, whatever, every orange, green, ripe, whatever. They just took the whole, everything in the whole place.

(Grower A, interview transcript, 08.12.00)

There was evidence that stories that linked farm workers to notions of mistrust, suspicion and racial disharmony were also circulating in other parts of the

community. Indeed, all of the business people who were interviewed had something negative to say about itinerant farm workers. Many of their stories associated farm workers with activities that were either illegal or potentially against the law. These stories tended to set farm workers aside, describing them as different from the permanent or residentially-stable residents of Harbourton. Often referred to as “they,” the farm workers were seen as quite different from, and having an effect, usually negative, on the “we” of the permanent residents:

I am of the opinion that the drug trade increases when they're here ... I sit here and observe that pub across the road and it's far more busy in the season than at this time of the year. And it amazes me because they're in there all day. They obviously only work a couple of days some of them.

(Real estate agent, interview transcript, 22.12.00)

This year we had everyone. We had every ethnic group. We had a lot of racial discord as well this year. It's been a very violent year ... they're not necessarily bad people, but they have a different way of displaying, and it's quite acceptable where they come from to behave this way, whereas we don't do that.

(Publican, interview transcript, 07.12.00)

In talking about itinerant farm workers, many interviewees referred to stories that they had heard from other sections of the community. Although they sometimes used these to substantiate their own stories about the residentially-stable–itinerant binary or about cultural conflict, the intertextual links hinted at the way that such stories were circulating in and being spread through the community. Grower A, for example, commented that, “Well, for some of them their culture is so strong and so different to our permanents that it is, you know, quite difficult. I know that at the youth centre they had quite a bit of trouble with the itinerant workers' children” (Grower A, interview transcript, 08.12.00). Similarly, the publican identified cultural differences as underlying some problems in the community. However, she recognised the tensions and misunderstandings that occurred between different ethnic groups and the local community, arguing that Harbourton residents had caused some of the difficulties:

My most bitter disappointment is not so much in the different ethnic groups, but in the way that our local population has handled it. And that's probably what disappoints me the most, is that they for some reason, I guess we have a bit of a redneck community here, ignorant kind of community, and rather than learning from the influence of all these great new cultures and ethnic

groups, everybody winds up resenting and hating them, because they don't really understand that they are different. Like the Turkish guys, they've got a different culture, the way they talk to women and the way that they, I mean we just can't take offence because it's not our way. And the same with the Asian guys.

(Publican, interview transcript, 07.12.00)

Indeed, discourses of racism seemed to thread through a number of the interviews and reflected discourses that circulated in other parts of the community. At the beginning of the current research, Harbourton's elected member of state government was one of the members of Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party who had become independents during their term in parliament.⁴³ A One Nation advertising flyer (see Robinson, 2001), distributed throughout the community as part of the electoral campaign for the 2001 Queensland state election, indicated the extent to which racial discourses were overtly proclaimed in the community.⁴⁴ The following excerpt (with layout, spelling and punctuation as per the original document) illustrates this point:

IMMIGRATION – No more Immigration until the last Aussie has a job. NO more importing skilled workers – we will train our own.

ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS – The day they arrive, put them on a plane and send them back to where they came from. No more Tampa fiascos.

AGED CARE – The hundred's of million's saved by sending illegal immigrants back immediately would easily cover the cost of care and comfort for our elderly.

MULTICULTURALISM – This Country was built on Christian values. People who want to live in Australia should want to live like us. If they don't or can't, they should go back to where they came from.

(Robinson, 2001, p.3)

⁴³ Pauline Hanson was elected the independent member for Oxley (Queensland) in the 1996 federal election. She became well-known in Australia for representing "the undiluted voice of the people in all its bigotry and unformed passions" and for her "call for a nation re-centred around one culture as opposed to a multicultural nation" (Saunders & McConnel, 2000, pp.49, 46). In 1997, she established her own political party, Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party, which experienced considerable success at the 1998 Queensland state election. Indeed, almost one in four Queenslanders (22.68%) voted for One Nation candidates and the party won 11 of the state's 89 parliamentary seats. Internal party problems, however, resulted in most of these members of parliament leaving the party (Millar, 2001). At the next state election, the One Nation Party received only 8.69% of the vote (Queensland Parliamentary Service, 2001).

⁴⁴ The One Nation candidate was not re-elected in the 2001 election.

It appeared that many of the community stories that identified farm workers as untrustworthy or involved in illegal activities were intertwined with stories of racial disharmony and illegal immigration. The relationship between farm work and illegal immigration received recurring coverage in *The Harbourton Bulletin* (e.g. “Growers concerned at immigration role,” 2000; “Growers tell Immigration: Kicking in doors not the answer,” 2001; “Harbourton's a haven for illegal workers,” 2001; “Illegal immigrant transferred,” 2000). However, in late 2001 and into 2002, the topic was emphasised when the mayor and the federal member of parliament suggested that Harbourton be offered as a site for a detention centre for illegal immigrants. In arguing that such a centre would provide an economic boost for the town (e.g. “Detention centre worth \$7m a year to economy” – Cepulis, 2001, p.3), the mayor was reported in a newspaper with statewide distribution as saying, “If they look at all the people detained for breaking their visas most of them probably came from Harbourton picking fruit anyway” (Ketchell, 2002, p.22).

The reaction of some community members to the proposed detention centre was evident in two letters to the editor (Kock, 2001; Payn, 2001), which criticised the politicians’ proposal and the focus on an economic discourse. Both letters identified community safety as a major consideration.

Detention centre “not only answer”

I strongly object to such a proposal. The “economy” is not the only answer to the survival of Harbourton. The average resident is aware of the problems of detention centres in or near populated areas. Cr [name]’s comment of solving the labour problems on the farms is totally ill-conceived as it would be a move of losing all control over the detainees. ... So, I urge residents to object to the proposed installation.
(Kock, 2001, p.2)

Carrot for donkey

Regarding the story about an illegal immigrants (*sic*) detention centre being worth \$7 million a year to the Harbourton economy (*The Harbourton Bulletin*, August 31). Our township is a pleasant, safe community at present. Please don’t let \$7 million be a carrot dangling in front of a donkey – us.
(Payn, 2001, p.2)

These exchanges took place within a context of Australia-wide concern with refugees, illegal immigrants and detention centres, especially in the lead up to the federal election of November 10, 2001. Although *The Harbourton Bulletin* reported only local news or outside news that was of direct significance to the community, discourses from national news reports were evident in some local stories. For example, a news report under the headline “Raids nab 22 illegal migrants,” not only reflected national events but indicated the pressure on local growers to support, and even police, federal immigration policies. The article stated:

Raids nab 22 illegal migrants

Twenty-two illegal immigrants located around Harbourton this week will be deported....

A spokesperson for the Immigration Department said the illegal immigrants would be removed from Australia as soon as possible. The spokesperson said although they had been found at their residences, it was proven they had been working in the area.

“Employers, particularly farmers, had an obligation to ensure their workforce had a legal right to work in the area,” the spokesperson said.

(“Raids nab 22 illegal migrants,” 2001, p.9)

It appeared, therefore, that there was a complex web of stories in circulation, stories that linked farm workers to a range of characteristics that predominantly suggested untrustworthiness and associations with local illegal activities, including theft, drugs and drinking, as well as more nationally oriented offences, such as illegal immigration. Racist discourses also permeated these stories.

“Most of these guys like a beer”

Farm workers were described by some interviewees as a group of people who worked hard but also liked to party hard, as indicated in a comment by the bank representative: “Most of these guys like a beer. They work hard and they play hard” (Bank representative, interview transcript, 07.12.00). He was not alone in his views, as one of the growers made a similar point:

I think there's certainly a fair percentage of them that get themselves into strife. And I think particularly with the pickers, because there's potential for them to earn a lot of money, and they just go to the pub.

(Grower B, interview transcript, 21.12.00)

Grower B went on to explain that, in the peak of the season, the packing shed operated seven days a week, with shed staff working on five-day rosters. The pickers, however, were employed six days a week, with no fruit being picked on Saturdays:

Most of our pickers, we only try to work six days a week. We have Saturdays off. Friday is payday, so we've learnt that we only get half the crew there.

(Grower B, interview transcript, 21.12.00)

The publican, whose business relied on workers wanting to have a drink, said that farm workers would spend money if they had it. Although she began by talking about farm workers in general, it became apparent that her comments referred mostly to the young backpackers who tended to be a visible group in Harbourton, particularly in the centre of the town. In the late afternoon or early evening during the harvesting season, they could often be seen at the supermarkets, the hotels or the fast food stores, or walking between those places and the backpacker hostels which were located near the centre of town. The publican explained that:

The more people out working, the busier we are. You know, the more people getting a pay packet at the end of the week, the busier we are ... They spend a lot of money ... of a Friday night when we have one hundred and eighty backpackers ... they'll drink the cheap beer, but they'll also drink the gin and tonic and Jack Daniels and, you know ... there's enough of them to have a party when they go out.

(Publican, interview transcript, 07.12.00)

Although a number of the stories focused on farm workers' drinking or partying, stories which seemed reminiscent of the "overindulgence of alcohol and drugs after working hours" comment by the police representative, it appeared that interviewees often generalised from sub-groups of farm workers, such as backpackers, to farm workers in general. The shire councillor, however, talked about single and family farm workers, blaming the former for crime and linking the latter to domestic violence and alcohol abuse. Itinerancy was identified as something that exacerbated such "problems":

Because of the nature of the work, the type of people you get outside of the family arrangement or the family unit, the single type person, you know, attributes a lot of crime in town ... there are a few feral type people that come with that type of industry ... The family side of things, it usually isn't too bad, but obviously they have problems as far as, you know, domestic violence and that type of stuff, alcohol abuse and everything that seems to relate more so if they're travelling around a lot more.

(Shire councillor, interview transcript, 08.10.00)

Discourses relating to masculinity seemed to run through many of the interviews. Several interviewees appeared to draw on stereotypical masculine views of farm workers – tough, manual labourers who enjoyed an alcoholic drink at the end of the day and were likely to appear in court for a range of offences. Farm work was often described as divided on gender terms, as indicated by the bank representative:

I suppose historically, you know, the males are seen as the better pickers and the females are seen as the better packers⁴⁵ and I know most of the farmers would agree with that.

(Bank representative, interview transcript, 07.12.00)

The perceived gendered division of labour seemed to match his understanding of the nature of the work. He described the masculine work in the field as:

hot hard work, physical work, because they're bending all the time and moving and carrying buckets of tomatoes to the packing shed, I mean to the haul-out trucks, so it's very physical work.

(Bank representative, 07.12.00)

In contrast, the feminine work in the shed was portrayed as “not so physical. They're in the shed so it's normally a bit cooler” (Bank representative, interview transcript, 07.12.00). This binary located male farm workers doing hard physical labour out in the hot fields and the women doing less physical work in the supposedly cool packing sheds.

Indeed, the bank representative was almost alone in discussing female farm workers. It was as if the women who worked on farms were often invisible to many members of the community. The construction of farm work as a male dominated occupation was also supported by *The Harbourton Bulletin's* reports of crime. Over the two years of the media study, 16.4% of court appearances by people other

⁴⁵ “Packing” is a term used to describe shed-work, where vegetables are packed into cartons.

than farm workers and 15.7% of all court appearances were attributed to women. In contrast, however, 93.2% of farm workers who appeared in court were men and only 6.8% were women, as shown in Table 9.

What was surprising, however, was that a discussion with one of the growers revealed a huge discrepancy between the community's perceptions of a predominantly male farm workforce and the insights of an employer of farm labour (Field notes, 16.08.02). The grower said that for every ten workers in the field, nine workers were employed in the packing shed, with the majority of field workers being men and the majority of shed workers being women. The overall ratio of men to women was approximately 60:40. The substantial contribution of women to the farming industry, therefore, had been virtually silenced through much of the community. Indeed, the inclusion of women in the community stories that were circulating would no doubt have resulted in very different, and perhaps gentler, narratives.

Bad citizens and inadequate parents

Many of the stereotypical stories about farm workers that were circulating in the community of Harbourton seemed to be associated with a residentially-stable–itinerant binary. Even though some permanent residents alluded to how little was known about the backgrounds or past histories of the itinerant families who lived temporarily in the town, they often seemed to regard itinerant people as bad citizens and inadequate parents. The real estate agent, for example, highlighted the uncertainty of doing business with people who have unknown backgrounds:

I've found this in the past, the longer people live here, the more they want to accept the good things in our society and they strive for those things, for their children especially ... Well, you know, you get a lot of people who, I think, nobody knows their background. When you live in a small town, you have a fair idea of who does what. But when you get these people in ... they have free entry to the place.

(Real estate agent, interview transcript, 22.12.00)

Table 9. Occupation and gender of offenders whose court appearances were reported in *The Harbourton Bulletin* during 2000 and 2001

Occupation	Number (%) of reported court appearances		
	Male	Female	Total
Farm workers	193 (93.2%)	14 (6.8%)	207 (100%)
Others	741 (83.6%)	145 (16.4%)	886 (100%)
TOTAL	934 (85.5%)	159 (14.5%)	1093 (100%)

This not-knowing, however, was probably instrumental in allowing a whole range of assumptions to be made, often on what seemed to be fairly flimsy evidence. Many of the stories appeared to be generalisations that had originated from a single incident or, on some occasions, had come from second-hand stories. There was evidence of this in stories that conceptualised itinerant farm workers as bad parents. Although the shire councillor had implied bad parenting in his comments about domestic violence and alcohol abuse (see earlier in this chapter), other interviewees were more explicit. For example,

I've seen at the school where Julie [his daughter] goes, some of those kids coming into her class and I feel very sorry for them. Some of them don't achieve very well at all. Some of them finished Year 1 and still couldn't write their name ... There were three of them that I particularly noticed and they all were from an itinerant family. Well, I don't know, but just as a parent, I wonder what sort of attention those kids get at home or how much help they get or what sort of food do they get to eat.

(Grower B, interview transcript, 21.12.00)

I think that children in that situation generally seem to be a bit, not in every case, but a lot of them are a bit dis-, how would you say? They kind of don't have roots. Dislocated. And they, I can remember Sean [her business partner] saying to me that he felt that a lot of children, you take them into something to rent and they would immediately say, especially the little ones, "Which is my bed?" Which indicates, I think, a lot of what those sort of kids are coping with ... My daughter's little one goes to [name of childcare centre] and she was commenting that towards the end of the year, in the last couple of months, a very rough element seemed to arrive amongst the kids. They were mostly Turkish but they were very boisterous kids compared to the group that have been there. And she just made that comment and I don't know but I imagine it's the same at school.

(Real estate agent, interview transcript, 22.12.00)

These interview excerpts show how the observations of one person were taken up by others and were re-told as generalised stories about "those children" and about families whose lives were perceived as different from "the group that have been there," presumably those who were residentially-stable. Both examples illustrate the slippage that occurred from one idea to another – from low achievement to poor parenting, or from ethnicity to implied poor parenting.

Stories of bad parenting also seemed to emanate from narratives that implied that farm workers were an unruly group of people who needed regulating. Both of the growers who were interviewed discussed the necessity for farms to have written

policies and rules, as well as to employ a “ground foreman” (Grower A, interview transcript, 08.12.00) or a “quality inspector” (Grower B, interview transcript, 21.12.00) to watch and inspect the pickers and their work. Even though such practices are part of a much wider quality assurance movement that attempts to ensure high quality work – or, as in this case, to maintain a quality harvest – the growers’ information was interspersed with stories of farm workers who were dishonest, untrustworthy and irresponsible.

However, many of these stories were second-hand, recounting incidents that had not been experienced first-hand. Grower A, for example, explained that,

We’ve never had trouble with anybody’s children. Like, we have a policy where no children are on the farm at all, so we’ve never ever had someone come and leave children in their cars or whatever, where I know that does happen on other farms. And children after school even, they get dropped off by bus and have to sit in a car. And farmers have tried to put an end to that. Like they’ve put policies in place and make sure that that’s not happening.
(Grower A, interview transcript, 08.12.00)

There is no way of knowing how often such incidents occurred, and in recent years, growers have had to implement a range of procedures as part of the government’s requirements for workplace, health and safety practices. Nevertheless, the growers talked as if there was a need for the practices of at least some farm workers to be regulated. Although irresponsible work practices do not augur well with growers’ economic concerns for getting a crop picked, for sending it to market in prime condition and for receiving a high price for quality produce, none of the stories were said to come from first-hand experience. Yet, the message of these stories seemed to be that farm workers had a reputation for being unreliable and unruly workers and they were also incapable parents whose parenting practices also required the regulation of farm policies.

Bad parenting stories seemed to circulate widely throughout the Harbourton community and this became evident in incidental anecdotal evidence that I collected. In talking to Harbourton residents about my research, a common response to hearing that it involved farm workers was advice that I talk to social workers, guidance officers and what residents called the Department of Family Services (now called the Queensland Department of Families). There seemed to be

a commonsense belief that there would be extensive official records to substantiate the stories that were in circulation. My follow-up to this advice suggested that this was not the case. Indeed, when I raised the issue with a representative of the Department of Families, I was told that their interaction with itinerant families was minimal.

Despite the negative stories that were in circulation, there were also times when farm workers' families seemed to be silenced. Just as female farm workers were a reasonably invisible group, so at times were family groups. They tended to be visible when they fitted the bad parenting stereotype, but invisible at other times. Certainly over the two years of the media study, *The Harbourton Bulletin* had offered few indications that farm workers' families even lived in the community.

“You smell them when they walk in the door”

My observations suggested that, in the late afternoon, some farm workers were visible in the community of Harbourton, especially in places like the supermarkets and the post office. Farm workers often showed the effects of exposure to the sun, were usually dusty from working in the fields, and their hands and clothes were generally stained green from tomato plants. It was not unusual for them to also be marked by particular odours – the smell of sweat, of particular crops and of pesticides, including the one that was affectionately called “dead horse.” These occupational markers highlighted farm workers in a visible way, helping to distinguish them from other members of the community whose unmarked position would probably have been the more comfortable one (Davies & Hunt, 2000). Surprisingly, however, only one interviewee discussed the visual and olfactory markers of farm workers. He said:

We have a lot who turn up here and they've just finished a day's work and they have green chemical all over them and you smell them when they walk in the door and it goes through the air conditioning.

(Bank representative, interview transcript, 07.12.00)

Contradictory economic discourses

Although many community stories about itinerant farm workers focused on negative characteristics, there were also stories that recognised the economic boost that itinerant workers brought to Harbourton. Some business people talked about the itinerant workers in terms of survival, indicating that some businesses could not operate without them. For example:

We wouldn't be able to survive unless we had itinerant pickers, because we wouldn't be able to get enough locals to pick ... Without those people we couldn't operate.

(Grower A, interview transcript, 08.12.00)

We love them. You know, not everybody does, but they're mad if they don't. We would not survive without them.

(Publican, interview transcript, 07.12.00)

The impacts on the caravan parks are monstrous and the fact that just about every house is taken up from a rental point of view, so it fills the place up and puts smiles on people's faces.

(Post office representative, interview transcript, 24.01.01)

Some of Harbourton's business people estimated that sales increased by approximately 30% during the harvesting season (Field notes, 08.10.00). Others, however, spoke in a more general way about the economic benefits of having extra people in the community. It was claimed that farm workers helped to keep other people in jobs as well as ensuring the viability of a whole range of businesses:

There's no doubt that the economy of Harbourton depends heavily on those itinerants. And that is right across the whole spectrum, from caravan parks, supermarkets etcetera, pubs, all that cheap sort of accommodation ... they're still very important to Harbourton, not only to the farms but also to the other business houses as well.

(Bank representative, interview transcript, 07.12.00)

Well it's really keeping someone in a job. That's what it comes down to ... Basically because of these people, we're one of the biggest sellers of Vodaphone in the state ... from that point of view the itinerant people have made this place work remarkably well for us.

(Post office manager, interview transcript, 24.01.01)

At the same time, however, there were many contradictions in these stories. On the one hand, farm workers were described as ensuring the town's economic survival, and on the other hand, they were also seen as taking jobs that would otherwise have

been available to permanent or residentially-stable residents. The shire councillor, for example, argued that,

And then on the downside ... the locals who do want to work miss out on that type of work. Now, I've held a strong belief that I don't believe that every local person on the dole is a dole bludger, but certainly there's not a level playing field there at the moment, where itinerants and especially overseas backpackers have preference for farm work.

(Shire councillor, interview transcript, 08.10.00)

In the same month, a similar view was expressed in a published letter to the editor that appeared in *The Harbourton Bulletin* on October 20, 2000. The writer of the letter claimed that he had not been able to secure a fruit-picking job, because European backpackers were given preference over Australian workers. The letter (grammar and punctuation as per the original) stated:

Discrimination

I am writing this letter because I feel discriminated against for being an Aussie. On October 16, 2000, I walked in to [name] job agencies to look for any picking work in the area. I was told to go to [name] Road to start work picking capsicums.

We turned up at 6.45am as told and waited for the farmer to turn up. As I was waiting I overheard one of the farmers saying, "only backpackers, only backpackers". Five minutes or so later the head farmer walks up and asks, "where are you from?"

I answered, "Harbourton". He asked, "who sent you?" and I said "[name of job agency]", and then got told, "no work, mate". ...

The only people left on the job were European backpackers. Four Aussies knocked back, the only Aussies there....

Well, there's definitely work in Harbourton, but not for me because I am an Aussie.

(Utz, 2000, p.2)

Yet, not everyone agreed with that point of view. The two growers were adamant that local labour was not sufficient for their needs, especially at the peak of the season:

We wouldn't be able to get enough locals to pick.

(Grower A, interview transcript, 08.12.00)

When we get very busy around the September period, we find labour's always short. Even though we're told that the unemployment rate in the town might be still as high as ten or fifteen per cent, we can't find people to work.

(Grower B, interview transcript, 21.12.00)

As discussed earlier, the complex interplay of a range of economic, criminal and racist discourses presented a number of contradictions within the community. In opposition to the economic discourses, that argued the economic advantages of a mobile workforce in the harvesting season, were beliefs that itinerant workers were taking money out of the town. Such comments probably reflected the low economic status of Harbourton and its history of business closures, lost jobs and high unemployment. It was as if some residents believed that itinerant workers contributed to the poverty of the town, by taking their earnings with them when they moved to other places. For example, some comments were:

I've got no evidence to support it, but I don't think, from what I see, apart from the licensed premises, I don't think much money is spent in the town at all, so I think whatever they earn in wages, a big percentage would go out of the town and is not spent here.

(Police representative, interview transcript, 01.12.00)

A lot would say that some of the money drains to places like Airlie Beach. As far as they're here to work and save ... most people would say that Harbourton could be the saving leg of their journey for when they go and party in Cairns, Townsville or Airlie Beach.

(Shire councillor, interview transcript, 08.10.00)

SUMMARY

The purpose of this chapter was to contextualise the current research, by providing insights into the community of Harbourton and its relationship with itinerant farm workers. The chapter focused on some of the stories that were circulating in the community. Whilst the dominant stories were ones that identified farm workers negatively – constructing farm workers as untrustworthy, more interested in partying than in being good citizens and good parents, and linking them to crime and illegal immigration – other stories recognised the economic utility of farm workers and the cultural diversity that they brought to Harbourton. Although many

of the negative stories appeared to be stereotypes or generalisations that had originated from one or two incidents, it appeared that these stories circulated as commonsense understandings in the community.

Some of the community stories seemed to reflect wider societal stories about families in poverty (see Comber, 1998; Freebody et al., 1995) and so-called illegal immigration (e.g. Lehmann, 2001; Whitmont, 2001). Through national media coverage relating to the latter, the public had been saturated with discourses of “hatred, dehumanisation and demonisation” and stories that blamed victims for their circumstances (Clyne, 2002, p.10). It is perhaps not surprising, then, that the stories circulating in Harbourton constituted itinerant farm workers as threats to permanent residents.

Whilst farm workers’ green, sweaty and dirty bodies marked them as a visible, easily recognisable group within the community, many of the stories in circulation focused on the way that farm workers were unable to control or manage their bodies. They were described as having alcohol or drug problems, as being involved in theft, as being untrustworthy, and as unable to discipline their children. Such views appeared to be accompanied by beliefs that farm workers needed to be managed and controlled in society and that the relevant authorities, including the police and the Immigration Department, should carry out some of this work. As Comber (1996) pointed out in her review of social discourses about poverty, the issue often becomes a “matter of immorality rather than material deprivation” (p.85). Poverty and its consequences, as well as social class, can be masked by a focus on what such a group can do to society (Bessant, 1995; Comber, 1996).

This thesis now moves to the institutional context of Harbourton State School. Chapter 7 begins by examining how itinerancy is identified within the policies of Education Queensland. It then focuses on the local school context, examining how it attempted to cope with the arrival and enrolment of up to sixty itinerant farm workers’ children during the harvesting season.

CHAPTER 7.

CONTEXTUALISING THE STUDY: THE SCHOOL CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the institutional context of the current study. It begins by examining how itinerancy was perceived within the larger institutional context of Education Queensland, before investigating how teachers and administrators within the local school context of Harbourton State School attempted to make sense of, and to work with, itinerant students who enrolled in the winter months. The chapter explores some of the difficulties experienced by the school in trying to manage a school population that seemed to be constantly in flux.

The chapter also discusses teachers' understandings about itinerant children's lifestyles, their diverse linguistic backgrounds and the perceived relationships between these and literacy learning. The school's documentation of the children's progress in literacy learning, statewide assessment data and teachers' interviews offer a picture of the literacy achievements of the itinerant farm workers' children who attended the school during 2000 and 2001.

EDUCATION QUEENSLAND'S POLICIES ON ITINERANCY

Education Queensland, as the government educational authority for the state of Queensland, provides over-arching policies and guidelines for schools. Current policy documents that were written prior to 1999 make few references to mobility or itinerancy. In the equity area, for instance, the policy for the *Management of behaviour in a supportive school environment* (Department of Education, Queensland, 1998) identifies itinerant students as a target group for whom "specific educational issues" should be addressed, whilst other documents that discuss target groups (e.g. Department of Education, Queensland, 1997-2002) do not mention itinerant students at all.

In contrast, the more recent policy documents disseminated by Education Queensland (e.g. Department of Education, Queensland, 1999, 2000a, 2002) have flagged mobility as playing a potentially significant role in student diversity and learning, including literacy learning. In looking beyond the labelling that has tended to accompany a target-group approach, these documents have recognised mobility as one of “the many complex interactions of disadvantaging factors that can affect student literacy outcomes” (Department of Education, Queensland, 2000a, p.79). As a result, mobility is emphasised in a number of current initiatives, including whole-school literacy planning (Department of Education, Queensland, 2002c) and the school improvement and accountability framework (Department of Education, Queensland, 2002a).⁴⁶ Queensland state schools are now required to investigate and profile the communities in which they are located, a process that includes documenting “enrolment, mobility and attendance data” as well as the “employment patterns” and “special features of the community that the school serves” (Department of Education, Queensland, 2002a, p.10).

However, despite the expectation that schools will examine mobility and its significance in specific contexts, the education system offers limited information about appropriate pedagogical considerations. The *Guidelines for the placement of interstate and overseas students in Queensland state schools* (Department of Education, Queensland, 2001a),⁴⁷ deals with the administrative issue of students’ year level placement, providing a process for schools accompanied by detailed information about differences that exist amongst the education systems of the Australian states and New Zealand. Although the need for “orientation programs, appropriate placement, monitoring of social and academic adjustment, and the careful collection of student performance information” (p.5) is highlighted, there are no supporting documents to provide practical suggestions for school practice in relation to student mobility.

⁴⁶ The documents published in 2002 were not available to schools during the data collection period of the current research.

⁴⁷ This document replaced two information statements that had been available since the early 1990s (see Department of Education, Queensland, 1990, 1991a).

ITINERANCY – THE SCHOOL’S VIEWPOINT

In the case of Harbourton State School, teachers and administrators appeared particularly concerned with the administrative problems that accompanied the arrival of itinerant farm workers’ children. The effects of itinerancy – enrolment fluctuations, class sizes, and resource availability – on the organisational capacity of the school were causes of apprehension and often the subject of staffroom conversation. It was not unusual to hear comments such as “Another one arrived in my class today” or “How many more are we going to get this year?” Although my presence in the school and the topic of the current research may have contributed to the foregrounding of issues relating to itinerancy, school personnel appeared to be grappling, almost continually, with the perceived impact of itinerancy on the operations of their school and their classrooms.

Enrolment fluctuations

Itinerant farm workers’ children enrolling at Harbourton State School entered a context where school personnel appeared to feel pressured by the annual enrolment fluctuations that occurred in conjunction with the local harvesting season. School personnel argued that the annual increase in school enrolments (see data presented in Chapter 5) should have been addressed proactively by the education system. Although the system responded reactively once the school population exceeded a prescribed numerical standard, teachers and school administrators lamented the time lag between the arrival of additional students (and the consequences of increased enrolments, such as over-sized classes) and the provision of extra staff. In 2000, for example, an additional teacher was not appointed until the beginning of Term 4 (early October) and, within a month, the school was beginning to experience its annual decrease in numbers.

One teacher suggested that, at one stage, there had been an attempt by the education system to deal proactively with the annual enrolment fluctuations:

Two or three years ago we had a special arrangement ... to staff the school right from day one, as if the influx had already arrived. So we started off with small classes and the idea was that we’d be able to, the itinerants would come in and everything would fill up and we wouldn’t need to do reshuffles and form composites and all that sort of thing in the middle of the year or in

September. And then, of course, the itinerants didn't arrive that year, so we couldn't get the same arrangement for the year after. And then, lo and behold, once that arrangement had gone and we were staffed on what we were supposed to have, back they came.

(Teacher, interview transcript, 08.12.00)

Not everyone agreed with this version of events. The deputy principal thought that the provision of an additional teacher had been to ease the school through the transition following the appointment of a new principal. Despite the differences of opinion, the stories identified the unpredictable nature of seasonal work and the resultant annual variations as significant issues impacting on the school. The deputy's opinion was that the additional teacher had meant that the increase in student enrolments had not been as noticeable as it might have been. He explained:

It [student enrolment] was a lower number, but it was still significant. It's just that I don't think it was noticed as much. We were operating at a fairly good staffing level and they [itinerant students] managed to be placed in without too much pressure. What happened was that we had enough staffing to cope with that rise, so kids did come in but it just didn't seem to be that big.

(Deputy principal, interview transcript, 24.07.01)

Another concern was that the timing of some institutional processes disadvantaged Harbourton State School, because the enrolment fluctuations were invisible to the system's procedures. In particular, teachers complained that the enrolment census that determined the annual allocation of teaching staff to Queensland schools was conducted on the eighth day of the school year (in early February), when the itinerant children who enrolled at Harbourton State School were in other places, mostly in Victoria or New South Wales. As a result, the school's staffing numbers were allocated on the minimum annual enrolment and the arrival of itinerant children part of the way through the school year resulted in larger classes. These sometimes exceeded the maximum sizes set by the Enterprise Bargaining Agreement between Education Queensland and the teachers it employed (see Queensland Industrial Relations Commission, 2000).

Similarly, the school had lost its entitlement to an administrative registrar in 2000, because the enrolment figures on the eighth day of school were below the level required. The principal regularly used this example to show how the timing of the

census disadvantaged the school (e.g. Field notes, 26.05.00, 08.12.00, 22.08.01). The two census dates that determined funding and ancillary staff allocations operated on cycles that did not match the arrival and departure dates of itinerant farm workers' children. As the school's deputy principal explained, this situation resulted in "help coming at the wrong time" (Field notes, 26.05.00).

Although issues relating to itinerant children were generally the topics of in-house discussions or of meetings between the school administrators and personnel from Education Queensland's district office, they were put into the public arena on two occasions during 2000. Both occasions were in conjunction with a one-day strike of Queensland teachers on June 14, 2000. An article (written by a group of teachers on behalf of their colleagues from all of the Harbourton schools) and a letter to the editor (written by one teacher) were published in *The Harbourton Bulletin*. They highlighted class size issues in the local context and emphasised the impact of seasonal enrolments on Harbourton schools:

**Harbourton teachers join campaign
to seek more support services**

A total of 73 teachers in the Harbourton area took part in the Queensland Teachers' Union's statewide full-day stoppage on Wednesday....

In a statement prepared by six QTU [Queensland Teachers' Union] representatives – Darrell Sard, Mike Clements, Bernie Hock, Alison Rodgers, Kevin Perrett and Lyn Edgar – the teachers said while they regretted the inconvenience to parents and students on Wednesday it was important the community understood the reasons for this action.

... One of the major issues in the Harbourton area is that staff allocations are based on February enrolments which leave schools understaffed to meet the needs of seasonal fluctuations in student population.

Provisions of funding for each school's budget are dependent on the February enrolments.

As the year goes on and the student numbers increase, the schools experience a budget shortfall with less money to support an increasing student population.

("Harbourton teachers," 2000, p.5)

Strike

Last Tuesday Queensland State School teachers voted for a work stoppage on Wednesday, June 14.

... These claims are particularly relevant to Harbourton as an influx of seasonal workers in the middle of the year puts additional pressure on class sizes....

Proposals in the QTU claim would see schools with a growing population staffed more liberally at the beginning of the year and classroom numbers drop by an average of five pupils. This would avoid the disruption of classes being reshuffled during the year and allow teachers greater opportunity to meet the needs of all the learners.

(Clements, 2000, p.2)

Reconfiguring classes

Although the arrival of an additional teacher and the creation of a new class allowed the school to overcome the problem of over-sized classes, the principal and deputy principal argued that new problems were often generated. The reconfiguration of school classes, at short notice and with the least disruption to school routines, was a problematic task and appeared to be a source of ongoing tension within the school. According to the principal, this practice caused

a logistical nightmare when we get so many kids in that we have to rearrange classes to make more classes ... when the numbers go down so do the class levels again and it all starts again. It's just one big cycle.

(Principal, interview transcript, 08.12.00)

The deputy principal outlined some of the organisational difficulties of having to restructure classes, including the issue of having to decide which students were moved into a newly created class. He explained:

I've noticed that teachers usually shed off the kids that they either had difficulty working with or they didn't personally gel with ... we've tried the two ways – admin choose the kids or teachers choose and we still end up with having a hard time bonding those kids into a class half the way or a third of the way during the year.

(Deputy principal, interview transcript, 24.07.01)

In 2001, however, the school administration decided to try a different approach. Because many of the “new” children seemed to be enrolling in Years 2 and 3, a Year 2/3 composite class of “new arrivals” was created. According to the deputy

principal, this decision “was quite contentious” amongst the staff (Interview transcript, 24.07.01):

Some teachers thought it was the right way to go and some teachers said no ... that the teacher who had to take that class would be under more pressure and there'll be more itinerant kids coming in and a lot would be English as a second language. So it was quite divided in the staff whether it was the right or wrong way to go.

(Deputy principal, interview transcript, 24.07.01)

As illustrated by the following excerpts from interview transcripts, the decision seemed to be as controversial at the end of the year as it had been when it was first mooted:

In my opinion, it shouldn't be like this ... I think they should split the classes and share them [the itinerant children] out.

(Teacher, interview transcript, 03.08.01)

Certainly for social interaction I think it went all right. I was worried about that. I was worried about putting all the kids in the one class.

(Teacher, interview transcript, 26.10.01)

I still feel that they need a broader base of children, not put all these children in one group. I think they need to have, they need to have a more balanced class and not have them all together.

(Teacher, interview transcript, 10.12.01)

Alleviating community apprehension

School personnel seemed concerned that the annual rearrangement of classes, which followed the enrolment of itinerant children, disrupted the school's operations and was an unpopular decision with the parents of the permanent cohort of students, the students who were described by the principal as “our twelve monthers” (Principal, interview transcript, 08.12.00). According to one teacher, the school's reorganisation of classes caused “permanent” parents to blame itinerant parents, because they thought their children were “suffering because of the changes in structure and so on” (Teacher, interview transcript, 08.12.00). Even though the school's *Annual Report 2001* described the restructuring of classes as “disruptive to students and quite unpopular with parents” (Harbourton State School, 2002, p.6), evidence about which parents had expressed this concern and how such concern had been voiced was vague.

In many of the teachers' interviews, it appeared that successful schooling was equated with students spending a stable school year in a single class with a single teacher. Certainly the school administrators were cognisant of the seemingly impossible task of trying to please everybody, including the teachers, when the re-arrangement of classes had to occur. In the opinion of the deputy principal, the re-arrangement of classes involved making judgements about what was the best course of action for those involved:

We had to make a decision whether to mix the kids, sprinkle them into the existing classes or combine all of the new kids into the one class. You have that scale I guess. It's a judgement. On one side, if we get a new teacher in and level the classes across we'd be moving lots of kids, kids that have been here right through. So putting them all in and mixing them all up ... and levelling them across say four grades instead of three, will have the disadvantage of moving lots of kids and it's disappointing parents that have had kids here at school ... I would prefer that it didn't have the impact of disappointing the parents.

(Deputy principal, interview transcript, 24.07.01)

He also argued that the process was difficult for students, both itinerant and residentially-stable students:

Teachers have activities at the beginning of the year to bond the classes together ... And kids must have a sense of disappointment that they've been taken away from their friendship groups and taken away from the teacher they're accustomed to working with. And so the idea of having the itinerants together, all we have to move, they have to change anyway, so why put that on other kids. Why force them to change as well?

(Deputy principal, interview transcript, 24.07.01)

Many comments from teachers helped to construct itinerant children as "other" and different from the children who were permanent residents of Harbourton, thus setting up a permanent-itinerant binary, as had been evident in the stories from the wider community. The deputy principal, however, highlighted the way that the reorganisation of classes affected both itinerant children and residentially-stable children (the "other kids" in the transcript above) and caused angst for some parents. He appeared to argue for minimising the impact on residentially-stable children and their parents, by confining the difficulties and disappointments to the itinerant children who "have to move anyway."

Acknowledging cultural and linguistic diversity

The arrival of itinerant farm workers children, 70 to 80% of whom were learning English as an additional language (EAL), increased the cultural and linguistic diversity of the school's student population. As already explained (see Chapter 5), 12 to 13% of the student population had been identified as Indigenous and, during the harvesting season, approximately 10% of students were EAL students. For the principal, the link between itinerant students and non-English speaking backgrounds was a salient one, because

When we talk of itinerants, I mean straight away I seem to think of ESL, a major problem.

(Principal, interview transcript, 08.12.00)

I still identify the fruit pickers as ESL and that's wrong, because I've tried to go and see the other fruit pickers or seasonal workers and I realise that it's not just ESL.

(Principal, interview transcript, 26.10.01)

The principal identified the importance for school personnel to be sensitive to cultural differences. Some aspects of cultural diversity were prominent within the school. For example, three flags were raised every day during parade and flown from the school's flagpoles – the Australian flag, the Aboriginal flag and the Torres Strait Islander flag – and the cultural diversity of students and of teacher aides, several of whom were of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, was visible in classrooms. The principal explained that

The cultural differences too, not just the language, but the whole cultural difference to Samoans and Tongans and Turks and everyone coming in. We really need to be culturally aware and our teachers need to be culturally aware. And our kids of course need programs where they're culturally sensitive and it needs to be a pretty good cross-cultural environment for the kids.

(Principal, interview transcript, 08.12.00)

Some teachers were cognisant of the diverse backgrounds of many of the children, particularly the itinerant children. One teacher, for example, was quite excited by the diversity demonstrated by the itinerant children in her classroom. She explained that,

I think they have a more interesting life probably and it's more challenging, more stimulating and it seems to show with all the ones that I've got.

(Teacher, interview transcript, 17.11.00)

Another expressed regret that teachers “don't really bring that [cultural diversity] into our school and into our classrooms” (Teacher, interview transcript, 23.07.01). However, not all teachers demonstrated such awareness of cultural differences and not all understandings were positive ones.

The school administrators were very aware of the racial discourses that were circulating in the community context outside the school and the way that some racist ideas were brought into the school. In talking about this, the deputy principal recounted a playground experience:

We had the behaviour problems caused by the kids who are here for twelve months ... saying “Here comes the Tongans, here come the Samoans,” which they've probably got from their home life. There were some small pockets of antagonism and teasing, conflict directed at the kids who were coming in, by some of our kids. I think they've learnt from their parents' attitudes towards them – like they're the kids that steal. But in reality they're not ... I must admit, this year seemed a little bit bumpier than what I've experienced in previous years. And I think there was the fact that [a group of students – names given] were very vocal this year. They come from families that have those views ... we have a small vocal minority who try to be difficult. I do recall a Year 1 or 2 coming up to me on bus duty in the early few weeks and saying “The tonkas are here.” I said “What?” “Yeah, the ones that steal.” I said “Who?” “The tonkas.” I said, “Oh, the Tongans?” And he was only a little one repeating something he'd heard either from at home or from the older kids. I had a vision of tonka trucks that were going around pillaging. But that's a worry because he'll grow up with that attitude.

(Deputy principal, interview transcript, 24.07.01)

The school administration appeared to work hard to promote racial harmony and, although their approach was sometimes a reactive one, they were aiming at long-term attitudinal change. During my classroom observations in 2001, I observed the deputy principal working with a class where racial tensions had occurred. Whilst some of the students joked that the class was involved in “group therapy,” the deputy principal described his work as a “softly, softly approach” (Field notes, 24.05.01). He began by building up students' understanding of their classmates, with a plan to work towards more specific skills that would promote harmonious classroom relationships (Field notes, 24.05.01).

The principal explained that events in the community sometimes damaged the cultural harmony that the school was trying to develop and maintain. For example, in June 2002, the principal was most concerned about an article that was printed in *The Harbourton Bulletin*. The article reported a letter sent home by the principal of Harbourton's high school to warn parents and students about stranger-danger, particularly "males of Mediterranean appearance." The article stated that:

**Principal writes to warn of strangers:
"Advise daughters of extreme danger"**

Harbourton State High School wrote to all parents of students this week after a police visit to emphasis (*sic*) the awareness to Stranger Danger.

The police visit to schools followed a number of complaints in recent weeks of children being approached by strangers.

Harbourton High principal [name given] said he had sent the letter to parents as part of the school's "duty of care".

Headed "urgent matter for your attention", the letter said police had said vehicles with "males of Mediterranean appearance" had been seen in and around Harbourton attempting to "procure females in the 12-15 years age group"....

"As there is generally more than one person in the vehicle, we believe that a potential threat exists to any female walking the streets of Harbourton at the present time."

(Douglas, 2002, p.3)

The concern, according to the principal of Harbourton State School, was that the high school principal had unwittingly contributed to racist discourses circulating in the wider community by identifying the apparent offenders as being of Mediterranean appearance. At Harbourton State School, the newspaper article had caused what the principal described as "a lot of damage" in the form of increased racial tensions within the school context (Field notes, 09.08.02).

Working with linguistic diversity

In the area of linguistic diversity, the school received an additional staffing allocation for children identified as ESL.⁴⁸ In 2000, despite the enrolment of over 40 ESL students, one “specialist” teacher was employed for one day per fortnight, with that time shared amongst the three schools in Harbourton. Not surprisingly, the ESL teacher commented, “at the moment I feel a bit inefficient” (ESL teacher, interview transcript, 06.11.00). Although the provision of additional support for ESL children was institutionally validated, the time allocation seemed inadequate for the number of children who were enrolled.

As a result of the ESL teacher’s update to Education Queensland’s ESL database during 2000,⁴⁹ the funds available to Harbourton schools increased tenfold in 2001. Although enough funds were provided for a full-time ESL teacher across the cluster of schools, the principals decided to employ a teacher on a 0.5 ESL teaching load and to convert the remainder of the funds into teacher aide time for providing one-on-one support for identified students.

Harbourton State School’s (2001a, 2002) *Annual reports* identified high intervention needs for students in the school (see Chapter 5). Teaching staff commented regularly that there were insufficient funds to provide what they thought was necessary intervention. In an effort to share limited resources, the school’s Special Needs Committee categorised children, allocating specific groups to the intervention provided by particular funding sources. Many itinerant children, the majority of whom were learning English as an additional language, were directed into the ESL program. Through this process, English as a second language was foregrounded, while the students’ histories of changing schools tended to be backgrounded.

⁴⁸ The school’s enrolment form required parents to identify their nationality and the languages other than English that were spoken at home. The response of parents to the language question was used to identify which children were “ESL.”

⁴⁹ As is explained later in this chapter, the ESL teacher spent a considerable amount of time in 2000 updating the school’s records of ESL students and updating the education system’s ESL database. The principal had encouraged her to prioritise this task, because future ESL funding was to be linked to database entries.

During the period of data collection, the ESL teacher went on leave and was replaced by another teacher. Neither had received any form of specific training in the area of ESL, and the replacement teacher described herself as “just a primary teacher, just trying to pick up what difficulties they [ESL students] were having” (ESL teacher, interview transcript, 12.11.01). Indeed, opportunities for professional development⁵⁰ seemed limited. The first ESL teacher, however, had been able to access one day of professional development that focused on Education Queensland’s use of ESL Bandscales (see McKay, 1994). She explained that this had offered an opportunity to talk with teachers in similar positions in other schools and that, as a result, she had questioned her approach to ESL teaching:

And now, after going to this conference ... I’m an okay teacher and common sense should have whacked me on the forehead, like I used to work with [one of the ESL students], like I used to work with her orally in that I’d correct her and we’d talk about how she’d said things wrong and all that, but I’d never made her oral language the centre of her aide-time help ... then I go to this bandscale conference and go, oh no, I’ve been doing everything wrong ... it’s changed my teaching philosophy ... so it’s going to make me a better teacher now.

(ESL teacher, interview transcript, 06.11.00)

Such comments, however, raise questions about the efficacy of a program being organised by teachers with limited knowledge of the specific field. Whilst the teachers were obviously well-intentioned and committed to what they were doing, their pedagogical decisions appeared to be based on previous mainstream classroom experiences, on commonsensical understandings of ESL teaching, and on limited opportunities for reflective discussions with other practitioners in the ESL area.

Such issues also impacted on the employment of the teacher aides who worked within the ESL program.⁵¹ As one of the ESL teachers explained, the teacher aides had not received enough training and this had created problems for classroom teachers. In one of the interviews, she discussed this issue:

⁵⁰ To attend professional development, particularly in specialist areas such as ESL, teachers from Harbourton State School had to travel to the nearest regional centre – a round trip of over 400 kilometres.

⁵¹ The plural “teacher aides” has been used in this discussion to refer to the whole group of teacher aides employed with ESL funding during the data collection for this research. Some of the teacher aides who worked with the ESL teacher were based in the other Harbourton schools.

And I did have a complaint from one of the teachers ... and she said to me, “What’s going on? Because the aide that you’ve employed knows nothing, is basically a parent that’s starting from scratch, and when she comes into the classroom, she’s asking me what to do, and I don’t have time to sit down.” And I said, “You are totally right.” And when I explained to her what my priority had to be for this year, that my principal said I had to get all these kids on the database or we don’t get any money for next year, and that I only had one day a fortnight, she was okay with that then ... I explained to her that, if the aide continues next year, which I’m sure she will, I’ll inservice her and things will be a lot smoother.

(ESL teacher, interview transcript, 06.11.00)

These comments highlight the difficulties under which the ESL teacher and teacher aides had been working. With a limited allocation of ESL teacher time – at that stage, only one day per fortnight shared across three schools – the updating of the database was given priority over teaching and learning. Although this could be understood as neglect of core educational business, it emphasises the difficult decisions that were being made. Neglect of the database may have meant no funding for the following year. Although the increased funding was achieved, the lack of professional development for teachers, the inadequate time allocation and the focus on the database rather than pedagogical considerations meant that the effectiveness of the educational program was questionable.

Making resources stretch further

Another concern of the teaching staff at Harbourton State School was that the arrival of additional students meant that limited school resources had to stretch further. According to the deputy principal, even the size of the playground became an issue when school enrolments increased:

I think behaviour problems escalated in the playground because of the increased pressure of numbers ... I noticed the extra twenty or thirty kids going into what we already know is a small play area added to the behaviour problems.

(Deputy principal, interview transcript, 24.07.01)

In terms of funding, I heard much discussion about the way that the school’s budget hinged on the enrolment figure for the eighth day of the school year, when itinerant farm workers’ children were enrolled elsewhere. As the itinerant students arrived, the school was expected to stretch its resources to meet the needs of a much larger,

and high need, student population. The principal argued that the resource-funding situation created tensions within the school:

There's always the thought of are they dragging money away from our twelve monthers, you know, like our kids that stay here all the time. There's always that thought, even though we don't, we always say no, they're kids at our school too.

(Principal, interview transcript, 08.12.00)

Although the principal did not go into details on this occasion, there were times when I was given the impression that the “temporary” status of itinerant students had been used as an argument for excluding them from particular intervention programs. As already discussed, the Special Needs Committee used a differential referral system as one strategy for coping with the large demand for limited resources. As a result, many itinerant students who were identified as not coping with their schoolwork or as being behind their year-level peers were referred to the ESL teacher for “specialised support” (Learning support teacher, interview transcript, 03.11.00).⁵²

Resource considerations, however, sometimes required a balance between school issues and systemic requirements. In some cases, systemic rules had precedence over the school's strategy. The Reading Recovery program, for example, had rigid rules about which students could access the program and which students had priority over others. The principal expressed concern that it was more difficult for children who were “Harbourton permanent residents” to access the program because

Systemic things like Reading Recovery, where the kids come in on a Reading Recovery program, the kids have to be taken on. Hence there's that lessened chance for Harbourton permanent residents to get on.⁵³

(Principal, interview transcript, 08.12.00)

⁵² Non-ESL students in Years 4-7 were referred to the learning support teacher and non-ESL students in Years 1-3 students were referred to the Early Years literacy co-ordinator, who co-ordinated literacy intervention across Years 1, 2 and 3.

⁵³ A child who is part of the way through a Reading Recovery Program has to be taken into the “new” school's program as soon as a vacancy is available (see Department of Education, Queensland, 2000b).

However, the school's Reading Recovery teachers also used the systemic rules to ensure that some children were not disadvantaged by a conflict between their itinerant lifestyle and the program rules mandated by the education system. For example, one rule states that children are eligible to start the program only when they are between 6 years and 7 years 2 months of age, whilst another rule gives priority to newly arrived children if they have already been involved previously in the Reading Recovery program (see Department of Education, Queensland, 2000b). To assist itinerant children, the Reading Recovery teachers ensured that Year 1 children who were leaving Harbourton at the end of the harvesting season – and would not meet age eligibility requirements on their return – had been involved in the program for at least a couple of lessons. As a result, these children could re-enter the program when (or if) they returned to Harbourton in the following harvesting season, without breaking the rules imposed by the education system.

The needs of itinerant children had also been considered in the planning of other literacy intervention organised by the Early Years literacy co-ordinator.⁵⁴ This was particularly obvious in the intervention that followed the identification of students by the Year 2 Diagnostic Net. Intensive intervention, usually involving the use of the *Support-a-reader* and *Support-a-writer* programs (Department of Education, Queensland, 1991b, 1996a), was commenced as soon as children were identified, rather than waiting for government funding to arrive. In this way, teachers were able to make sure that itinerant children had been involved in intervention before their departure for the southern states.

It appeared, though, that itinerant children tended to receive shorter periods of intervention than were available to other children. The literacy co-ordinator explained that the school's plan to provide children with an intervention “top-up”

⁵⁴ The literacy co-ordinator's position had been established by the school in 1999 in response to concern about the large number of children identified in the reading and writing components of the Year 2 Diagnostic Net (a mandatory statewide screening process in literacy and numeracy). The co-ordinator's brief was to introduce the Early Years Program, a package purchased from the Victorian Education Department (Department of Education, Employment & Training, Victoria, 1998). In introducing this program, the school aimed to enhance literacy teaching across Years 1, 2 and 3, with the literacy co-ordinator providing professional development for early childhood teachers and teacher aides and co-ordinating literacy intervention for students in the first three years of schooling.

at the beginning of the following year, as the children entered Year 3, was usually not available to itinerant children:

When we went through and identified those children who needed a top-up, a lot of those children were the itinerant children, but they didn't come back at the beginning of the year. So they may have got part of the intervention now, because we've restructured around that fact that they're moving, but they don't get the complete package.

(Literacy co-ordinator/teacher, interview transcript, 10.11.00)

ITINERANT CHILDREN'S LITERACY ACHIEVEMENT

The school office files contained the official documentation about enrolled children, including enrolment documents, copies of school report cards and statewide assessment data (the Year 2 Diagnostic Net and the Years 3, 5 and 7 Tests). For the itinerant children, however, these official school records were often incomplete. If children had exited the school before report cards had been prepared, then the children's files were often devoid of any information about their learning or achievement levels whilst at Harbourton State School. During the two years that I collected data, this was the case for considerable numbers of itinerant farm workers' children – 21 of the 40 enrolled during 2000 and 27 of the 59 enrolled during 2001. The evidence of the children's performances on a range of literacy assessments, as presented in this section of the chapter, is therefore limited to the records that were available.

The school's files also indicated that information about the academic progress of itinerant farm workers' children was rarely transferred from one school to another. Although I found no transfer documents or information from previous schools in the students' files that I accessed, the literacy co-ordinator explained that, during 2000, "information came through for two children and they were from different schools in Victoria" (Literacy co-ordinator/teacher, interview transcript, 10.11.00). She lamented, however, that the non-standardisation of practices from one state education system to another made the "reading" of literacy records difficult:

When they do arrive, they [records from other states] are difficult to assess ... It would be lovely if we had a national language in education, so that we could communicate with them [other state education systems].

(Literacy co-ordinator/ teacher, interview transcript, 10.11.00).

Teachers' explanations about itinerancy and literacy

Although there were considerable variations amongst the opinions of teachers at Harbourton State School, the dominant view was that itinerant farm workers' children did not achieve particularly well at school. Some teachers talked about the influence of an itinerant lifestyle, with one teacher suggesting that there was a "standard stereotype of the itinerant kid" associated with a "rough" lifestyle, and that stereotype had persisted despite the situation having change (Teacher, interview transcript, 08.12.00):

I mean, the standard stereotype of the itinerant kid, which seemed to be current when I arrived in Harbourton back in 1984, was that you would expect that they'd be used to living rough. Showering habits may be rudimentary. So I think there are a lot of stereotypes that got built up and the stereotypes associated with farm work haven't changed as the populations who are doing the work have changed.

(Teacher, interview transcript, 08.12.00)

It did seem, however, that stereotypes linking farm workers' children to low socio-economic circumstances and to a range of supposed consequences, including social problems, emotional problems and poor parenting, were circulating in the school community. The principal, for example, commented that

Itinerant pickers also seem to bring in a lot more problems. I don't want to stereotype itinerant pickers into a low socio-economic category where social problems seem to manifest, but we do seem to have more than our fair share of social problems, social and emotional problems. And I haven't done any sort of research or data collecting on whether they're itinerants or whether they've come here as itinerants and thought I'll do picking, and then they've stayed and don't pick any more, because it's a lovely social welfare town, you know. Yeah, a lot of social problems.

(Principal, interview transcript, 08.12.00)

Comments such as these demonstrate the ease with which poverty, farm work and social problems were linked together, just as they had been in stories circulating in the wider community of Harbourton (see Chapter 6). It was probably not surprising, therefore, that the linking of poverty, disadvantage and itinerant families' lack of resources would suggest that itinerant children would not be successful literacy learners. Indeed, on several occasions, I heard comments that suggested that there was a "standard expectation that itinerant kids are going to be

below the peer group” (Teacher, interview transcript, 08.12.00) or that “itinerant kids and literacy is definitely an issue” (Teacher, interview transcript, 10.11.00).

However, teachers expressed a range of reasons about why they thought literacy learning was problematic for this particular group of children. Some teachers identified an itinerant lifestyle as preventing parents from providing print resources for their children. One teacher, for example, surmised that “because they’re itinerant, I imagine what they bring is what they can fit in the car. So you don’t bring your library” (Teacher, interview transcript, 19.10.00). This commonsensical and stereotypical statement⁵⁵ demonstrated how some itinerant students were constructed as particular types of literacy learners (Partington, 2001; Klein, 2001). In this case, an itinerant lifestyle was understood to impede literacy learning.

Other teachers suggested that poor parenting and its effects on children’s schooling were significant issues. Although further discussion will appear within the context of the case studies, it is relevant to note, however, that the teachers’ descriptions of itinerant children were both varied and contradictory. Some itinerant children were described by teachers as well-groomed, well-behaved and appearing to have caring parents, whilst others were depicted in less positive terms which implied poor parenting. The following excerpt from a teacher’s interview exemplifies the latter:

She [a student in the teacher’s class] has a lot of behavioural characteristics that are a concern to me – not of a concern that I’m going to rush out to Family Services ... because they’re not quite like that. But in terms of her emotional dealings with the students’ emotions, probably not the right word, social dealings, she’s very aware in different areas ... But she’s very in-their-face at times with explicit language ... it’s used these days in adult language, you know, a lot of expletives and sometimes they slip out. Obviously she’s exposed to a lot of that ... I’m just saying that she exhibits social characteristics that we would classify as not being acceptable in the ideal environment.

(Teacher, interview transcript, 22.08.01)

Such views seemed reminiscent of the community stories which suggested that farm workers needed some form of regulation to control their behaviours (see Chapter 6). Similar comments also appeared in relation to the “new arrivals” class that was

⁵⁵ As will be discussed in Chapter 8, some itinerant families rented houses in Harbourn for the whole year, even though they spent several months in a southern state.

described in an earlier section of this chapter. It was argued that many of the children who went into that class had problems:

Social problems, behavioural problems, lack of foundation problems. They start on foundations in maths and English and literacy. I find a lot of that. And then every time they come, obviously each year they get a little bit more behind ... Social behaviour is very hard. I mean, some of them have been out of schools for a while. Maybe they've got no control at home because there are no parents there. I don't know. But when they come to school, they're wild, very wild.⁵⁶

(Teacher, interview transcript, 03.08.01)

Explanations such as this implicated both itinerancy and parenting in the academic achievement and school behaviour of itinerant children. For some teachers, assumptions about lack of parental control, in conjunction with perceptions of the difficulties experienced by students as a result of changing schools, seemed to facilitate an acceptance of students' underachievement as understandable and predictable.

Teachers' understandings of itinerant children's linguistic diversity

Whilst some teachers thought that an itinerant lifestyle affected children's success in literacy learning, others focused on the language backgrounds of the majority of the itinerant children. Many teachers appeared to be of the opinion that "ESL children have high needs" (Teacher, interview transcript, 10.11.00). As explained earlier, it was school procedure to direct ESL students who were experiencing difficulties in literacy learning into the ESL program. Whilst this was a pragmatic decision – aimed at economic efficiency in a context where there was considerable demand for learning support – it labelled children as having a particular type of problem and circumvented, albeit unconsciously, the need for effective strategies of diagnosis.

Although such practice meant that many itinerant students were labelled as "ESL," not all teachers appeared to have a clear or useful understanding of how, or even whether, students' linguistic diversity might impact on classroom learning. Some teachers, for example, seemed unaware that many of the children spoke what

⁵⁶ Further discussion of these comments can be found in Chapter 9.

appeared to be diaspora dialects of English and that their spoken and written language contained examples of what Gibbons (1991) described as “grammatical errors not typical of an English speaker, such as mistakes in tense or with prepositions” (p.5). This is illustrated in the following interview excerpt, where a teacher discusses two Tongan children and some samples of their writing:

- T: They have problems with reading and writing ...
RH: Can you identify specific problems that they have?
T: Just the use of the incorrect words in their language. I just brought these [some samples of children’s work] along because I couldn’t remember any examples. Like he put in this sentence [reading from one work sample] “Dogs is fat and thin.” Should have been “Dogs are fat or thin.”
RH: Would those types of structures appear in their spoken language?
T: Yes, I think things like “Dogs is” might come from their background, from their spoken language, but I’m not sure because I don’t know their spoken language very well either, the way they use their language, but I’m thinking that could be a reason why they sort of use some words in the wrong context in a sentence. So it could be that.

(Interview transcript, 19.10.99)

Despite the acknowledgement by most teachers that many itinerant students were learning English as an additional language, the responsibility for catering for their language and literacy learning needs seemed to lie with the designated ESL teacher and the teacher aide who was employed as part of the ESL teacher’s program. Whilst such an approach seemed to abrogate the responsibilities of classroom teachers, the learning support teacher expressed the opinion that it was an approach that was entrenched in the operations of the school. She explained that

I think you’ll find that what happens mainly is they’ll refer to the [special needs] committee and say, “I need support and can you find out what the problem is?” I still don’t think we’ve got over the hurdle of saying “This is the problem. Can someone help me address it?”

(Learning support teacher, interview transcript, 03.11.00)

Whilst school procedures appeared to locate responsibility for ESL students outside of mainstream classrooms, it was also evident that not all teachers had the necessary diagnostic capacity to ensure that the literacy learning needs of all students would be met. This situation seemed reminiscent of the findings of other research that has shown that Queensland teachers are not necessarily skilled at recognising,

diagnosing or catering for student differences, despite their adeptness at providing supportive and caring learning environments (e.g. Department of Education, Queensland, 2000a, 2001b; Luke, 2003).

The ESL teachers, however, talked about the differences between the children identified as ESL and their peers, emphasising that “when you target ESL language needs, they’re generally different from your mainstream class” (ESL teacher, interview transcript, 04.06.01). However, despite their apparent awareness of differences between the needs of ESL children and children who spoke English as their first language, the teachers’ descriptions of their teaching suggested that they drew from a narrow range of pedagogical approaches that were almost the same as the ones employed in other literacy intervention programs in the school.

From the evidence that was available, it appeared that literacy support for the ESL children was based on traditional skills-based pedagogy and focused mainly on code-breaking activities in the areas of reading, writing and spelling (see Freebody, 1993; Freebody & Luke, 1990; Luke & Freebody, 1999b, 2000). As the examples in Table 10 illustrate, the “English as a Second Language Support Statements,” which were written for parents, identified the particular skills that were the focus of each child’s ESL support. Similarly, the timetable for the designated ESL teacher aide, shown in Table 11, indicated that a substantial amount of her support was skills-based. Indeed, oral language received only one mention in the timetable, whilst alphabet and word level activities, including sight words, Dolch words, spelling and THRASS,⁵⁷ appeared to be core components of the teacher aide’s work. The pedagogical strategies that were employed – in particular the *Support-a-reader* and *Support-a-writer* programs (Department of Education, Queensland, 1991b, 1996a), Reading Recovery (Clay, 1993), THRASS and one-on-one time with a teacher aide – appeared to be the same strategies that were used to provide literacy intervention for children across the school, regardless of the reason/s for their identification or the program through which they were receiving support.

⁵⁷ THRASS is the acronym for a marketed program called “Teaching handwriting reading and spelling skills” (see *THRASS home page: Leading the world in whole-picture keyword phonics*, nd). This method of learning phonics involves the learning of word chants and the display of charts in the classroom.

Table 10. Examples of support statements sent to parents of EAL children

[Student's name] ^a Year 3	Reading	<p>Outcome: To support [student's name] when reading individually or in a group and encourage the use of picture and context clues, reading on etc.</p> <p>Progress: [student's name] is currently reading Reading Recovery level 19 books and started at Reading Recovery level 14.</p>
	Spelling	<p>Outcome: To assist [student's name] with phonic blends.</p> <p>Progress: [Student's name] is currently working with a computer programme which promotes the phonic blends. He is progressing satisfactorily.</p>
	Writing	<p>Outcome: To help with punctuation and grammar.</p> <p>Progress: When writing a simple report, [student's name] maintains the correct tense most of the time. Punctuation is satisfactory.</p>
	[Student's name] needs further support with reading and spelling.	
Sina Moala Year 5	Writing	<p>Outcome: To develop grammar and punctuation in written tasks set by class teacher.</p> <p>To develop correct use of verb tenses, singular/plural nouns and phrasing in sentences.</p> <p>Progress: Sina has carried out exercises on singular/plural nouns and verbs which add "ed" when using the past tense. He completed these well. However, Sina needs further work when using these skills in classroom writing tasks such as recounts etc.</p>
	Spelling	<p>Outcome: To revise spelling errors made in writing tasks.</p> <p>Progress: Sina is able to recall 43 of the 50 spelling words on his words list.</p>
Sina needs further support with grammar, punctuation and spelling.		

^a The unnamed student is not one of the case study children and therefore has not been given a pseudonym.

Table 11. Timetable for the ESL teacher aide, Semester 2, 2001

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8.50-9.20	Yr 3 student Spelling	Yr 3 student Reading	Yr 1 student Readers/ concepts Books Letters	Yr 3 student Reading	Yr 1 student Writing/ reading
9.20-9.50	Yr 4 student Reading/ Sight words	Yr 3 student Reading	Yr 1 student Reading Sight words Alphabet	Yr 4 student Spelling	Yr 1 student Spelling/ reading
9.50-10.20	Yr 3 student Reading	Yr 3 student Reading	Yr 5 student THRASS Chart/games Spelling	Yr 5 student Writing	Yr 1 student Reading/ compre- hension Computer
10.20-10.50	Yr 1 student Reading/ sight words Alphabet	Yr 1 student Reading Letters	Yr 1 student Reading	Yr 3 student Reading	Yr 7 student Reading/ compre- hension
11.20-11.50	Yr 4 student Spelling	Yr 4 student Reading/ Sight words	Yr 3 student Writing	Yr 5 student Language	Yr 5 student Reading
11.50-12.20	Yr 6 student Reading/ writing	Yr 5 student Reading	Yr 3 student Writing	3/2 student Oral language/ writing Sight words (Dolch) THRASS	Yr 5 student Reading
12.20-12.50	Yr 6 student Reading	Yr 6 student Reading	Yr 5 student Spelling THRASS	Yr 1 student Dolch words Letters Reading	Yr 1 student Reading Sight words Alphabet

Even though it appeared that the repertoires of strategies that were available to teachers were drawn from a limited pool, the principal indicated they were trying to implement whole school strategies that would cater for all students:

We've been looking at some strategies, whole school strategies, that will help the itinerant kids. It will help any kids, just good teaching practice. One of the spelling ones even helps ESL kids ... Although the itinerant kids are important, it becomes second priority to the fact that we've got to get our own curriculum development planned real solid first, before we build up other plans to cater for, because our curriculum plan should cater for everyone, with some support, strategies and resources and so on for the other kids. And we've got to get our teachers comfortable with that.

(Principal, interview transcript, 26.10.01)

In attempting to focus on whole-school change, the principal seemed to suggest that ESL and itinerant students were separate from, rather than part of, mainstream schooling. This view was reinforced by the education system's provision of separate funding for ESL students, whereby specific personnel were employed to provide for that particular group. In the case of itinerant students, there was no specific funding provision. Thus, the linking of itinerancy with ESL was probably not surprising in a context where the influx of additional students appeared to be drawing on valuable school resources and reducing the resources available to "mainstream" students.

Itinerant children's literacy results

Strangely enough, despite teachers' apparent beliefs that itinerant children generally experienced difficulties in literacy learning, there had been few attempts to collate or analyse their literacy results. As far as I could ascertain, there had been only one detailed investigation of the results of itinerant students and that had been in relation to the Year 2 Diagnostic Net (see Harbourton State School, 2001b). The purpose for doing that analysis, however, had not been to focus on students' learning needs, but to explain, to the district's performance measurement officer, the effects of itinerant children's literacy results on the school's performance targets. The principal also wanted to be able to justify the continuation of the school's Early Years Program and the allocation of a half teaching load to the literacy co-ordinator.

The principal was concerned that the Year 2 Diagnostic Net results for 2000 and 2001 showed that the school's literacy performance had remained considerably below the state mean and the results of like-schools,⁵⁸ despite the introduction of the Early Years Program. In the school's *Annual Report 2000*, itinerancy was used as an explanation of the school's poor performance in comparison to like-schools:

In determining Like Schools, itinerancy (sic) is not one of the factors which are considered; for this reason, many other schools in our Like Schools group may not be impacted upon by this factor. For example, in 1999, we had 35 students identified for additional support in reading. Ten of these students were no longer enrolled at Harbourton State School by the end of 1999, and a further six have since left ... This is probably a significant factor in explaining why the performance of our Year 2 students does not compare particularly well with the average performance of our Like Schools group.

(Harbourton State School, 2001a, p.7)

At the end of 2001, the principal conducted the analysis of the school's Year 2 Diagnostic Net results. In his subsequent report, he stated that the numbers of children identified by the Year 2 Diagnostic Net had decreased, with 46.6, 45.8 and 40.0% of the Year 2 cohort identified in 1999, 2000 and 2001 respectively (Harbourton State School, 2001b). He argued that, if itinerant children who had participated in the school's program for less than six months were excluded from the data, only 29.5% (instead of 40.0%) of the 2001 cohort would have been identified as requiring additional support. The report stated that

While there continues to be an influx of itinerant students during the school year whose performance is generally significantly below that of the cohort they are joining and while, consequently, overall school Year 2 data indicates performance below State and/or Like Schools, there is an ongoing need for early identification and intervention for students whose performance in Literacy places them in an "at risk" category. In summary, then, the continuation of the Early Years Program would definitely seem to be advantageous.

(Harbourton State School, 2001b, p.2)

The principal's argument was that the skilling of teachers and teacher aides through the Early Years Program, and consequent changes in teaching practice that were occurring in classrooms, were not likely to influence the results of children who had

⁵⁸ Education Queensland clusters schools into groups of like-schools according to enrolment numbers, socio-economic status of the community, and the number of Indigenous students.

recently arrived in the school. The school's literacy co-ordinator supported the principal's argument and explained that,

A lot of those [itinerant] children who were identified [by the Year 2 Diagnostic Net as requiring additional support in literacy learning] actually don't even get into the school until around April, May. Sometimes they don't even have the contextualising activities up to that point.⁵⁹

(Literacy co-ordinator/teacher, interview transcript, 10.11.00)

The literacy co-ordinator's reference to the "contextualising activities" highlighted the difficulties of conducting mandatory point-in-time assessments on children who had not had an opportunity to experience the entire literacy unit that was meant to contextualise the assessment processes. Understandably, school personnel felt that the identification of their school as having results below the state mean and below like-schools was unfair. The report's division of the school population, into those who had been involved in the Early Years Program for more than six months and those who had not, highlights the difficulties of having to balance systemic requirements for improved literacy results and accountability with a mobile student population.

In my investigations of the literacy results of itinerant farm workers' children, the data from statewide assessments – the Year 2 Diagnostic Net and the Year 3, 5 and 7 Tests⁶⁰ – offered opportunities to collate results and to compare them with the relevant year-level cohort at Harbourton State School as well as against state results. As shown in Table 12, the Year 2 Diagnostic Net results of 2000 and 2001 identified at least 55% of the itinerant children as requiring additional support in reading and writing.⁶¹

⁵⁹ As part of Year 2 Diagnostic Net procedures, teachers were required to validate their classroom observations of Year 2 children's progress in literacy learning, by using specific assessment tasks for reading and writing (Department of Education, Queensland, 1997). Teachers were expected to contextualise these tasks within a planned literacy unit that provided "a purposeful context" and ensured that "all children will have some common prior knowledge of the subject matter that they are to write and read about" (Department of Education, Queensland, 1997, p.14; see also Queensland Studies Authority, 2004).

⁶⁰ I recognise that the numbers of itinerant farm workers' children involved in the Year 2 Diagnostic Net and the Years 3, 5 and 7 Tests were quite small.

⁶¹ As has already been indicated in this chapter, Harbourton State School's Year 2 Diagnostic Net results were below state results and below like-school results.

Table 12. Children identified by the Year 2 Diagnostic Net at Harbourton State School, 2000-2001

Year	Year 2 students	Number of students	Number (%) identified in reading	Number (%) identified in writing
2000	All students	83	38 (45.8)	28 (33.7)
	Itinerant farm workers' children	5	3 (60)	4 (80)
2001	All students	85	34 (40)	21 (24.7)
	Itinerant farm workers' children	9	6 (66.7)	5 (55.6)

Similarly, the Years 3, 5 and 7 Test results for 2001,⁶² shown in Table 13, Table 14 and Table 15, demonstrated that the results of the itinerant children were below those of their year-level cohorts at Harbourton State School.⁶³ At least 50% (and up to 75%) of the itinerant children were in the lower 25% range of state results, and in some aspects of the tests – Years 3, 5 and 7 spelling, and Years 3 and 7 reading/viewing – no itinerant children scored in the top 25%.⁶⁴

On four occasions during the school year – at the middle and at the end of each semester – teachers at Harbourton State School provided parents with descriptive information about students' progress. Although school-based assessment data were collected in a variety of ways and often varied from classroom to classroom, teachers adhered to the reporting time-frames set by the school and reported on students' achievements and efforts across a range of curriculum areas, including English/literacy, mathematics, science and social studies.

In comparison to the statewide data, school-based assessment data were more difficult to analyse. As was explained earlier, the school's official records of students' academic achievements comprised copies of report cards, and because these were generally not written for students if they had already left the school, many students' files were incomplete. Even though itinerant children may have been enrolled for all but the last couple of weeks of the semester, there was sometimes no official record of their progress during the time they were enrolled.

⁶² Only the Years 3, 5 and 7 Test results for 2001 have been analysed and discussed. It appeared that, during 2000, few itinerant students were enrolled in these year levels.

⁶³ In these tables, the results for the year-level cohorts ("all students") include the results of the itinerant students. The results have been organised according to the results range used by the Queensland School Curriculum Council (QSCC) for reporting to parents – lower 25%, middle 50%, and higher 25% of the state cohort.

⁶⁴ In the three aspects of literacy that were tested – spelling, writing, and reading/viewing – the results for the year-level cohorts of students at Harbourton State School were similar to or above state results. The exceptions were Year 5 writing, Year 7 writing and Year 7 spelling, where fewer than 25% of Harbourton State School students were rated in the higher 25% of the state. On the Year 5 Test (see Table 14), the school's results in spelling and reading/viewing were outstanding, with 47% of the school's cohort achieving in the higher 25% of the state.

Table 13. Harbourton State School's Year 3 Test results for 2001, organised according to the QSCC results range

Aspect of literacy	Year 3 students at H.S.S. (Number)	QSCC results range ^a		
		Number (%) of students in lower 25% of state	Number (%) of students in middle 50% of state	Number (%) of students in higher 25% of state
Spelling	All students (79)	21 (26.5)	32 (40.5)	26 (33)
	Itinerant farm workers' children (6)	4 (67)	2 (33)	
Writing	All students (79)	9 (11)	40 (51)	30 (38)
	Itinerant farm workers' children (6)	3 (50)	2 (33)	1 (17)
Reading/ viewing	All students (79)	12 (15)	42 (53)	25 (32)
	Itinerant farm workers' children (6)	4 (67)	2 (33)	

^a This is the result range that the Queensland School Curriculum Council (QSCC) used for reporting the results of the Years 3, 5 and 7 Tests to parents.

Table 14. Harbourton State School's Year 5 Test results for 2001, organised according to the QSCC results range

Aspect of literacy	Year 5 students at H.S.S. (Number)	QSCC results range		
		Number (%) of students in lower 25% of state	Number (%) of students in middle 50% of state	Number (%) students in higher 25% of state
Spelling	All students (96)	15 (15.5)	36 (37.5)	45 (47)
	Itinerant farm workers' children (8)	6 (75)	2 (25)	
Writing	All students (96)	27 (28)	57 (59)	12 (13)
	Itinerant farm workers' children (8)	5 (62.5)	2 (25)	1 (12.5)
Reading/ viewing	All students (97)	23 (24)	28 (29)	46 (47)
	Itinerant farm workers' children (8)	6 (75)	1 (12.5)	1 (12.5)

Table 15. Harbourton State School's Year 7 Test results for 2001, organised according to the QSCC results range

Aspect of literacy	Year 7 students at H.S.S. (Number)	QSCC results range		
		Number (%) of students in lower 25% of state	Number (%) of students in middle 50% of state	Number (%) of students in higher 25% of state
Spelling	All students (82)	19 (23)	46 (56)	17 (21)
	Itinerant farm workers' children (4)	2 (50)	2 (50)	
Writing	All students (82)	26 (32)	50 (61)	6 (7)
	Itinerant farm workers' children (4)	2 (50)	1 (25)	1 (25)
Reading/ viewing	All students (82)	15 (18)	42 (51)	25 (31)
	Itinerant farm workers' children (4)	3 (75)	1 (25)	

In addition, teachers used a range of different report cards formats over the two-year period⁶⁵ and they designed their own assessment measures for describing students' achievements in literacy learning. In general, they did not incorporate statewide assessment data into their evaluations of students' progress.

What was obvious from my examination of school-based assessments was that very few itinerant farm workers' children were rated on school report cards as achieving high achievement levels for literacy.⁶⁶ However, an examination of school literacy results for the itinerant children in Years 2, 3, 5 and 7 during 2001 (a total of 27 children)⁶⁷ revealed that approximately 75% of their school literacy results were recorded as satisfactory, with the remainder shown as low achievements. It appeared, then, that school-based assessments reported more favourable results than did the statewide literacy tests for this particular group of itinerant students.⁶⁸

In both sets of assessment data, there seemed to be no obvious differences in results along gender lines or in relation to the children's language backgrounds. Indeed, there were girls, boys, EAL children and children with English as their first language who achieved satisfactorily, and a mixture of students who achieved poorly. It is important to keep in mind, however, that the available results were a partial record of the itinerant children who had been enrolled and did not represent the results for the whole group.

⁶⁵ In 2000, three report card formats were used for the end-of-semester reporting – one format for Year 1 (using a range of descriptors including an often-sometimes-seldom format), another for Years 2 and 3 (three categories – advanced, developing satisfactorily, and emerging), and another for the older year levels (five levels of achievement – very high, high, sound, limited and very limited). In 2001, the Year 1 format was maintained, and the format that had been used previously for only Years 2 and 3 was used for Years 2 to 7 (shown in Appendix C). In both years, a different format was used for mid-semester reporting and required teachers to draw on two categories (working satisfactorily, and need for improvement).

⁶⁶ I examined the report cards of itinerant students to see whether they were identified as achieving in a high category (advanced, or very high/high achievement), a middle of the range category (developing satisfactorily or sound achievement), or a low category (emerging or limited/very limited achievement).

⁶⁷ These were the children for whom state assessment data were available.

⁶⁸ Whilst I recognise that the school and state assessments generated different types of data, this comment is made in relation to the same children – the itinerant farm workers' children in Years 2, 3, 5 and 7 during 2001. Later chapters address this apparent discrepancy in school-based and statewide literacy results in relation to some of the case study children.

A discrepancy that did appear, however, was in the numbers of students identified as having an ESL background, with fewer students identified in the statewide assessment data than on the school's ESL database. A reason for this may have been that parental identification formed the basis of the school's ESL list, whilst self-identification by students determined the information accompanying the results for the Years 3, 5 and 7 Tests (Queensland School Curriculum Council, 2001c, 2001d).⁶⁹

On school report cards, many of the itinerant children were rated highly in terms of their effort in literacy learning, with approximately 30 to 40% of the children rated as "consistently high," only one or two children shown as "needing improvement," and the remainder considered satisfactory. These ratings seemed consistent with teachers' written comments on report cards, which generally referred to student behaviour and demeanour. Many itinerant children were described positively, with comments praising the children for their friendliness, co-operation, positive attitudes and pleasant, polite or courteous natures, whilst a small number of students were described less positively. Appendix D provides a complete list of the report card comments that related to the children's itinerancy.

Many teacher comments on Semester 1 report cards referred to the students' recent arrival at Harbourton State School and identified students as either having "settled in well" or as having "considerable difficulty in settling in."⁷⁰ Such comments appeared to represent teachers' judgements of whether itinerant students had taken up the normalised practices, attitudes and behaviours of schooling. Positive comments were more prevalent than negative ones,⁷¹ with students who had not settled in reported as needing constant encouragement, having a bad attitude, and not having "fitted in" to classroom routines (see Appendix D).

⁶⁹ The answer booklets for the Year 3, 5 and 7 Tests required students to answer yes/no to the question: "At home, does either of your parents/carers use a language other than English MOST of the time?" (Queensland School Curriculum Council, 2001a, p.1, emphasis as per the original).

⁷⁰ Comments on "settling in" appeared on 20% and 50% of the report cards that were written for itinerant children in Semester 1 of 2000 and 2001 respectively.

⁷¹ Positive comments represented 75% and 85% of "settling in" comments in 2000 and 2001 respectively.

The teacher of the Year 2/3 composite class of “new arrivals,” where “settling in” might have been regarded as an issue for all children, commented on this characteristic for only one student. This suggests, perhaps, that teachers’ comments may have been relative and thus were made in relation to the “permanent” students. In the case of the “new arrivals” class, there were no permanent students to allow that comparison. Interestingly, across the school, no Semester 2 report cards contained comments about itinerancy, probably because most itinerant students enrolled in Semester 1 and were no longer “newly arrived” in Semester 2.

SUMMARY

This chapter focused on the institutional context relevant to this study. Although recent policy documents of the Queensland education system have flagged itinerancy as an educational issue, there has been limited information for schools about pedagogical considerations. Within the context of Harbourton State School, it seemed that itinerancy was frequently discussed in terms of the administrative difficulties caused by the enrolment of itinerant children and in terms of the negative impact of itinerant children on the education of residentially-stable students. Stereotypical stories that linked poverty and social problems to itinerant students and their families – and implied that itinerant families may not have had the social and economic resources of other families – were prevalent, with very few teachers suggesting that the annual influx of itinerant students may have had positive effects on the school.

A dominant view amongst teachers at Harbourton State School was that itinerant farm workers’ children did not do particularly well at school literacy learning, with many teachers explaining low academic achievement as a “natural” and expected consequence of the families’ lifestyles or language backgrounds. Whilst the school’s academic records indicated that very few itinerant farm workers’ children achieved high results on any measure of literacy, the results of one group (those who were enrolled in Years 2, 3, 5 and 7 during 2001) indicated more favourable achievements on school-based literacy measures than on statewide literacy tests.

It was apparent that the school had been trying to improve its literacy outcomes and that there had been attempts to consider the literacy intervention needs of itinerant

students. Most of the additional learning support for the children was in withdrawal mode as part of the ESL teacher's program and appeared to offer similar strategies to those offered by other literacy interventions within the school. Some school personnel implied a sense of frustration that itinerant students generally departed before teachers could see the results of their efforts. Efforts to provide appropriate literacy instruction and intervention for itinerant farm workers' children were further impeded by a lack of information transfer between schools.

Chapters 6 and 7 served to contextualise this research by considering the community and institutional contexts that the itinerant farm worker families entered. The thesis now moves to the family case studies and focuses specifically on six itinerant families. The next chapter, Chapter 8, begins by focusing on teachers' narratives about two of those families, the Moalas and the Potais, who identified themselves as Tongan. The chapter weaves together data and data analysis.

CHAPTER 8.

TEACHERS' NARRATIVES:

TWO TONGAN FAMILIES – DOING AS WELL AS COULD BE EXPECTED

INTRODUCTION

This chapter opens the discussion of the case study families. As explained in Chapter 5, my initial considerations divided the data into teachers' (Chapters 8 to 10) and families' narratives (Chapter 11). I then used two features – whether the families were in Harbourton during one or two winter harvesting seasons whilst I was collecting data, and the extent to which ethnicity was used as a point of reference by teachers – to organise the teachers' stories. As a result, Chapter 8 focuses on two families (two seasons in Harbourton; ethnicity featured strongly), Chapter 9 on three families (one season; ethnicity as one of many points of reference), and Chapter 10 on one family (two seasons; no apparent focus on ethnicity).

This chapter begins by describing two families, the Moalas and the Potais, and their recent histories in relation to Harbourton. It then explores teachers' constructions of the families' children as literacy learners, drawing on interview data, school report cards, the results of external literacy tests, and my observations of the children in their classrooms and the school playground.

TWO TONGAN FAMILIES

Although I refer to the Moala and Potai families as “Tongan,” I recognise that the naming of families by terms that imply nationality, ethnicity and race is problematic (Partington, 2001; Singh, 2000). Because both families identified themselves as Tongan, thus recognising the parents' country of birth and heritage, I have chosen to do the same. Nevertheless, the term masks some of the complexities of the families' lives. The children's places of birth, and the resulting possibilities for citizenship, illustrate this, as the three Moala children were born in New Zealand,

three of the Potai children were born in Tonga and the other three were born in Australia.

In the course of data collection, I learnt that the Moala and Potai families were related and that Mr Moala and Mrs⁷² Potai were cousins. The family tree in Figure 7 provides a visual guide to the families and their familial relationships, as well as the names and ages of their children at the beginning of data collection.

The Moala family

Mr and Mrs Moala and their three children, 11-year-old Leilani and 9-year-old twin boys Sepi and Sina, arrived in Australia in 1993. They regarded Harbourton as home, explaining that, “We love in Harbourton very much, ’cause this is the first town that we just come from New Zealand” (Mr Moala, interview transcript, 19.10.00). The family spent approximately seven months of each year in Harbourton and the other five months in a tomato growing area in the state of Victoria, over 2500 kilometres to the south. Their movements to and from Harbourton during 2000 and 2001 are shown in Table 16.

When I first met the Moala family early in 2000, they told me that they were ready to give up the harvesting trail and settle permanently in Harbourton. Although Mr and Mrs Moala planned to work one more harvesting season in the south, the children were not going to attend school there. The plan was for the children to return to Harbourton with their grandmother, who lived and travelled with the family, in time to commence the 2001 school year. However, the plan did not work out as the children’s grandmother became sick. As a result, the children did attend school in Victoria and did not return to Harbourton until May, at the end of the southern harvesting season.

⁷² Throughout the case study chapters, the titles “Mr” and “Mrs” have been used for four of the six sets of case study parents. This was in keeping with the parents’ usages of the terms and helped to keep first-name pseudonyms to a minimum.

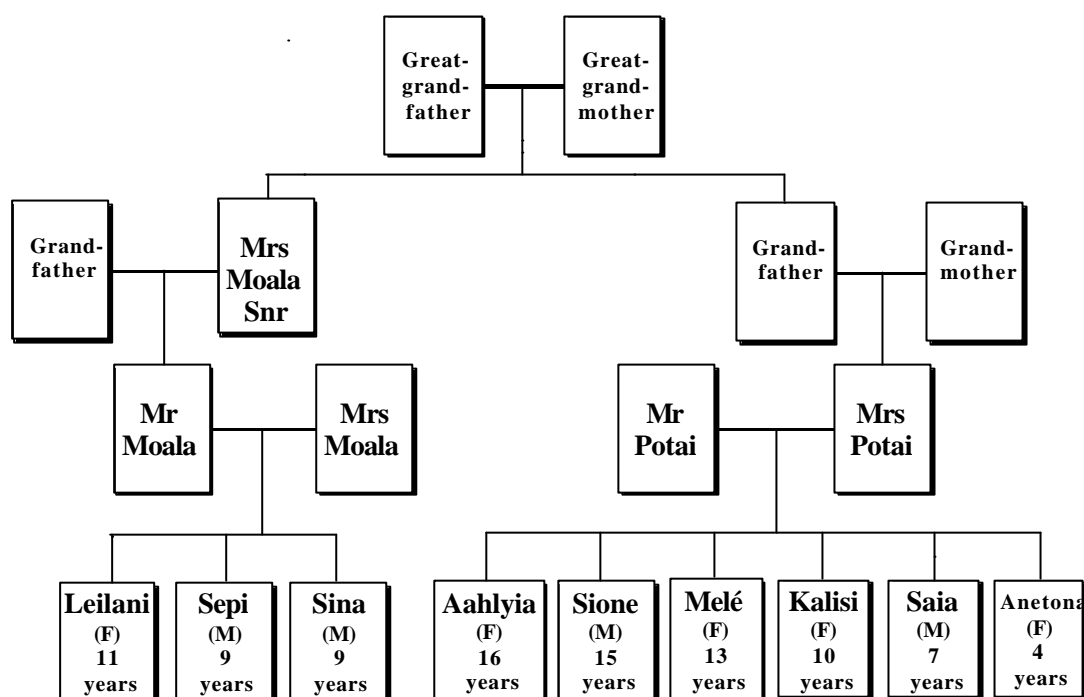


Figure 7. The Moala and Potai children's family tree (as at January 1, 2000)

Table 16. The Moala and Potai families' arrivals in and departures from Harbourton during 2000 and 2001

Year	Month & day	Arrivals and Departures	
		Moala Family	Potai Family
2000	May 9		Family arrived from Sydney. Kalisi and Saia enrolled at Harbourton State School.
	May 22	Family arrived from Victoria. Leilani, Sepi and Sina enrolled at Harbourton State School.	
	Dec. 15	Family departed for Victoria.	Family departed for Victoria.
2001	Feb. 6		Kalisi, Aahlyia and Melé returned to Harbourton. Kalisi re-enrolled at Harbourton State School.
	Feb. 19		Saia re-enrolled at Harbourton State School. Mrs Potai and Anetona back in Harbourton.
	March/April		Mrs Potai and Kalisi travelled to the south for 2-3 weeks. Mr and Mrs Potai and Kalisi returned to Harbourton.
	May 22	Family returned to Harbourton. Leilani, Sepi and Sina re-enrolled at Harbourton State School.	
	December		Family departed for Victoria.

The Potai family

When this research began, the Potai family were living and working in Harbourton for the first time, having previously lived in Sydney. The family's six children were at various stages of schooling. I was particularly interested in the experiences of 10-year-old Kalisi, who was enrolled in Year 5 at the beginning of 2000. Kalisi's older sisters, Aahlyia and Melé, were attending the high school in Harbourton and an older brother was attending high school in New Zealand. Her younger brother, 7-year-old Saia, was enrolled in Year 2 and her youngest sister, Anetona, was not yet at school.

Aahlyia and Melé, the older sisters, always appeared interested in my research and they often interpreted for their mum who, at first, did not seem confident speaking in English. Although I found Mrs Potai spoke better English than I had initially thought, she tended to take a listening role during interviews, leaving most of the talk to Aahlyia who increasingly took on the role of family spokesperson.

Seven year-old Saia never seemed to be at home when I visited the family. When I asked about this, Aahlyia explained:

My dad reckons that if he stays with girls and hangs with girls, he's going to become a poofter. My older brother isn't here and there's like no other boys around here, so my dad reckons he should get away from the girls and hang with him instead of hanging with us.

(Aahlyia, interview transcript, 03.08.01)

According to Aahlyia, the Potai family had been encouraged by the Moalas to move to Harbourton and to work the summer and winter harvesting seasons. Aahlyia explained that the Moalas had told her parents that it was "better living" in Harbourton, "because there's not much violence" and "because the money and everything that we could achieve was more" (Aahlyia, interview transcript, 12.10.00).

At the end of the 2000 school year (and harvesting season), the Potai family travelled to the same tomato-growing district in Victoria as the Moalas. During the school holidays, the three teenagers – Aahlyia (17 years), Melé (14 years) and Kalisi (11 years old) – worked part-time on the tomato farm where their parents

worked. At the end of the school holidays, they travelled back to Harbourton by themselves, returning to school during the second week of the school year. The three Moala children and their grandmother were meant to have accompanied them, but the grandmother's illness prevented that from happening.

As shown in Table 16, the family returned to Harbourton in stages. Although there were periods of time when the three girls were in Harbourton without their parents, they were not alone. They sometimes slept at a relative's house, sometimes a relative stayed overnight at their house, and an aunt always drove them to and from school. On my data collection visits to the school, I often saw Kalisi and her cousins waiting near the school gate for the aunt to arrive.

Making Harbourton home

The Moala and Potai families lived less than a kilometre apart in Harbourton and several families, all relatives, seemed to congregate late in the afternoon at the house rented by the Moalas. It was not unusual to see a group sitting and talking on the grass or on the steps of the house, or to see a group of teenage girls, including Leilani, Kalisi, Aahlyia and Melé, walking between one family house and another.

As explained earlier, the Moala family regarded Harbourton as "home" and I felt a sense of permanence when I visited their residence. Numerous family photographs decorated the lounge room wall and a huge woven mat from Tonga covered the floor. I wondered how they managed to pack up and move south for the summer harvesting season, but I learnt that they paid rent on this house all year round, even though they spent approximately five months of each year in Victoria. In contrast, the Potai family's home was sparsely furnished when I first visited, probably because the family was newly arrived in Harbourton. Over time, however, furniture was purchased and the living room was decorated with photographs. Like the Moalas, the Potais had covered the lounge room floor with a large woven mat and we used to sit on it to talk. The Potai family also continued to pay rent on their house when they travelled south for the summer harvesting season.

Both families joined in a range of community activities. The Moala family had attended one of Harbourton's churches over a long period of time and the Potai

family joined them in 2001. The Moala children were members of the town library and the children from both families liked to perform Tongan dances at school events, including school fetes, and community events like the annual multicultural festival and the fishing competition.

Home languages

Both Tongan and English were spoken in the Moala and Potai homes, with Mr Moala's mother – grandmother to the Moala children and great-aunt to the Potai children – being the only family member who did not speak any English at all. Mr Moala explained that English is the language used for schooling in Tonga:

Tongan is the first language and the second language is English, but all the school they have to use the English. Even when very little, you have to speak English in the classroom. You not allowed to speak in Tongan. The only time you speak Tongan, they have a Tongan lesson.

(Mr Moala, interview transcript, 24.07.01)

Throughout this thesis, interview transcripts, including this one, demonstrate that the families did not speak Standard Australian English, but spoke a form of English that could be considered a diaspora dialect of English – Tongan-Australian. Whilst the school identified the children as ESL learners, there should perhaps have been the additional consideration that children who grow up speaking a diaspora English also need to become competent in Standard Australian English, the dialect that is used for education, government, the law and the media (Barnett, 2001; Berry & Hudson, 1997; Emmitt & Pollock, 1997; Queensland Government, 2000).⁷³

TEACHERS' NARRATIVES

This section of the chapter focuses on teachers' narratives about the children from the Moala and the Potai families. Because the children were enrolled at Harbourton State School during both years of data collection, many teachers worked with them. Although it was usual for students to have only one teacher per year, that was not always the case. Five teachers, for example, taught Kalisi Potai during the two-year period. To prevent unnecessary confusion about names, therefore, Table 17

⁷³ Dialect was not mentioned in any of the school's literacy documents.

provides a summary of the children's year levels and their class teachers during 2000 and 2001.

Whilst the teachers seemed to use ethnicity to categorise the itinerant children in broad terms, their discussions of particular students and families used other features including past history of itinerancy and home background as points of reference. As will become evident through the following discussion, teachers constructed narratives about the children from the two Tongan families in different and often contradictory ways.

Tongan students: Well-behaved or aggressive?

Considerable teachers' talk around the school – in the staffroom, in discussions with me, and in compliments made directly to students – commented positively on aspects of the Tongan students' grooming. As a group, they were described as neat, tidy, and always dressed appropriately in school uniform, with teachers particularly applauding the braiding of the girls' hair. The adjective "beautiful" was used by many teachers and on many occasions to describe the boys' and girls' appearances. As one teacher explained, "the thing is that they're all beautifully dressed, beautifully groomed, and they're all in uniform" (ESL teacher, interview transcript, 22.03.01).

In focusing on grooming, beauty and braiding, such stories seemed to attribute a femininity to Tongan students. Some teachers also discussed the passive natures of Tongan students in relationships with other students and in attitudes to learning. One teacher, for example, referred to "that really slow down-the-beach movement that they have" (Teacher, interview transcript, 10.11.00) and went on to suggest that Tongan students led a stress-free existence that sometimes made them "slow" in class. It appeared, then, that many teachers "read" the Tongan students' bodies as indicators of temperament, particularly docility, and learning ability.

Sometimes, teachers used their readings of students' bodily appearances as signifiers of parental attributes. For example, many of the teachers regarded the Tongan children's grooming and the way they conducted themselves in the school

Table 17. A summary of the Moala and Potai children's year levels and teachers during their enrolments at Harbourton State School

Family	Student	2000		2001	
		Year level (and age)	Teacher	Year level (and age)	Teacher
Moala family	Leilani	Year 6 (11 years)	Ms Singleton	Year 7 (12 years)	Mr Graham
	Sepi	Year 4 (9 years)	Mr Bennett	Year 5 (10 years)	Ms Armstrong
	Sina	Year 4 (9 years)	Mr Bennett	Year 5 (10 years)	Ms West
Potai family	Kalisi	Year 5 (10 years)	Mr Hopkins (until end of Term 3) Ms O'Sullivan (Term 4)	Year 6 (11 years)	Ms Burns and Ms Singleton (shared teaching arrangement) ^a Term 4 – Mr Sutcliffe replaced Ms Singleton
	Saia	Year 2 (7 years)	Ms Thomas	Year 3 (8 years)	Ms Dixon

^a Each teacher worked 0.5 of the week.

grounds as evidence that their parents cared about them and were generally “making an effort” (Field notes, 19.10.00, 03.11.00, 24.05.01). The principal, for example, commented on the way that Tongan students arrived in school uniform on their first day in the school each year, thereby linking the students’ appearances to parental organisational abilities:

On the first day of school, they’re in school uniform. So I don’t know, I imagine this thing of mum and dad packing to go down to the other place and putting aside a Harbourton port.⁷⁴

(Principal, interview transcript, 08.12.00)

Such readings of Tongan students and their parents, which linked them to ostensibly feminine characteristics – being compliant, gentle and willing to fit in with the school – contrasted with the masculine themes that pervaded so many of the community stories about farm workers – alcohol, drugs, bad citizens, inadequate parents (see Chapter 6).

Nevertheless, some teachers did attribute more masculine, and less desirable, characteristics to some Tongan boys. For example, in talking about some incidents of bullying that had occurred in his class, one teacher said that “It’s just the Tongans are a good target. They’re basically passive until you rile them up enough” (Teacher, interview transcript, 25.05.01). In this case, the teacher seemed to imply that there was a latent aggression underlying the Tongan students’ passive natures. On other occasions, some teachers commented on aggression as characteristic of Tongan boys. This is evident in the following interview excerpt:

We find that a lot of the Samoan and Tongan boys are very aggressive in the playground ... I talked to [name of deputy principal at Harbourton’s high school] and he said even the older [name of Tongan family] boys have terrible aggression levels and after school they fight kids in the playground. And the two young boys are the same. In their culture, I think, I don’t know how to put it, they’re not defensive, but in their personalities they’re aggressive. I think it’s part of their communication as well ... The boys have this aura of rough and tough. They seem to ooze that, whereas the girls don’t ... I think they’re fairly rough and tumbly in the playground. Saia [Potai] is really over the top.

(ESL teacher, interview transcript, 23.07.01)

⁷⁴ This is a Queensland term and is a synonym for suitcase.

The excerpt helps to demonstrate how different discourses seemed to be taken up at different times. Stories about Tongan boys, for example, varied from those that focused on passive and compliant characteristics, as already discussed, to those that highlighted aggression. The excerpt also shows how a limited number of incidents involving a limited number of students was sometimes generalised, thereby representing a particular group – in this case, Tongan boys – in stereotypical ways. In noting comments from the deputy principal at Harbourton's high school, and thus identifying intertextual links between stories circulating within and beyond the context of Harbourton State School, the ESL teacher's story about aggression was no longer a story of isolated incidents, but it had become a "truth" about a particular group of boys. Although Saia Potai and two brothers from another family were the only ones named, their behaviours were associated with a "lot of the Samoan and Tongan boys," "their culture" and part of their communication."

Such stories indicate how stereotypes work to homogenise groups of students and to set them apart from what is considered "normal" (Griffiths, 2003; Klein, 2001; Pickering, 2001; Stephan, 1999). They also highlight the difficulties for teachers in trying to recognise and understand cultural differences – thus considering what are regarded as critical aspects of productive pedagogy (Department of Education, Queensland, 2001b, 2002b) – without drawing stereotypical conclusions.

In examining some of the stories like the one told by the ESL teacher, it became evident that there was sometimes uncertainty about the ethnicity of particular students, especially those who were Tongan, Maori or Samoan. This was demonstrated in some interview comments. For example, one teacher questioned, "Tongan or is it Samoan?" (Teacher, interview transcript, 08.12.00), and another said, "[Student's name] is Maori. No, I think he's Samoan, no, I'd have to look up his records" (Teacher, interview transcript, 06.11.00). Although some of the teachers' narratives linked specific characteristics to particular ethnic groups, it appeared that these were sometimes dependent on vague, inaccurate or uncertain understandings.

The conflicting stories about Tongan students – on the one hand, that all of them, regardless of gender, were passive, and on the other hand, that the boys were

aggressive – demonstrated how teachers’ constructions could represent groups in stereotypical, and yet contrastive, ways. I suspected that the stories accessed by teachers probably reflected particular experiences (with particular students) and their familiarity with some families. As will be discussed later in this chapter, the Moala children, who seemed to be recognised by everyone as “Tongan students,” had long histories of attendance at the school and were rarely discussed in negative ways. In contrast, other Tongan students had much shorter histories at the school and teachers were not always sure of their ethnicity. These differences may have allowed such different stories to be promulgated.

The Moala children: Really nice kids; must have good parents

The Moala family seemed to be regarded highly by most of the teaching staff at Harbourton State School. The principal told me that, “They’ve been absolutely wonderful. Everyone loves them” (Field notes, 23.08.01), and I regularly heard comments that praised the students as being “lovely,” well-behaved and model students, as illustrated by the following excerpts from interviews:

She’s [Leilani] very keen, she’s excellent in the classroom, and she works diligently. I mean, she is the essence of a model student.

(Mr Graham – Leilani’s Year 7 teacher,
interview transcript, 22.08.01)

The twins, I never have much to do with them ... they’re the loveliest kids out ... you don’t get to see a lot of them because they’re not bad.

(Principal, interview transcript, 08.12.00)

Whilst these comments located positive traits, such as a work ethic, in the children, other comments from teachers linked the children’s “good” behaviours to “good” parenting and a supportive home environment. Sepi and Sina’s Year 4 teacher, for example, explained that

The parents must be keen for them to do well at school, because they’re always well-behaved and they’ve got a good, I think their family background is pretty good at home and things, because they’re really nice kids, well-behaved, that type of thing. They’ve always got their homework done and they always make an effort to get all work done and stuff. They’re pretty much model class members.

(Mr Bennett – Sepi & Sina’s Year 4 teacher,
interview transcript, 19.10.00)

Mr Bennett's use of the modal verb "must" with the conjunction "because" suggests that he was fairly confident of a link between the children's behaviours and their parents' support of school activities and encouragement of behaviour and work ethic. At the same time, however, his use of "I think" implies a tentativeness about these conclusions. When I asked him whether he had any contact with Sepi and Sina's parents, he responded,

No, not at all. They don't come up. I have spoken to dad or mum, said hello to them when they've brought them up just when they started, when they've come halfway through the year, but that's the only contact I've had with them.

(Mr Bennett – Sepi & Sina's Year 4 teacher,
interview transcript, 19.10.00)

It appeared, then, that the links that Mr Bennett had made between children's school behaviours and parental behaviours were based mostly on observations of the children, in the absence of their parents. He acknowledged a set of traits that he associated with "good" students, such as being well-behaved at school, completing homework and making an effort, whilst other teachers' accounts of the Moala children highlighted additional characteristics, including wearing school uniforms and being polite. These features, which were easily observed by teachers, suggested that the Moala children arrived at school with the material, social and emotional resources that would enable them to be successful.

In other research (e.g. Freebody et al., 1995; Gregory & Williams, 2000), teachers have been shown to associate such resources with middle class homes and practices and to make links between middle/high socio-economic status and literacy achievement and between low socio-economic status and literacy difficulties or failure. Freebody et al.'s (1995) study of low socio-economic urban schools, for example, noted that teachers often used the extent to which parents supported schooling and provided particular literary, literacy, social and cultural experiences as evidence of appropriate home practices that facilitated school literacy learning. Even though parental participation in schooling may be the ideal and the notion of two working parents has come to be understood as a "reality" of contemporary living, teachers have been found to criticise parents who are not actively or visibly involved in their children's education (Freebody et al., 1995; Kalantzis, Cope,

Noble, & Poynting, 1990). In the case of the Moala family, however, teachers talked positively about the children's parents, despite limited contact with them and despite limited parental participation in the school context. It appeared that the teachers' readings of the children's appearances and demeanours enabled them to make positive assumptions about Mr and Mrs Moala and their parenting abilities. Negative stories, such as those about the aggressive Tongan boys, never seemed to be applied to Leilani, Sepi, Sina or their parents.

In Chapters 6 and 7, where I identified a number of stories that circulated in both the general community of Harbourton and the school community, itinerant farm workers were regarded in a range of negative ways – as criminals, bad citizens and inadequate parents. Stories about the Moala children and their parents, however, were positive and did not draw on the stereotypical stories that seemed to be so widespread. Across the school, it appeared that the Moala children were recognised as “good” children with “good” parents.

The family, however, did seem to have some characteristics that may have helped them stand out from other itinerant farm workers' families who came to Harbourton for the annual harvesting season. By attending one of the local churches and performing at community events, the Moalas joined in a range of community activities, which sometimes resulted in stories and photographs in *The Harbourton Bulletin* (e.g. “Carols by candlelight,” 2002; “Harbourton Multicultural Festival,” 2000; “Lagoon a scene of delight: The Harbourton 2001 Multicultural Festival,” 2001). Such visible, community-based practices may have contributed to the positive perceptions expressed by teachers.

The Moala children: “Regulars” who return every year

Another story about the Moalas that circulated in the school was that they were one of the many families who were “regulars” and returned to Harbourton every year for the duration of the harvesting season. As the principal explained,

Most of the kids coming in are regulars, so we know the kids, so we look forward to seeing them and they look forward to seeing us, so behaviour isn't so much of a problem.

(Principal, interview transcript, 08.12.00)

In general, teachers talked positively about the “regulars” and the ease with which they fitted back in to Harbourton State School.

They're happy to be back. The kids are happy to receive them and they just settle back to a desk and continue. In my class, they had no settling in problems. It's a school they like and this class seems to happily accept them.

(Ms West – Sina's Year 5 teacher,
interview transcript, 24.07.01)

Every time they come in, they find it so much easier to survive.

(Ms Armstrong – Sepi's Year 5 teacher,
interview transcript, 23.07.01)

If it's a school they've been to before, they cope fairly well. Like the ones I've got, I know they've been to Harbourton before, so they know the kids already, so they fitted in.

(Ms Dixon – Saia's Year 3 teacher,
interview transcript, 13.09.01)

Well see, Matilda [another itinerant student] and Leilani, they're fortunate because they're more or less coming back to a known factor. Like they were here last year, then they left late in the year and they didn't come back until this year, so the continuity was broken in the school structure and system, but they knew what was going on in the school ... you can just see it.

(Mr Graham – Leilani's Year 7 teacher,
interview transcript, 22.08.01)

When talking specifically about Leilani, Sepi and Sina Moala, teachers reported that they seemed pleased to be back in Harbourton and that the other children were excited by their return. One Year 5 teacher, for example, had not worked at the school for long and was surprised by the reaction of her class to Sepi's arrival:

I just remember when Sepi was coming. They were excited. Everyone wanted his desk beside them. They were saying, “Is it Sina or Sepi? Sina or Sepi?” I said, “I don't know, but we have one of them coming into our class.” “Well what does he look like, Ms Armstrong?” I've never met these boys before, but you can tell them apart. They were just buzzing ... he was a celebrity.

(Ms Armstrong – Sepi's Year 5 teacher,
interview transcript, 23.07.01)

The deputy principal had also referred to the twins as celebrities. When students enrolled at the school, the deputy principal had to “walk them to the classrooms,” so he had seen the responses of other students first hand (Deputy principal, interview transcript, 24.07.01). Although he reported that many of the “regulars” were “really

warmly welcomed,” he described the twins’ reception as akin to “celebrity status” (Deputy principal, interview transcript, 24.07.01; field notes, 04.06.01).

Such stories suggested that the Moala children were returning to a place where they were well-known, popular and well-liked. It was as though their travel away from Harbourton was understood as an annual aberration of their “normal” life and that their arrival in Harbourton each year was regarded as a return to “home.” As has already been discussed, the Moalas themselves wanted Harbourton to be their home and, in becoming involved in a number of community practices, it appeared that they had communicated that message to some residents of the town.

My observations in Sina and Sepi’s classrooms, after their arrival in 2001 (Classroom observations, 24.05.01, 25.05.01, 28.05.01), suggested that the twins had effective strategies for coping with their placement in “new” classes. Both were skilled at checking with students sitting nearby to make sure that they had taken out the correct notebook from under their desks or were doing the correct activity. If they had problems with a task, they asked their teachers for help. In comparison, some of the other itinerant children appeared to withdraw from classroom activities, worked alone and did not communicate with either their peers or the teacher. Sepi and Sina, however, did not appear to have any difficulties interacting socially in the classroom and they always seemed to be actively engaged in classroom learning tasks. It is possible that their status as “regulars” may have facilitated this.

Teachers’ ratings of Leilani, Sepi and Sina’s *effort* or *work and study habits*, as shown on their report cards, also indicated that teachers were pleased with the way that the children operated in classrooms. These were the sections on report cards that were meant to provide parents with an indication of how their children were shaping up as students, as distinct from results on assessment items or tests.⁷⁵ Teachers’ ratings on these categories appeared to be a guide to their satisfaction

⁷⁵ As explained in Chapter 7 (see Footnote 65), a range of report card formats was used at Harbourton State School during 2000 and 2001. On all reports, teachers were required to rate students’ *effort* or *work and study habits* for each of the aspects of curriculum that were listed. A copy of a 2001 report card is provided in Appendix C.

with the students' progress. As shown in Table 18, Leilani, Sepi and Sina were always rated in the "high" or "satisfactory" categories.

Indeed, teachers' written comments on Leilani, Sepi and Sina's report cards were all positive, as shown in Table 19. Teachers praised the children's manners (e.g. "polite," "courteous"), their work ethic (e.g. "hardworking," "works consistently without disturbing others," "always willing to help others"), other characteristics they displayed in the class (e.g. "responsible," "constructive"), and their academic progress (e.g. "pleasing results"). The Moala children appeared to make effortless transitions into Harbourton State School. Although teachers complained about increasing class sizes, increased workloads, the need to restructure classes, and other difficulties associated with the annual arrival of itinerant farm workers' children (see the discussion in Chapter 7), they rarely talked negatively about the Moalas. In fact, during the two years of data collection, I heard only one negative comment. In telling me about the particular incident, however, the teacher was quick to qualify her statement and to emphasise how unusual Sepi's behaviour had been:

On one sports day, he [Sepi] got really angry with me ... I saw him give the finger or do something rude, and I said, "Sepi, there was no reason for me to receive that anger." And he said, "I'm really really sorry." ... Then the next day he came up to me again and he said, "I'm very sorry that I was rude yesterday." He was just frustrated, that was all ... but you know he was so intent on being polite.

(Ms West – Sina's Year 5 teacher,
interview transcript, 24.07.01)

Thus it appeared that the Moala children were liked by teachers and by other children, and were seen to "fit in" with the school's processes and standards of behaviour.

One of the assumptions that teachers seemed to make about the "regulars" was that children's attendance at only two schools each year, especially familiar schools, minimised any difficulties associated with being itinerant. In talking about the Moala children, two teachers explained:

Table 18. Report card ratings of the Moala and Potai children's efforts or work and study habits in literacy during 2000 and 2001

Student	Year & semester	Ratings for <i>effort or work and study habits</i> ^a		
		Performing to a high standard/consistently high	Satisfactory	Greater effort needed/more development needed
Leilani Moala	2000 Sem. 1		✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	
	Sem. 2	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓	
	2001 Sem. 1	✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	
	Sem. 2	✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	
Sepi Moala	2000 Sem. 1	✓ ✓ ✓	✓	
	Sem. 2	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓	
	2001 Sem. 1	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓		
	Sem. 2	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓		
Sina Moala	2000 Sem. 1	✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓	
	Sem. 2	✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	
	2001 Sem. 1	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓		
	Sem. 2	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓		
Kalisi Potai	2000 Sem. 1	✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓	
	Sem. 2	✓ ✓ ✓	✓	✓
	2001 Sem. 1	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓	
	Sem. 2	✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	
Saia Potai	2000 Sem. 1		✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
	Sem. 2		✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	
	2001 Sem. 1		✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
	Sem. 2		✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	

^a The number of ratings required by teachers varied from one report card format to another, hence the variation in the number of ticks.

Table 19. Report card comments for the Moala and Potai children during 2000 and 2001

Name	Positive comments	Negative comments
Leilani Moala	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • polite manner x 2 • willingness to accept all tasks x 2 • constructive class member x 2 	
Sepi Moala	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • responsible • well-liked student • friendly • courteous • works quietly on a given task with minimal supervision • applies himself to classroom tasks • positive attitude x 2 • enthusiastic • has worked hard • pleasing results 	
Sina Moala	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • well-liked class member • friendly x 2 • courteous • hardworking • fits in easily to our classroom • works consistently without disturbing others • even if he finds a task difficult he quietly keeps working for as long as required • always willing to help others 	
Kalisi Potai	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conscientious • capable • participates well 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • would like to see more consideration and co-operation with other students
Saia Potai	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has grown in self-confidence • has been very appreciative of any extra help given to him • has made considerable progress x 2 • has proven he can produce some pleasing work • seems to be capable of current work load 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • needs encouragement and supervision • needs to apply himself • refuses to try when he thinks it's too difficult • continually disturbs people around him • easily distracted • several incidents of disappointing behaviour • more independence required • does require constant encouragement to complete tasks • needs to be reminded of classroom protocol

They're only going to two schools a year and they're going to the same two schools every year so they're familiar with the schools and they go back with the same kids they were with the year before, so they're not struggling making friends or feeling threatened or anything, so they come pretty much straight back into the school and start their learning straight away, and don't have to spend a couple of weeks getting used to the school ... I don't think they'd be disadvantaged too much.

(Mr Bennett – Sepi and Sina's Year 4 teacher,
interview transcript, 19.10.00)

I try to settle the kids in, get them feeling comfortable and then start working from there ... so Matilda [also a "regular"] and Leilani are at an advantage ... I think there has been a bit of continuity there with those two ... I think you can safely make the assumption, by looking at Leilani and looking at Matilda and looking at Jake [who had enrolled at Harbourton State School for the first time], I'd say Jake has moved around a little bit more.

(Mr Graham – Leilani's Year 7 teacher,
interview transcript, 22.08.01)

Many teachers equated what they perceived as a lesser form of itinerancy – movement between only two schools – with children experiencing fewer problems. In part, this may have been accurate, since there was evidence that the Moala children were able to cope well, emotionally and socially, with their biannual transitions between schools. It was also apparent that the children who attended a limited number of schools were also likely to be the "regulars," the children who returned to Harbourton every year. However, the children's academic results (see later in this chapter) and the stories told by the children and their parents (see Chapter 11) suggested that school transitions were more problematic than teachers thought.

The Potai children: Are they itinerant?

Whilst the Moala children were categorised as "regulars," their second cousins, Kalisi and Saia Potai, were not. As explained earlier in this chapter, Kalisi and Saia's family had lived in Sydney until the beginning of 2000, arriving in Harbourton at approximately the same time as I began this study. Although the children's parents were identified in school records as seasonal farm workers, and they had identified themselves as such in my initial discussions with them, their first experiences of an itinerant lifestyle coincided with the beginning of my data collection.

It was probably not surprising, then, that the teacher who taught Kalisi's class for three terms in 2000 commented that, "I wasn't even sure she was itinerant. I thought she just moved here. I didn't know she kept coming and going to places" (Mr Hopkins, interview transcript, 25.10.00). Indeed, at that point in time, the teacher was correct, as Kalisi did not have a history of "coming and going to places." Nevertheless, I heard a similar story in the second year of data collection, when Ms Burns, one of the Year 6 teachers who taught Kalisi, was adamant that "she isn't really itinerant" and was surprised that Kalisi was involved in the case studies of my research (Field notes, 06.08.01). By then, though, the Potai family had travelled to Victoria for the summer harvesting season and had returned to Harbourton for the winter season.

The teachers' comments raised interesting questions about how itinerancy was perceived and what being "really itinerant" meant. Unlike other itinerant students, Kalisi did not attend a school elsewhere. However, her family's decision to adopt an itinerant lifestyle did affect her attendance at Harbourton State School, with over a week missed at the beginning of the year and an additional two to three weeks missed in March–April (see Table 16). This example illustrates how "itinerancy" could be experienced by different students in different ways and, in this case, was perceived differently by some teachers.

Examples like this highlighted the diversity of itinerant families and the diversity of their experiences of being itinerant. Indeed, the families who were involved in this study seemed to have only two characteristics in common. Firstly, they were seasonal farm workers who considered themselves to be itinerant at the time of my data collection and, secondly, they were living in Harbourton at that time. Further evidence of the diversity of the families is offered throughout the remainder of this thesis.

The Potai children: Their parents are negligent

Although Ms Burns had argued that Kalisi was not an itinerant student, her teaching partner, Ms Singleton, was aware that all members of the Potai family had travelled to Victoria for the 2000-2001 summer harvesting season, but different members of the family had returned at different times. Interview Transcript 1 is an excerpt from an interview with Ms Singleton, during which she described particular incidents – Kalisi leaving the stove on at home and Saia not having lunch money at school – that had alerted school personnel to the possibility that the children’s parents were not in Harbourton. For Ms Singleton, these events suggested, both directly and indirectly, that the Potai children’s parents, particularly Mrs Potai, were negligent.

Ms Singleton identified several ways in which Mr and Mrs Potai had been deficient parents, offering evidence of both certainty (e.g. the use of “obviously” in lines 21 & 41) as well as tentativeness (e.g. the repetition of “I think” on a dozen occasions) in her assertions. In her opinion, there was evidence of parental neglect and abdication of responsibility: older children had been left in charge of younger ones (lines 5-7), children were expected “to bring themselves up” (line 37), and Mrs Potai had failed to ensure that the children were fed (lines 23-24). Moreover, she regarded Mrs Potai as a repeat offender, as there had been evidence of such practices on more than one occasion (lines 2-3, 8-9, 21-22).

In her description of deficit behaviours, Ms Singleton suggested that Mr and Mrs Potai not only regarded their work as more important than looking after their children, but were unaware of the unacceptability of their behaviours (lines 33-34). Such views are similar to those reported by Freebody et al. (1995) in their study of low socio-economic schools. In that research, a dominant theme amongst teachers’ accounts of socio-economically disadvantaged homes was that parents who were poor often lacked “intelligence, knowledge, propriety, and responsibility” (p.x). In identifying Mr and Mrs Potai as “bad” parents, Ms Singleton implied a monolithic view of what constitutes a “good” parent and an expectation that all good parents should behave in similar ways, with similar values and beliefs, and should treat their children in particular ways.

Interview Transcript 1. Ms Singleton, 22.03.01

1 We [Ms Singleton and the principal] were about to make a home visit
2 because we realised that mum was missing from up here and mum hadn't
3 been here for a few weeks. Mum was down in Victoria finishing off the
4 season and Kalisi had come up here at the beginning of the year to start, I
5 think it was the third week into the year, with her big sister and her other
6 sister. I think they're sixteen or seventeen. They're still not of age. I
7 think they're Year 11 or 12 at high school. And she was actually living
8 with them for three or four weeks before we realised that mum wasn't
9 there. And she ran in one day to our classroom and said, "I've left the
10 stove on!" and she was absolutely hysterical and I looked at her and I
11 thought that she was really sincere. She's in a panic, so the principal got
12 one of the aides to take her home. And, sure enough, the stove was on.
13 And then we got to the bottom of it. The story was that mum was still
14 down south. And we were all set to make a home visit, but they must
15 have told mum that the principal and Ms Singleton were coming around
16 and mum must've come back and brought Saia with her as well. And
17 then, I think, then what happened that we didn't know about until
18 something happened with Saia, he forgot lunch money. What mum did
19 was leave Saia with the two big sisters and mum went down south with
20 Kalisi, I think. Either went with Kalisi or Kalisi went by herself. They
21 spent another two weeks down in Victoria. They were obviously
22 finishing off the season. Saia was up here. And we discovered one day,
23 we thought everything was okay and Saia had forgotten his lunch money
24 and hadn't had lunch for two days or something, and was really hungry
25 and was starting to misbehave and was a little bit, just not concentrating in
26 class. And something just didn't add up so the principal brought him into
27 the office and rang the big sister up, I think, and found that mum wasn't
28 there. So promptly mum came back again, and, as far as I know, the
29 principal said to me, they're all there now. But just the amount of
30 responsibility that is expected of them is very different. I am sure they're
31 still, even in our culture there are families that do that, but I think the
32 families that do in our culture do it for different reasons. It's more, like I
33 sincerely don't think that they think it's neglectful. I think that for them
34 that responsibility is put on those children at a very young age and high
35 expectations as well. And I think they're more, even in their culture –
36 Samoan, Tongan – I think they're given a lot more free reign. They're a
37 lot more independent. And they tend to bring themselves up as well.
38 That's what I think, because I mean, the thing is that Kalisi used to come
39 to school with her hair beautifully done very morning and I wouldn't have
40 even guessed. And she had lunch and everything. And she never said a
41 word because obviously mum had instructed her to not speak about it.

Towards the end of the interview excerpt (from line 29 onwards), Ms Singleton began to draw on a different discourse to make sense of the actions of the Potai parents. She explored the possibility that their behaviours were evidence of cultural differences (lines 30-32, 35-36), even though she appeared uncertain about the children's ethnic origins (line 36). In drawing on a binary logic, she juxtaposed "our culture" (lines 31-32) against "their culture" (line 35), and, by implication contrasted an unnamed "us" with "them" (lines 30, 33) and the way "we" do things in school against the way Tongan parents might do things in the home.

Although Ms Singleton identified a range of possible cultural differences, in relation to parental expectations of children's responsibilities (lines 29-30, 33-35) and independence (lines 36-37), her ideas were accompanied by insinuations that these behaviours were "neglectful" (line 33) and that Mrs Potai had deliberately deceived the school (lines 40-41). At this point, it appeared that the discourses that Ms Singleton had drawn on to explain the Potai family's actions – family deficits and cultural differences – had merged. Not only was the Potai family construed as culturally different from mainstream families, but its alleged cultural practices were also identified as deficient and even dishonest, with the latter point interdiscursively linking to community stories of bad parenting and criminal intent.

Explicit links between the perceived parental behaviours and the children's schooling were few, with Saia's misbehaviour and lack of concentration (lines 24-25) being the only ones mentioned. However, although Ms Singleton did not talk about Education Queensland's requirements for teachers to exercise a duty of care – that is, to ensure the health and safety of themselves and others (e.g. Department of Education, Queensland, 1997-2003a, 1997-2003b, 1997-2003c) – her comments suggested that such requirements were instrumental in the school's reaction. She certainly alluded to the school's surveillance of parents – indirect surveillance through children being questioned (lines 13-14, 26-28) and direct surveillance through a planned home visit (lines 1, 14) – and the perceived necessity of getting "to the bottom of it" (line 13). The involvement of the principal, the main figure of authority in the school, demonstrated that not only was perceived parental neglect a school matter, but it was regarded seriously. Indeed, Ms Singleton implied that Mrs

Potai's return to Harbourton was evidence that the school's indirect surveillance had been effective (lines 14-16, 28-29).

It would appear that Ms Singleton's story was similar to some of the stereotypical stories that were circulating in the school and the broader community. As discussed in Chapter 6, stories suggesting that farm workers were bad citizens and inadequate parents were not uncommon in the Harbourton community and these linked unruly and unreliable behaviours, which needed regulation, to itinerant farm workers. Similarly, as outlined in Chapter 7, stories circulating in the school community linked the social, behavioural and learning problems of itinerant students with parental behaviours, including a lack of control over their children.

What was striking about Ms Singleton's attempts to make sense of the incidents involving the Potai children – and to make sense of the family's involvement in itinerant farm work – was that she seemed to draw on quite limited discursive resources. Other constructions of the Potai family might have focused on the advantages of the children being so independent at a young age, or on the family's efforts to provide stability and continuity in the children's schooling, to maintain family relationships over distance or to balance economic, social and educational needs.

The competent behaviours of Kalisi and her older sisters – their ability to look after themselves, to be well groomed, to organise school lunches, and so on – were apparently “invisible” to Ms Singleton, even though she acknowledged Kalisi's grooming and organisational skills (lines 38-40). As with the Aboriginal children in Malin's study (1990a, 1990b), Kalisi was “spotlighted” for doing the wrong thing, namely leaving the stove turned on, even though her remembering could have been interpreted as an example of competence. However, alternative discourses did not seem to be available to Ms Singleton. It was as if her expectations of homogeneity amongst parents had helped to silence, albeit unintentionally, constructive talk about difference and about how Kalisi's attributes could be utilised in the school setting (Luke, Kale, Singh, Hill, & Daliri, 1995).

Doing as well as could be expected

When asked specifically about the Moala and Potai children's progress in literacy learning, most of the children's teachers suggested that the children were achieving as well as could be expected. In other words, they seemed to have low academic expectations of these particular itinerant farm workers' children. Although the views of teachers seemed fairly consistent in this regard, teachers' constructions of the Moala and Potai children as literacy learners appeared to be influenced by a range of assumptions, with teachers varying in their views about which particular factors were limiting the children's chances of success.

The children's school literacy results for the four semesters of 2000 and 2001 are collated in Table 20. Whilst it is recognised that comparisons of results were difficult, because of the range of report card formats⁷⁶ in use and teachers' use of different assessment measures, the table shows that the Moala and Potai children were mostly identified as achieving in the middle range of achievement, that is, as "developing satisfactorily" or as "gaining a sound achievement." All five of the children were given "emerging" or "limited or very limited achievement" ratings in some aspects of literacy, but only three of them (Leilani, Sina and Kalisi) received "advanced" or "high or very high achievement" ratings.

Whilst the low ratings were spread across various components of reading and writing, the high ratings were almost all for aspects of listening/speaking. The latter is perhaps not surprising. My observations in classrooms and in the playground had suggested, for example, that the Moala children communicated effectively in face-to-face situations and were willing to check information, ask questions, and participate actively in school activities. Similarly, Kalisi's teachers regarded her competencies in oral language as above a satisfactory level and her Year 6 teachers said that she was "talkative in class" (Ms Burns, field notes, 06.08.01) and "giggly

⁷⁶ Students were rated on a range of literacy aspects, depending on the report card format in use. These aspects included all or some of the following:

- Reading – comprehension, fluency.
- Writing – composing, spelling, editing skills, word knowledge, handwriting.
- Listening/speaking – listening and following directions, speaking with confidence, speaking clearly and fluently, participating in discussions.

Table 20. School literacy results of the Moala and Potai children during 2000 and 2001

Student	Year & semester	Literacy rating ^a		
		High (advanced or very high/high achievement)	Middle range (developing satisfactorily or sound achievement)	Low (emerging or limited/very limited achievement)
Leilani Moala	2000 Sem. 1 Sem. 2	✓	✓✓✓✓ ✓✓✓	
	2001 Sem. 1 Sem. 2	✓	✓✓✓ ✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓✓
Sepi Moala	2000 Sem. 1 Sem. 2		✓✓✓ ✓✓✓	✓ ✓
	2001 Sem. 1 Sem. 2		✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓ ✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓	✓ ✓
Sina Moala	2000 Sem. 1 Sem. 2		✓ ✓✓	✓✓✓ ✓✓
	2001 Sem. 1 Sem. 2	✓✓✓ ✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓ ✓✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓ ✓✓
Kalisi Potai	2000 Sem. 1 Sem. 2	✓ ✓	✓✓✓ ✓✓✓	
	2001 Sem. 1 Sem. 2	✓	✓✓✓✓✓✓ ✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓
Saia Potai	2000 Sem. 1 Sem. 2		✓✓✓✓ ✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓ ✓✓✓✓✓
	2001 Sem. 1 Sem. 2		✓✓ ✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓ ✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓

^a Report card formats varied. In brief:

2000 – ratings were given for reading, writing, listening/speaking and spelling, hence 4 ticks.

2001 – ratings were given for a greater number of literacy components clustered under 3 headings: reading, writing and listening/speaking.

Further information is provided in Appendix C.

and cackly ... She's chatty, so she's just talking a little bit too much in the classroom" (Ms Singleton, interview transcript, 23.07.01). These communicative attributes may have led some teachers to rate the students in the middle to high range in terms of their performances in particular categories on the school report cards: speaking with confidence, speaking clearly and fluently, and listening and following directions.

When asked to comment on the children's progress in literacy learning, most of the teachers acknowledged that the children were experiencing difficulties but tended to assume either that the children's hard work and efforts would eventually lead to success or that the children's backgrounds limited their chances of success. Teachers' interview comments suggested that the children's middle-of-the-range results were sufficient and that there was no need for additional support for literacy learning. About Sepi and Sina's progress, for example, teachers explained that:

Compared to some of the other Grade 4s, because it's a 4/3 [composite class], a lot of the Grade 4s are pretty low, they achieve quite well. They're lower, they achieve towards the lower level of the literacy level in the class. Yeah, they have problems with reading and writing, but they're not problems, they don't affect them so much so that they can't do the classwork
(Mr Bennett – Sina and Sepi's Year 4 teacher,
interview transcript, 19.10.00)

They're [Sepi and Zafer, a Turkish student] at the lower end of Year 5 ... With more written assignments and going looking for information, I think they'll struggle a little. It's hard to predict, isn't it? Because they're not kids that sit back. Sepi's not a boy that sits back and will let things go on around him. He'll come and ask for help.

(Ms Armstrong – Sepi's Year 5 teacher,
interview transcript, 23.07.01)

In my class the itinerant children aren't any worse than some of the others ... The main thing, his [Sina's] reading is hesitant, but then again that might be language. His writing is a little bit disjointed and he'll confuse words like "they" and "there" ... He's moving towards satisfactory. This is low satisfactory, but he is still emerging. He's still developing.

(Ms West – Sina's Year 5 teacher,
interview transcript, 24.07.01)

As discussed earlier in this chapter, teachers' comments about the Moala children were almost always positive. This was evident in their interviews as well as in the report card comments that they wrote about the children (see Table 19). Even

though teachers recognised that Sepi and Sina were experiencing difficulties with literacy learning, they remained optimistic about the twins' future achievements and appeared to believe that the twins' hard work and effort were qualities that would ensure their eventual success. For example, according to Mr Bennett who taught Sepi and Sina in Year 4, they had "all the attributes that someone sort of needs to learn. They listen. They try hard. They want to learn" (Mr Bennett, interview transcript, 19.10.00). Similarly, Leilani was seen to have "the drive" to do well (Mr Graham, interview transcript, 22.08.01). In always being on task, well behaved and willing to ask for help, the Moala children were often constructed within developmental discourses and regarded as "still developing" (Ms West, interview transcript, 24.07.01).

In contrast, Kalisi and Saia Potai did not always present as "good" students and their teachers offered varied and contradictory constructions of them as literacy learners. Some comments about Saia's work efforts, for example, praised him – "tries very hard" (Ms Dixon, interview transcript, 13.09.01), "has been very appreciative of any extra help given to him" (see Table 19) – and others were more critical – "refuses to try when he thinks it's too difficult" (see Table 19). In terms of his behaviour at school, he could be "easily distracted" (see Table 19), but he could also be "really over the top" (see the interview transcript on p.214). Saia's school literacy results, however, were mostly in the low to middle range (see Table 20) and he was identified by the Year 2 Diagnostic Net⁷⁷ as requiring additional support to reach the required phases of development in reading and writing (see Table 21).⁷⁸

⁷⁷ The Year 2 Diagnostic Net uses the developmental phases of Western Australia's *First Steps* program, where children's observable behaviours in reading and writing are mapped on to six developmental phases – from their beginning development in Phase A, through to Phase F. Children in Queensland schools are expected to achieve Phase C in reading and Phase B in writing at the beginning of Year 2.

⁷⁸ As a result of being identified as requiring additional support for literacy learning, Saia Potai received one-on-one support from a teacher aide in the *Support-a-reader* and *Support-a-writer* programs (Department of Education, Queensland, 1991b, 1996a).

Table 21. Year 2 Diagnostic Net results for Saia Potai in 2000

Student	Year	Reading		Writing	
		Phase ^a	Identified for support	Phase	Identified for support
Saia Potai	2000	B	✓	A	✓

^a Children in Queensland schools are expected to achieve Phase C in reading and Phase B in writing during Year 2. Government funding is allocated to schools for children who have been identified as not having achieved the required developmental phase.

Teachers' comments on report cards (see Table 19) implied that Saia could achieve success in literacy learning if he was willing to change a range of personal behaviours. Whilst some comments indicated behaviours that were interfering with his learning (e.g. "disappointing behaviour," "disturbs people around him"), others identified what he needed to do – "apply himself," "complete tasks," show "more independence" and observe "classroom protocol." All of these comments suggested that Saia's problems in literacy learning were problems located in him. In an interview, one of Saia's teachers described him as "just one of the poorer readers ... a below average child" (Ms Dixon, interview transcript, 13.09.01). Although some teachers had commented on the way that the Potai children were neglected by their parents, I did not hear any of these comments from Saia's classroom teachers.

Kalisi Potai was also described in contradictory ways. Although her teachers seemed to be pleased with her academic progress, they tended to qualify their comments by reference to her ESL status and to her personality. For example:

For someone who speaks Tongan first, like she could read above her age in the classroom. She's fine.

(Mr Hopkins, interview transcript, 25.10.00)

You wouldn't know that she's ESL at all. She's just so capable. So, as far as Kalisi's concerned, I don't think there's any real problem. Probably get her reading a lot more would be good.

(Ms O'Sullivan, interview transcript, 17.11.00)

Yeah, she's a sporty girl. She's competitive. Just because she's big girl, she picks on the boys. If someone does something, and she wants to know about it, she'll go and try and do better or something like that. She's competitive.

(Mr Hopkins, interview transcript, 25.10.00)

She's not a good listener though, because she's got, she's got other things on her mind, little feuds, little personality things she lets interfere with her work.

(Ms O'Sullivan, interview transcript, 17.11.00)

Whilst generally positive about Kalisi's literacy learning, the teachers' comments implied, albeit vaguely, that there were factors impacting on her progress. Teachers seemed to discount any limitations that might have occurred as the result of being a student who was learning English as an additional language. However, the stories of parental neglect (as discussed earlier in this chapter) and Kalisi's sometimes-

inappropriate school behaviours seemed to suggest that Kalisi was not always focused on literacy learning. Issues about Kalisi's school behaviour had come to the notice of the principal and he explained that, at the end of 2000,

Kalisi seemed unhappy ... As an older member of the [Year 4/5 composite] class she was picking on other kids and it became so bad that she actually lost her silver badge.⁷⁹ She was devastated and mum was devastated, but mum understood that what she was doing was wrong ... she certainly was rough on other kids. Not physically rough. Just mentally abused them.

(Principal, interview transcript, 08.12.00)

It appeared that Kalisi's behaviours as an individual were understood as impacting on her success as a literacy learner. Many teachers implied that success was achievable by students who worked hard and were appropriately behaved in the school context. Although it was not said directly, I was left with the impression that some of Kalisi's teachers thought she could have achieved better results if she had put her mind to it and had complied with the school's standards of behaviour. The ESL teacher, for example, had not continued to provide Kalisi with "a little bit of assistance with English" because she felt that Kalisi had not wanted it (ESL teacher, interview, 12.11.01).

Leilani's Year 7 teacher identified family background as a limiting factor:

I think she's progressing and that is basically I think she's doing an excellent job, you know what I mean. In terms of oral language, as you probably would have gauged, I think her oral language is quite good, for her background ... I think her communication and her understanding of English is quite good for where she's coming from.

(Mr Graham – Leilani's Year 7 teacher,
interview transcript, 22.08.01)

Although Mr Graham did not specify which aspects of Leilani's background were involved, his reference to "her understanding of English" suggested that he was taking her family's bilingualism into consideration.

⁷⁹ Students were awarded a silver badge for acting "appropriately in and out of the classroom" and for being "co-operative, responsible and show[ing] good sportsmanship" (Harbourton State School, 2000, p.3 – see Appendix E). Although the principal used the word "lost," he had made the decision to impose a demerit and to remove Kalisi's silver badge status.

Teachers were mixed in their views on whether there was a relationship between students' home language/s and school literacy difficulties. Some appeared uncertain about the linguistic diversity of their students and possible implications in school settings, whilst others identified the children's capabilities in spoken English as indicative of their potential success in school literacy tasks, an assumption that may be problematic (Cummins, 2000; Drucker, 2003; Gibbons, 1991; Williams, 2001). The following excerpts from interviews illustrate the range of teacher comments:

There is that language side of things where they're experiencing a bit of difficulty, but I just don't know whether to put that down to their background, knowing other languages, or whether they just, I don't know. I'm more inclined to think it's the other languages that they speak and stuff, which is interfering with their language at school, but I couldn't be sure.

(Mr Bennett – Sepi and Sina's Year 4 teacher,
interview transcript, 19.10.00)

She [Kalisi] has an accent, a little bit of one. But I didn't know until we did the Year 5 Test⁸⁰ that Tongan was her first language ... I'd never heard her speak Tongan at school.

(Mr Hopkins – Kalisi's Year 5 teacher,
interview transcript, 25.10.00)

You wouldn't know that she's [Kalisi] ESL at all.

(Ms O'Sullivan – Kalisi's Year 5 teacher,
interview transcript, 17.11.00)

I don't think it causes any problems because he [Saia] doesn't speak English at home.

(Ms Dixon – Saia's Year 3 teacher,
interview transcript, 13.09.01)

Some of the teachers' comments suggested a lack of communication within the school, as Kalisi and Saia were listed in the ESL database and Saia had been exempted from sitting for the statewide Year 3 Test.⁸¹ Even if communication was not an issue, it did appear that most of the teachers interviewed were not

⁸⁰ As explained in Footnote 69, the answer booklet for the Year 5 Test (Queensland School Curriculum Council, 2001a) required students to indicate whether they had a parent who spoke a language other than English most of the time.

⁸¹ Students may be exempted from the Year 3, 5 or 7 Tests if they have been "assessed by an English as a second language (ESL) teacher and classroom teacher as achieving at or below Reading Level 4 and Writing Level 4 using the National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia (NLLIA) ESL Bandscales" (Queensland School Curriculum Council, 2001f, p.21).

particularly knowledgeable about ESL issues, bilingualism or how to cater for bilingual students in their classrooms.

In reading the interview transcripts where teachers talked about the students' literacy difficulties, I became aware that many of their comments matched the features that Gibbons (1991) described as "some general characteristics associated with the English of some bilingual children" (p.4). To illustrate this, I have mapped some of the teachers' comments on to the reading and writing characteristics listed by Gibbons. These comparisons are shown in Table 22 and Table 23. As the information in these tables demonstrates, teachers linked very few of their observations or perceptions of the Tongan students' "literacy problems" with the children's bilingualism. Similarly, no teacher mentioned the possibility that the Tongan children might speak a dialect of English that was different from the English spoken by other children in the school or different from Standard Australian English. In talking about "literacy" in interviews, teachers tended to focus exclusively on the reading and writing components of their classroom programs, even though the school expected them to report on aspects of reading, writing, listening and speaking (see report card format in Appendix C).

Although some teachers were aware that particular itinerant children were identified ESL learners, they did not always have specific strategies in place to either assess or cater for those children. Mr Bennett who taught Sina and Sepi Moala in Year 4, for example, explained that his classroom processes were the same for all children. When I asked what types of assessment records he kept for the twins, he replied that

Just do what I do in class. I keep running records, just any tests I decide to do – there's no set tests I have to do with them because they're ESL or anything like that, that I've given or been told I have to do. They're just treated as a normal class member.

(Mr Bennett – Sepi and Sina's Year 4 teacher,
interview transcript, 19.10.00)

As has already been suggested, there seemed to be limited liaison between classroom teachers and the designated ESL teacher. However, as explained in Chapter 7, the ESL teacher spent most of her time in 2000 entering student

Table 22. Teachers' comments about the reading of the Moala and Potai children mapped against Gibbons' (1991) characteristics of bilingual children's English

Characteristics associated with the English of bilingual children (Gibbons, 1991) – reading	Teacher comments about the Moala and Potai children's reading
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reads slowly • has poor comprehension if the topic is unfamiliar • has trouble paraphrasing and isolating the main idea • has difficulty reading for meaning, drawing conclusions and, in a narrative, predicting what will happen next • rarely self-corrects when reading aloud 	<p>Sina – “His reading is hesitant.” Kalisi – “Oral reading still needs a bit of work.” Saia – “He’s just one of the poorer readers.”</p> <p>Sepi – “Written comprehension ... a little bit more difficult than just oral reading a story.” Kalisi – “She said, oh I can’t remember what happened. Her comprehension level was quite awful.”</p> <p>Kalisi – “She’s not able to communicate in English what she’s taken in.”</p> <p>Sepi – “He’s not obtaining meaning.” Kalisi – “I found mostly that I had to prompt her. She didn’t remember a lot.”</p>

Table 23. Teachers' comments about the writing of the Moala and Potai children mapped against Gibbons' (1991) characteristics of bilingual children's English

Characteristics associated with the English of bilingual children – writing (Gibbons, 1991)	Teacher comments about the Moala and Potai children's writing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has generally poor written language skills, especially in subject areas • can write sentences but has difficulty writing a paragraph or sequencing paragraphs • writes only in an informal, "chatty" style • uses a limited vocabulary which lacks descriptive words • uses simple sentence structures only • makes grammatical errors not typical of a native speaker – for example, in word order, word endings, tense or prepositions • spelling is poor • lacks the confidence to write at length • tends always to write the same thing (such as a simple recount) in free choice writing 	<p>Sina – "His writing is a little bit disjointed." Sepi – "I know the structure problems he was having." Kalisi – "She has good ideas but putting them in the right sequence is a problem."</p> <p>Kalisi – "If others write one or two pages, she's likely to do three, all conversational style."</p> <p>Sina – "He'll confuse words like 'they' and 'there'." Sina – "When he's editing he doesn't recognise if it's wrong." Sepi – "Composing, gets sentences down ... they're not grammatically correct." Kalisi – "She still has problems with tense."</p> <p>Sepi – "Spelling is a weaker area definitely. In spelling he's borderline." Kalisi – "She's not too bad with her spelling actually. She's not as bad as other ESL children."</p> <p>Sina – "His writing is also a bit hesitant at times."</p>

information on the ESL database and this left little time for assisting classroom teachers or providing direct support for students' learning.

In the case of Sepi and Sina Moala, who appeared to cope so well in the classroom, it appeared at times that some difficulties in literacy learning were invisible to classroom teachers. For example, their Year 4 teacher, Mr Bennett, explained that, "They're not so low that they need specialist attention ... They manage in the classroom and understand a lot of the concepts" (Mr Bennett, interview transcript, 19.10.00).

In Year 5, though, Sina was withdrawn twice weekly from the regular classroom program to work with the ESL teacher within the school's ESL program. Strangely, Sina's classroom teacher did not mention this in her discussions of Sina's literacy learning. This may have been another indication that the ESL program operated more or less independently of classroom programs. The ESL teacher's program notes and reports to parents (see Figure 8, and see Table 10 in Chapter 7) indicated that Sina's program was skills-based, a point that was discussed in Chapter 7. Whilst it appeared that many classroom teachers may have not been skilled at recognising and diagnosing literacy issues in relation to ESL students, the ESL teachers seemed to base their work on constructions that identified the students as deficient in the rules and grammatical structures of English and as needing a traditional skills-based pedagogy.

In their interviews with me, all of the teachers talked at length about what the Moala and Potai children could and could not do in relation to classroom literacy learning. In doing this, they did not use the children's results on statewide literacy assessments – the Year 3, 5 and 7 Tests⁸² (e.g. Queensland School Curriculum Council, 2001a, 2001b) and the Year 2 Diagnostic Net (Department of Education, Queensland, 1996b) – as points of reference.⁸³ Similarly, there was no reference to

⁸² The only teacher comment that mentioned these tests in relation to the Moala and Potai children was the comment from Mr Hopkins about Kalisi Potai's home language (see the interview transcript on p.237).

⁸³ This was in contrast to teachers' specific references to the Year 5 results of Ryan Neilsen, as discussed in Chapter 10.

Sina Moala

ESL program Term 3/4, 2001

Spelling:

Review spelling list established by class teacher and review written texts completed by Sina and revise spelling errors consistently written. Practise and repeat spelling and add new words to the list as needed following the year five class core spelling list. Use spelling activities worksheet devised by ESL teacher where needed.

Writing:

Review written texts completed by Sina and rewrite correcting grammar, punctuation and spelling where needed.

Choosing topics of interest to the students, based on past written samples, write sentences and passages, teaching singular/plural nouns, verb tenses, prepositions and articles as well as punctuation using commas. Booklet on grammar to be used by Sina.

Complete tasks and reading tasks which may be set by the class teacher and correct any punctuation, spelling and grammar errors which may arise.

Figure 8. The ESL teacher's program notes for Sina Moala, 2001

the results of those tests on any of the five students' school report cards.⁸⁴ It was as though these external assessment measures were regarded as separate from everyday schooling.

As shown in Table 24, Leilani and Kalisi's statewide test results were similar to the ratings they had been receiving at school. However, this was not the case for Sepi and Sina, whose Year 5 Test results indicated that they were operating in the lower 25 per cent of Queensland Year 5 students. In another external test, the *Australian Schools English Competition*, organised by the Education Testing Centre at the University of New South Wales, both Sepi and Sina gained very low scores, as shown in Table 25. Whilst I recognise that teachers may not have given very much credence to the results of tests like this one, high achievers received public acclaim at school parades. Likewise, "good results" were promoted in the newspaper (e.g. "Enrolment 2001," 2001; "Students go well in national contests," 2003) and in the school's *Annual reports* (e.g. Harbourton State School, 2001a, 2002), where it was argued that the results were "a feature of the enrichment programs offered by the school" (Harbourton State School, 2001a, p.4).

For Sepi and Sina, however, the two sets of external results provided dramatic contrasts with their school results and with teachers' comments. As has already been discussed in this chapter, the twins' teachers acknowledged that they were at "the lower level" (Mr Bennett, interview transcript, 19.10.00) and were "still emerging" (Ms West, interview transcript, 24.07.01), but at no stage did they suggest that Sepi and Sina were experiencing the level of difficulty that the external results seemed to indicate. In the absence of any teacher discussion about Sepi and Sina's Year 5 Test results, I recognise that there are multiple possible reasons for the teachers' apparent lack of concern. Perhaps they had accepted the cautions offered by the *Test reporting handbook* (Queensland School Curriculum Council, 2001e) that accompanied the Year 5 Test: that the tests are "administered at a particular point in time" and the results "should not be considered as the sole indicator of performance" (p.25).

⁸⁴ I recognise that the then Queensland School Curriculum Council provided schools with reports on each student and these were sent home to students' parents. In 2001, a photocopy of these test results was added to the students' files that were kept in the school office.

Table 24. Results of the aspects of literacy components of the Years 3, 5 and 7 Tests during 2000 and 2001 for the Moala and Potai children

Student	Test & year	Results ^a		
		Spelling	Writing	Reading and viewing
Leilani Moala	Year 7 Test 2001	Middle 50% range	Higher 25% range	Middle 50% range
Sepi Moala	Year 5 Test 2001	Lower 25% range	Lower 25% range	Lower 25% range
Sina Moala	Year 5 Test 2001	Lower 25% range	Lower 25% range	Lower 25% range
Kalisi Potai	Year 5 Test 2000	Middle 60% range	Middle 60% range	Reading – Middle 60% range Viewing – Lower 20% range
Saia Potai	Year 3 Test 2001	Exempted by the school because of his language background other than English		

^a Results for 2000 and 2001 were reported differently. In 2000, students' results were identified as located in the top 20%, middle 60% or lower 20% of 4 aspects of literacy (spelling, writing, reading and viewing). In 2001, results were identified as located in the top 25%, middle 50% or lower 25% for 3 aspects of literacy (spelling, writing, and reading/viewing).

Table 25. Scores on the Australian Schools English Competition in 2000 for Sepi and Sina Moala

Student	Score				
	Data Interpretation (13 questions)	Language (11 questions)	Reading (16 questions)	Vocabulary (10 questions)	Total (50)
Sepi Moala	4	2	3	0	9
Sina Moala	7	4	4	1	16

What was evident was that, within the context of Harbourton State School, the Year 5 teachers did not regard Sepi and Sina's literacy results as extraordinary. In making comparisons between itinerant students and other students in their classes, they commented that:

There's not a huge difference between them [Sepi and another itinerant student] and many other students in the class.

(Ms Armstrong – Sepi's Year 5 teacher,
interview transcript, 23.07.01)

In my class the itinerant children aren't any worse than some of the others.

(Ms West – Sina's Year 5 teacher,
interview transcript, 24.07.01)

It appeared then, that in classroom contexts where students' achievement levels were recognised as being generally low,⁸⁵ Sepi and Sina were noticed for their "good" classroom behaviours rather than for their low achievement levels. Although it appeared that the twins' low results were accepted by teachers as the effects of an itinerant lifestyle and a language background other than English, the similarity of their results to those of other students may have helped to make their progress in literacy learning seem unexceptional and not requiring special consideration.

SUMMARY

This chapter focused on teachers' narratives about the children from the two Tongan families, the Moalas and the Potais. Within the school context, stereotypical and contradictory stories circulated about Tongan students, with some teachers commending their grooming and appropriate school behaviour and others emphasising the aggression of Tongan boys. Teachers' constructions of the children of the two case study families, however, appeared to differ along family lines.

⁸⁵ Chapter 5 explained that the school's *Annual reports* (Harbourton State School, 2001a, 2002) had highlighted low achievement levels and explained that large numbers of students were identified as requiring educational support and intervention.

All teachers, it seemed, agreed that the Moala children were well-behaved, polite, hard working and popular. The parents' and children's involvement in the community of Harbourton and the children's status as "regulars" at the school appeared to contribute to the positive acceptance of the children by the school community. Indeed, teachers spoke about the Moala children as if they epitomised "good students" and were amongst "the best" of the itinerant students. They were identified as quickly "fitting in," observing school protocols, and participating in curricular and extra-curricular activities, and they were noted as always wearing school uniform. Although the Moala children were marked by their ethnicity and by their itinerancy, they appeared to be able to take up unmarked positions within the school, positions that were not necessarily available to all itinerant students.

In contrast, stories about the Potai children, who did not always take up the normalised practices that were expected, were varied. Some teachers highlighted behavioural and learning problems in the children and others perceived the children's parents as negligent, thus drawing on deficit discourses about the children and their family. Because the Potai family had only just taken up an itinerant lifestyle and had not lived in Harbourton previously, the children did not have histories at the school and some teachers were even sceptical that they were an itinerant family.

In terms of the children's literacy learning, a common theme in teachers' stories was that the children of both families were generally doing as well as could be expected. Teachers identified a range of factors relating to the children's circumstances – including their itinerancy, ethnicity, language background, the extent to which they complied with the school's standards of behaviour, and characteristics of the parents – as limiting the children's achievements in literacy learning. However, the combinations of factors used by teachers to construct students as literacy learners varied from teacher to teacher and in relation to particular children.

Although teachers tended to use itinerancy and the children's home language to explain the children's low achievements, there were times when teachers attributed the Moala children with the potential to improve their academic achievement levels. It was as though the children's ability to fit into school practices and to present themselves as keen students influenced teachers' constructions of the children as literacy learners. The children's annual enrolments, and hence prior experiences, at Harbourton State School may have helped here. In contrast, the Potai children did not have prior experiences of the school and were perceived as not always behaving in appropriate ways. Their teachers tended to comment on the need for attitudinal and behavioural changes to ensure better literacy results.

The literacy results of Sepi and Sina Moala – indicating satisfactory-to-low progress on school-based assessments, but particularly low results on external literacy tests – raised questions about how teachers perceived different types of literacy results and how they made sense of students' literacy learning. In interviews, no teacher initiated discussion about the boys' achievements levels (in the bottom 25% of students in the state) on the Year 5 Test or about the apparent discrepancies with their results on school-based assessments. Whilst this might have been expected, since I did not question teachers specifically about either topic, it is interesting to note that teachers made specific (and unsolicited) references to these topics in the case of Ryan Neilsen (see Chapter 10).

The case studies of the children from the Moala and Potai families suggested that teachers had limited knowledge about issues relating to the children's language backgrounds, both in terms of the students being learners of English as an additional language and speakers of what appeared to be a Tongan-English dialect. Although some teachers identified the children's home language as a potential reason for some of the difficulties experienced in literacy learning, they did not appear to be particularly knowledgeable about how to cater for bilingual students in their classrooms. Whilst this may have been a result of inadequate access to pertinent professional development or training, it demonstrated the necessity for teachers to have a depth of knowledge that would enable them to cater for diverse groups of literacy learners.

The next chapter considers three more case study families. The children of the Ata, Ozturk and Russell families were not regulars and did not have long histories of enrolment at Harbourton State School, but all three families spent one harvesting season in Harbourton during the time that I was collecting data. Chapter 9 discusses the narratives that teachers told about the children of these families.

CHAPTER 9.

TEACHERS' NARRATIVES:

THREE OTHER FAMILIES – GOING OKAY

UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is the second of the three chapters that focus on teachers' narratives about the case study families. It investigates the stories that were told about the primary school-aged children of the Ata and Ozturk families, who identified themselves as Turkish, and the Russell children, whose mother identified herself as Maori.

The children from the three families attended Harbourton State School during only one of the two harvesting seasons when I collected data. As a result, the data sets were much smaller than those for the children described in the other two chapters, and because the children were not “regulars” and did not have “histories” within the school, teachers seemed to know much less about them. As in the narratives about the Moala and Potai families, described in the last chapter, teachers drew on a range of points of reference, including ethnicity, to talk about the children and their families.

This chapter begins with descriptions of the families. These are supported by Table 26, which provides a ready-reckoner of the families, listing the children, their year levels and their teachers at Harbourton State School during either 2000 or 2001. The chapter then investigates teachers' stories about the children and their progress as literacy learners during the time they spent in Harbourton.

Table 26. The year levels, ages and teachers of the Ata, Ozturk and Russell children during their enrolments at Harbourton State School

Family	Year	Student	Year level (and age)	Teacher
Ata family	2000	Deniz	Year 7 (12 years)	[No data collected]
		Mustafa	Year 4 (10 years)	Mr Connington (until the end of Term 3) Ms O'Sullivan (Term 4)
		Kemal	Year 1 (6 years)	[No data collected]
Ozturk family	2001	Zafer	Year 5 (11 years)	Ms Armstrong
		Ebru	Year 2 (8 years)	Ms Allen
Russell family	2001	Kirra	Year 6 (11 years)	Ms Burns and Ms Singleton (shared teaching arrangement) Term 4 – Mr Sutcliffe replaced Ms Singleton
		Lexie	Year 3 (8 years)	Ms Allen
		Ethan	Year 2 (7 years)	Ms Allen
		Bree	Year 1 (6 years)	Ms Wood

THREE ITINERANT FAMILIES

The Ata family

The Ata family joined the study in 2000, the first year of data collection, when their middle child Mustafa was in Year 4. Although Mr and Mrs Ata worked in Harbourton as itinerant farm workers during the 1999 and 2000 harvesting seasons, they explained that these were working holidays, which allowed them to spend time with Mr Ata's sister and her family who were permanent residents of Harbourton. According to Mr Ata's sister, who interpreted during some interviews,

Up here she's [her sister-in-law] like a, she's on holiday ... She's working, but after work – like me, I never think to myself I'm on holiday now, because I'm going home and cook and clean. Okay? But the rest of the day I'm at home. They go out and they go swimmings and all that and they feel like they're on holiday.

(Mr Ata's sister, interview transcript, 12.10.00)

The Ata children – Deniz (12 years), Mustafa (10 years)⁸⁶ and Kemal (6 years) – were born in Australia, but had been to Turkey with their parents on several occasions to visit relatives. Although all members of the family spoke both Turkish and English, they did not necessarily feel competent, or perceive each other as competent, in both languages. Mrs Ata, for example, preferred to answer my interview questions in Turkish and opted to have either the children or her sister-in-law interpret, because “She said that she can't speak English very good. She can't help it” (Mr Ata's sister, interview transcript, 12.10.00). The children, however, preferred to speak English, even though their parents generally spoke to them in Turkish. I was informed, however, that in the adults' opinions, the children's English was much better than their Turkish:

Between the three of them [the children] they speak English at home. Only sometimes they talk Turkish to their mum and dad, but they not with mum and dad every single minute because they go upstairs and at half past eight they go to sleep. And, one more thing, she [Mrs Ata] said, instead of speaking, they can speak English very good. They can't speak Turkish.

(Mr Ata's sister, interview transcript, 12.10.00)

⁸⁶ Because I planned initially to focus on children in either Year 4 or Year 5 (see Chapter 5), case study data about the Ata family focuses on Mustafa. As the family did not return to Harbourton in 2001, I collected very little data about Deniz and Kemal.

The Ozturk family

The Ozturk family arrived in Harbourton in May 2001. Although the family had followed the harvesting trail in other years and had spent some seasons in North Queensland, the previous two years had been spent in one town in Victoria. When asked why they decided to return to Harbourton and to an itinerant lifestyle, Mrs Ozturk replied, “First of all, my husband loves fishing. Yeah. And people go, Harbourton’s got really nice hot weather and fishing” (Mrs Ozturk, interview transcript, 01.06.01). Even though the family arrived during May, the parents drew unemployment benefits until they were able to secure work in August.

During 2001, Zafer (11 years) and Ebru (8 years) were enrolled in Year 5 and Year 2 respectively. On their arrival at Harbourton State School, the principal was going to enrol Zafer in Year 6 because of his age, but Mrs Ozturk had questioned that decision. She argued that Zafer would have spent only a few months in Year 5, thus highlighting one of the current difficulties of moving between state education systems. She explained:

I said, look, I don’t want him to skip a year without him knowing what’s going on. Because, I said to the principal, when he doesn’t understand, he distracts the one next to him and plays around. And I don’t want that to happen. Once he gets to high school he won’t know what’s going on. I said, is it better for him to repeat now or in high school? And he said now is much better.

(Mrs Ozturk, interview transcript, 01.06.01)

She also explained that Zafer and Ebru had experienced difficulties when they first went to school and, as a result, both had repeated Year 1. She was particularly concerned by Zafer’s early experiences at school:

When he was in Grade 1 his teacher, I don’t know, she says that he needs to repeat, he needs to get his eyes checked, ears checked and everything. I’ve done all that and there was nothing wrong with them. It’s just that, you know how what happens when you get a teacher that picks on one because he was talking in Turkish all the time. She didn’t know what he was saying.

(Mrs Ozturk, interview transcript, 01.06.01)

Mrs Ozturk was of the opinion that Zafer and Ebru’s difficulties with school had occurred because the family had always spoken Turkish at home. My observations when collecting data suggested that Mrs Ozturk and the children used both Turkish

and English and that the children tended to answer in English to questions asked in Turkish. Mr Ozturk, however, appeared to speak little English, an observation that was confirmed at a later date by Zafer who said, “Dad doesn’t know much English but my mum knows English” (Zafer Ozturk, interview transcript, 01.06.01).

The Russell family

The Russell family also joined the research project in 2001. Four of the five children were at school: Kirra (11 years) in Year 6, Lexie (8 years) in Year 3, Ethan (7 years) in Year 2 and Bree (6 years) in Year 1. The children’s youngest sister was not old enough to attend school. All of the children had been born in Australia, but their mother explained that they were “New Zealanders by descent,” highlighting her own Maori heritage (Sian, the Russell children’s mother, interview transcript, 23.07.01).

The children’s mum had been picking fruit for about five years, whilst their stepfather, Harry, was a third generation fruit picker who had been travelling since he was eight years old. When the family joined the study, they explained:

Sian: I don’t think we’re going to be moving any more ... There’s no work in Victoria for us. We’ll probably have to stay put.

Harry: Yeah. It’s not worth our while going down to Victoria. They’ve had about four bad years in a row now where you just make survival money. And the cost of travelling there, the expense.

(Sian and Harry – the Russell children’s mother and stepfather, interview transcript, 23.07.01)

Over the previous three years, the older Russell children had attended eight different schools in two states – in Victoria during orange and apricot seasons, in far North Queensland during banana seasons, as well as in vegetable-growing areas around Harbourton. The children’s mum laughed about this, saying “We’ve been gypsies” (Sian, the Russell children’s mother, interview transcript, 23.07.01). By the middle of the following year, however, the family had bought a house in Harbourton, they had a new baby, and the older children were continuing to attend Harbourton State School.

TEACHERS' NARRATIVES

Settling in to a “new” school

This section of the chapter focuses on the teachers' narratives that were told about the Ata, Ozturk and Russell children. As discussed in Chapter 7, teachers often commented on the report cards of itinerant children as to whether they had “settled in” to Harbourton State School and taken up the normalised behaviours and attitudes that teachers expected. In 2001, Zafer Ozturk and Kirra, Lexie and Bree Russell were identified as successfully settling in or adjusting to the school environment, with their “settling in” linked to desirable student behaviours and traits, such as having a positive attitude, being diligent, motivated and pleasant, and accepting school routines (see Table 27).

In contrast, Ethan Russell had apparently not taken up these normalised practices of schooling and had presumably not settled in. Although his teacher did not refer specifically to this characteristic, she constructed him as a child who needed to change his behaviours – “must learn to listen to the teacher” and “needs to be more consistent” (see Table 27).

Mustafa Ata: Personal, family and lifestyle deficits

In 2000, Mustafa Ata spent approximately four months in Mr Connington's Year 4 class, before being moved into a newly formed Year 4/5 composite class taught by Ms O'Sullivan.⁸⁷ The two teachers told quite different narratives about Mustafa, as will be seen from this section and the next. The narrative discussed in this section is based on Interview Transcript 2, an excerpt from an interview with Mr Connington. In the interview, Mr Connington drew on deficit discourses to explain Mustafa's classroom behaviours and perceived difficulties with reading and the problem-solving area of mathematics.

⁸⁷ In response to increased student enrolments, Education Queensland transferred Ms O'Sullivan to Harbourton State School at the beginning of Term 4, 2000 and a Year 4/5 composite class was formed.

Table 27. Report card comments for the Ata, Ozturk and Russell children

Student	Year/Semester		Report card comments
Mustafa Ata	2000	Sem.1	Mustafa is working to a high standard.
		Sem.2	[No report card issued]
Zafer Ozturk	2001	Sem.1	Zafer has settled in well this term. He displays a positive attitude to his work and has achieved some pleasing results.
		Sem.2	Zafer is a pleasant, hard working student. He has continued to apply himself this semester, making pleasing progress in some maths and English areas.
Ebru Ozturk	2001	Sem.1	Ebru works well when she applies herself. She needs to be more consistent with her written work. She gets on well with her peers.
		Sem.2	Ebru is a pleasant member of the class. She tries hard in all areas of her work with good results. Well done Ebru.
Kirra Russell	2001	Sem.1	Kirra has adjusted very well and is a diligent and motivated student.
		Sem.2	[No comment]
Lexie Russell	2001	Sem.1	Lexie has settled down well in this class. She is a pleasant pupil who gets on well with her peers.
		Sem.2	Lexie has continued to produce work of a high standard for this class. She tries hard in all areas of her work. She is a pleasant, helpful member of the class. Well done, Lexie.
Ethan Russell	2001	Sem.1	Ethan works well when he tries. He must learn to listen to the teacher. He needs to be more consistent when doing his work. He has the ability to do well in this class.
		Sem.2	Ethan can produce good work when he tries. He grasps new concepts quickly and easily.
Bree Russell	2001	Sem.1	Bree is a pleasure to teach and has settled well into the routine.
		Sem.2	With continued effort, Bree's results should improve.

Interview Transcript 2. Mr Connington, 19.10.00

1	Mr C:	Literacy. Ah, he was good at composition and so we did a fair bit
2		of work on what paragraphs were and what sentences were and
3		that sort of thing, and he seemed quite comfortable with that, and
4		strung together some pretty good little articles and stories and
5		recounts and things like that. He was pretty successful at that. I
6		don't need to put the rider in that he was a bit older and he was
7		performing well in the class. And he was pretty good at
8		articulation, so he was a talker and good at expressing ideas and
9		his handwriting was good and his spelling was good. The only
10		thing I've got him down low here [in a markbook] was his
11		reading. I don't think his reading was that flash.
12	RH:	So do you have any idea of why that might be the case? To be
13		good at writing and not at reading seems
14	Mr C:	a bit strange. Oh, possibly, well he <u>mightn't</u> be exposed to much
15		written material at home, <u>might</u> spend a bit of time in front of the
16		box instead of reading. His parents <u>mightn't</u> supply him with any
17		reading books. His only reading <u>might</u> be at school, so that would
18		slow him down. It <u>might</u> mean that his parents aren't helping him
19		choose books in English. If they're not shooting down to the
20		library to get books themselves, because there's <u>probably</u> not
21		many Turkish books in the library here, and also, because they're
22		itinerant, <u>I imagine</u> what they bring is what they can fit in the car.
23		So you don't bring your library, if you fill one up. So yeah,
24		<u>perhaps</u> there's limited books at home, <u>maybe</u> two or three books
25		period, the Turkish bible or whatever, so that <u>could</u> be it. And
26		then, you know, like so many kids, <u>I think</u> he's into computer
27		games and TV and stuff like that, not reading.
28	RH:	You said that for you his behaviour was a problem. Do you think
29		that had implications for his schoolwork?
30	Mr C:	He could get away with not working very hard because he was a
31		year older, because he'd done Year 4 last year with [name of
32		teacher], and a lot of the stuff he finished fairly quickly and then
33		wanted to move on to something else. So it didn't repeat his
34		schoolwork, it was just annoyance that he called out like that. So
35		his work was a penalty because of his behaviour. It was when he
36		had to sit and face the board for calling out too many times ...
37		Other areas, well he was way up there in maths. Number study,
38		number facts operations, he's all got a VHA here, very high
39		achievement. Problem-solving, he's only scored satisfactorily
40		with that, but <u>I'd say</u> getting back to exposure to printed material
41		... <u>I'd say</u> for maths he was generally doing well and his literacy
42		let him down in maths for his problem solving.

In some sections of the interview, Mr Connington blamed Mustafa's age for some problematic classroom behaviours. Although Mustafa had been enrolled in Year 4 when he attended Harbourton State School for ten weeks of the previous year, he was re-enrolled in Year 4 on his return. As far as I could ascertain, Mustafa's parents had requested this, as they felt that he had not coped particularly well with schooling in Queensland in the previous year. As a result, Mustafa was approximately one year older than most of the children in his year level cohort. According to Mr Connington, Mustafa's age was both a strength – in relation to his “performing well in the classroom” (lines 6-7) and finishing his work “fairly quickly” (lines 31-32) – and a problem, because “he could get away with not working very hard” (line 30) and “called out” in the classroom (line 34).

Although Mr Connington noted that Mustafa had strengths in literacy learning (lines 3-9), he qualified his statement by referring to Mustafa's age – “the rider ... that he was a bit older”(line 6). Reading, however, was described as a weak area of Mustafa's development as a literacy learner (lines 9-11). Mr Connington attributed this to the family's lifestyle, blaming Mustafa's parents and their itinerancy for not having printed materials in the home (lines 14-16, 23-25, 40) and for not being able to carry books in the car (lines 20-23). He also implied that the parents neglected Mustafa's reading by allowing him to watch too much television and play too many computer games (lines 15-16, 26-27), and by not helping him to choose books for reading in English (lines 18-19). Most of these comments were based on supposition, as indicated by his use of “might” and “mightn't” (see lines 14-18), “probably” (line 20), “I imagine” (line 22), “perhaps” (line 24), “maybe” (line 24), “could” (line 25), “I think” (line 26) and “I'd say” (lines 40, 41). As indicated by the underlining in Interview Transcript 2, Mr Connington used these speculations to weave a story about the possible deficits of Mustafa, his family and their itinerant lifestyle.

The reasons Mr Connington put forward to explain Mustafa's lack of success in reading seemed to be founded on assumptions that home book reading was essential for success in reading at school and that Mustafa's parents were deficient in not providing the necessary experiences (lines 16-17) and resources (lines 18-19). In focusing on what Mustafa's parents “mightn't” do, Mr Connington implied that

they were not engaging in the normative activities that would ensure school success for their son. Such views suggested that Mr Connington ascribed to a fairly traditional understanding of literacy learning, even though there is now much evidence that children come from diverse home circumstances and children's strengths often lie in literacies related to electronic technologies (e.g. see Carrington, 2001; Carrington & Luke, 2003; Hill et al., 1998a; Department of Education, Queensland, 2000a).

Mr Connington also emphasised the family's ethnicity. Whilst he spoke in general terms about a lack of books and reading materials in the home, he specified the parents' ethnic differences from other parents, implying not only that they would be only reading books written in Turkish (lines 20-21) but that the "Turkish bible or whatever" might be one of the "limited books at home" (lines 24-25). However, his opinions, which identified the Ata family as different from other "Australian" families, seemed grounded in fairly limited knowledge of the family. As suggested by Tsolidis (2001), such assumptions identify migrant families as "perpetually transient" and as not belonging to "real" Australian communities (p.6). However, perhaps contradictorily, Mr Connington also recognised that Mustafa was "like so many kids" (line 26) in his preference for computer games and television over book reading (lines 26-27).

In terms of Mustafa's progress as a literacy learner, very little information was kept in Harbourton State School's records. During the five months that he was enrolled in 2000, only one report card was issued and that was three weeks after his arrival (see information in Table 28 and Table 29). Although Mr Connington had additional data about Mustafa's progress recorded in his mark book, that information was not entered into the school's office files.⁸⁸ Whilst the one report card indicated that Mustafa's reading was satisfactory, Mr Connington's comments during interviews suggested that he had a number of concerns about Mustafa's reading (Interview Transcript 2, line 11) and its effect on problem-solving aspects of mathematics (lines 41-42).

⁸⁸ As was explained in Chapter 7, teachers generally did not prepare report cards for students who were no longer enrolled at the school. As a result, many of the itinerant students' files did not contain information about academic achievement during their stay in Harbourton.

Table 28. Report card ratings of the Ata, Ozturk and Russell children's efforts or work and study habits during 2000 and 2001

Student	Year & semester	Ratings for <i>effort or work and study habits</i>		
		Performing to a high standard/ consistently high	Satisfactory	Greater effort needed/more development needed
Mustafa Ata	2000 Sem. 1		✓✓✓✓	✓
	Sem. 2	[No report]		
Zafer Ozturk	2001 Sem. 1		✓✓✓✓✓ ✓✓✓✓✓	
	Sem. 2	✓✓✓✓✓ ✓✓✓✓✓		
Ebru Ozturk	2001 Sem. 1	n/a ^a		✓✓
	Sem. 2	✓✓✓✓✓ ✓✓✓✓✓	✓✓	
Kirra Russell	2001 Sem. 1	✓✓✓✓✓ ✓✓✓✓✓		
	Sem. 2	✓✓✓✓✓ ✓✓✓✓✓		
Lexie Russell	2001 Sem. 1	n/a	✓✓	
	Sem. 2	✓✓✓✓✓ ✓✓✓✓✓	✓	
Ethan Russell	2001 Sem. 1	n/a	✓✓✓	✓
	Sem. 2		✓✓✓✓✓ ✓✓✓✓✓	✓
Bree Russell	2001 Sem. 1	✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	
	Sem. 2	✓	✓✓	✓

^a Different report card formats meant that different numbers of ratings were required (hence variations in the number of ticks) and particular categories were unavailable (hence n/a).

Table 29. School literacy results of the Ata, Ozturk and Russell children during 2000 and 2001

Student	Year & semester		Literacy rating ^a		
			High (advanced or very high/high achievement)	Middle range (developing satisfactorily or sound achievement)	Low (emerging or limited/very limited achievement)
Mustafa Ata	2000	Sem. 1	✓✓✓	✓	
		Sem. 2	[No report]		
Zafer Ozturk	2001	Sem. 1		✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓	✓✓
		Sem. 2		✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓	✓✓
Ebru Ozturk	2001	Sem. 1	n/a		✓✓✓✓
		Sem. 2		✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓	✓✓
Kirra Russell	2001	Sem. 1	✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓✓✓	
		Sem. 2	✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓✓✓	
Lexie Russell	2001	Sem. 1	n/a	✓✓✓✓	
		Sem. 2	✓✓✓✓✓ ✓✓✓✓✓	✓	
Ethan Russell	2001	Sem. 1	n/a		✓✓
		Sem. 2		✓✓✓✓✓ ✓✓✓✓✓	✓
Bree Russell^b	2001	Sem. 1	✓✓✓✓✓	✓	✓✓✓
		Sem. 2	✓	✓✓✓✓✓✓✓ ✓✓✓✓✓✓✓	✓✓

^a In 2000, most report cards required teachers to rate students in reading, writing, listening and spelling, hence four ticks. In 2001, teachers had to rate a greater number of literacy components.

^b Literacy results for Year 1 students followed a different format from the other year levels and indicated the frequency (often, sometimes or never) of particular behaviours.

Mustafa Ata: A really good boy

At the beginning of Term 4, Mustafa was moved from Mr Connington's class into the newly formed Year 4/5 composite class taught by Ms O'Sullivan. As the interview excerpt in Interview Transcript 3 demonstrates, Ms O'Sullivan's construction of Mustafa was very different from the one that became apparent in the interview with Mr Connington. Ms O'Sullivan regarded Mustafa as "a really good boy" (line 18) who achieved at the "top of the class" (lines 1-2, 18-19). She rated his oral reading and comprehension as "excellent" (lines 4-5) and praised the extra effort that he put into his schoolwork (lines 9-13).

Not only did Ms O'Sullivan speak highly of Mustafa, but she also commended the other itinerant students who were in her class. In comparing them with "a lot of the others" (lines 15, 39), she set up a binary that contrasted the positive, even superlative, qualities of the itinerant students with what she perceived as the lesser qualities of residentially-stable students. She described the itinerant students as "more mature" (line 22), "very capable" (line 23), "really keen to work" (line 29), "very independent" (lines 37-38), and having the "best manners" (line 28). In contrast, she appeared to regard "a lot of the other students" as deficient – not able to understand instructions, lacking independence (lines 15, 39) and, by implication, less mature, less capable, not as keen to work and not as well-mannered. In her opinion, the residentially-stable children were the ones who "can't" (line 39) and "don't" (lines 15, 16) do the work she required. She thus constructed residentially-stable children as the less desirable "others" (lines 15, 39).

In the data I collected at Harbourton State School, these particular binary constructions were unusual. Whilst most of the teachers who were interviewed identified the residentially-stable students as "normal" and the itinerant students in negative terms, Ms O'Sullivan described the itinerant children positively and implied that the residentially-stable students experienced more difficulties and were less interesting to teach. Her constructions of itinerant children highlighted their experiences of mobility as being "more challenging, more stimulating" (line 34), providing "a more interesting life" (lines 33), and developing attributes that were

Interview Transcript 3. Ms O'Sullivan, 17.11.00

1	Ms O'S:	Mustafa was a delightful boy. I really miss him. He was top
2		of the Grade 4s. His English was very good. A couple of
3		little idiomatic things that he said incorrectly, but his
4		reading, oral reading was excellent, comprehension was
5		excellent. He took a sort of outstanding part in the class to
6		answer questions. Written work, I sent one of his books up
7		to the office so he could get a sticker for it, because it was so
8		beautifully done, for a Bush Christening, when he wrote out
9		the poem. And often he used to say on the weekend, can I
10		do some extra work and is it all right if, instead of writing
11		four stanzas from the poem, can I write the whole lot? And
12		he'd bring it in on Monday with everything done and a
13		special printed heading as well. I didn't see any problems
14		with him at all. I think he understood all the instructions and
15		which a lot of the others don't. They don't understand. And
16		they're not, English is their first language. They don't
17		understand the instructions, the things that they have to do.
18		A really good boy ... Mustafa used to come first quite often
19		in the Grade 4 kids.
20	RH:	Because you have a 4/5 composite, haven't you?
21	Ms O'S:	Yeah. I found that generally with the itinerant children that
22		they are much more mature, socially much more mature as
23		well, very capable, and I'm very sorry to have seen them go.
24		Three, that's three of them, three Turkish children, all
25		excellent.
26	RH:	And they've all gone now?
27	Ms O'S:	Lost them all. They were all the top ones in the class. They
28		weren't the hardest, they had the best manners, they were
29		really keen to work, and they didn't, they all spoke English
30		very well. They didn't have any problems.
31	RH:	My last question was going to be did you have any general
32		comments about itinerant fruit pickers' children and literacy?
33	Ms O'S:	I think they have a more interesting life probably, and it's
34		more challenging, more stimulating and it seems to show
35		with all the ones that I've got. And I think I've lost another
36		boy, an itinerant one, and he was excellent too ... Superb,
37		you just set the work and they get on with it. They're very
38		independent. That's the key word, independent, whereas a lot
39		of the others can't do that.

useful in the classroom. She framed their departure in terms of personal loss – “I really miss him” (line 1) and “I’m very sorry to have seen them go” (line 23). In having “lost them all” (line 27), Ms O’Sullivan implied that the students she enjoyed teaching had departed.

It appeared that Ms O’Sullivan had been able to make a resistant reading of itinerant farm workers’ children, thus disrupting the deficit discourses that seemed so prevalent within the school context. Although it is impossible to know why Ms O’Sullivan constructed itinerant farm workers’ children so differently from other teachers, it did appear that her newness to the town and the school might have been a factor. In having just arrived in Harbourton, following her transfer from another school at the beginning of Term 4, she did not have the same access to histories of itinerant families or to the past experiences of the school’s staff, as did other teachers who had been working at the school for some time.

Ms O’Sullivan appeared to keep very much to herself at the school and I rarely saw her in the staffroom or talking to other teachers. In hindsight, I have wondered whether she deliberately avoided the deficit discourses that pervaded staffroom talk and constructed itinerant students so negatively. Unfortunately, however, I had no further opportunity to interview Ms O’Sullivan, as her stay at Harbourton State School was temporary and she was transferred to a school in another district once student numbers had decreased. This also meant that there were few opportunities for Harbourton teachers to come into contact with the alternative discourses and practices that she used in relation to itinerant students. Whilst Ms O’Sullivan’s resistant reading appeared to work positively for the itinerant children, however, the effects of her negative opinions about residentially-stable children are outside the scope of this research.

In terms of school records about Mustafa’s progress during the time he spent in Ms O’Sullivan’s class, there were none. Mustafa and his family departed Harbourton prior to the end of the school year and no report card was written. Hence no information was entered into the school’s office files. As discussed earlier, this was not unusual when students departed prior to the school’s production of report cards.

Lexie and Ethan Russell and Ebru Ozturk: Doing okay in a wild class

The children from the Ozturk and Russell families enrolled at Harbourton State School during 2001. During that year, the school administration experimented with a “new” approach for coping with the influx of itinerant seasonal workers’ children, forming a Year 3/2 composite class of “new arrivals.” Lexie Russell (Year 3, 8 years old), Ethan Russell (Year 2, 7 years old) and Ebru Ozturk (Year 2, 8 years old) were enrolled in this class, which was formed at the beginning of Term 2, grew to just over 20 students by August, and began to decrease in size as the harvesting season finished. Most of the children in the class were the children of itinerant farm workers, as became evident in my interview with the class teacher, Ms Allen, in the second last week of the school year:

RH: And you said you’re down to about ten [students] now?

Ms A: I’ve got ten, eleven actually. There are only four who are permanent in my class, so that leaves seven still to go.

(Ms Allen – Year 3/2 teacher,
interview transcript, 10.12.01)

In an earlier interview with Ms Allen, an excerpt of which is shown in Interview Transcript 4, she discussed the formation of the “new arrivals” class and expressed her opinion that “it shouldn’t be like this” (lines 10-11). Her description of the class focused on children’s deficits, including social, behavioural and learning problems (lines 13, 16-17). She appeared to link such characteristics to the children’s itinerant lifestyles, arguing that “obviously every year they get a little bit more behind” (line 19) and citing time out of school and a lack of parental supervision as possible reasons for the children’s “wild” behaviours (lines 22-26). Although such views seemed to reflect the stories that were circulating in the wider community about the characteristics of itinerant farm workers and their inadequacy as parents, Ms Allen’s words indicated that she was operating on supposition or hearsay (e.g. “maybe,” line 24; “I don’t know,” line 25).

However, whilst Ms Allen blamed parents for the way the children behaved at school, she seemed to see a solution for this problem in the ability of other children, the “steady, stable children” (lines 33-34), who could “help them and settle them down in a class” (lines 33-34). She implied that the “new arrivals,” almost all of

Interview Transcript 4. Ms Allen, 03.08.01

- 1 RH: I want to ask you some questions about your class. I talked to
2 [name of the deputy principal] last week and he said it was a
3 controversial decision when it was put to the staff.
- 4 Ms A: I think so. I think it was two thoughts. One was that they would
5 share them out, but then they said teachers tend to get rid of the
6 children they don't like, which is just human nature. You tend
7 to say, oh I'll get rid of that one, so that didn't work so well.
8 And also they didn't think it was fair for the children who have
9 stayed from the beginning of the year to be moved again when
10 all these children are new. In my opinion, it shouldn't be like
11 this. They should share them out. I think they should split the
12 classes up and share them out. It's a lot for one teacher to deal
13 with the children, with all their different problems and things
14 they've got.
- 15 RH: What sorts of problems do they have?
- 16 Ms A: Social problems, behavioural problems, lack of foundation
17 problems. They start on foundations in maths and English and
18 literacy. I find a lot of that. And then every time they come,
19 obviously every year they get a little bit more behind. So I
20 mean, some of them are now in Grade 3, so they get to Grade 1,
21 they get to Grade 2 and now they get to Grade 3 and the gap is
22 getting a little bit wider. Social behaviour is very hard. I mean,
23 some of them have been out of schools for a while. Maybe
24 they've got no control at home because there are no parents
25 there. I don't know. But when they come to school, they're
26 wild, very wild. Yeah.
- 27 RH: So you'd obviously recommend that they didn't do this next
28 time?
- 29 Ms A: I can understand. If it was my child who'd been here from the
30 beginning of the year and they moved into a class like this, I'd
31 be upset. But from a teacher's point of view, I don't think it's a
32 good idea. I think they should be shared out. I just also think,
33 you know, that they need the variety. They also need steady,
34 stable children that can help them and settle them down in a
35 class. That makes it easier for the teacher as well, to at least

36 have some system going all year and children who know the
37 system. To suddenly get twenty children from twenty different
38 places, totally new to the whole system – although not totally
39 new, because they would have been here in Grade 1 ...

40 Ms A: Lexie is actually working very well. I have no problems with
41 her at all. She's excellent in just about everything she does.
42 And Ethan is very bright as well. He's just a behavioural
43 problem. He's just got an attitude and don't want to be at
44 school, don't want to learn. When you get through to him, his
45 work is really good. I mean, literacy, no problems at all, either
46 of them. It's genetic as well.

47 RH: Do you think?

48 Ms A: There's got to be something there to start with. And I suppose
49 there's the family background. I've met mum and she seems a
50 very with-it lady. She knows what she's doing.

51 RH: And what about Ebru?

52 Ms A: Ebru is all right. She's not quite in the same league as they are.
53 She struggles with her reading and she struggles, her writing is a
54 bit better. It's her reading and she's actually going for an extra
55 half an hour reading now. She daydreams. I've got to watch
56 her. I've got to push her all the time. One minute she'll be
57 looking out the window, the next minute doing her work, but
58 she's making progress. She's not one of my problem children,
59 that's for sure ... I mean Ebru hasn't had any problems. She's a
60 very social little girl. She's chatty, she's pleasant, she's a nice
61 little girl.

whom were children of itinerant farm workers, were “wild, very wild” (line 26) and therefore different from the steady, stable and settled children who were not itinerant (lines 33-34). This juxtaposition of the two groups set up a binary, whereby the residentially-stable children who “know the system” (lines 36-37) were contrasted with the itinerant children, who were new and, by implication, less steady, less stable, unsettled and had no knowledge of how the classroom “system” operated.

However, later in the interview, when Ms Allen began to talk about specific children in the class (see lines 40-61), it became apparent that not all of the itinerant children were perceived as “wild” or as having social, behavioural or learning problems. Lexie Russell, for example, was “actually working very well,” “excellent in just about everything she does” and causing “no problems” for Ms Allen (lines 40-41). This example demonstrated how easily the perceived characteristics of some children could be used to generalise and stereotype a group of students such as itinerant students. Such slippage probably contributed to the circulation of negative stories and views about itinerant children.

In talking about Ethan Russell and Ebru Ozturk, Ms Allen used both positive and negative descriptions. Ethan, for example, was constructed as “very bright” (line 42) and “a behavioural problem” with “an attitude” (lines 42-43):

very capable, full of energy ... You’ve got to push him. He can be naughty. He doesn’t want to listen. He wants to go and play, but he produces good work. I think he’s got it there [pointing to her head]. He’s obviously got the genes. He has.

(Ms Allen – Year 3/2 teacher,
interview transcript, 10.12.01)

In contrast, Ebru was described as experiencing some difficulties, particularly in relation to reading (lines 53, 54), but was “very social,” “pleasant,” “a nice little girl” (lines 60-61) and “not one of my [Ms Allen’s] problem children” (line 58). Both students, however, were constructed as requiring effort from Ms Allen. She had to “get through to” (line 44) and “push” Ethan (Ms Allen, interview transcript, 10.12.01) and she had to “watch” and “push” Ebru (lines 55-56).

Whilst some of Ms Allen's comments appeared contradictory – for example, Ebru “struggles with her reading” (line 53), but “Ebru hasn't had any problems” (line 59) – she offered some insight into her understandings about perceived relationships between children's personalities, their family backgrounds and their potentials for academic success. For Ethan, she identified his genetic and family background (lines 46, 48-50) as providing the necessary traits to be successful in the classroom, suggesting that he did not achieve to his potential because he “don't want to be at school, don't want to learn” (lines 43-44).

She argued that Ebru, on the other hand, was “not quite in the same league” (line 52) but was “making progress” (line 58), through Ms Allen's efforts in the classroom (lines 55-56) and some additional support as part of intervention linked to the Year 2 Diagnostic Net (lines 54-55). Ms Allen confirmed this progress in an interview approximately four months later, when she explained that, “Ebru did very well. She pulled up a lot. She's above average, just above average” (Ms Allen, interview transcript, 10.12.01).

It appeared that Ms Allen regarded hard work and effort as necessary for both Ethan and Ebru to be successful academically, even though she constructed the children in different ways. Ms Allen's comments in the interview and on the children's report cards suggested that Ethan needed to work hard in order to achieve his potential, because he “can produce good work when he tries” (see Table 27), whilst Ebru needed to work hard because she was a daydreamer (Interview Transcript 4, lines 55-57) and would not achieve without effort.

The Year 2 Diagnostic Net results for Ebru and Ethan, as shown in Table 30, indicated that neither child had been at the level expected of Year 2 students. Ebru had been identified as requiring additional support in the area of reading, whilst Ethan, although not identified as requiring additional support,⁸⁹ had not reached Phase C, the expected level for Year 2 students (Department of Education,

⁸⁹ As part of the Year 2 Diagnostic Net processes, the “identification” of children as requiring additional support was linked to government funding and therefore to accountability measures. Although the expectation was that Year 2 students would be operating in Phase C for reading, some students in Phase B were not identified as requiring additional support.

Table 30. Year 2 Diagnostic Net literacy results for Ebru Ozturk and Ethan Russell

Student	Year	Reading		Writing	
		Phase ^a	Identified for support ^b	Phase	Identified for support
Ebru Ozturk	2001	B	✓	B	
Ethan Russell	2001	B		B	

^a Children in Queensland schools are expected to achieve Phase C in reading and Phase B in writing during Year 2.

^b Government funding for intervention programs is sent to the school for each child who has been identified as requiring additional support.

Queensland, 1996b). As a result of the intervention step of the Year 2 Diagnostic Net, Ebru received half an hour per day of reading with a teacher aide as part of the *Support-a-reader* program (Department of Education, Queensland, 1991b).

By the end of the year, the report cards of both children rated them as “developing satisfactorily” in literacy (see Table 29). Report card comments about Ebru (e.g. “She tries hard in all areas of her work with good results,” see Table 27) and her *efforts* or *work and study habits* ratings, which were mainly in the high category (see Table 28), indicated that, in Ms Allen’s opinion, Ebru had put in the effort necessary to improve her results. In contrast, the comments about Ethan suggested that he was still not working to his potential – “Ethan can produce good work when he tries” (see Table 27).

Ethan’s sister Lexie, who was also in the Year 2/3 composite class, was described by Ms Allen as “excellent in just about everything she does” (see Interview Transcript 4, line 41) and was rated as demonstrating high *effort* or *work and study habits* (see Table 28) and achieving high literacy results (see Table 29). In contrast, Lexie’s results on the Year 3 Test, as shown in Table 31, indicated that she achieved in the middle 50% range for the spelling and reading/viewing aspects, and in the lower 25% range for the writing aspect of the test.

Ms Allen expressed surprise at Lexie’s low results on the Year 3 test, particularly in the writing component: “Her result in the writing component was disappointing. I thought she’d do better than this” (Ms Allen, field notes, 10.12.01). Although an easy explanation may have been to suggest that either the school results or the statewide test results were wrong or misleading, or that the results of statewide tests should be read with caution (e.g. see Queensland School Curriculum Council, 2001e), Ms Allen did not attempt to offer an explanation. However, as will become apparent in Chapter 11, the narratives of the children offered other ways of making sense of such differences.

Table 31. Results on the aspects of literacy components of the Year 5 and Year 3 Tests for Zafer Ozturk and Lexie Russell

Student	Test & year	Results		
		Spelling	Writing	Reading and viewing
Zafer Ozturk	Year 5 Test 2001	Lower 25% range	Middle 50% range	Middle 50% range
Lexie Russell	Year 3 Test 2001	Middle 50% range	Lower 25% range	Middle 50% range

Kirra Russell: We thought she would do better than this

During 2001, Kirra Russell (Ethan and Lexie's older sister) was enrolled in the same Year 6 class as Kalisi Potai (see Chapter 8). Two teachers, Ms Burns and Ms Singleton, shared this class, each with a 0.5 teaching load. Although I interviewed the teachers separately, Ms Singleton often spoke for Ms Burns as well as for herself. As can be seen in Interview Transcript 5, which is an excerpt from an interview with Ms Singleton, many of Ms Singleton's ideas were framed using "we," "us" and "our" (e.g. "we thought," lines 3, 9; "we expected," line 23; "our instincts," lines 16-17). The following discussion is based on that interview transcript and on an unrecorded discussion with Ms Burns.

Both teachers spoke positively about Kirra. Ms Singleton discussed the way that she and Ms Burns had thought initially that Kirra was "bright" (lines 3, 21). Ms Burns confirmed this story, explaining that she had told the deputy principal that Kirra had been placed mistakenly in their class because she was "tidy, bright and intelligent" (Ms Burns, field notes, 23.08.01). In praising Kirra, Ms Burns implied that the majority of students in the class did not possess these qualities. Her concerns about the academic levels of the class were further elaborated in her descriptions of curriculum organisation, where she explained that she operated "virtually four separate programs" because the students were working at "four different year levels" (Ms Burns, field notes, 23.08.01). In commenting on the diversity of the class, the teachers implied that the students ranged from average to low, with few operating at Year 6 level. Editing seemed to be a literacy activity that was of particular concern to both teachers:

But three-quarters of our class are still not editing their work independently. That seems to be the thing that all the children find difficult. You ask them to re-read their work and how they could make it better and they say, "Oh, it's good." That's it. They're not prepared to work at it.

(Ms Singleton – Kirra's Year 5 teacher,
interview transcript, 23.07.01)

The whole class is low on editing. That's pretty obvious if you look at the students' report cards.

(Ms Burns – Kirra's Year 5 teacher,
field notes, 23.08.01)

Interview Transcript 5. Ms Singleton, 23.07.01

1 Ms S: When Kirra arrived, just from her reading and things like that
2 and her listening and just from the little bit of work she did for
3 us, we thought she's bright. But when it got down to the nitty
4 gritty, she is just at the Year 6 level with her language. Her
5 writing needs work, the flow of her stories, the punctuation, the
6 spelling and all that sort of stuff all needed work. I remember
7 when she did a story for me, she doesn't edit her work very well.
8 She needs help to do that, so she needs guidance. Everything is
9 okay, but when she arrived we thought she'd be higher than this.
10 But when we did the testing and sat down and worked with her.
11 You know, I didn't realise Kirra was itinerant. I thought she just
12 came from [name of nearby town].

13 RH: Yes she did come from [name of nearby town] but she's been to
14 more schools than any other child I've spoken to.

15 Ms S: Well, if that's the case, she's functioning quite well. For the
16 amount of schools she's been to, she's coping really well. Our
17 instincts are probably right that she is bright, but because of her
18 travelling so much from school to school, perhaps that's
19 hindered her so that she just functions at a Year 6 level. I'm sure
20 she could probably do better than that. She really did strike Ms
21 Burns and I as being a very bright little girl, but then when we
22 did some work with her, Ms Burns and I both said, oh, she's not
23 as high as we expected. So that would be the reason. So she's
24 obviously coping really well.

It is possible that the class context had influenced the teachers' initial impressions that Kirra was a "bright" student. However, the teachers modified their assessment of Kirra when she did not produce the standard of work that they had expected (lines 4-10). According to Ms Singleton, their revised assessment placed Kirra "just at the Year 6 level with her language" (line 4) with a list of identified difficulties in writing, including "the flow of her stories, the punctuation, the spelling" and editing (lines 4-7). Nevertheless, Kirra remained in the class's top reading group. In Ms Singleton's opinion, "everything is okay," but "we thought she'd be higher than this" (lines 8-9).

The discrepancy between what the teachers had thought and Kirra's results on school-based assessment was evident in Kirra's report cards. Here she was shown as achieving mostly satisfactory ratings in literacy (see Table 29), but was given consistently high ratings for *effort* or *work and study habits* (see Table 28) and positive report card comments (see Table 27).

During the interview, Ms Singleton's "story" changed when she realised that Kirra was an itinerant student (see line 11). Prior to that section of the interview, she had constructed Kirra as a student who appeared to be bright, but needed help and guidance to reach the level of performance that the teachers had expected of her (lines 8-9). However, after my comment, which clearly identified Kirra as "itinerant" (see lines 13-14), Kirra was constructed as a student who was "functioning quite well" (line 15) and "coping really well" (lines 16, 24), even though "her travelling" (lines 17-18) had "hindered her so that she just functions at a Year 6 level" (line 19).

It appeared that the introduction of Kirra's itinerancy had caused a subtle shift in Ms Singleton's position. Her words, "if that's the case" (line 15), implied apparent acceptance of an understandable and predictable causal relationship between itinerancy and low academic performance. Although concluding that "our instincts are probably right that she [Kirra] is bright" (lines 16-17), Ms Singleton appeared to accept that lower achievement was a taken-for-granted and unavoidable outcome of an itinerant lifestyle.

Bree Russell: Really struggling

Ms Wood, the Year 1 teacher who taught Bree, the youngest of the school-aged Russell children, also drew on deficit discourses when talking about the perceived effects of an itinerant lifestyle. In her opinion, the itinerant farm workers' children in her class were "all struggling. All struggle really really big time" (Ms Wood, interview transcript, 10.12.01). When talking specifically about Bree, she linked changing schools and "moving around" to a lack of what she regarded as prerequisite literacy experiences. She explained that,

She's changed schools, from [name of school] to here, so that might have made a difference. She's got the alphabet and things like that but she doesn't use it ... She was young too, so she would only have been a baby when they were moving around so much. So she probably didn't have all that early literacy, the reading and pre-literacy stuff I dare say.

(Ms Wood – Bree's Year 1 teacher,
interview transcript, 10.12.01)

Ms Wood also located some of Bree's problems in individual traits that seemed detrimental to her progress in school literacy lessons:

She's ... loud, easily distracted, doesn't seem to focus on her work, always needs to be directed to what she has to do ... She's going on Reading Recovery next year. She really is struggling with her reading. She just strings letters together and that's it.

(Ms Wood – Bree's Year 1 teacher,
interview transcript, 10.12.01)

In being identified as a candidate for the Reading Recovery program, Bree was identified as amongst the lowest achievers in the Year 1 cohort. This information, however, was not readily recognisable from Bree's report cards. Although her Semester 2 report card suggested that "continued effort" should improve her results (see Table 27), she was identified as mostly demonstrating a high standard in terms of *effort or work and study habits* (see Table 28) and in the middle range for most of the check-listed literacy behaviours that were assessed (see Table 29). However, this may very well have been a situation where parents and teachers may have "read" the report card differently (see Comber, 1997b). Although Bree's results indicated that she was operating in the middle range of three categories, the middle range meant that she was only "sometimes" demonstrating particular literacy

behaviours (as opposed to “often” or “never”).⁹⁰ It appeared that the categories offered by the report card may have helped to mask Ms Wood’s concerns about Bree’s lack of progress in literacy learning.

Zafer Ozturk: Working at the lower end of Year 5

Zafer Ozturk, Ebru’s brother, was enrolled in Year 5 in 2001. Like Sepi Moala, who was in the same class, Zafer was described by his teacher Ms Armstrong as working “at the lower end of Year 5” (Ms Armstrong, interview transcript, 23.07.01). On Zafer’s report card, however, Ms Armstrong rated Zafer as achieving mostly at a satisfactory level, with only spelling and editing shown as being at an “emerging” level of achievement (see Table 29). When I asked about these ratings, Ms Armstrong explained that,

I put “developing satisfactorily” as working within a Year 5 [standard]. So, even if they are at the lower end of Year 5, they’re still, I couldn’t really put them in emerging, because I put emerging as not yet reaching Year 5.

(Ms Armstrong – Zafer’s Year 5 teacher,
interview transcript, 23.07.01)

In some sections of the interview, Ms Armstrong compared Zafer with Sepi. When discussing spelling, she said that,

Zafer is a little bit more hesitant, but he still gets it done. But it’s [spelling], a weaker area definitely and sometimes that influences their reading and their problem-solving and their understanding of words.

(Ms Armstrong – Zafer’s Year 5 teacher,
interview transcript, 23.07.01)

Zafer’s results on the literacy components of the Year 5 Test seemed to support Ms Armstrong’s evaluations. On the Year 5 Test, Zafer was identified as achieving within the middle 50% of Queensland students on the reading/viewing and the writing aspects of the tests, but in the lower 25% for spelling (see Table 31).

In discussing students’ coping strategies in the classroom, Ms Armstrong described Zafer and Sepi as both wanting to do well and being capable of seeking assistance from others. As demonstrated in Interview Transcript 6, an excerpt from an interview I conducted with Ms Armstrong, she considered Zafer as having “all the

⁹⁰ The Year 1 report card format was different from all other report cards issued by the school.

right attitudes” (line 19) and being willing to ask other students for help (lines 4, 21-22), but unlikely to ask for help from her (lines 3-4, 28-29).

Although Ms Armstrong said that Zafer was not at the bottom of the class (line 9), she identified his family’s itinerant lifestyle (lines 11-13) and his Turkish background as possible barriers to learning. Being Turkish, for example, was associated with a language and/or cultural barrier and lower results (lines 9-11, 24-27). Ms Armstrong also identified cultural attitudes towards gender as a possible cause for Zafer’s underachievement, suggesting that her own gender may have been an issue for Zafer as a Turkish male student (lines 26-27). Ms Armstrong provided no further elaboration of this point.

The effects of being itinerant were described in general terms and Ms Armstrong did not specify exactly what it was that “moving around has to influence” (lines 11-12). She did note, however, that moving across education systems was problematic, “because we don’t have the same standard in each state” (lines 12-13) and that being permanently itinerant might facilitate students’ abilities to “fit in” to new classes – “so that every time they come in, they find it so much easier to survive” (lines 23-24). Ms Armstrong’s assumptions about Zafer’s background and its possible negative effects on schooling, however, appeared to be balanced to a certain extent by her assumptions about his parents and the positive effects of their interest in education (lines 15-17). Earlier in the interview, she had commented on how keen Zafer’s mother was for him to “catch up” to a Year 5 level, explaining that, “Mum is pushing Zafer to be there by the end of the year, quite openly” (Ms Armstrong, interview transcript, 23.07.01). As with some of the other teachers who were interviewed, Ms Armstrong indicated that itinerant students sometimes had characteristics that put them ahead of the residentially-stable children. In this case it was that Zafer’s parents “see education as important, which puts them one step above some of the others in the class” (lines 16-17). Ms Anderson seemed to imply that Zafer’s progress in literacy learning was partly the result of factors external to the school and that, under the circumstances, appeared satisfactory.

Interview Transcript 6. Ms Armstrong, 23.07.01

1 Ms A: They're not kids that sit back. Sepi's not a boy that sits back and
2 will let things go on around him. He will come and ask for help.
3 Zafer is the same. He won't come to the teacher [to ask for help].
4 He won't come to me, but he'll ask the kids around him.

5 RH: I certainly noticed Sepi doing that when I was observing. He was
6 checking with the others all the time. He always seemed to be on
7 task.

8 Ms A: And wanting to do well. They're not, well they're at the lower end
9 of the class scale, but they're not the bottom. You'd expect them,
10 second language, talking another language at home, then coming to
11 school, but they're not the bottom ... The moving around has to
12 influence, and the coming across states, has to influence, because
13 we don't have the same standard in each state. They come to
14 school regularly. I don't know if that's the same down south. But
15 up here they rarely have any days at home. So both, I assume that
16 their parents see education as important, which puts them one step
17 above some of the others in the class ... They both want to do well.
18 They both want to please, probably more so Sepi than Zafer. But
19 both want to do well. They have all the right attitudes to help them
20 with learning. They're not sitting saying I've missed the boat. I've
21 never heard them say it's too hard or I can't do it. They're not
22 sitting there waiting for you to come. Maybe that's because they
23 have had so much moving from a young age, so that every time
24 they come in, they find it so much easier to survive. I think Zafer is
25 much more reluctant, probably because of nationality, with their
26 view on female teacher or on females, yeah, having a female
27 teacher. And Zafer doesn't want to be seen as having difficulty.
28 Even when you ask him, are you right, are you having a problem
29 there, he says he's fine. Whereas you'd ask Sepi if he's having a
30 problem, and he looks at you and says yes, can you just, just giving
31 him that prompting. It's hard, it could be just personality, or it
32 could be cultural.

SUMMARY

Because the three families described in this chapter either were new to Harbourton or had worked there intermittently, they did not have the “histories” that the “regulars” appeared to have within the school context. However, their itinerancy appeared to play a significant role in many of the teachers’ explanations of the children’s progress in literacy learning.

In this chapter, most of the teachers’ stories that linked itinerancy to literacy achievement constructed itinerant children and their families as deficient. According to these deficit discourses, moving around, or being itinerant, resulted in children missing time from school and limited the availability of books or other print materials in children’s homes. However, there were also suggestions that itinerant parents did not supervise or control their children adequately and that some of the itinerant children were therefore “wild.” Some teachers also identified problems caused by children missing time at school, even though they generally pointed out that the itinerant children attended school consistently whilst they were in Harbourton.

According to the teachers who drew on deficit discourses, itinerant children had a range of social, behavioural and learning problems which had a bearing on how classrooms operated and on whether children were going to achieve or not. Such stories helped to construct a residentially-stable–itinerant binary which highlighted the problems experienced by itinerant children in relation to their residentially-stable peers. Across the three case study families, the teachers generally regarded the children as achieving quite well considering their circumstances. Despite the stereotypical stories that circulated about itinerant children and the effects of itinerancy on schooling, some teachers talked about particular itinerant children in positive ways. Nevertheless, it became apparent that many teachers regarded low literacy results as predictable consequences of the children’s itinerant lifestyles, and even the children who were described positively were not expected to achieve high levels of academic success.

Factors other than itinerancy also featured in teachers' deficit stories. Some teachers identified ethnicity and associated cultural differences as impacting on students' literacy learning. Although the linguistic diversity of some of the families did receive an occasional mention, this was in relation to home languages other than English. Dialectical differences in the "Englishes" spoken by the children were not mentioned.

One of the characteristics of teachers' deficit narratives was their apparent basis in supposition. On many occasions, teachers' use of tentative language suggested that partial and limited information had been used to evaluate families' supposed actions and the perceived impact of those actions on children's literacy learning. When teachers focused on deficit constructions, they tended to blame the itinerant children and their parents for not engaging in the normative activities that were regarded as necessary for school literacy success. In accepting that low literacy performances were commonsense outcomes for particular children, teachers did not question the efficacy of school processes, curriculum and pedagogy.

In the pool of teachers who were interviewed, however, there was one teacher who stood out from the rest. She constructed itinerant students as well-mannered, challenging and stimulating, rating them above the other students in her class and claiming that the residentially-stable students experienced more difficulties and were less interesting to teach. This teacher appeared to be a resistant reader, constructing itinerant children positively despite the raft of negative constructions that circulated in the school and the community.

Amongst the plethora of negative stories about itinerant farm workers' children, some teachers commented that there were residentially-stable children about whom similar stories could be told. Although this study has not attempted to compare the itinerant children with those who were residentially-stable, the teachers' comments raise interesting questions about their perceptions of teaching in a school that is located in a recognised low socioeconomic area (see Chapter 5) and about how those perceptions impacted on their constructions of itinerant farm workers' children within that particular context.

The next chapter moves to the final case study family. Whilst the last two chapters have explored teachers' narratives about clusters of families, Chapter 10 focuses on an only child of one family who had come from New Zealand. For most of the time that Ryan Neilsen was enrolled, his classroom and playground behaviours were the focus of teachers' attention. By all accounts, Ryan Neilsen was one of the most challenging students enrolled in the school.

CHAPTER 10.

TEACHERS' NARRATIVES: A BOY BEHAVING BADLY – NOT SETTLING IN, NOT SETTLING DOWN, BUT GOOD AT LITERACY

INTRODUCTION

This chapter, the third chapter of teachers' narratives, focuses on Ryan Neilsen, an Anglo student from New Zealand. Unlike the previous two chapters, which focused on groups of families, this chapter tells the story of a single family with one child. Ryan stood out amongst the itinerant farm workers' children in Years 4 and 5, and indeed, amongst most of the children in the school, because of the challenges he posed for school personnel and school processes.

Whilst the majority of itinerant students, including the children from the families discussed in Chapters 8 and 9, merged into the school population with apparent ease, Ryan seemed to alienate some teachers rapidly and in an extreme way. He did not settle immediately into the routines and expectations of the school and, as a result of teachers' attempts to settle him down and to persuade him to follow school rules, he spent a considerable amount of time on detentions and suspensions. Many teachers, therefore, marked him as a problem student who failed to take up the normalised practices that were expected (Davies, 1994; Davies & Hunt, 2000).

Although the previous chapters have shown that ethnicity and cultural and linguistic diversity featured in teachers' discursive constructions of the children as literacy learners, teachers neither discussed Ryan's whiteness nor categorised him as belonging to a particular ethnic or family group. Yet, the privileges that unmarked white ethnicity usually offers (Singh, 2000) did not seem to be available to Ryan and he and his parents were often described in deficit terms. Dominant readings of Ryan suggested that he was a tough masculine subject who was deceitful and untrustworthy, paralleling some of the stories about itinerant farm workers that circulated in the wider community of Harbourton. However, some teachers also

focused on Ryan's parents and their itinerant lifestyle as culpable for Ryan's misbehaviours at school.

As this chapter will demonstrate, teachers struggled to normalise Ryan's behaviours and to settle him in to their expected ways of being a Year 5 student at Harbourton State School. However, amidst beliefs that Ryan was neither interested in schooling nor focused on learning, he continued to surprise teachers with his level of success on literacy tests. Although this chapter probably does not do justice to the complexities and intricacies of teachers' narratives about Ryan, it provides some insights into the shifting and multiple explanations that teachers used in trying to make sense of a boy who seemed intent on behaving badly.

ONE ITINERANT FAMILY

The Neilsen family

Dave and Lisa Neilsen and their son Ryan were New Zealanders who had come to Australia to work as itinerant farm workers. Although Dave and Lisa had worked at a range of jobs in New Zealand, including apple picking and factory work, they had not previously experienced an itinerant lifestyle. Encouraged by Dave's sister, who had been fruit picking in Australia for six years, they arrived in Australia in early 2000 with a three-year plan – to work hard, to get ahead financially, and to return home at the end of 2002 in time for Ryan to start high school.

The Neilsens spent the 2000 and 2001 winter harvesting seasons in Harbourton and, at the end of each season, travelled to southern New South Wales to pick apples. Even though they had arrived in Australia with no previous experience of picking tomatoes or other vegetable crops, their time in Harbourton was a financial success. In each season, they were able to pay approximately \$16,000 off their home mortgage. Ryan, however, had a fairly tumultuous time during his enrolments at Harbourton State School. For Dave and Lisa, this was of great concern and probably influenced their decision to not return to Harbourton in 2003.

Ryan the school student

Ryan was ten years old when he arrived in Australia and enrolled for the first time at Harbourton State School. He was a small child with fine features and looked smaller and younger than his peers. He always looked clean and tidy and, although he wore the regulation uniform shirt – a knit polo-style shirt embroidered with the school's name and logo – he did not wear the basketball-style shorts as recommended by the *School Prospectus* (Harbourton State School, 2001c). Instead, he wore fashionable board or cargo shorts. As dictated by school rules, Ryan always wore a broad-brimmed hat in the playground. In the classroom, however, Ryan's changing hairstyles (sometimes a "number 1" cut or an unusual style with shaved sections), in combination with his non-regulation shorts and the grey metallic beads that he wore around his neck, suggested that he liked to look trendy.

On Ryan's arrival at Harbourton State School in 2000, he was placed in Mr Greene's Year 4 class. He made friends with a group of boys who played rugby league and soon joined the town's junior club. Although Ryan's parents were concerned about league being a contact sport, they believed that it had eased his transition into a new community. As Ryan's dad explained,

That was another thing that helped us here. Straight away, he wanted to go to league. He went down and watched them training one night and the guy said, "Come on in," and he joined up and played league.

(Dave Neilsen, interview transcript, 15.10.00)

When Ryan returned to Harbourton in 2001, he was placed into Mr Connington's Year 5 class and renewed his friendships with his football mates of the previous year.

Ryan the behaviour problem

As shown in Table 32, which lists significant events during Ryan's enrolments at Harbourton State School, 2001 was an eventful year. Within a week of Ryan's enrolment and placement in Mr Connington's class, he was given a one-day in-school suspension for supposedly bullying another student. Less than two weeks later, he was suspended for five days. This was an official school suspension, based

Table 32. Significant events during Ryan Neilsen's period of enrolment at Harbourton State School, 2000-2001

Year	Month & Day	Significant events
2000	May 15	Enrolled in Mr Greene's Year 4 class
	November 14	Departed for New South Wales
2001	May 22	Enrolled in Mr Connington's Year 5 class
	May 31	1 day in-school suspension
	June 7-13	5 day out-of-school suspension
	June 14 – September 21	13 week ^a transition period in Ms Anderson's Year 7 class
	October 8	Full-time return to Mr Connington's Year 5 class
	October 9	3 day in-school suspension (This was to have been a 5 day out-of-school suspension, but Ryan's parents negotiated a change with school personnel.)
	October 15	Returned to Mr Connington's Year 5 class
	December 3	Departed for New South Wales

^a This figure excludes the four weeks of school holidays that occurred between June 14 and September 21.

on Ryan's "misconduct, disobedience, and conduct prejudicial to the good order and management of the school" (*Notification of suspension*, 06.06.01). According to Mr Connington, Ryan had been uncooperative and defiant and had sworn at him.

After the suspension, Ryan was placed in the Year 7 class of Ms Anderson. This was to have been a temporary measure, during which Ryan was expected to participate in problem-solving activities that would prepare him for his return to the Year 5 class. According to Ms Anderson, however, Ryan's "good" behaviour in the Year 7 class provided few opportunities to work on problem-solving strategies within the classroom context. She explained that

He has never displayed any behavioural problems in the classroom ... He's polite. He puts his hand up. He's just lovely. He's well thought of in the classroom ... but this week we've talked about the transition ... We've talked about the skills of, instead of answering back what can you do – stop, think before you say something, and then act. We've talked about putting your hand up when you want to speak, being polite, thank you, excuse me. All those things.

(Ms Anderson – Year 7 teacher,
interview transcript, 23.07.01)

After 13 weeks in the Year 7 class, including a transition period during which Ryan spent part of the day in Year 7 and part in Year 5, he returned full-time to his original class. After less than two days with his year-level peers, he was suspended again. Although this was to have been another official out-of-school suspension, the principal responded to concerns expressed by Ryan's parents and instead invoked an in-school suspension. According to Ryan's dad:

Dave: He told Mr Connington to "get fucked." He said to a couple of boys if they had good behaviour in a couple of classes they could go out to have a reward thing. From what I gather, the whole group hadn't behaved, so he said, "No, you can't." And Ryan got up on his high horse and said, "Well I had" and "I was good." ... Mr Connington said, "You can't do it." So Ryan threw a wobbly and walked out.

RH: Had he been in that class for long?

Dave: No, it was the second day ... And they suspended him and I went and saw the principal and said, "You've given him a holiday. Five days off school and he'll be rapt." ... So they let him go back to the special unit⁹¹ down there. He seems to like working by himself ... When we went down and said suspending's not going to help; he's just going to

⁹¹ The Special Education Unit was located across the street from the school's main campus.

spend that time, with us working, time-off for Ryan, you know, is with somebody else. Who's going to keep on him the way we would? So he gets to play, you know, it's go outside and play football or go and colour-in or something.

(Dave Neilsen, interview transcript, 24.10.01)

Following the in-school suspension, Ryan returned to his Year 5 class and remained there until he and his parents departed for New South Wales in early December.

Prior to Ryan's departure, Mr Connington provided his assessment of the situation:

He still stirs up and pushes the boundaries, but he doesn't stand up and swear at anyone ... So he has patches of good work and he's a capable student and he's manageable in the class at the moment. And he seems to have even improved from trying to be a big hero.

(Mr Connington – Ryan's Year 5 teacher,
interview transcript, 13.11.01)

TEACHERS' NARRATIVES

With misbehaviours and resultant suspensions occupying considerable amounts of school time, most teachers expected Ryan to be an average or below average student. However, this was not born out and apparent discrepancies, between teachers' observations of Ryan in the school context and his performances on external⁹² literacy tests, continued to puzzle teachers for the duration of his enrolment.

In constructing Ryan as a literacy learner, the teachers drew on a range of discourses, including developmental discourses that positioned Ryan as an immature student who might "settle down" as he grew older, and those that suggested that Ryan might "settle in" once he became accustomed to an itinerant lifestyle. Dominant readings, however, drew on Ryan's bodily inscriptions and performances – in particular, what he looked like, where he was, what he was doing, who was with him – and positioned him within masculine discourses that identified him as a badly behaved boy and "tough guy" who was not interested in being a literacy learner.

⁹² I have used the term "external" to refer to tests that were set and marked by persons outside Harbourton State School, but were administered to students within the school context.

However, as time went on and teachers learnt more about Ryan, they struggled to make sense of the contradictory information that became available to them. In the following discussion, I attempt to describe the complexities surrounding teachers' constructions of Ryan and the angst that teachers experienced in trying to make sense of a student who appeared to resist the normalised practices of the school.

Tough guy hiding his capabilities

When Ryan first enrolled at Harbourton State School in 2000, he was assigned to Mr Greene's Year 4 class. From my initial discussions with Mr Greene, I was aware that he regarded Ryan as a "challenging" student who was always "pushing the boundaries" and displaying "unacceptable behaviours" (Field notes, 10.10.00, 10.11.00). However, by the end of the school year, it appeared that Mr Greene had modified his constructions of Ryan, describing him as a capable literacy learner who deliberately hid his abilities in the classroom. Mr Greene's view was based on his perceptions of a discrepancy between Ryan's "classroom demeanour" and results on an externally organised literacy test.

According to Mr Greene, Ryan's classroom behaviours suggested that he was not particularly interested in either reading or writing. He explained:

He didn't give the appearances of being a great lover of reading ... Looking at classroom demeanour, you'd tend to probably rate him down a little. You can pick usually the kids who are right into reading. They'll be the ones who always have a book around etcetera etcetera etcetera.

(Mr Greene – Ryan's Year 4 teacher,
interview transcript, 08.12.00)

[He was] very capable, but tended to work at about three and a half million miles an hour, and tended to approach the writing side of things as do-it-as-quickly-as-you-can and then go and do something else ... Basically he wrote okay. Proof reading skills needed a little bit of work, but you would expect that was a case of a little bit of effort rather than skills, maybe skill is not quite the right word that I wanted. Very good in some ways. He was very good in some ways, in picking out nice terms of phrase and things like that, which thinking back over it, possibly suggests that he read or recalled a bit more than he was letting on. But I think really he was pretty much into that sort of category of the guy who doesn't want some of his skills to be recognised.

(Mr Greene – Ryan's Year 4 teacher,
interview transcript, 08.12.00)

On Ryan's school reports, Mr Greene had indicated that Ryan's progress in the areas of reading, writing, listening and speaking was satisfactory (sound achievement), with a high rating for spelling in Semester 1 and a low rating for handwriting in Semester 2 (see Figure 9 and Figure 10). The report cards also indicated Mr Greene's concerns about Ryan's behaviour, with behavioural comments on both reports and a "Level 2" rating for behaviour on the Semester 1 report (see Figure 9).⁹³

However, Ryan's results on the *Australian Schools English Competition*, organised by the Education Testing Centre at the University of New South Wales, placed him at the 93rd percentile for the Year 4 students from Harbourton State School who entered the competition. This result had caused Mr Greene to rethink his assessment of Ryan's literacy progress and to decide that "he definitely has a fair amount of ability" (Mr Greene, interview transcript, 08.12.00). Although Ryan's good result relative to his peers placed him at the 58th percentile for students in the state of Queensland, Mr Greene did not comment on the apparently low achievement levels of students at Harbourton State School.

Mr Greene seemed concerned that a literacy test, that he considered was "a fairly objective evaluation" of students' abilities (Mr Greene, interview transcript, 08.12.00), rated Ryan differently from the assessment processes and observations that he had used in the classroom. According to Mr Greene,

He was one of the kids who rated highest out of the whole school population, to the extent where he either got a credit or a distinction certificate. I forget which ... Using a fairly, a fairly objective evaluation like that would put him into the top fraction of the school, or the top fraction of his peers, as far as those sorts of decoding and interpretation skills are concerned, which is quite interesting because, as I said, I didn't think he was a particularly keen reader or student of literature.

(Mr Greene – Ryan's Year 4 teacher,
interview transcript, 08.12.00)

⁹³ Appendix E provides an excerpt from Harbourton State School's (2000) *Student behaviour management strategy* and this explains the strategy's levels of behaviour (and misbehaviour).

AREA OF SCHOOLING	WORKING SATISFACTORILY	NEED FOR IMPROVEMENT
Reading	✓	
Writing	✓	
Handwriting		✓
Spelling	✓	
Listening/Speaking	✓	
Comment	<i>Ryan needs to channel his energy into productive directions.</i>	

Figure 10. Excerpt from Ryan Neilsen's report card, Mid-Semester II, 2000

Mr Greene was obviously surprised by Ryan's success. However, he did not appear to question the result of the *Australian Schools English Competition*, apparently regarding it as having a credibility that warranted consideration. Other readings of Ryan's success might have highlighted the possibility that different tests measure different aspects of literacy or even literacies, or that one assessment might measure performance on one particular test at one particular point in time, and that it might not be possible to generalise such a result. Mr Greene, however, seemed to accept the test as a valid measure of Ryan's literacy achievement. The perceived discrepancy between Ryan's results on the external test and school-based assessments, then, required explanation.

Mr Greene's explanation was that Ryan was a student who deliberately downplayed his ability, deceived teachers and manipulated classroom events. Although this explanation was tentative (e.g. the use of "tend to," "maybe" and "probably") and in some ways appeared guarded (e.g. the use of the euphemistic "those people" instead of referring specifically to Ryan), it enabled him to make sense of contradictory evidence about Ryan's abilities in literacy learning. His logic seemed to be based on a view that even the most deceptive of students, who could hide their abilities from teachers, could not trick an external test and, if the external test showed a student as having high abilities, then the student must be "a keen reader." He explained:

You tend to get the expectation that kids will be the good readers if they appear to be avid readers, and that the ones who aren't so keen will be further down the population ... Sometimes those people make a little mistake and they'll get themselves caught out and maybe that happened in this case. But then again, maybe he's an avid closet reader. Probably a little bit difficult to say and it would probably be very difficult to get him to admit to being a keen reader ... I have the feeling that we've got maybe a few kids who decide to hide their abilities a little bit, particularly if they get the impression that by hiding their ability they'll get work that's slightly easier.

(Mr Greene – Ryan's Year 4 teacher,
interview transcript, 08.12.00)

Mr Greene also generalised his thoughts to itinerant students, suggesting that their avoidance of schoolwork contributed to their "image" as academic underachievers:

I may be cynical, but I have a feeling that quite a few of these kids who travel around are seen to underperform or are expected to underperform. And the expectation becomes reflected in practice, which becomes a case of the kids start to spot some advantages in not being seen to be all that brilliant ... You find, looking through, there are always kids who manage to sneak through and play dumb and happily reduce the amount of work they're expected to do. And you would suspect perhaps that itinerant kids, given the expectation on the part of teachers and administrators that this kid is probably going to be at risk, you may find that they're contributing to the image a little themselves as, you know, a sort of defence mechanism.

(Mr Greene – Ryan's Year 4 teacher,
interview transcript, 08.12.00)

Mr Greene's construction of itinerant students as deliberately deceiving teachers seemed reminiscent of the community stories that attributed negative traits and illegal actions to farm workers. Indeed, on two occasions during the interview, Mr Greene drew on a prison metaphor, describing Ryan's departure from Harbourn as an escape. In using this metaphor, he implied that itinerant children could time their departures so as to avoid the school's testing program:

RH: Talking about Ryan, how do you think he's going?

Mr G: Well that's a little bit difficult since he's escaped ...

[Later in the interview, talking about assessment]

We always look at things like the Waddington Reading Age Test⁹⁴ and so on, but of course he managed to escape before we got round to doing the end-of-year one. And being itinerant, he got here after we did the start-of-the-year one, so unfortunately I don't have that sort of hard data on him.

(Mr Greene – Ryan's Year 4 teacher,
interview transcript, 08.12.00)

The use of the escape metaphor suggested, on the one hand, that Ryan was unwilling to be controlled or restrained by the rules of the school, and on the other hand, that even the school was unable to exert sufficient control to regulate his behaviour or to ensure that "hard data" was collected about his level of literacy achievement. Comments such as these, which linked Ryan's perceived negative behaviours – untrustworthiness, deviousness and work-avoidance – to a deliberate attempt to escape, were in turn linked to an itinerant lifestyle.

⁹⁴ See Waddington (2000).

Whilst Mr Greene had pointed out that teachers often had “standard expectations that itinerant kids are going to be below the peer group,” the problem that he attributed to Ryan was not a deficit in terms of his literacy ability. Instead, he identified what he thought were undesirable behavioural characteristics that resulted in Ryan’s underachievement. As reported in other research (e.g. Bakari, 2000; Moriarty & Danaher, 1998; Office for Standards in Education, 1996), the linking of pejorative characteristics to itinerant or transient peoples can be indicative of a perception that itinerancy is in opposition to residential stability and community commitment. In Ryan’s case, his arrival in Harbourn after the beginning of the school year and his departure before the end of the school year were seen as evidence of that opposition, and Ryan’s deficiency was his apparent decision to underachieve and to deceive teachers.

Still the tough guy

In the following year when Ryan returned to Harbourn, he was placed in Mr Connington’s Year 5 class. When Mr Connington and the principal discussed Ryan’s experiences of the previous year, they both drew on a metaphor that was similar to the one used by Mr Greene. Their use of an ‘on the chain’ metaphor suggested that Mr Greene had tried to prevent Ryan’s escape and that Ryan had been metaphorically constrained, either as a punishment or as a way of trying to persuade or coerce him into changing his behaviours:

RH: I know that last year he was often tagging around behind Mr Greene at lunchtime.

Mr C: On the chain, yeah. Well, Greenie told me he was the worst he’s come across and I thought that was a good call.

(Mr Connington – Ryan’s Year 5 teacher,
interview transcript, 13.11.01)

And I mean, last year was a pretty traumatic year for him [Ryan]. He was on the chain for most of the time.

(Principal, interview transcript, 26.10.01)

Teese and Polesel (2003) reported that prison images and their associations with “negative confinement” and “academic prisoners” were popular with high school students, especially boys who were achieving poorly (p.138). It seemed here, however, that it was particular teachers – and, as it happened, they were all male

teachers – who represented a recalcitrant Ryan as prisoner and Mr Greene as gaoler. The prison and on-the-chain metaphors, which constituted Ryan as a student who had to be restrained, constrained and kept constantly under surveillance, implied that his behaviour was so bad that his body had to be kept physically under control. Although there was only an implied link between the metaphor and crime, there did seem to be a parallel with some of the community stories that associated farm workers with crime.

Nevertheless, there were other times when criminal attributes were linked more explicitly to Ryan. On one occasion, for example, Mr Connington described an investigation into Ryan's behaviours that drew on the language of criminal inquiries. As the following interview excerpt indicates, Mr Connington discussed the need to keep accurate records of Ryan's behaviours, because Ryan could not be relied upon to tell the truth. He also discussed the investigatory work that went on, by representing the school administrators and students as detectives and witnesses:

Oh he's [Ryan] sharp ... I write the date, I keep a log in a book, the date, the time, what he said. If I said, "That's it, Ryan," he says, "I did nothing. I did absolutely nothing." ... We got sort of halfway through the day and I said, "You can go up the office," and he sat there and they had to get about three kids up from the class to say exactly what Ryan was doing before Ryan caved in and said, "Yeah, I was being rude. I was calling out." And what got me was the principal and the deputy principal, like a couple of Ds [detectives] in an investigation, working this kid over, and he's holding his ground, and they're calling in witnesses and they're all saying, "Yeah, Ryan was calling out. Ryan was doing this." ... So now every time he does something I write it down. He says, "What are you doing?" I say, "Look. I'm writing it down. Here it is, so we don't have a memory problem."

(Mr Connington – Ryan's Year 5 teacher,
interview transcript, 13.11.10)

Not only had Ryan been under the teacher's surveillance, but other students in the class were also expected to scrutinise and report on his actions. In this way, Ryan was constructed as a student who had deliberately taken up the identity of a school "tough guy," an image that seemed to be associated with the prison and criminal metaphors. In attributing agency to Ryan, the teachers viewed him as consciously making decisions about how he would act, with whom he would be seen, and so on. Ryan's behaviours, therefore, were seen as direct challenges to the authority of teachers and as threats to some members of the school community. Mr Greene and

Mr Connington discussed some of these behaviours in separate interviews. The excerpt from Mr Greene's interview demonstrates how behavioural and academic issues were seen as intertwined:

Mr G: Challenging would be possibly the word to describe when it came to his behaviour and so on.

RH: That was in-class behaviour?

Mr G: In-class and around-the-school-grounds behaviour. He had his couple of mates and tended to go with the tough guys. So fitting in with the tough guy image in the tough guy crowd. Being a keen student of literature and a lover of creative writing and that sort of thing probably wouldn't be quite in character.

(Mr Greene – Ryan's Year 4 teacher,
interview transcript, 08.12.00)

Mr C: Well I'm not a psychologist. I pretend to be sometimes. But I would guess that the factors affecting Ryan would be the fact that he's moved from New Zealand to here, down to New South Wales, back to here, and he has to show that he can cope. I've seen it before, when I was at school. Kids would come in and pick on the biggest kids.

RH: Wouldn't you pick on the small ones?

Mr C: No, you pick on the biggest to show; no point taking on the little pipsqueaks.

(Mr Connington – Ryan's Year 5 teacher,
interview transcript, 13.11.01)

Although the teachers did not directly discuss issues of masculinity or mention how small Ryan was in comparison to most of his classmates, their talk suggested that they saw Ryan as drawing on masculine discourses that foregrounded power and aggression, especially in opposition to teachers, and would give him kudos and notoriety with other students. In the Year 4 and Year 5 classrooms, the teachers had perceived Ryan as a student who had chosen to not accept any form of regulation or authority. In their opinion, he had deliberately rejected the behaviours of the well-behaved student – characteristics that might be seen as more feminine, such as a love of literature and creative writing, being polite or even acquiescent – in favour of the verbal and bodily performances of a "tough" masculine subject.

The focus on Ryan's body – how he conducted his body, its size relative to other students' bodies, and with whom he was seen – was also evident in the descriptions of Ryan's misdemeanours documented by Mr Connington on *Individual student behaviour sheets*. These formed part of the school's official records of a student's

misbehaviours and, as such, represented Mr Connington's official construction of Ryan as a child who misbehaved. As demonstrated by the excerpt presented in Figure 11, Mr Connington appeared to read Ryan's body as the embodiment of unacceptable or inappropriate school behaviours.

Bodily actions such as frog marching, squatting and tripping, along with a range of verbal actions, such as repeating the teacher's words and saying "no," were recorded as evidence of Ryan's disobedience, defiance, and perhaps even mockery of the teacher. In keeping with the purpose of an *Individual student behaviour sheet* – to document unequivocal evidence of a student's "bad" behaviours and to demonstrate that the school's actions have been procedurally correct – this record of Ryan's actions was written in declarative mood,⁹⁵ often omitting the Participant that would usually have been used (e.g. "Ryan" or "he"). Mr Connington's shorthand notes highlighted Ryan's misdoings by presenting his actions (e.g. "frog marched," "squatting," "marched") in Theme positions⁹⁶ and without modality.⁹⁷ In this way, Ryan was constructed as a deliberately naughty student who refused to accept school rules, school expectations and the teacher's authority.

In contrast, teachers' comments on report cards (see Figure 9, Figure 10 and Figure 12) had a different focus, representing Ryan through a mixture of quality and managerial discourses (see Comber, 1997b). These offered euphemistic descriptions of Ryan's misdemeanours, by referring to "his energy" (see Figure 10), "his impulses and energies" (see Figure 9) and the "considerable difficulty" he experienced in "settling into" the school (see Figure 12). In serving a different purpose from the behaviour records, the report cards offered information for Ryan's

⁹⁵ As explained in Chapter 5, a clause written in declarative mood gives information. An examination of mood offers insight into the interpersonal meanings of language (see Butt et al., 2000, pp.86-87 and Fairclough, 1989, pp.125-126).

⁹⁶ The Theme is the first element in a clause. Further information is provided in Chapter 5.

⁹⁷ As Butt et al. (2000) explained, modality allows a speaker or writer to "signal that they are not definite about their messages, that is, they are looking for a position between a definite *yes* and a definite *no*" (p.113). Modality was not used in Mr Connington's comments on the *Individual student behaviour sheet*, thus allowing no room for argument or discussion.

INDIVIDUAL STUDENT BEHAVIOUR SHEET	
NAME: Ryan Neilsen YEAR: 5 SEMESTER: 1	
Date	Behaviour
25.05.01:	1.50 pm. Repeating what the teacher has just said. Warned twice – he continued – asked to go to [another teacher's class] to work and refused to go. Frog marched to [the other class].
28.05.01:	Refused to sit on parade – squatted instead – On being asked to sit properly replied "No." 1.50 pm. Repeatedly disrupting class – sent to [name of another class]. Answered with "No." Marched to [the other class].
30.05.01	10.00 am. Repeated rudeness and disruptions during the day. When asked why he was out of his seat he asked me "Why are you out the front?" 2.30pm. Ryan tripped [student's name] during T-ball. He was asked to sit out and replied "No." I escorted Ryan to a seat on the edge of the oval and during this time Ryan called me a "F**king wanker."
SUMMARY Since commencing school at Harbourton State School on the 22.05.01, Ryan has been sullen, rude and unco-operative in response to nearly every interaction I had had with him. I fear Ryan's behaviour may have unsettled other boys in the class. On giving instructions I have had the reply "whatever" from at least one other class member.	

Figure 11. Excerpt from Ryan Neilsen's *Individual student behaviour sheet*, May 2001

	Achievement				Effort		
	Advanced	Developing satisfactorily	Emerging		Consistently high	Satisfactorily	Greater effort needed
ENGLISH							
Reading							
Reading for meaning		✓					✓
Fluency		✓					✓
Writing							
Composing		✓				✓	
Editing		✓				✓	
Spelling			✓			✓	
Word knowledge		✓				✓	
Handwriting			✓				✓
Listening/speaking							
Listening			✓				✓
Speaking		✓				✓	
Participates in discussions		✓				✓	
BEHAVIOUR LEVEL	SOCIAL GROWTH & WORK HABITS						
Silver Badge	Works without disturbing others						✓
①	Shows respect to others						✓
2	Co-operates with others						✓
3	Completes tasks on time						✓
④	Attempts homework						✓
Attendance – days absent 2	Works independently						✓
General comment:							
Ryan has had considerable difficulty settling into Harbourton State School this term. Ryan has shown ability when he applies himself. With the right attitude I'm sure Ryan will produce good results.							

Figure 12. Excerpt from Ryan Neilsen's report card, Semester I, 2001

parents and suggested that Ryan should “maintain a more orderly management of his impulses and energies” (see Figure 9), “channel his energy into productive directions” (see Figure 10) and develop “the right attitude” (see Figure 12).

However, as Comber (1997b) pointed out, euphemistic language may go unnoticed by parent readers, yet “trigger warning bells” for teachers (p.403). The *Individual student behaviour sheets* and the report cards appeared to be predicated on an assumption that Ryan was able to control and manipulate his behaviours at will. Although the report card comments were positive and suggested that a change in Ryan’s attitude could bring “good results” (see Figure 12), there was no suggestion as to how difficult such a transformation might be to achieve. In constructing Ryan as responsible and accountable for his school behaviours and for his school results, there was no consideration given to the effects of context and little room for the actions of teachers to be interrogated.

Still a real toughie but also a nice kid

The image of Ryan as a tough guy, described by Mr Greene and Mr Connington, seemed to be associated with macho behaviour and violence, not unlike the behaviours of some of Gilbert and Gilbert’s (1998) “bad boys” (p.176). However, even though this seemed to be the dominant construction of Ryan, not all teachers perceived him in that way. Ms Anderson, the teacher of the Year 7 class that Ryan attended temporarily (see Table 32), appeared to construct Ryan as a student who was trying to balance the conflicting identities of being a “good” student with the physicality of hegemonic masculine discourses. Her opinion was that

he’d like to be seen as a good kid, but he’s also rough and tumble and he’s also very sporty and he also likes to have a biff and a bash in the playground a bit, because he’s a boy. He’s a real boy.

(Ms Anderson – Year 7 teacher,
interview transcript, 23.07.01)

Although Ms Anderson did not mention the terms masculinity or masculinities, she discussed her attempts to provide opportunities for Ryan to take up what are often seen as oppositional discourses. As Gilbert and Gilbert explained (1998), the “image of the cool sociable sportsman is constantly set against the picture of the

boy whose interests might be to read a book” (p.63). Ms Anderson explained that she set out to disrupt such images and to show Ryan that supposedly oppositional discourses could go together harmoniously. She did this by sitting him next to a student she described as “a tough rugby league player,” but also “a nice boy” who “gets his work done and gets on well with the class.” She explained:

I’ve got him sitting next to a boy who’s one of my real boys, who doesn’t need to be sat on in class or need to be constantly reminded to get his work done, but he’s a real boy. They want to behave, they want to conform and they want to achieve, but they’re also really good at sport and they’re quite popular. So Ryan sees that I can be well-behaved, I can be well-mannered, I can get on with my work, but I can also get out in the playground and play sport, make it to North Queensland [competition] like this boy’s done. I can still be a real toughie but I can still be a nice kid. He’s starry-eyed about this one because he’s made [the] touch football [team] and I think he may have even made [the] rugby league [team]. Where else would I put him but next to a rugby league player? So he can see that he’s a tough rugby league player but he’s also a nice boy, gets his work done and gets on well with the class.

(Ms Anderson – Year 7 teacher,
interview transcript, 23.07.01)

To Ms Anderson, “real boys,” those who were sporty, tough and popular with their peers, could also be good at their schoolwork and well-behaved in class. By describing Ryan’s “rough and tumble” characteristics as a natural part of being a boy, she was able to see her role as one of opening up opportunities for Ryan to become a “good student” whilst allowing him to retain his “real boy” attributes.

Mr Connington’s readings of Ryan had been different. From the moment Ryan had walked into the Year 5 class, Mr Connington had constructed him as a troublemaker, reading his physical appearance as a sign of the bad behaviours to come. Mr Connington described that event:

And the thing about Ryan, he had trouble written across his forehead when he walked in the door. He had this look in his eyes and as soon as he came to the door, all these guys in here went, “Ooooooh Ryaaan.” You know, they knew what was going to happen.

(Mr Connington – Ryan’s Year 5 teacher,
interview transcript, 13.11.01)

Yet, Mr Connington’s apparent attempts to coerce Ryan into accepting the teacher’s authority – and to take up what Ryan may have perceived as a more feminine and

less powerful position in the classroom – may have been one of the catalysts for Ryan's ongoing attempts to push the boundaries and to assert his independence. In the Year 5 classroom, the options for Ryan appeared limited. From Mr Connington, there seemed to be the expectation that Ryan would either stop being the "tough guy" and become the compliant "good" student, or would persist with his "tough guy" image and therefore be continually reprimanded. To Ryan, the first option may very well have seemed like a request "to 'do boy' in non-hegemonic ways," a position which Renold (2004) argued often "involves inhabiting a marginalized and often painful position within a system of gender relations that carries a host of derogatory labels for any boy who dares to deviate from a normative masculinity" (p.248). The second option, then, may have seemed the preferable one for Ryan, despite the difficulty of always being in trouble with the teacher. It was perhaps not surprising that Mr Connington had predicted that Ryan would choose to continue being the "tough guy":

But I would say the next few days, next week, he'll do something. He'll defy me in the class. That's where he's at now. He's just very, you know, and he says "whatever" and he's not prepared to follow instructions so next week he'll probably defy me. I'll say, "Ryan, here's the program, here are the choices." He's going to do something.

(Mr Connington – Ryan's Year 5 teacher,
interview transcript, 25.05.01)

In contrast, Ms Anderson's construction of Ryan as having multiple subjectivities offered an option beyond the oppositional "choices" that Mr Connington had presented. Ms Anderson wanted Ryan to be able to see that he did not have to choose between mutually exclusive positions, but that he could be a "real boy" and "real toughie" in the playground, on the sporting field and in out-of-lesson times, yet be "polite," "lovely" and "well thought of" in the classroom (Ms Anderson, interview transcript, 23.07.01). Although Ms Anderson's plan seemed to work, she did not claim that it was an easy solution and recognised that working with Ryan was fraught with difficulties. For example, she explained:

There's no way I would get into a confrontation with Ryan, because I would come off second best. You just know, you know with kids like that.

(Ms Anderson, interview transcript, 23.07.01)

She also said that the classroom context, with her Year 7 students acting as role models, made a difference. She said that the Year 7 students provided

a calming influence. It doesn't matter if they [Ryan and another student who was temporarily in her class] throw a woop, the Year 7s are just going to ignore the childish behaviour. They just seem to provide really good role models. They ignore anything silly, so the kids learn that you can ignore bad behaviour. You don't have to react to bad behaviour.

(Ms Anderson – Year 7 teacher,
interview transcript, 23.07.01)

What seemed to particularly worry Ms Anderson, however, was that her apparent success with Ryan was likely to complicate her professional relationships with Mr Connington, the principal and the deputy principal (Field notes, 03.08.01, 24.08.01). I suspected that she had worked hard to downplay comparisons between Ryan's behaviours in the Year 5 class and in her Year 7 class, in an attempt to avoid the situation being perceived as a good-versus-bad-teacher binary. Nevertheless, in our discussions, there were times when she implied that Mr Connington and the administration had not dealt with Ryan in the way that she would have done, but she stopped short of directly criticising their actions or of making what may have been construed as unprofessional comments about her colleagues. She did report, though, that she had told Mr Connington and the deputy principal that, "You have to like him. He can tell that you don't", because "it's the non-verbals. Kids pick up on that" (Field notes, 03.08.01, 24.08.01).

Not surprisingly, the differences between Ryan's behaviour in the two classes were noticed. As part of his monitoring of Ryan, the deputy principal observed the Year 7 class and was impressed by Ryan's behaviour, work habits and interactions. He described what he had observed:

I did observe him a couple of times with Ms Anderson and he seemed not only to be behaving in class, which is one thing, but he also seemed to be working. I went to a reading lesson when they were doing a play and he was actually working really well ... He was interacting almost as if he was at their level.

(Deputy principal, interview transcript, 24.07.01)

Mr Connington was also aware of how different Ryan was in the Year 7 class and, on one occasion, rationalised the difference in terms of Ryan not liking him. He commented that, "He obviously doesn't like me. He's happy in Ms Anderson's class" (Field notes, 14.09.01). Although some of Mr Connington's comments had suggested underlying assumptions about the essentialism of Ryan's attributes, particularly his "unco-operative and difficult" personality (Field notes, 20.07.01), he drew on a range of discourses, including developmental and gender discourses, when speculating on the possibilities for Ryan's predicted return to Harbourton in 2002:

RH: So what's in it for Ryan next year?

Mr C: Well, on the positives, he might be more mature. He might be more used to the cycle and so he might settle in more quickly. And he might have a female teacher.

RH: Mmm. You and Mr Greene, both males. Do you think things would be different for a female teacher?

Mr C: Oh yeah, he did good work for Ms Anderson.

(Mr Connington – Ryan's Year 5 teacher,
interview transcript, 13.11.01)

An ongoing puzzle for school personnel

Ryan remained a source of puzzlement for school personnel. In general, they had not been able to isolate any one factor as the cause of Ryan's misbehaviours and the failure of conventional behaviour management strategies to normalise Ryan's behaviour had been a major complication. Despite the success of Ms Anderson's strategy, which promoted the co-existence of a range of acceptable behaviours, there did not seem to be any discussion of how to apply that strategy to other classroom contexts. Indeed, Ms Anderson had attempted to downplay her success and, moreover, I suspected that the principal and the deputy principal had been careful to support Mr Connington and to not let the story become one that blamed the teacher, or the school, for ineffective management of Ryan.

Information from the school that Ryan had attended in New South Wales had supported the view that "the problem" was located in Ryan, as he had demonstrated "bad" behaviours in more than one context. The deputy principal and Mr Connington both discussed this information:

I rang the teacher there and he was someone that realised that the only way to win Ryan over was to con him along, rather than put the finger down and you behave or else. He tried to give him jobs around the classroom, praised him up when he did well at sport, getting him on side. He said the first three weeks was a real nightmare, but by the fourth week he started to have a win with him. Because Ryan could be such a disruption to his class, he decided to have him as a good mate and won him over.

(Deputy principal, interview transcript, 24.07.01)

The deputy principal rang his [Ryan's] previous school and that was the pattern that he had down there, verbal abuse and defiance and stuff for about a month and then he settled down a bit.

(Mr Connington – Ryan's Year 5 teacher,

This information helped to validate the construction of Ryan as a disruptive, disobedient, difficult and disrespectful student, as well as endorse the school's response to his misbehaviours. Legitimised by the school's behaviour management policy, Ryan's removal from his peers and from the school – through his suspensions and his relocation to the Year 7 class – was a strategy of persuasion, even coercion, which aimed to modify Ryan's behaviours so he would conform to school expectations.

However, as Meyenn and Parker (2001) pointed out in their research about school perspectives on boys and discipline, approaches that focus on individuals ensure that “questions of discipline, school culture and classroom organization remain essentially unproblematized” (p.174). Indeed, the focus on Ryan as the perpetrator of a range of misdemeanours may have deflected teachers' attention away from other explanations. For example, almost all of the incidents that had been documented in Ryan's file had originated in Ryan's social interactions with others, mostly with teachers but sometimes with students. However, a view of Ryan as a troublemaker may have served as a narrow lens that ignored the contextual factors that may have been involved.

Ms Anderson, though, did consider contextual factors. In viewing the situation with a wider lens, she moved away from a search for essentialised personal attributes and instead considered how Ryan might take up different subjectivities in different contexts. She also thought about the way that Ryan's return to Harbourton State School at the beginning of the harvesting season might have been implicated in the events that had occurred. She suggested:

It's hard coming in, when you've been away. And when you come back, you've got to make your mark very quickly. You don't just slot in. It just doesn't happen. Maybe you want to be noticed.

(Ms Anderson – Year 7 teacher,
interview transcript, 23.07.01)

Amongst the teachers involved in Ryan's case, there was general agreement that Ryan was happy and trouble-free in Ms Anderson's class. Indeed, in an interview approximately six weeks after Ryan's placement in the Year 7 class, the deputy principal indicated that Ryan would probably have been happy to remain in that class:

He knows that we've got to a point where he's ready for a change. He knows one is imminent. We have to find the best way of moving him. And I told him that we won't be moving you, but I found out on Friday that he misinterpreted. I said, "We won't move you until we've spoken to mum or dad." His interpretation I found out was that unless mum and dad come and see me, then he won't be moved. A little bit of an inverted [unclear]. What I meant was that we wouldn't actually be moving him until we talk to mum and dad, but he had it worked out the other way – that unless mum and dad came to see me, he wouldn't get moved.

(Deputy principal, interview transcript, 24.07.01)

The deputy principal made it clear that a range of options was under consideration for Ryan's return to a Year 5 class, with a number of factors to be taken into account, including the behaviour of other children and the size of class enrolments. He explained:

Do we put him with Ms Armstrong? No, we can't do that. Mr Connington is well placed to have him back in the class and there might be some people who say he should go back with Mr Connington. And I think Ms West has her share of scallywags. And another thought was to put him with Mr Bennett ... but it's impossible really, because he's got a 4/5 composite with 26 [children] already. To put 27 would just not be fair. So it's not a simple decision.

(Deputy principal, interview transcript, 24.07.01)

Deciding what to do with Ryan did indeed seem to take time, as Ryan remained in the Year 7 class for a further nine weeks before eventually returning to Mr Connington's class.

Another puzzle for school personnel was related to Ryan's abilities as a student and it was this issue that seemed to draw together many of the discourses that have

already been discussed. Mr Connington, who used to talk with Mr Greene about Ryan and was probably familiar with Mr Greene's construction of Ryan as a tough guy hiding his capabilities, indicated in several of our discussions and interviews that Ryan was capable of better work than he generally produced. In an interview only one month after Ryan's arrival, Mr Connington said that, "Anything he did was really half-hearted and he didn't demonstrate his ability." (Mr Connington, interview transcript, 11.06.01). At that stage, Mr Connington claimed that he had seen only "one good piece of writing ... on rugby league, his rugby league game" (Mr Connington, interview transcript, 11.06.01).

Ms Anderson agreed that Ryan was a "very capable student," but she noted that his classroom demeanour and the presentation of his work sometimes detracted from the standard of the work he produced:

I think he's a very capable student. I think that there are gaps, but I also think he can be quite good at his work in the classroom. He gets his work done. He can be quite slow with his work, you know, easily distracted and not on task, but the standard of his work isn't too bad ... He's not neat by any means.

(Ms Anderson, interview transcript, 23.07.01)

On Ryan's school report cards shown in Figure 12 and Figure 13, however, Mr Connington indicated that Ryan's abilities were generally middle-of-the-range, with Ryan rated in the middle category (either a "sound achievement" or "developing satisfactorily") for most aspects of literacy learning. The exceptions included low ratings for spelling, handwriting and listening in Semester 1 (see Figure 12) and a high rating for composing in Semester 2 (see Figure 13).⁹⁸ Although one comment indicated that Ryan "has shown ability when he applies himself. With the right attitude I'm sure Ryan will produce good results" (see Figure 12), this was not linked to specific areas of the curriculum.

⁹⁸ The "advanced" rating for composing that appeared on Ryan's end of Semester II report card for 2001 (see Figure 13) was awarded after the results of the Year 5 Test had been released to schools.

	Achievement				Effort		
	Advanced	Developing satisfactorily	Emerging		Consistently high	Satisfactorily	Greater effort needed
ENGLISH							
Reading							
Reading for meaning		✓					✓
Fluency		✓					✓
Writing							
Composing	✓					✓	
Editing		✓				✓	
Spelling		✓				✓	
Word knowledge		✓				✓	
Handwriting		✓				✓	
Listening/speaking							
Listening		✓				✓	
Speaking		✓				✓	
Participates in discussions		✓				✓	
BEHAVIOUR LEVEL	SOCIAL GROWTH & WORK HABITS						
Silver Badge	Works without disturbing others						✓
①	Shows respect to others						✓
2	Co-operates with others						✓
3	Completes tasks on time					✓	
④	Attempts homework						✓
Attendance – days absent 9	Works independently					✓	
General comment:							

Figure 13. Excerpt from Ryan Neilsen's report card, end of Semester II, 2001

The arrival of the Year 5 Test results at the school, however, caused Mr Connington and the school administration to rethink their assessments of Ryan's abilities. In the writing component of the Aspects of Literacy Test, Ryan and another student shared the highest result of the students in Harbourton State School's Year 5 cohort, scoring an E on an A-G scale.⁹⁹ That result placed him amongst the highest achievers within the top 25 per cent of Year 5 students in Queensland.¹⁰⁰ On the reading/viewing components of the test, Ryan scored in the top 13% of his school cohort and in the top 25% of the state. His spelling result, however, was not as good – in the middle of the school cohort and in the middle 50% range for the state. Thus, Ryan, who had been separated from his Year 5 class and to some extent from the Year 5 curriculum¹⁰¹ for several periods of time – six days during in-school suspensions, three days during an official suspension and a 13 week transition period in the Year 7 classroom – had achieved well in comparison to his peers.

Mr Connington retrospectively offered some details about Ryan's efforts in the writing section of the Year 5 Test:

Mr C: Yeah and he wrote well for that [the Year 5 Test]. It was a description, a descriptive piece of writing which I told him, "Don't do it on a gameboy," because I thought it would be very hard to describe a gameboy.

RH: Did they specify what they had to describe?

Mr C: No, just open, a description, like a pushbike or a dog or a surfboard or a house.¹⁰²

RH: And he did a good job even though you thought it was a hard thing to do?

Mr C: Yeah, that's right. They said, "Can we do a gameboy?" And I said, "Well, what could you say about a gameboy? That wouldn't have

⁹⁹ The same A-G scale was used to rate students' writing from the Years 3, 5 and 7 Tests.

¹⁰⁰ The Queensland School Curriculum Council (2001g) reported results of the Years 3, 5 and 7 Tests to schools and to parents. The report for schools provided the individual results of the students in the school cohort on three aspects of literacy (reading/viewing, writing, and spelling) and indicated where students were located within the top 25%, the middle 50% and the lower 25% of the state cohort.

¹⁰¹ Whilst in the Year 7 class, Ryan worked on materials prepared by Mr Connington and Year 7 work modified by Ms Anderson.

¹⁰² In 2001, the writing task on the Years 3, 5 and 7 Tests required students to "Write a description about something that you like very much." Students' writing was marked using criteria relating to contextual factors (generic structure, subject matter, audience), textual features (cohesion, grammar, vocabulary, punctuation) and spelling (Queensland School Curriculum Council, 2001e, p.31).

much scope,” or I didn’t think so. But Ryan managed to talk about the games and how it did this and that.

(Mr Connington – Ryan’s Year 5 teacher,
interview transcript, 13.11.01)

Interestingly enough, in a later interview, Mr Connington said, “I had another look at it [the copy of Ryan’s writing for the Year 5 Test]¹⁰³ and I didn’t think it was that good” (Mr Connington, interview transcript, 11.12.01).

It was during an interview with the principal of Harbourton State School that I became particularly aware of the extent to which Ryan had puzzled, and was continuing to puzzle, school personnel. Interview Transcript 7 is an excerpt from that interview. As demonstrated in the transcript, the principal reflected on Ryan’s enrolment at the school and reviewed some of the explanations that had been considered in trying to make sense of his behaviour and his literacy results. The principal began by justifying and evaluating the school’s actions (lines 2-11), then went on to discuss some of the possible explanations of Ryan’s behaviour, before examining a potential course of action for the following year (line 45 onwards). These comments indicated the delicate balance that seemed to exist between academic and behavioural considerations for Ryan, as well as the shifting understandings of school personnel.

In discussing the perceived reasons for Ryan’s misbehaviours, the principal described Ryan using noun groups that represented him as an intelligent student – “a very intelligent boy,” “that clever,” “a very bright boy, really incredibly bright,” with the adverbs “very,” “that,” “really” and “incredibly” providing emphasis (lines 19, 23, 44). Although intelligence is usually regarded as a positive attribute for students, the principal constructed Ryan as a student who was misusing his intelligence to counter school rules. In the principal’s opinion, Ryan was exercising his intelligence to manipulate people and events – “he stirred up people just to get a

¹⁰³ The Year 5 teachers at Harbourton State School photocopied the writing that their students produced during the Year 5 Test, “just as a reference” for the teachers (Mr Connington, interview transcript, 13.11.01).

Interview Transcript 7. Principal, 26.10.01

1 RH: Can we talk about Ryan? ...

2 P: Academically I don't think he's suffered. In fact he was probably
3 fairly productive in Ms Anderson's class. Looking back on it, the
4 strategy was to 1. get Ryan to realise consequences for actions or
5 be responsible for his own actions and 2. to probably give respite
6 to some of the other kids who he thought he was leading. Looking
7 back on it, making him go to Ms Anderson's room as a
8 consequence probably was not a good one, because he enjoyed it
9 so much, then went back into Mr Connington's room and did some
10 things to be bad and get back to Ms Anderson's, till it was
11 explained that he'd go to Mr Greene's room. Talking to Ryan, he
12 really had a personality clash with Mr Connington. A couple of
13 solutions were to move him from the classroom to another class.
14 Not feasible. They all have 30 kids. Put him in a Year 6 or a Year
15 4. They all had 30 kids. Swap him with another kid, a Year 5.
16 Not feasible because it wasn't fair on the other kid to be uprooted
17 and moved. And so, yeah, he went back into Mr Connington's
18 class. Speaking to him, he told me and I'm honestly now starting
19 to believe it, Ryan is a very intelligent boy who will say exactly
20 what you want him to say and he can manipulate very very well.
21 He told me that he didn't like Harbourn and that he would be
22 glad to go back to where they're going to, and that, yeah, he stirred
23 up people just to get a reaction. He was that clever that we got
24 him in one day. He had played up for Mr Connington and, part of
25 the problem was Mr Connington's inexperience too, not being able
26 to handle the situation. Because Ryan was very good at what he
27 did. Ryan would be asked a question and he'd answer it exactly,
28 correctly. And if he was caught out on something he was able to
29 turn it. Like, "Oh, I thought you said IN my desk," instead of ON.
30 Very good at that sort of behaviour. We got to the stage where the
31 questions were so explicit. "Ryan, where was the slingshot when
32 Mr Connington stood next to your desk and asked you for it." "It
33 was in my hand." "Thank you." You know? And all that time, I
34 had it in my desk, I wasn't playing with it, and it had to go down
35 to those sorts of things. So I think the personality clash with Mr
36 Connington was the whole problem. But Ryan had to learn, I
37 mean we believe that we had to teach Ryan that to be naughty to
38 get out of that situation was not quite, and we did offer the other
39 thing but he wouldn't accept it – behave yourself and so on. We
40 were worried that Mr Connington might have been doing things
41 that might have inflamed the situation without realising it, but

42 then when Ryan was doing it to other teachers, it wasn't any one
43 particular button. It was really just defiant of the rule, defiant of
44 the authority. As I say, a very bright boy, really incredibly bright.
45 Maybe we need to look, if he was a little bit older – where we've
46 got productive pedagogies in place, we would have been able to
47 cater for him. Perhaps it will go to Grade 5 but things like Mr
48 [teachers' name]'s adopt-a-beach and pick up the rubbish and
49 inventing rubbish-picking-up machines, and the electives this term
50 for kids who have been behaving, mainly with choices, but you
51 know, for the kids who might be good at art or sailing or computer
52 studies, there's an outlet for them to achieve. Sort of like the
53 multi-intelligences, that sort of pedagogy.

54 RH: Presumably Ryan is going to go away and come back next year, I
55 suspect. His parents had a three-year plan, so there'd be a third
56 year.

57 P: Yeah. I don't know. Hopefully he'll be referred through to the
58 special needs committee and at present we're looking at an
59 identification process with [name supplied – a district consultant]
60 and looking at ways of helping teachers identify, not labelling, but
61 identify kids who have gifted and talented, are gifted and talented
62 and organising the sort of things that they can do. Because I think,
63 you know, it could have been Mr Connington's curriculum. It
64 didn't suit Ryan's level, but then again I think Ryan also used it as
65 an excuse and too he was a leader. I mean he had, he does tend to
66 lead people or to make sure his pecking order was at the top, so
67 the bravery was with Mr Connington to follow the pecking order.
68 That group of kids, probably the wrong spot to put him. They had
69 30, 31, those. Ms West still has 31 now. Mr Connington's got the
70 lowest. Ms Armstrong's got 30 and then Mr Bennett's got about
71 26 in the composite ...
72 Maybe the only thing we've got in place will be from experience,
73 rather than probably from good data, but from experience we'll
74 have to have a look at a place where we can put him ...
75 You know, we were mystified for a long time why he was doing it.
76 We still are. I don't think we'll ever fathom. But knowing what
77 we've done this year, probably looking in retrospect, which is
78 really easy, it was wrong to put him in Ms Anderson's room,
79 because he loved it so much. Academically it was fine, but
80 socially he still has not learnt control.

reaction,” “he was able to turn it,” and “will say exactly what you want him to say” (lines 22-23, 28-29, 19-20) – and to demonstrate his contempt of school rules and authority – “really just defiant of the rule, defiant of the authority” (lines 43-44).

The principal represented Ryan as a bright, clever and agentic subject who was able to manipulate and provoke people. However, although suggesting that the possible causes for Ryan’s behaviours were many – including a personality clash with Mr Connington (line 12), Mr Connington’s inexperience (lines 24-26, 40-41), pedagogical issues (lines 45-47) and inappropriate curriculum (line 63) – he discounted each with a “but” statement (lines 36, 41-43, 64-65), drawing attention back to Ryan’s attributes and behaviours, in particular his intelligence. In constituting Ryan as a bad student, who was wilful, naughty and did not accept responsibility for his actions, the principal concluded that the problem was Ryan’s use of his intelligence to disrupt school processes.

The principal explained that he was only beginning to agree with Mr Connington’s assessment of Ryan as “a very intelligent boy” (lines 18-19). Although he did not specifically mention other sources of evidence, the Year 5 Test results had just arrived in the school and he had probably heard Mr Greene’s comments about Ryan’s achievement in the *Australian Schools English Competition*. The assessment of Ryan as a gifted and talented student (lines 57-62), then, seemed to represent another way of understanding Ryan’s extreme behaviours. It was as though the failure of school behaviour management processes to normalise Ryan’s behaviours had come to suggest that Ryan was neither behaviourally nor academically “normal.”

Indeed, as the principal explained, Ryan’s behaviours had perplexed and disturbed school personnel for a very long time (see lines 75-76). As Interview Transcript 7 demonstrates, the principal’s words seemed to suggest that the school had a moral responsibility to ensure that Ryan’s behaviour was appropriate within the school context, whilst also giving a sense of his despair that school processes had not been effective. However, whilst the principal acknowledged the contextual constraints on school actions, including class sizes (e.g. lines 13-15, 68-71) and responsibility for all students (line 16), he did not seem to take contextual constraints into

consideration in relation to Ryan's actions (lines 4-5, 26-27, 75). In considering and discounting a range of reasons for Ryan's misbehaviours, the principal seemed to return to the beliefs that the problem was located in Ryan (lines 75-76) and that bad behaviour represented deliberate choices (lines 4-5, 20, 28-29, 64-65, 75) in the face of school-preferred choices (e.g. lines 38-39).

Ryan's enjoyment of his time in Ms Anderson's class (lines 7-9, 78-79) appeared to provide further support for the idea that Ryan was misusing his intelligence. Just as Mr Greene's construction of Ryan as manipulative and deceptive had focused on Ryan hiding his academic abilities, the principal identified some of Ryan's actions as attempting to subvert school behaviour management strategies. In the principal's opinion, there had been times when Ryan had deliberately misbehaved, as he knew that he would be returned to Ms Anderson's class (lines 9-10, 37-38). A "naughty" student manipulating events because he enjoyed the "punishment" (lines 37, 9-10) was certainly not the outcome that school personnel had expected or wanted.

In trying to make sense of Ryan's ongoing disruption of school processes, school personnel appeared to struggle with the intersection of academic and behavioural issues. What were they to do with a student who would not behave in the ways that they expected, was ready to break school rules in order to invoke the consequences of doing so, and yet was able to demonstrate that he could still achieve average results (as per his report cards) and even outstanding results (on the Year 5 Test)? The principal's suggestion that the next step would be to identify, but not label (line 60) Ryan as gifted and talented, seemed to be almost a last ditch effort to find a way of explaining Ryan's behaviours and academic abilities.

The principal seemed to recognise that the identification of Ryan as a gifted and talented student would require modifications to the school's learning-teaching processes, albeit through a vague reference to "organising the sort of things" that would be suitable (line 62). Although he had considered inappropriate curriculum earlier in the interview (lines 63-64), he had stressed Ryan's use of the situation for his own purposes (line 65). It is noteworthy that an interrogation of school processes was only going to become a necessity once it was officially established

that Ryan was “different” from “normal” students and it was apparent that “schooling as usual” was not going to work (see Alloway & Gilbert, 1998, p.254).

The opening up of school processes to examination and critique was a positive move. Nevertheless, time was running out for Ryan. With the end of the harvesting season imminent, he and his parents were about to relocate to a southern state. There was little the principal could do but focus on strategies for Ryan’s return in the following year.

Blaming Ryan’s parents and the family’s lifestyle

Another explanation that some teachers offered for Ryan’s behaviours and perceived disinterest in school literacy learning was related to his parents, their choice of work, and their itinerant lifestyle. In an interview conducted only three days after Ryan’s re-enrolment at Harbourton State School in 2001, Mr Connington discussed the lifestyle of farm workers and how he thought that such a lifestyle might have affected Ryan, and in turn, was affecting what was happening within his classroom. Interview Transcript 8 presents an excerpt from that interview.

In the interview, Mr Connington highlighted what he believed were significant characteristics of farm workers’ lives, including the physical nature of their work, long workdays and the need for a beer at the end of the day. Such features reflected the types of stories that circulated in the wider community (see Chapter 6). Mr Connington’s assumptions about the physically exhausting nature of farm work allowed him to construct Ryan’s parents as busy and tired farm workers (lines 10-11, 17-20) who would have to look after the needs of their own bodies (lines 12, 17-19) and thus would have little time (lines 13, 7-8) to spend with their son or to talk with him about school (lines 8-9, 16-20). In Mr Connington’s opinion, the Neilsen’s lifestyle would negatively affect Dave and Lisa’s ability to “parent” Ryan. In taking a deficit view, Mr Connington described Dave in terms of the things he would not have time to do, emphasising that “He’s not going to be talking to Ryan, not shepherding Ryan, not guiding Ryan” (lines 19-20).

Interview Transcript 8. Mr Connington, 25.05.01

1 They know he's got problems too. They said, "How has he been so far?
2 Has he been in trouble yet?" They were expecting something and I said
3 the same things. I said, "Well Dave," his dad's name is Dave, "If
4 you're involved in his schooling then he'll be cueing off you," but Dave
5 said to me straight away, "Every afternoon for an hour, I talk to him
6 about his school work." And I thought as soon as they start work
7 they're going to have very little time. As soon as they start work they
8 will have very little time to spend with him, to talk about the things he's
9 got to deal with at school, his angst or anger or confusion or emotions,
10 because they're going to be busy working, and when they're not
11 working I guess they'll be stuffed. Judging by the rule of thumb, I
12 wouldn't be surprised if Dave just wants to have a few beers and relax
13 when he's not working and he might work 10 or 12 hour days. So in
14 terms of me saying to him, "Hey Ryan is going to do better in school if
15 you're involved and reading with him and saying how's your
16 schooling," that will just go with the wind, because he'll never get a
17 chance. He's going to walk in the door at six, covered in dirt, with a
18 very dry throat and need a hot shower and a couple of hours on his own
19 at night. He's not going to be talking to Ryan, not shepherding Ryan,
20 not guiding Ryan. And some of those guys work seven days a week.
21 That's where we'd see a difference in Ryan, I think. If Ryan was Ryan
22 and he didn't have itinerant parents or if he didn't have parents that
23 were working that long, then you might be able to say, "Hey, come up
24 and let's get Ryan going."

Although Mr Connington talked initially about the effects of both of Ryan's parents working, line 11 marked a change to discussion that focused specifically on Dave, Ryan's dad, and the apparently masculine attributes of farm workers. In this section of the discussion, Ryan's mum (Lisa) was excluded, paralleling the apparent invisibility of women in many of the community stories about farm workers (see Chapter 6). Nevertheless, Lisa was constructed, with Dave, as responsible for Ryan's difficulties in the classroom. In blaming both parents, Mr Connington seemed to be drawing on a particular normative view of the family, where families are expected to provide specific experiences that will ensure children's success at school and in school literacy learning (see Carrington & Luke, 2003; Comber, 1998; Dudley-Marling, 2001; Henderson, 2002; Hicks, 2002; Lewis, 2001).

Ryan, therefore, was constructed as a boy with deficient parents who would be too tired to provide what Mr Connington thought were the necessary aspects of parenting and, in turn, the necessary foundations to literacy learning. However, rather than considering how school processes might assist Ryan, Mr Connington seemed to come to the conclusion that school efforts would be unproductive. He explained that any suggestions for Ryan's parents would "just go with the wind" (line 16) and concluded that Ryan's chances of success at school would be much better if his parents were not itinerant workers (lines 21-24). By linking his views to the occupation and lifestyle of Ryan's parents, Mr Connington appeared to be using social class as a determining factor of educational success (cf Carrington & Luke, 2003; Lewis, 2001).

Although, in this particular interview, Mr Connington's comments referred only to Ryan's parents, another interview three weeks later indicated that he had generalised those ideas to refer to a much broader group of children. In this follow-up interview, a section of which is presented in Interview Transcript 9, Mr Connington appeared to value what Carrington and Luke (2003) described as stereotypical middle-class family life, with "one working parent ... and sufficient surplus income, education, and leisure time" to prepare their children for school literacy learning (pp.232-233).

Interview Transcript 9. Mr Connington, 15.06.01

1 In my class at first we didn't have any behaviour problems. In fact, no
2 one was below Level 1.^a And at the end of the term I said, "Let's make
3 the whole class go right through with all of Level 1." Term 2 started
4 okay, but then it started going down and down. And now we've got poor
5 behaviour in our class and it's a bit difficult. And I rang [a parent's name]
6 last night because [student's name] has not been working. And I said
7 [student's name] is not doing much in class and she said, "Yeah, I've just
8 started work." And a couple of weeks ago, I rang [another parent's name]
9 and said, "[another student's name] has been a pain. And she said, "Yeah,
10 I've just started work." And I suddenly thought, why is Ryan here? It's
11 because his parents are here and have started work. And I thought it's the
12 impact of those few itinerant kids coming in, who in Ryan's case are
13 angry and disruptive, plus maybe three, four kids in your class who go
14 from a mum that's there every morning and a mum that's there in the
15 evening to no mum being there and coping with an older sister or
16 something arrangement, just changes the dynamics amazingly. Because
17 Ryan can literally knock out, he's dragging in two or three other boys like
18 that who are on the borderline, two or three kids who suddenly go from
19 mum there to not being there at all. As the principal said to the P. & C.
20 the other night, he said behaviour in the school has gone from first term,
21 one kid maybe in the withdrawal room. Now there are eight to ten a day,
22 and I just thought, that itinerant situation has an acute impact on the whole
23 structure of the class. I like to sort of teach open but when the behaviour
24 goes down you have to shut it back down. Because as soon as you open it
25 up, all those kids, so it changes the way you teach.

^a Level 1 referred to the Harbourton State School's (2000) *Student behaviour management strategy*. Under this policy, students begin each school year on Level 1. They are able to move to upper levels if they meet the criteria of "good" behaviour, or to lower levels if they misbehave. Further details are provided in Appendix E.

In the interview, Mr Connington compared his Year 5 class in Term 1, when “we didn’t have any behaviour problems” (lines 1-2), to his class in Term 2, when behaviour “started going down and down. And now we’ve got poor behaviour in our class” (lines 3-5). His comparison of the two school terms, and his view that the apparent deterioration of class behaviour coincided with the arrival of itinerant children and the beginning of the harvesting season, set up a series of binaries in both school and home contexts. He argued that, in the school context, the bad behaviour (lines 3-5) coincided with the arrival of itinerant children (line 12). In the home context, the time before the harvesting season, when children’s mothers were at home and were supervising their children (lines 14-15), was contrasted with the harvesting season when mothers were going to work (lines 7-8, 10, 11, 19) and when young children were “coping with an older sister or something arrangement” (lines 15-16). At this point, Mr Connington’s comments seemed also to extend to the residentially-stable mothers who engaged in farm work during the winter harvesting season.

For Mr Connington, the evidence for these binaries was convincing. His perceptions of changes that had affected students in his class, ascertained through telephone conversations with two mothers (see lines 5-10) and his considerations of Ryan’s situation (lines 10-11), had offered a before-and-after explanation of what was happening in the classroom. He concluded that the arrival of itinerant children and the beginning of the harvesting season were the catalysts for the deterioration of student behaviour, and he argued that his observations at classroom level were corroborated by comments made by the principal at a Parents and Citizens’ Association meeting (lines 19-21). According to Mr Connington, the principal drew attention to an escalation in school behaviour problems, with “one kid maybe in the withdrawal room” becoming “eight to ten a day” (line 21). This enabled Mr Connington to draw a parallel between the events in his classroom and events in the broader school context. His conclusion that the “itinerant situation has an acute impact on the whole structure of the class” (lines 22-23) assumed that the arrival of itinerant children triggered a series of events, changing classroom behaviours and ultimately affecting his teaching (lines 23-25).

Even though Mr Connington had broadened his arguments to discuss what he called the “itinerant situation,” Ryan was at fault for “dragging in two or three other boys” (line 17). However, in assuming that boys whose mothers had started work were generally more vulnerable and could be influenced easily, Mr Connington appeared to draw on widely circulating narratives of blame that criticise mothers for not doing the unpaid “work” that schools value (see Dudley-Marling, 2001; Griffith & Smith, 1987; Kolar & Soriano, 2000; D. E. Smith, 1987; Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989). It appeared, then, that Mr Connington was suggesting that it was really Ryan’s parents who were at fault, especially since Ryan was only at the school “because his parents are here and have started work” (line 11). Working parents and itinerant lifestyles were thus implicated in the classroom problems that Mr Connington had identified.

At a later date, when Mr Connington seemed particularly frustrated by the tensions between himself and Ryan, he was more direct about the origins of Ryan’s bad behaviours, commenting that, “It’s all his parents’ fault anyway” (Field notes, 14.09.01). Similarly, on another occasion, he used information that he had heard about Ryan’s home-life to explain the difficulties at school:

When Ryan started here he didn’t even have his own room and he goes to [student’s name]’s before and after school, so you know, he could be a bit lost.

(Mr Connington – Ryan’s Year 5 teacher,
interview transcript, 13.11.01)

Such stories, however, were not told in isolation. As demonstrated in Chapters 6 and 7, stories like this were circulating in the broader community of Harbourton as well as in the school community. Within the school context, the principal and the deputy principal had also considered the itinerant lifestyle of Ryan’s family as a reason for Ryan’s school behaviours:

I think he’s real street-wise. I think the fact that he might move to different areas, he’s picked up a lot more than a kid might have by being in one area. You know what I mean?

(Principal, interview transcript, 08.12.00)

And what was the original problem? Because of moving to here and the family circumstances, being in a couple of houses during the school week, during the day?¹⁰⁴ Or was it something that happened in the classroom? I'm not really sure.

(Deputy principal, interview transcript, 24.07.01)

Although tentative, such stories no doubt helped to contribute to the narratives that circulated about itinerant farm workers' families, whilst those telling the stories were simultaneously being influenced by the stories already in circulation.

SUMMARY

This chapter examined teachers' constructions of Ryan Neilsen as a literacy learner, constructions that seemed to be constituted by teachers' readings of him as a boy, as a badly behaved student, and as the child of itinerant farm workers. Ryan spent two harvesting seasons enrolled at Harbourton State School and during that time challenged school personnel with his extreme classroom and playground misbehaviours. However, he not only disrupted the school and its expectations of student behaviour, but he also disrupted teachers' assumptions about the relationship between behaviour and academic achievement.

In attempting to find explanations for Ryan's misbehaviours, some teachers drew on a range of deficit discourses, sometimes blaming Ryan, sometimes blaming his parents and their itinerant lifestyle, but rarely questioning school processes. Issues of gender and social class threaded through many of the teachers' constructions of Ryan as a badly behaved student and, at times, teachers' narratives appeared to appropriate some of the negative representations of farm workers that circulated in the community of Harbourton.

Through the processes of the school's behaviour management strategy, Ryan was removed from his year-level peers through detentions, suspensions and relocation into an older class. However, Ryan's "good" behaviours and apparent ability to become a productive student in the context of the other class raised a new concern, that blame for Ryan's disruption of school processes would shift from Ryan to his Year 5 teacher. It appears, though, that the approach of the other teacher may have

¹⁰⁴ The deputy principal was referring to the after-school child-care arrangements that had been organised by Ryan's parents. These are described in Chapter 11.

offered a way forward for working with difficult students like Ryan. Ms Anderson's approach took context into consideration and looked beyond essentialised characteristics in Ryan towards providing him with opportunities to take up different subjectivities: to still be the "tough guy" in some situations, but to also be a good student. Within the context of the school, however, that strategy did not receive the consideration that it perhaps deserved.

However, it was Ryan's high achievement levels on external literacy tests that contested the assumptions of some school personnel. It appeared that some teachers had been focusing so narrowly on Ryan's misbehaviours that his strengths in literacy learning had virtually been forgotten. It was not that the teachers were totally unaware of his abilities, but that they had been so busy trying to convince him to take up particular classroom and playground behaviours that issues surrounding literacy learning had lesser priority. During a considerable amount of his time in the school, Ryan had been visible for his bad behaviours, not for his abilities in literacy learning. Teachers' ratings of Ryan as generally achieving satisfactorily on school-based assessments had not challenged their apparent assumptions about recalcitrant students, perceived "bad" parenting choices, social class and gender. However, results that put Ryan at the top of his year-level cohort were difficult to ignore. It appeared that badly behaved students were not expected to achieve so well.

The case study of Ryan demonstrated some of the complexities involved in schooling. When teachers constructed and reconstructed Ryan in relation to his misbehaviours as a student, they seemed to lose sight of issues surrounding his literacy learning. Although Ryan's high achievements on external literacy tests had opened up possibilities for the curriculum and other school processes to be examined and critiqued, time was running out for Ryan. With the end of the harvesting season not far away, the best that school personnel could do was to plan for the following year when Ryan might re-enrol at the school.

This situation highlights how crucial it is for a school that enrolls itinerant children to be able to assess quickly and efficiently where students are at in literacy learning and to then work towards moving them forward. In Ryan's situation, a considerable

amount of available learning time was lost to behaviour management processes, in an attempt to make him “fit” the practices that were in operation within the school. As a result, educational outcomes took second place to behavioural outcomes. If more had been known about Ryan’s strengths and abilities and if curriculum and pedagogy had been open to critique and amendment right from the start, then it is possible that his time at the school may have been productive and that teachers’ narratives about him may have been different.

Having concluded the chapters that considered the teachers’ narratives about the case study families, the next chapter of this thesis moves to the stories told by members of the case study families. In investigating a range of issues related to itinerancy from the perspective of parents and children, Chapter 11 offers “another take” on itinerancy and its relationship to education and literacy learning.

CHAPTER 11.

FAMILY NARRATIVES: ANOTHER TAKE ON EDUCATIONAL ITINERANCY

INTRODUCTION

Whilst Chapters 8, 9 and 10 focused on teachers' narratives about how they made sense of the literacy learning of the children from the case study families, this chapter explores stories from the family members. When talking about their itinerant lifestyles and education, the children and parents tended not to focus on literacy. Instead, they offered their perceptions of what it meant to be itinerant, of the difficulties of trying to balance itinerant lifestyles with education, and of their efforts to fit into the community of Harbourton.

This chapter, then, offers “another take” on many of the stories about educational itinerancy that were told in the earlier chapters. It also provides different perspectives on the circumstances that seemed to foster deficit discourses in Harbourton State School and in the wider community of Harbourton. Because this chapter draws on data from all six of the case study families, Table 33 provides a summary of the families, their children and their ethnic backgrounds.

BALANCING LIFESTYLE WITH EDUCATION

As has been explained elsewhere, the six case study families of this research exemplified the diversity of families who identified themselves as itinerant farm workers. From the how and when of their participation in the farming industry, to the educational considerations that they made for their children, the families tended to differ. As shown in Table 34, four of the families had long-term experience of farm work, but only two – the Moala and Russell families – had long-term experiences of being itinerant. The Ozturk family was itinerant intermittently and the Potai and Neilsen families commenced an itinerant lifestyle as I began data collection for this study. For the parents of five families, itinerant farm work was

Table 33. A summary of the case study families, including children and ethnic backgrounds

Family	Children (ages in 2001)	Background
Moala family	Leilani (12) Sepi (10) Sina (10)	Tongan
Potai family	Aahlyia (17) Sione (16) Melé (14) Kalisi (11) Saia (8) Anetona (5)	Tongan
Ata family	Deniz (13) Mustafa (11) Kemal (7)	Turkish
Ozturk family	Zafer (12) Ebru (9)	Turkish
Russell family	Kirra (12) Lexie (9) Ethan (8) Bree (7) Pia (3) [Zed – born 2002]	Maori
Neilsen family	Ryan (11)	Anglo (New Zealand)

Table 34. The case study families' experiences of farm work, itinerant lifestyle and changing schools, as at 2001

Family	Experiences		
	Farm work	Itinerant lifestyle	Changing schools ^a
Moala family	Long-term ^b	Long-term	Long-term and regular (twice per year for 7 years)
Potai family	Began in 2000	Began in 2000	Once only
Ata family	Only during 1999 and 2000	Only during 1999 and 2000	Only during 1999 and 2000
Ozturk family	Long-term	Intermittent	Intermittent
Russell family	Long-term	Long-term	Long-term and often (8 schools in 3 years)
Neilsen family	Long-term	Only during 2000 and 2001	Only during 2000 and 2001

^a This category does not include transitional changes of school (e.g. between primary school and secondary school).

^b Long-term has been used to indicate more than five years.

identified as their current occupation, even though it was not necessarily a permanent one. In contrast, the Ata family regarded itinerant farm work as a temporary occupation of convenience, because it allowed them to have “a working holiday” at the same time as visiting relatives (Mr Ata’s sister, interview transcript, 12.10.00).

In terms of changing schools, the Moala and Russell children had long-term experiences. The Moala children were “regulars,” who returned to Harbourton State School for the winter of each year and generally attended one specific primary school in Victoria during the summer harvesting season. In contrast, the older Russell children had attended many different schools – eight in three years. Although they had been long-term itinerant children, they were not “regulars” at Harbourton State School and first enrolled there in 2001.

The children in the other four families had more limited experiences of changing schools. The Potai children, for example, had done so only once, even though their parents had taken up itinerant farm work. As was discussed in Chapter 8, the family relocated to Victoria for the summer harvesting season at the end of 2000, but the older children (17-year-old Aahlyia, 14-year-old Melé, and 11-year-old Kalisi) returned to Harbourton near the beginning of the 2001 school year without their parents. Although some teachers criticised the parents for this, the family had made a deliberate decision to maintain the children’s enrolments at a single school.

Despite the diversity of the families’ lifestyles and the range of educational arrangements that they made for their children, all parents expressed concern about their children’s educations. A theme that became evident throughout their stories was that educational decisions were made in conjunction with decisions about other family matters. Financial and health issues played major roles in determining what families would do and, at times, these issues took priority over education, even though the families regarded education as important.

Making difficult decisions

In one interview, as shown in Interview Transcript 10, Mr and Mrs Moala discussed the difficult decisions that they had to make in relation to their family's finances, health and education. Despite their preference for living in Harbourton and pressure from their children, who wanted to attend Harbourton State School for the whole school year (lines 4-8, 12-14, 28-31), the family had continued to move to Victoria on an annual basis. They identified financial issues as the most pressing reasons for their relocation (lines 38-46, 52-56), explaining that they could earn "quick money" (line 55) and therefore meet their financial commitments.

One of the options they had considered was to divide the family for the summer harvesting season, with Mrs Moala and the children remaining in Harbourton while Mr Moala worked in Victoria. This option, however, raised a new set of concerns. In particular, they were worried about health (lines 21-26), safety issues including cyclones (lines 59-61), and how they would cope with such issues in the absence of the other parent (lines 20, 58-59).

In another interview, Mrs Ozturk talked about the financial pressures that were related to the uncertainty of farm work, especially when families moved from one town to another. Just as the Moalas continued to pay rent on their house in Harbourton while working the summer seasons in Victoria, the Ozturks put their furniture and other belongings into storage in Victoria during the winter seasons when they were in North Queensland. They regarded this as a less expensive option than simultaneously paying two rents. As Mrs Ozturk explained,

I put that [the furniture] into storage. I had to rent a storage ... It's just like you pay a house. I would have left it in the house but you can't afford it. We pay rent here and pay rent there.

(Mrs Ozturk, interview transcript, 01.06.01)

For the Ozturks, finding work in Harbourton took time and they had to wait until the peak of the harvesting season when work became readily available. They recognised that their intermittent travel to Harbourton was a disadvantage, as the previous season's workers were always given the first jobs. It appeared to be

Interview Transcript 10. Mr and Mrs Moala, 19.10.00

1	Mr M:	Leilani, starting growing up. And she's starting, next year,
2		be on Grade 6.
3	Mrs M:	Seven.
4	Mr M:	Seven. And I realise this year what she want. She want to
5		be stay here a whole year in Grade 7 and when we move she
6		be going into high school. She doesn't like to do half year
7		there and half year here. Because she want to stay here and
8		do full year in Harbourton.
9	RH:	And you said [at the last interview] that you were thinking of
10		leaving the children here this time? Is that still the plan?
11	Mr M:	We just going up, going down, we don't know what's going.
12	Mrs M:	Our plan is not sure yet what we going to do. 'Cause the
13		kids, they don't want to go down, surely they don't want to
14		go down there, but
15	RH:	It's very difficult for you.
16	Mrs M:	Yes, it's very difficult. I know, it's very difficult. That's
17		why we still talking and see what's coming up.
18	Mr M:	It's very hard for me, for myself. If I go by myself, she have
19		to stay here with only the kids.
20	Mrs M:	I haven't stay with the kids myself, you know, before. And
21		yeah, that's why I was looking and why I was thinking. It's
22		alright, but me, I'm not very healthy, because I, sometimes
23		that's what I was saying to him, what about if I get sick,
24		because my sickness is coming, you know, it's just coming
25		up. There need to be someone to be with us, and that's why
26		we still not really sure what will happen December.
27	Mr M:	It is a very difficult decision.
28	Mrs M:	It's very difficult to us, because the kids doesn't want to go
29		down to Victoria, and they want to stay here for next year,
30		especially her. She want to stay and go through the whole

31 year on Grade 7 before she go down to the high school. And
32 then we know it's very hard and it's difficult for them,
33 because when we come back, when we come back from
34 Victoria and there's like homework and things like that
35 coming from school here and they all look at them and they
36 sit there, confused and, you know, because they miss out on
37 a lot of things, eh?

38 Mr M: It's like starting again. Yeah, there's another reason, because
39 like, just different things, we need some money, because
40 something like financing all these things. At the moment, we
41 can't, we can't stay in here.

42 Mrs M: Can't afford to stay here.

43 Mr M: Can't afford to stay here because we have to pay

44 Mrs M: Debts and

45 Mr M: Money, finance all these things. See, if we're going to be

46 Mrs M: If we've got nothing to pay, that's all right.

47 Mr M: Then we stay here. We're going be stay for sure. I can get a
48 job here in a farm.

49 Mrs M: Farm hand.

50 Mr M: So I'm going to do some farming hand, or something like
51 that, after picking, eh? After December, just a few things I
52 can do, like planting, get ready for next year. That's another
53 problem, another key purpose for why we really have to go,
54 to settle our

55 Mrs M: Quick money.

56 Mr M: Our financing of these things. I tell her it's better for her to
57 stay with the kids. I can go by myself. But she can't. But
58 not only that. It's what I think, it's very hard for me myself
59 to go. You know what I mean, the wind you get here, in
60 Queensland, like cyclone and all those things like that
61 coming up, in the time that I was in Victoria, I don't know.

standard practice that growers “look after those who’ve been there before” (Dave Neilsen, interview transcript, 17.06.01).

Between the Ozturk family’s arrival in Harbourton in May and commencing work in August, the family relied on unemployment benefits. Mrs Ozturk explained that this was difficult:

We’ll see what the season is doing. If we can’t find a job, I don’t know, we might go back. But it’s still early. You need to work up here. The money you get from unemployment can’t do it. I paid bills yesterday, 600 dollars. I mean the money they give you, what are you going to survive on for two weeks?

(Mrs Ozturk, interview transcript, 01.06.01)

The complexities of family decisions, such as those highlighted by the Moalas and Mrs Ozturk, were generally invisible to teachers. Whilst parents made their decisions within the context of a broad range of issues that impacted on their families – often taking health, safety, economic commitments, as well as education into consideration – teachers appeared to have a much narrower focus. For them, the educational context, incorporating classroom, school and wider systemic factors, was where their core business was conducted. As was evident through sections of Chapters 7 to 10, teachers often seemed to look negatively upon outside factors that disrupted or hindered their work, including the arrival of itinerant children after the beginning of the school year, the increased linguistic and cultural diversity that became evident in the school population as itinerant children enrolled, and perceived family deficits. These were, at times, blamed for both the additional classroom pressures experienced by teachers and itinerant children’s apparent lack of success in literacy learning.

For the parents, education was only one of the multiple factors that were taken into account. Although the broader set of issues that concerned parents was rarely discussed with teachers, there were times when teachers had asked parents to make decisions that gave priority to educational considerations. For example, one teacher, who had taught Sepi Moala a few years prior to the data collection for the current study, explained that she had tried to talk the Moalas into delaying their departure from Harbourton until the end of the school year:

And during that time when I was trying to persuade them to stay a little bit longer, because Sepi was progressing and was making improvements, just wait a few more weeks, and they did delay by about a month I think it was. They still left a little bit early.

(Teacher, interview transcript, 10.11.00)

It appeared that the Moalas had taken such considerations on board, because they explained that they did try to time their travel with the beginnings and ends of school terms:

Mr M: That's why we try to get into the

Mrs M: Victoria.

Mr M: Stay while, I mean, before they start school and all this thing, then get back here before the next semester starts.

Mrs M: Not to stay long out from school. Always make plans that we, plans that we get here on time and get off on time before school starts. You know it's very hard.

(Mr and Mrs Moala, interview transcript, 19.10.00)

However, whilst the teacher's request made sense in an educational context, where educational issues were paramount, it did not take into account the other issues that families had to consider. For some families, a month without income was not sustainable when there were financial commitments to meet, rent to pay, and the need to ensure that there was always food on the table. Just as Comber (1998) had highlighted how deficit accounts of low socio-economic families masked the material effects of poverty, it appeared that an educational lens helped to hide from teachers the range of issues and associated difficulties that concerned families.

Nevertheless, for families, the necessity to make decisions that sometimes impacted negatively on their children's education was not always guilt free. Ryan Neilsen's parents, for example, expressed concern that their decision to take up an itinerant lifestyle may have contributed to Ryan's behavioural problems at Harbourton State School:

Dave: Ryan has been fully settled his whole life and then suddenly he's moving every year.

Lisa: It makes me feel guilty. It does. It makes me feel guilty that

Dave: He's getting into trouble because you're moving around?

Lisa: I feel responsible. I do. I feel responsible in a way, don't you?

Dave: (Nodded.)

Lisa: You do.

(Dave and Lisa Neilsen, interview transcript, 17.06.01)

At that stage, the Neilsens had worked a season in Harbourn, a season in the south, and were part of the way through a second season in Harbourn. Because the previous southern season had not been a financial success, and Ryan had been in so much trouble at school, Dave and Lisa considered staying in Harbourn during the summer, thereby removing any need for Ryan to change schools:

Dave: We're sort of tossing up ... we might be better off just staying here, getting through the summer and waiting for the tomatoes. There's quite a bit of work that I could drive to, a couple of hours down the line and go and do a couple of weeks here and a couple of weeks there, and be better off.

Lisa: It might be better for Ryan, I think. I really don't think that moving from school to school is good at all.

(Dave and Lisa Neilsen, interview transcript, 17.06.01)

However, by the end of the season, Dave and Lisa had decided that a return to the southern New South Wales town, where they had spent the previous summer season, might be of more benefit to Ryan. Although they were still trying to balance other issues with educational ones, they particularly wanted to get Ryan into what they thought might be a more stable situation. During the previous season in the south, a next-door neighbour had become a "grandmother figure" and had "looked after Ryan in the morning and after school" (Lisa Neilsen, interview transcript, 11.06.01). Dave and Lisa were hopeful that a return to this situation would alleviate some of the problems they had encountered in Harbourn:

RH: So your plans now?

Dave: Well, we've got work for a good five or six weeks at least. It could be up to eight weeks. We'll be picking right till Christmas, so we'll just play that out. At the moment we're thinking southern New South Wales again. Go back to the same place, because the school, the same, keep things the same a bit. Try not to shake him [Ryan] up too much.

RH: Last time you said maybe you'd stay here.

Lisa: Yeah.

Dave: We've given it a lot of thought, haven't we? And we've looked around to see what sort of work it'd be. And even now it's getting hotter and hotter, you know.

Lisa: Not so much that, but Ryan as well.

Dave: Have a break away.

Lisa: It's good to get him away. In a way it's not good, but it is good. He's playing up too much.

(Dave and Lisa Neilsen, interview transcript, 24.10.01)

As Lisa highlighted, however, there were potential advantages and disadvantages in making another move. Like the other case study families, the Neilsens were attempting to juggle a range of factors, all of which were likely to impact on the family's wellbeing, and to find a way forward that suited the whole family. Decision-making circumstances such as these seemed to be very much a part of the itinerant lifestyle described by the case study families.

Keeping quiet about breaking the law

Although teachers were not always privy to the reasons behind families' decisions, there were particular occasions when families deliberately withheld information from teachers. One family,¹⁰⁵ for example, had knowingly broken the law, by allowing a primary school-aged child to work full-time for six months. The information was shared with me during an interview with the student and Interview Transcript 11 provides part of that interview. As can be seen from that transcript, the student was concerned about having "missed out heaps and heaps of work" (line 5) and predicted that teachers would "probably freak" (line 3) if they found out.

The student's parents were not only concerned about the difficulties they had created for their child, but were also worried about the legal implications of their decision. Nevertheless, in relation to their particular circumstances at the time, they believed that they had no choice. During the summer season in a southern state, a family member needed medical treatment at a centre away from the tomato growing area where they were living. As the children's parents explained, they had to weigh up the consequences of being without one income, and therefore being unable to make the necessary loan repayments, with the consequences of one child missing some time at school. Although they chose the latter, they recognised that they had broken the law and were uneasy about how hard their child seemed to be working in "trying to catch up" (Parent, interview transcript, 24.07.01). Whilst the decision-making processes described in the previous section highlighted families' attempts

¹⁰⁵ As discussed in Chapter 5, this story raised a number of ethical issues. To ensure the student's and the family's anonymity, I have filtered the information by using non-gendered descriptors along with general statements regarding family relationships.

Interview Transcript 11. Student, 11.06.01

- | | | |
|----|----------|---|
| 1 | Student: | They don't know that I didn't go to school for six months. |
| 2 | RH: | What do you think they'd say? |
| 3 | Student: | They'd probably freak! |
| 4 | RH: | Why do you think that? |
| 5 | Student: | Because I would have missed out heaps and heaps of work. |
| 6 | RH: | How come you didn't go to school? |
| 7 | Student: | Well I was going to go to school, then [name of family |
| 8 | | member] got really sick, so my parents told me to just stay |
| 9 | | on at work for a few days until [name of family member] got |
| 10 | | better. |
| 11 | | Then I stayed and I went to work for my mum, because she |
| 12 | | had to stay with [name of family member] ... So I went to |
| 13 | | work for my mum and I worked with my dad. |
| 13 | RH: | Does that mean you were supporting the family with the |
| 14 | | money that you earned? |
| 14 | Student: | Yeah ... we had so much stuff to pay off ... and they thought |
| 15 | | that I could go to work and help them. |

to make the best decisions for all family members, this was a situation where the family believed that it had no choice but to prioritise immediate health and financial issues over education.

In not telling teachers that the child had not attended school during the previous six months, the parents avoided the possible legal ramifications of their decision. However, it appeared that their child worked under considerable pressure at school – needing help, but not wanting to ask for it:

There are some things ... that I haven't done before ... I really needed heaps of help because I hadn't been there for the stuff. I hadn't done it. It was really hard for me, but I just did it. I tried.

(Student, interview transcript, 11.06.01)

As a result, the student's teacher was unaware that the student had not had the opportunity to cover particular sections of the curriculum. Whilst it became obvious through classroom observations and discussions with the teacher that the teacher recognised positive qualities in the student, the teacher, nevertheless, had low expectations of the student's capabilities and potential for classroom success (Field notes, 22.08.01). It seemed, therefore, that not only was the teacher operating in a different context from the one in which the parents had made their decision, but the teacher had not had access to information that may have influenced pedagogical decisions within the context of the classroom.

Whilst it is understandable that the parents did not want school personnel to know that they had broken the law, the difficulties experienced by the student were probably compounded by the teacher's lack of information about the student's previous educational experiences (or lack of educational experiences). Such incidents illustrate the complexities of situations like these and the difficulties and dilemmas that can confront students, parents and teachers.

Managing parenting and farm work

As discussed in Chapters 6 and 7, many of the stories circulating in both the school and the wider community of Harbourton suggested that itinerant farm workers were “bad” parents. Although some teachers spoke positively about particular families of itinerant farm workers – as was evident in some of the stories about the Moala family (see Chapter 8) – there were times when stereotypical comments about poor parenting attributed blame to parents for the low literacy results of their children.

Amongst the stories that seemed to circulate widely were those that suggested that farm worker parents did not have the time or the energy to give their children the care and attention that they needed, and that they made inadequate, if any, childcare arrangements for their school-aged children. Such stories were evident in, for example, one teacher’s talk about the “wild” children who have “maybe ... got no control at home because there are no parents there” (see Chapters 7 and 9) and in some of the stories that linked Ryan Neilsen’s problematic school behaviours with perceived home circumstances and parental characteristics (see Chapter 10).

My interviews with the six case study families and my observations whilst conducting interviews in the families’ homes, however, suggested that such stories were generalisations based on limited information. There were times when elements of the stories seemed to match what families said, but the overall picture was generally quite different. For example, Dave and Lisa Neilsen discussed how tired they had become towards the end of the harvesting season:

Lisa: I’m finding it a bit hard now. I’ve just about had enough.

RH: Because of the heat?

Dave: No, the work. The degree of hardness.

Lisa: My body’s used to it, but I’m getting

Dave: Drained.

Lisa: My knees click all the time.

Dave: At the end of the day, it doesn’t matter whether you finish at one o’clock or four o’clock, you get home and the heat’s dragging it out of you. Ryan is always hassling me. “You don’t do anything dad, you don’t take me anywhere or play.” We used to spend most evenings in the yard, kicking the ball around or stuff. Too buggered nowadays.

RH: Compared to your apple picking at home, are tomatoes harder?

Dave: Tomatoes are harder.

Lisa: We never used to go home and blob out.

Dave: We'd go home and do the garden, something like that. So although it's hard work, it's not as physically draining as this seems to be. I think because you're just out in the elements all day, the winds sweeping all over you, and you're sweating, and the sun, it just takes it right out of you.

(Dave and Lisa Neilsen, interview transcript, 24.10.01)

Whilst a story such as this would appear to support some of the community stories – about farm workers being too tired after a day's work to take an interest in their children – it became apparent, from my discussions with the Neilsens, that they were utilising their leisure time differently. Lisa and Dave preferred to spend their leisure time indoors, and instead of kicking the ball around, Ryan and Dave spent time playing on their Sony Playstation and watching videos. As Dave pointed out, the family spent some of their disposable income on entertainment:

We actually spend money in town ... people like us are renting videos and take the boy to the show¹⁰⁶ ... We go and buy CDs and stuff. It's all consumer. We still take a lot of money out of the town, but we put a lot more in too.

(Dave Neilsen, interview transcript, 17.06.01)

The Neilsen family also bought a computer:

Dave: We might be picking up our computer today.

RH: Oh, you're getting a computer?

Lisa: We thought we needed one in this day and age ...

RH: That's another thing you'll have to carry.

Dave: Yeah, I know.

Lisa: We're buying a trailer.

(Lisa and Dave Neilsen, interview transcript, 24.10.01)

Whilst the indoor activities helped the Neilsens spend time together, they may also have helped to maintain the family's invisibility to the local community. As was discussed in Chapter 6, farm worker families tended to be visible when they fitted "bad parenting" stereotypes, but were often invisible at other times. It seemed that indoor activities, which were out of sight to those outside the family, did not disrupt the stereotypical stories that were circulating.

¹⁰⁶ Dave Neilsen's comment about "the show" referred to Harbourn's Annual Horticultural and Agricultural Show.

Similarly, stories circulating in the community about childcare were challenged by the information I received from the six case study families. None of the families left childcare arrangements to chance. The Moalas and the Potais, for example, generally relied on members of their extended family to provide care for their children, and Mrs Moala sometimes took time off work to ensure the children's wellbeing. Mr Moala's mother, who lived with the family, looked after Leilani, Sepi and Sina before and after school, as well as babysitting four-year-old Anetona Potai during the day.

This arrangement worked well when the families were in Harbourton because the distance between home and school was quite short. Interview Transcript 12, which comes from an interview with Mrs Moala, shows that there were times when alternative arrangements had to be made (lines 5-6, 8-10, 12-16). Even though Mrs Moala felt that she could rely on the eldest of her children, Leilani – “I trust her and I know that Leilani can look after the other two” (Mrs Moala, interview transcript, 19.10.00) – there were also times when she was “too much worried at work” (lines 26-27). Such comments did not support the community's perception that farm worker parents went to work and forgot about their children (see Chapter 6).

Like the Moala and Potai families, the Ata family also relied on family support to help with childcare. The other case study families, however, tended to make arrangements with friends they had made through farm work or through their children. The Neilsens, for example, initially approached the mother of a boy who had befriended Ryan at school and asked if she could help with childcare:

Lisa: Ryan has made quite a few friends. He's got Aaron and he's got his friends at school ...

Dave: He was around at their place [the house of Aaron's family] and we went round and said, “Well, since he's here and the boys are playing, would you look after him sort of thing?”

(Dave and Lisa Neilsen, interview transcript, 15.10.00)

From this informal beginning, the Neilsens began a childcare arrangement that developed into a firm friendship with Aaron's family. When the harvesting season was in full swing, Ryan arrived at Aaron's house at 6 am and the two boys later walked the one block to school. Aaron's mother and her contact details were

Interview Transcript 12. Mrs Moala, 19.10.00

1 Mrs M: Down there [Victoria], when the winter start, that's the time
2 we try to get up from there. It's very hard for kids to wake
3 up in the morning and go to school. And very difficult for us
4 because we going to go before them, but then they have to
5 walk. And it's very hard, so I go to work at 6.30 and I come
6 back at 8 o'clock, pick them up, take to school.

7 RH: You don't have to do that here?

8 Mrs M: No, not in here. At quarter to 3, I come back from work.
9 Sometime the farm be about 20 k away from school and I
10 have to do the same thing. But last year, no this year, the
11 owner of the caravan park, we asked them to take the kids.
12 But sometimes you don't have to trust people. That's why I
13 don't care and I don't mind how long and how far from
14 where we work down to school, but I still come to take my
15 kids and I'll make sure they at school and I have to make
16 sure to pick them up and take home. Yeah. And it's hard.
17 That's a lot of point that's, you know, it's hard for us to do it
18 when we moving to Victoria. Not like here. Here they walk
19 to school. I wake up in the morning. I leave them here with
20 my mum-in-law. If my mum-in-law not here, because last
21 week my mum-in-law in hospital, so I just leave the kids. In
22 the morning we start at 6 o'clock and sometimes I was bit
23 worried going and I was thinking what about if the twins get
24 up and do something, go and want to eat, warm up
25 something in the microwave, or anything like that, eh, and
26 like something burn, you know. Sometime I was too much
27 worried at work, I come back straight away, and yeah.

recorded on Ryan's school enrolment information – "She's down as like guardian for when we're not around" (Lisa Neilsen, interview transcript, 11.06.01).

Explanations like this one, describing a family's actions in relation to childcare arrangements, suggested that many of the stories that criticised farm workers for neglecting their children were either generalisations based on a small number of cases or assumptions based on inaccurate information. The stories of the case study families suggested that a range of support mechanisms were used to ensure the children's safety and wellbeing whilst parents were at work.

Despite the arrangements that families made for their children, there were situations, such as the suspension of a child from school, that created difficulties for parents who worked on farms. When Ryan Neilsen was suspended, for example, Dave and Lisa had to decide whether one parent would take time off work or whether daytime childcare could be arranged to cover the period of the suspension. Unlike some occupations, including teaching, where parents are able to access paid leave for situations that relate to family emergencies or responsibilities,¹⁰⁷ farm workers who take time off are without income. Apart from the inconvenience that such events might cause, economic consequences sometimes come into play and, according to Dave Neilsen, some growers were unsympathetic towards workers taking time off. In his experience,

These young guys ... if they have a day off or arrive late, they won't get back on for three days or they might get put on a cruddy job ... Yeah, they get punished. The employer turns round and punishes. Whereas at home [New Zealand], it's a lot different from that, especially in the situation that I'm in. Like, I can more or less dictate when I will come, like "I'm not coming tomorrow." Whereas here, if you said that, he'd say [his current employer], "Well don't come for the rest of the week."

(Dave Neilsen, interview transcript, 15.10.00)

When Ryan received an out-of-school suspension in June (see Chapter 10), his mother took time off work, saying that, "at the moment it's pretty slow and it's just

¹⁰⁷ Teachers who are employed in Queensland state schools are able to access what is called emergent or compassionate leave, which provides up to three days per year for "an emergency situation or on compassionate grounds" (Backen, 2000).

wages,¹⁰⁸ so I'd rather stay home and get everything, go to school and get everything done. I only miss out on 60 dollars [per day], so it doesn't bother me" (Lisa Neilsen, interview transcript, 11.06.01). However, when Ryan was suspended again, it was the peak of the harvesting season when the economic consequences of Lisa taking time off work had increased to approximately 200 dollars per day.¹⁰⁹ As discussed in Chapter 10, Dave and Lisa negotiated with the school, on the grounds that the school had "given him [Ryan] a holiday," which would be spent with Aaron's mother and her one-year-old son (Dave Neilsen, interview transcript, 24.10.01). Although the school responded positively to Dave and Lisa's request, it appeared that the financial considerations that farm worker parents have to make as a result of suspensions can remain invisible to school personnel. As a result, school personnel were not always aware of the material impact of some school processes on families.

Working hard at school

According to the itinerant farm workers' children, especially the Moala and Russell children who had been itinerant for quite some time, their movement from school to school sometimes created difficulties in the classroom. In particular, the older children talked about their experiences of having to cope with new ways of doing things in classrooms, with new curricula, and with making new friends.

The Moala children and their parents raised the issue of curriculum discontinuity as a major problem for itinerant children. Leilani, Sepi and Sina Moala thought that schoolwork seemed easier in one state than in the other and that they often repeated work that they had done at their previous school. In an interview, the Moala children explained their perceptions of the differences between the educational systems of Queensland and Victoria and the impact on them as learners:

¹⁰⁸ Field workers, such as fruit pickers, are generally employed on a contract basis, whereby they are paid a per bucket rate for the fruit that they pick. In the early stages of the harvesting season, some workers are employed on an hourly rate, which is referred to as "wages." For experienced pickers, the hourly rate provides a low rate of pay and offers little incentive to work hard.

¹⁰⁹ For "gun pickers," the economic consequences can be more than 400 dollars per day (Grower B, interview transcript, 21.12.00).

- RH: How do you go at school Leilani?
Leilani: At this one?
RH: Mmm.
Leilani: Really good. My education is really high, but when I go down to Victoria my education is high but their work isn't as high as Queensland work.
Sepi: But when you go back to Victoria you do easy work and when you go up to Queensland it's really hard and you don't understand.
Sina: In Harbourton State School we do work and when we go down there in Victoria we do the same one.
Leilani: Yeah. We do the subjects here and like they just started on it. It's really hard for our education.
(Leilani, Sepi and Sina Moala, interview transcript, 09.12.00)

Although the children spoke in general terms and did not give specific examples to support their comments, they indicated what they perceived as the effects of year-level variations, different starting ages, and the different curricula that currently exist amongst the educational systems of the Australian states. Such differences have been identified in publications and research about moving schools in Australia (e.g. Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training, & Department of Defence, 2002; Curriculum Corporation, 1998). Recent moves by state education ministers towards “nationally consistent outcomes” in Australia should help to alleviate such difficulties in the future (see Bligh, 2003a, 2003b; Holt, 2003).

Although the children complained about repeating aspects of the curriculum, it is probably fair to assume that they also missed out on sections of the established curriculum at both school sites. It was clear that Mr and Mrs Moala, whose children were moving between the Queensland and Victorian educational systems on a regular basis, were concerned about possible implications for their children:

- Mr M: I think they're going to miss some of their friends and not only that, I don't know about their subjects.
Mrs M: Education.
Mr M: I mean, the syllabus of Victoria and Queensland, is it the same or different? I don't know. They're just the sorts of things that I was thinking about because I'm not sure whether Victoria is lower in the syllabus or if Queensland is higher or something like that. And I'm not sure that they going come in starting

where they finished from Victoria, whether they start on the same thing here or they miss out some of, you know what I mean?

(Mr and Mrs Moala, interview transcript, 19.10.00)

My classroom observations of the Moala children suggested that they had efficient strategies for coping in “new” classrooms (see Chapter 8). In one interview, Sina who was in Year 4, talked about a worksheet that was pasted into one of his school notebooks and indicated how difficult he sometimes found the work he was doing in school:

Sina: This one – it’s hard, because I don’t know how to do it. See, *(reading)* List the, I can’t read that answer.

RH: Oh, you can’t read the question.

Sina: The big words.

RH: *(Reading)* List the features.

Sina: *(Continuing to read)* on the TV. Undue

RH: *(Reading)* Underline.

Sina: *(Reading)* Underline the

RH: *(Reading)* attributes. That is a hard word, isn’t it? So how did you get these answers?

Sina: My friend help me.

(Sina Moala, interview transcript, 02.11.00)

Although Sina had difficulty reading the instructions for the task, he had been able to complete the questions with the help of a friend or, as it appeared later in the conversation, with the help of several friends.¹¹⁰ It seemed that Sina had worked out that sitting close to friends who could help him was an effective strategy to use in the classroom. He also had definite ideas about which friends would be able to help him and which ones would not:

RH: And who’s your friend [who helps you]?

Sina: Oh, Jedd, Rick, Tony. Jack’s not any good. He is a little bit, when he does these. And that’s all.

(Sina Moala, interview transcript, 02.11.00)

¹¹⁰ It became evident, as the interview continued, that Sina’s use of the word “friend” referred to the plural “friends.” As pointed out by Gibbons (1991), the making of “grammatical mistakes not typical of an English speaker” is one of the characteristics associated with the spoken and written English of bilingual children (p.4).

Although such strategies enabled Sina to look as though he had completed the work set by the teacher, his teacher was misled, unintentionally, into thinking that he was coping quite well.

Unlike the Moala children, the Russell children did not talk about curriculum discontinuity or the difficulties of moving from one educational system to another. Instead, they discussed the social activities of making friends and feeling comfortable in a new classroom, a focus that may have originated in their experiences of attending eight new schools in a three-year period. In particular, Kirra and Lexie indicated that they worried about making friends and about other children's perceptions of them:

Kirra: When you get to the new school, you've got no friends.

Lexie: And you look shy when they look at you. When I went into Ms Smith's class, I had to sit next to Jack and he went like this [*pulling a face*], staring at me and I, like, all the boys were staring at me. And the girls were.

Kirra: Sometimes people might not like you.

(Kirra and Lexie Russell, interview transcript, 09.12.01)

The sisters explained that they did not like to admit that they were having difficulties with schoolwork, particularly when they first arrived in a new school. In talking about their experiences, both commented on the classroom practice of raising a hand to demonstrate lack of understanding. Whilst Lexie said that "I don't like putting my hand up," Kirra explained that she sometimes pretended that she was able to do the work even though she was experiencing difficulties: "Sometimes I need to put my hand up, but I just work" (Kirra and Lexie Russell, interview transcript, 09.12.00).

Like the Moala children, the Russell children generally presented positive characteristics in classrooms. Even though Ethan appeared to be the exception, his teacher argued that he was a capable student. It seemed, however, that the positive characteristics exhibited by the children from both families – including effective strategies for coping in "new" classes, enthusiasm, motivation, diligence and effective communicative abilities – masked, unwittingly in some cases and deliberately in others, the difficulties that the children claimed they were experiencing in literacy learning.

FITTING IN WITH THE COMMUNITY OF HARBOURTON

Some of the case study families talked about their attempts to “fit in” with the community of Harbourton. These families were aware of the derogatory stories about farm workers that were circulating in the community and were trying to ensure that the community had no reason to criticise them.

The Russell children’s stepfather claimed that *The Harbourton Bulletin*’s linking of theft to itinerant farm workers was inaccurate. He argued that, “Every year in the paper here it says the itinerant pickers are back in town, lock up your houses,” but “all the breaking and entering is done by local people” (Harry, interview transcript, 23.07.01). Others, however, had more personal experiences of what they regarded as discrimination against itinerant farm workers. The Neilsens, for example, talked about their first attempt at renting accommodation and their treatment by one of Harbourton’s real estate agencies:

Dave: I think coming to town and then saying that you’re going to be a picker, straight away you’re on the bottom of the list. You know, they don’t look at you as a real client. You’re a picker ... The first real estate agent that we dealt with here in town

Lisa: They were rude.

Dave: They showed us, we came and looked at a flat down there, number 4, and we looked at the flat. It was okay and we said, “Okay we’ll take it.”

Lisa: Signed it all up.

Dave: Signed it all up and then they said, “Oh no, someone has rung and they wanted it.” There was some reason, wasn’t there?

Lisa: It was bullshit though.

Dave: And we went to the other one [real estate agent] and they showed us this one, so we moved in here and that one stayed empty for about three weeks. They had people coming and looking at it and we found that quite funny, because we had looked at it and they turned us down, and then it was empty.

(Dave and Lisa Neilsen, interview transcript, 15.10.00)

This example illustrates the way that some of the stereotypical stories that were circulating in the community of Harbourton appeared to be played out in everyday business practices. It seemed that stories, which were constructed around a residentially-stable–itinerant binary and thus promoted mistrust of itinerant farm workers, were at times enacted through the non-acceptance of itinerant farm workers as customers, clients, or tenants. Some businesses, including the hotels,

seemed to thrive on the additional trade that the itinerant workers brought to town, whilst others were more wary about dealing with “outsiders.”

Families like the Neilsens, however, wanted to be accepted in the town. Even though they were using the job opportunities in Harbourton for their own ends – to set themselves up for a financially secure future – they wanted their son Ryan to be happy and to be able to live in a community where the family was accepted. Some of the case study families implemented deliberate strategies in their attempts to appease community mistrust.

Not looking like pickers

One simple strategy utilised by some of the families was to make sure that they blended in with Harbourton “locals” whenever they could. To do this, they made sure that they removed the visible body-markers that so readily identified them as farm workers – green stains, dirty clothes, and dusty and sweaty bodies – before going into the community. The Neilsens explained:

Dave: And you don’t even like going into the shops after work, do you, with your picking clothes on?

Lisa: No.

Dave: ‘Cause they know then.

(Dave and Lisa Neilsen, interview transcript, 15.10.00)

Although Mrs Ozturk used the same strategy, she found it difficult to understand why such behaviour was necessary. She said:

When I work, I can’t go into town. I have to go home ... I mean, you’re not doing nothing bad if you’re working.

(Mrs Ozturk, interview transcript, 01.06.01)

Nevertheless, the families argued that this strategy helped. They felt that they received better treatment from members of the community when they did not look like farm workers.

Taking up community practices

For the Moalas, who had spent the winter harvestings seasons in Harbourton over a seven-year period, their involvement in a range of community practices may have helped to enhance their acceptance by the community. As explained in Chapter 6, many of the community stories appeared to draw on stereotypical masculine representations of itinerant farm workers, linking farm work with manual labour, alcohol, crime and dirtiness. Through their involvement in the community – including attendance at one of the local churches, their children performing at public functions, and the return of their well-groomed children to the same school year after year – the family seemed to offer visible evidence to the community that the stereotypical traits generally associated with itinerant farm workers could not be applied to them.

Although teachers at Harbourton State School offered contradictory stories about Tongan students (see Chapter 8), their comments about the Moala children were almost always positive. It seems likely that the Moala's visible involvement in the community, over so many years, contributed to these positive narratives. For other families, such as the Neilsens – who spent less time in the community, tended to stay indoors in their leisure time, and did not join community organisations – opportunities to meet and be accepted by members of the local community were probably quite limited.

Hiding and disregarding some cultural practices

It appeared, however, that some of the case study families tried to fit in with the community by not publicising cultural practices that may have upset or offended the more permanent residents of Harbourton. The Neilsens, for example, kept their numerous tattoos hidden from public view, but pointed out that they had never felt that such actions were necessary in their hometown in New Zealand. Since living in Harbourton, Dave had decided that he would not have tattoos on his lower arms or legs, since visible tattoos were “not always socially acceptable” and sometimes “employers won't give you a job” (Dave Neilsen, field notes, 17.06.01). Dave and Lisa explained:

Dave: It's about trying to blend in with the community and not be looked down on.

Lisa: It's quite different, isn't it? At home we show them. It doesn't matter. Ryan says, "When I'm eighteen I'm getting a tattoo." It's normal, for him it's normal, because everyone he knows has one.

Dave: I think we've actually had quite good rapport with the school. We've been and talked to the principal a couple of times and he's seemed really pleased that we've done that. And the deputy principal too. And yesterday we went and picked Ryan up because he had earache and Ryan said to me that Mr Connington said, "Oh, your dad seems a pretty good, easy going sort of bloke." And then he rang up that night. He must have thought I seemed all right to talk to. "Oh, here's a parent I can ring."

(Dave and Lisa Neilsen, interview transcript, 24.10.01)

In talking about rapport with school personnel and the telephone call from Mr Connington, in the middle of a discussion about tattoos, Dave Neilsen implied that their strategy had worked. Indeed, in remarking on the telephone call, Dave Neilsen offered a "different take" on Mr Connington. As was evident throughout Chapter 10, Mr Connington had presented deficit views of Ryan and his parents within the school context. The Neilsens, however, suggested that Mr Connington had been looking for a space in which to work positively with Ryan, a perspective that had not been evident within the school setting.

Whilst the Neilsens set out to deliberately hide cultural practices that may not have been accepted by the community, the Atas were willing to temporarily disregard cultural and religious practices that may have set them apart from other community members. The Atas discussed their decision to not be concerned that some daily food requirements, like bread, contained pork products which were taboo for them as Muslims:

Sometimes even I have hard time with choosing cakes sort of stuff. But sometimes things I don't understand, I have to ask or I have to read ingredients. Yeah, and she [Mrs Ata] has a hard time reading ingredients. Because, you know, that we don't eat pork and lots of things have pork in them. Emulsifiers, when you read it and when you look, search, you'll end up with pork ... In Harbourton, I've got no choice. I can't get my bread from Victoria, or somewhere. I know that they do have emulsifiers and all that stuff in there, and I know that, I know that, but I have to eat ... Otherwise I'm going to starve and my children.

(Mr Ata's sister, interview transcript, 12.10.00)

Mr Ata's sister also identified other practices that could not be continued in Harbourton. For example, the Ata's eldest daughter, Deniz, had been learning to read and write in Turkish and to read the Koran:

Not Mustafa and Kemal, but Deniz, the girl ... Some of them send their children to mosque to learn how to read Koran. Like your bible is writing and reading in English, but our Koran, our bible, is written like Arabic words. It's very hard to us to understand. We don't understand, so we try to read and write. Even if you can't write, you have to read ... You must pray Arabic words, even if you don't understand.

(Mr Ata's sister, interview transcript, 12.10.00)

Although changes to the Ata's cultural practices were linked to pragmatic reasons, anti-Turkish sentiments had appeared in *The Harbourton Bulletin* and were circulated in community stories (see Chapters 6 and 7). Neither Mrs Ata nor her sister-in-law, however, alluded to those stories.

Whilst the cultural and pragmatic concessions made by the Neilsens and the Atas probably went unnoticed by the community, they demonstrated the ways that some families had attempted to diminish the effects of difference. Such actions, whether undertaken consciously or unconsciously, probably helped to avert some unpleasant community sentiment towards those whose cultural practices were perceived as different.

PARENTS SUPPORTING THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

Although all of the case study parents spoke positively about education, the type of support that parents offered to their children varied from family to family. The next section of this chapter discusses some of the educational support that parents provided.

Attending school functions and supporting school processes

For all of the parents, dealings with Harbourton State School tended to be limited by the hours that they worked. Whilst parents were generally unable to participate in school events during the day or to be involved in voluntary work in classrooms, it appeared that they did attend other school functions. As discussed in Chapter 5, there seemed to be full attendance by itinerant farm worker parents at Harbourton State School's fancy dress ball in 2000 when I was trying to identify potential case

study families. It was at that function that I met the Neilsens, the Moalas, the Potais and the Atas, the four families who joined the study in the first year of data collection. As Dave Neilsen explained,

Dave: We don't really have much time for school here, do we? Whereas at home we were at school all the time ...

RH: Even though you don't spend much time at school, you obviously turned up at the fancy dress ball.

Dave: Yeah, we turn up to those things. I suppose you feel, because you've moved, that you should be here and seeing what they're doing and encouraging them to mingle with other kids.

(Dave Neilsen, interview transcript, 15.10.00)

When I asked Aahlyia Potai and her mother about contact with the school, it appeared that their situation was similar:

RH: Does your mum have much to do with the school?

Aahlyia: *(Some discussion between Aahlyia and Mrs Potai in Tongan.)*

Yeah, she attends. *(Mrs Potai continued to talk in Tongan.)*

Yes, she attends meetings with the school.

RH: Is that meetings with

Aahlyia: The teachers, Kalisi's teacher, with interviews, with teacher-parent interviews.

(Aahlyia Potai and Mrs Potai, interview transcript, 12.10.00)

In general, the families seemed supportive of school processes and spoke positively about the school, its personnel and its operations. Mrs Ozturk, for example, said:

I prefer Harbourn State School. I think it's better, I mean, the way they teach, the discipline ... Everyday there's homework which I really like. That's what we need.

(Mrs Ozturk, interview transcript, 01.06.01)

This did not mean, however, that there were no problems. Although Mrs Ozturk supported homework, she expressed frustration when Zafer did not do the work that was expected:

I keep forcing them to read. I keep forcing them to read, read, read, but they go, the big one [Zafer] goes, "I read at school." I say, "You've got to read at home too," but he can never be bothered ... I was disappointed with him yesterday. He had one homework not finished. I don't like it when that happens.

(Mrs Ozturk, interview transcript, 01.06.01)

In contrast, Mr and Mrs Moala always seemed pleased with their children's progress at school. As was described in Chapter 8, the teachers at Harbourton State School praised the Moala children's appearances, behaviours and attitudes to school, and it seemed that the children's parents were aware of these compliments:

- Mr M: They're going great.
Mrs M: They doing all right.
Mr M: A lot of feedback, response, feedback coming from the people, they say our kids are just lovely kids. We care for their behaviour, because we don't like them to be troublemakers. I don't like that way the kids to go. They are doing all right, I suppose. That's what we want them to be like.
Mrs M: Only the twins, I think, it's a little bit, they've got some little bit of, find very hard when they do the English. Yeah, it's
Mr M: Language, yeah.
Mrs M: I think that's the only thing, like maths and other subjects it's all right, but the English, like readings and writings, yeah, because they have second language, here, ah, that's their second language, yeah. But everything it's good. They happy. They, I see them, they try hard, especially Leilani. Yes, they got few certificates from school. It's very good. Make us happy too.

(Mr and Mrs Moala, interview transcript, 19.10.00)

During my visits to the family, it became evident that homework was a daily, family affair in the Moala household, with the children and parents sitting around the kitchen table in the late afternoon. Mr Moala explained that, "We just keep an eye on their homework when they come home. Help them catch up what they done" (Mr Moala, interview transcript, 24.07.01). The parents expressed concern, however, that they were finding it increasingly difficult to keep up with the schoolwork that their children were doing and were sometimes unable to help them when difficulties arose. This was particularly the case with the schoolwork of their eldest child, Leilani. Mrs Moala explained:

They like going to school and they like, they like, as soon as they get here [home] they sit down with homeworks and do their homeworks straight away. Sometimes we just feel sorry for them, eh, because like us we can't help them. Only some little things, like my husband can sit down with them and read and do their homework like maths and things, but Leilani, Leilani has, it's hard for us too. It's hard for us to help them but Leilani just try by herself.

(Mrs Moala, interview transcript, 19.10.00)

Whilst the parents of the case study families were keen for their children to do well at school, it appeared that their own educational backgrounds sometimes limited the help that they could offer. Mr and Mrs Moala, for example, openly discussed their limitations and how the children's schoolwork was "hard for us too."

The interview excerpts and transcripts also suggested that language differences might very well have been barriers to access and participation in education for both the children and their parents. For example, some of the case study parents spoke little English. Although Mr Ozturk used to greet me with "Hello," he did not become involved in any of the interviews that I conducted in his family's flat. Zafer told me that "Dad doesn't know much English but my mum knows English" (Zafer Ozturk, interview transcript, 01.01.01).

Mrs Potai and Mrs Ata preferred to have someone interpret for them during interviews, rather than to speak directly to me in English. Mrs Ata's sister-in-law pointed out that,

She [Mrs Ata] doesn't know anybody here ... But because she can't speak English she can't be friend ... I have no hard time, but she have hard time because she doesn't know anybody and she can't make friends because of her English.

(Mr Ata's sister, interview transcript, 12.10.00)

Although some members of the Tongan and Turkish families appeared to be involved in what Barnett (2001) referred to as "the challenge of becoming bilingual" (p.320), most spoke what could probably be described as diaspora dialects of English. Their dialects, Tongan-Australian and Turkish-Australian, are evident in the interview excerpts and transcripts of this chapter.

Although many of the itinerant farm workers' children were recognised by the school as ESL learners, there appeared to be no discussion by teachers about the different forms of English that were spoken. As was discussed in Chapters 7 and 8, teachers did not appear to be tuned into the possibilities of dialectical forms of linguistic diversity, even though access to Standard Australian English has been identified as essential for educational success (Barnett, 2001; Berry & Hudson, 1997). It appeared, though, that some of the children had noticed differences

between their forms of English and those of others. Ryan Neilsen, for example, commented on his father's English:

My dad still speaks New Zealand. He's refusing to change to Australian. New Zealand and Australian language isn't very different.

(Ryan Neilsen, interview transcript, 01.06.01)

The reaction of Ryan's father to that observation highlighted how easily dialectical differences are not always noticed until someone highlights them:

Ryan said, "I've picked up a bit of Australian, but dad's determined not to." I'd never thought of it. It's English to me.

(Dave Neilsen, interview transcript, 17.06.01)

Trying to encourage futures beyond farm work

A common theme that emerged throughout the parents' interviews was that the parents wanted their children to use education as a pathway to job opportunities that did not involve manual labour. In arguing the point to their children, the parents took different approaches. Some, like the Neilsens and the Atas, used verbal encouragement, telling their children about the disadvantages of farm work:

Dave: We've already suggested that he'd [Ryan] be better off owning the bloody farm than working on one. Another time he said, "I want to be a truck driver." I said, "Don't worry about that. Keep going at school and buy a couple of trucks."

Lisa: The job's not good for you.

Dave: Definitely not good for you. Especially here, I've not seen anything like it ... Here you have planes [aerial sprayers] swooping over you and

Lisa: And I've had bronchitis ... the doctor told me it was from the spray. You put your arm up at the bush like that and you've got your face in it.

(Dave and Lisa Neilsen, interview transcript, 15.10.00)

She [Mrs Ata] said that because most Turkish people who do seasonal work and paddock work and most families, they don't want their children to become a picker because it's a very hard job. I don't want my children to become a picker. That's why at the moment I'm working hard and I'm going to give every single chance to my children. That's what she say too. She say sometimes because he [Mustafa] sees everything, hard job, under the sun ... So she say all the time, don't leave school, you finish school, high school or university ... Two choice, picker or something else. [*Comment in Turkish from Mrs Ata.*] Something else.

(Mr Ata's sister, interview transcript, 12.10.00)

The Moalas, however, said that they had taken an experiential approach, which is explained in the interview excerpt that is presented in Interview Transcript 13. Mr and Mrs Moala explained that they had not only talked to their children about the importance of education (lines 1-2, 7, 18-19), but they had also let them work with them during the long summer vacation, so that they experienced personally the hardships of manual labour (lines 11-12, 14-15). Even though they wanted the children to “find their own future” (lines 6-7), they were adamant that the children “not follow us picking tomatoes” (line 8).

The “not follow us” message was endorsed by most of the case study parents. Dave Neilsen, for example, explained that, “We don’t want him [Ryan] to end up doing what we’re doing. That would be my biggest fear that he’d end up doing what we’re bloody doing” (Dave Neilsen, interview transcript, 24.10.01).

It appeared that at least some of the children from the case study families had listened to what their parents had to say about the negative aspects of farm work, as some of the parents’ complaints also turned up in interviews with the children. The following excerpt illustrates how some of the children appeared to be retelling their parents’ stories:

- RH: Would you like to be out there too? Would you like to do that when you leave school?
Lexie: No, because you get all green.
Ebru: I wouldn’t like to do it because their backs hurt. They bend down and picking all the tomatoes and have to get the red ones and not the green ones.
Lexie: And get tired.
Sina: It’s hot.
Sepi: And hard.

Lexie Russell, Ebru Ozturk, Sepi Moala and Sina Moala,
interview transcript, 24.10.01)

Although the parents highlighted the difficulties and consequences of hard manual labour – exposure to the sun and pesticides, dehydration, bodily aches and pains, and so on – it was not clear whether these were their only reasons for not wanting their children to take up similar occupations. Indeed, the National Harvest Trail Working Group (2000) reported that a poor image of itinerant horticultural workers

Interview Transcript 13. Mr and Mrs Moala, 19.10.00

1	Mrs M:	That's why we tell the kids. You go and get good
2		education. Don't be follow us because you can't know
3		what you do. Do something else.
4	Mr M:	I don't know what they going to do.
5	Mrs M:	Yeah, we keep asking them what they
6	Mr M:	All the things that we want them to do, just find their own
7		future. I mean, get a good education.
8	Mrs M:	Not follow us picking tomatoes. That's the only thing.
9	Mr M:	It's very true.
10	Mrs M:	Tell them, either some time we take them to tomatoes and
11		let them to work, but Leilani, and I asked her when we
12		speak in like sore back and suns and it's hot, and I said to
13		her, "Do you want to be a tomato pickers?" And she goes,
14		"No." That's the feeling you have to understand. Go to
15		school, try your best and don't follow us. It's very hard and
16		I think that you kids not going to do this, you can't do this
17		job.
18	Mr M:	All you want, you want them to be growing up and have a
19		good education and get some job that's easy and not only
20		that, have a good future, as I mentioned. Never give up on
21		the school. As long as they got a good future. Not follow
22		our footsteps picking tomatoes.

deterred people from wanting to engage in farm work and that “in some regional areas, children were warned that unless they studied and did well at school, they would end up as pickers” (p.52). With so many negative stories circulating in the community of Harbourton (see Chapter 6), it is possible that the parents did not particularly want to encourage their children to undertake work that had associations with social undesirability and school failure.

Certainly, some parents commented on their own lack of education and their aspirations for their children to be better educated than they were. The Neilsens, for example, explained:

Dave: I left school at 15. I was just over 15 but I didn't finish my second year at high school, so I didn't even have two years at high school.

Lisa: I was there to eat my lunch. I didn't mind school, but if I had a choice I wouldn't go. As soon as I was 15, I was out of there ...

Dave: We'd like to see him [Ryan] go all the way with his education, at least do a couple of years at uni ... I think school's important and so we're always saying to Ryan, you know, I'd like Ryan to go on and at least do a year or two at uni. I'd like to see him go to uni ... Maybe I want Ryan to stay at school more because I didn't.

(Dave and Lisa Neilsen, interview transcript, 17.06.01)

Similarly, Mrs Potai encouraged her children to continue with education. In one interview, 17-year-old Aahlyia not only provided information from her mum, but included her own perceptions of her family's education:

[*Comments from Mrs Potai in Tongan.*] My mum says learning is more important than moving around picking, working and everything ... The money that we get is enough for our family, but learning and education and all that is more important for us, for us kids especially, because my parents, as you can see, they didn't go to school. And the learning they get, they get it from us, because when we talk at home, we speak in English and, you know we talk with more, honestly we're more educated ... My mum says it's better for me to keep learning than travelling around working with fruits and everything.

(Aahlyia Potai, interview transcript, 12.10.00)

Trying to be good parents

The interviews with the case study families indicated that all of the parents cared about their children and about their children's educations. There seemed to be no doubt that the parents were trying to do the best by their children. At times, however, efforts made by parents were not visible to school personnel. At other times, it appeared that the intentions of such actions were misread in the school context.

Whilst there had been criticism from some teachers of the Potai family, for example, particularly in relation to the family's staggered return from Victoria and the stove incident (see Chapter 8), interviews with family members suggested that the parents were working hard to maintain the coherence of their family unit. Seventeen-year-old Aahlyia Potai explained that the family used Mondays for problem-solving:

Every Monday, the church that we go to, every Monday is family evening, day, so the family gets together. We talk to each other about what problems we have at school, what problems we have with money, with, you know, our needs and everything in our family, and we talk to each other, the problems that we have, what can help ourselves solve the problem, you know, what special things can help our family solve the problems that we're going through.

(Aahlyia Potai, interview transcript, 12.10.00)

As with many of the other cultural practices discussed in this chapter, the Potais had their own ways of dealing with social, financial and educational issues, but those practices were not always visible to school personnel.

In contrast, Lisa Neilsen had decided to learn more about parenting by attending an evening course. Her discussion about this is presented in Interview Transcript 14. She explained that she had commenced the course before Ryan was suspended at school (lines 8-11) and, following his suspension, she attempted to implement some of the parenting practices that had been suggested (lines 11-13). Despite the difficulties Lisa experienced in attending a class at night (lines 18-24), she appeared open to suggestion and was willing to trial some of the practices and strategies promoted by the course. Her actions indicated not only her willingness to seek

Interview Transcript 14. Lisa Neilsen, 11.06.01

- 1 Lisa: I'm doing a parenting course at the moment. I've got my last
2 session tonight and that's through the lady that goes to
3 Harbourton State School. I can't remember her name.
- 4 RH: A guidance officer? [Name of guidance officer] or [name of
5 the other guidance officer at Harbourton State School]?
- 6 Lisa: Yeah, [Name of guidance officer]. She runs it at [name of a
7 nearby school].
- 8 RH: Did this happen as a result of [what has happening], or was it
9 separate?
- 10 Lisa: Quite separate. I just started going to this and then this all
11 happened as well. It's been a little bit stressful ... At the
12 moment, we've got, we only started it yesterday, a chart that
13 has, for doing as he's told. He was pretty good yesterday, but
14 that's the thing, because I'm at work I don't get to see what
15 he's like through the day. But [Aaron's mother] said he was
16 pretty good.
- 17 RH: Was it [the course] useful?
- 18 Lisa: Yeah, it has been useful. Because it's from seven to nine at
19 night, and you know, I get up at twenty to five in the
20 morning and by eight o'clock I'm sitting there like, and I
21 said to the lady, look, I can't watch the video and write
22 things as well. I said, that's just not me. I'm one thing or the
23 other. I just go blank. I come home and do it most of the
24 time.
- 25 RH: How did you hear about it?
- 26 Lisa: Aaron's mother. It might have been in the paper or
27 something. Not many people actually go to it. I don't think a
28 lot of people heard about it.

advice, but also to take up practices recommended by those working in the schooling system. As with many of the other social and cultural practices of the case study families, Ryan's teachers were probably unaware of Lisa's efforts.

SUMMARY

Whilst there were many occasions when teachers and members of Harbourton's community "read" the efforts, actions and appearances of itinerant families as deficit (see Chapters 6-10), this chapter has provided "another take" on those stories, by presenting the perspectives of parents and children. In talking about the ways that they attempted to balance their itinerant lifestyles with education and how they tried to fit in with the community of Harbourton, the families demonstrated not only how diverse their familial cultural practices were, but also how their practices were often very different from the ones assumed by teachers and members of Harbourton's community.

The families' stories provided insights into aspects of being itinerant and of working as farm labourers. Their experiences of itinerancy were varied and, in many respects, the families had little in common apart from being itinerant farm workers, located in Harbourton at the time that I was collecting data for this research. Similarly, the children's experiences of being educationally itinerant were also diverse, with the children having had different experiences in a range of locations over varying periods of time.

Even though all of the parents claimed that education was important, it became apparent that educational decisions were made in conjunction with a variety of health and financial issues that impacted on the families. Because employment opportunities were dependent on favourable weather and market prices, and farm workers did not have the leave entitlements available to those with salaried occupations, concerns about poverty and its consequences seemed to be on the agendas of most of the families. Whilst there were opportunities to make good money when harvesting seasons were in full swing, especially for those who were skilled fruit pickers, there were times when education did not get the priority that teachers might have expected.

Nevertheless, the parents were adamant that they did not want their children to become farm workers and they emphasised the physicality of the work that they did and its toll on their bodies. They wanted education to enable their children to do something else with their lives. However, the educational issues that worried families were not always the ones that concerned teachers. Several of the parents expressed concern about the differences between state education systems and the curricula on offer, and some of the children identified the effects on them of moving between state systems, of repeating aspects of curriculum and of not knowing how to do particular tasks in the classroom. These issues, however, had not featured strongly in teachers' discussions of itinerancy.

Social issues were also important, particularly to the children, as their arrival in a new school required them to make new friends and to participate in new classroom routines. However, there were times when the children masked, sometimes deliberately and at other times unwittingly, the difficulties that they were experiencing. It thus appeared that there some occasions when they had misled teachers into believing that they were coping quite well, when they were in fact finding the transition into a new school to be quite demanding.

Several of the families identified linguistic and cultural diversity as potentially problematical issues. In wanting the best for their children educationally, some parents worried about the extent to which language was a barrier and some admitted that their own knowledge of English, and in some cases their level of education, was insufficient for them to effectively help their children with homework. In relation to a broad range of cultural practices, however, several of the families discussed changes that they had made to familial practices, as they wanted to be seen as fitting in with the community. Similarly, some parents discussed their efforts to remove the telltale signs of being farm workers before, for example, going shopping. They argued that the community often discriminated against farm workers and that it was better to hide their occupation when becoming involved in community events.

Despite the negative and stereotypical stories that circulated in the community and in the school, it was apparent that the six case study families had well-organised arrangements for childcare and spent time with their children. It was evident that families organised their lives and negotiated various issues in multiple ways and that their reasons for some actions may not have always been obvious or visible to school personnel.

The following chapter is the concluding chapter of this thesis. It returns to the initial questions that I asked in Chapter 1, considers what has been learnt about the literacy learning of the itinerant children who participated in this study and about the broader issue of educational itinerancy, and makes recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 12.

HARVESTING SUCCESS FOR ITINERANT FARM WORKERS' CHILDREN

INTRODUCTION

This thesis has presented an investigation into the fields of educational itinerancy and literacy learning and teaching. It has addressed a range of educationally important issues through an analysis of the social and discursive construction of itinerant farm workers' children as literacy learners in one primary school in North Queensland. Because itinerant farm workers' children have not previously been the specific focus of research in an Australian context, this thesis has opened a space for thinking about school literacy learning for this particular group of children who do not fit normalised expectations of school enrolment and attendance.

The study explored the narratives told by teachers, children and parents about the literacy learning of six case study families. In using a polyvocal approach and incorporating the voices of itinerant children and parents alongside those of teachers, I was aware of the potential to construct binary perspectives and to pit teachers against families. I was also mindful that historically, mobile or itinerant peoples have been, on the one hand, ostracised and even persecuted and, on the other hand, exoticised (e.g. see Frankham, 1994; Ivatts, 2000; Kenny, 1997; Staines, 1999). Such viewpoints have been evident in popular culture, with songs like Cher's *Gypsies, tramps and thieves*, stories like the novel and movie *Chocolat* (Hallström, 2000; Harris, 1999), and television series like *Carnivàle* (Knauf, 2003). Even autobiographical memoirs of itinerant farm workers, such as Jiménez's (1997) *The circuit* and Treviño Hart's (1999) *Barefoot heart*, which describe the hardships and poverty of itinerant farm workers in the USA, have tended to romanticise stories of educational success in the face of adversity.

My intention through this thesis, however, has been to consider the situatedness of the narratives that were told about the literacy learning of itinerant farm workers' children, and to show how these stories manifested in specific contexts and how

they linked intertextually across contexts (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Fairclough, 1989, 2001c). I viewed the itinerant children and the stories told about them through a wide lens (Hill et al., 1998a), taking account of the social and cultural contexts that they inhabited during the time they spent at Harbourton State School. This investigation was framed by the research questions I identified in Chapter 1:

- What social and discursive constructions manifested within the social and cultural contexts of a particular school and community to explain the literacy learning of itinerant farm workers' children?
- How did the social and cultural conditions mediate teachers' access to particular discourses and not to others? How did these compare to the discourses accessed by the children, their parents and community members?

I begin this final chapter by briefly retracing the research process. I then highlight some of the insights that this study has offered into educational itinerancy and literacy learning. I conclude the chapter by considering the research's limitations and implications and discussing the potential for further research to build on the agenda taken up by this thesis.

RETRACING THE PROCESS

The conceptual foundations

Defining literacy as a social practice, I framed this research within cultural-critical understandings of literacy, and critical discourse and poststructuralist theories. I used these to theorise the social world and literacy learning within it and to understand itinerancy and educational itinerancy as part of the social and cultural practices of particular families.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Chouliaraki and Fairclough's (1999) theorisation of the social world and Fairclough's (1989, 2001c) text-interaction-context model enabled an understanding of a dialectical relationship between the structures of society and social action. In accepting the constraining nature of social structures, I was able to make sense of the multiple social and discursive constructions of itinerant farm workers' children that became apparent in particular contexts. Yet, this theorisation also offered a way of conceptualising agency, creativity and transformation. School

action, then, was viewed as capable of transforming social structures, a point that is particularly relevant to my discussion of the implications of this research.

In Chapter 3, I examined the take-up of itinerancy as an educational and research issue in a range of countries and demonstrated that the development of formalised strategies to cater for itinerant students has been quite limited in the Australian context. Recent education system documents in Queensland (e.g. Department of Education, Queensland, 2000a, 2001a) and announcements from the Queensland education minister (Bligh, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c) and the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (see Holt, 2003), however, suggest that itinerancy, mobility, and nationally consistent curriculum are now being considered as relevant educational issues for schools in current times. This research seems timely in light of those developments.

In my examination of the literacy field in Chapter 4, I identified three families or clusters of approaches, showing how different conceptualisations of literacy constructed literacy learners in different ways. I argued that traditional skills-based and progressivist child-centred approaches identify literacy as an attribute of individuals. This perspective seems to lead easily to deficit discourses, whereby children, families, home backgrounds and social circumstances are blamed for low levels of school literacy achievement. I argued, therefore, in favour of cultural-critical approaches to literacy, whereby literacy is understood as socially and culturally constructed practices, and literacy learning is conceptualised in terms of normalising practices that construct particular versions of the literate student. This view of literacy acknowledges that a range of factors, including gender, social class, poverty, ethnicity, geographical location, itinerancy and school practices, can enable and constrain the types of literacy (or literacies) that are accessed and the successes that children might experience in school literacy learning.

Examining context

Because contextual factors were regarded as important to this research, I used Chapters 6 and 7 to examine the specific contexts into which the itinerant farm worker families moved, namely the community context of the town of Harbourton and the school context of Harbourton State School. I also referred to the broader

institutional context of the education system, beyond the school site where the research was conducted, and to the wider societal context beyond the community of Harbourton.

Predominantly negative stories about farm workers circulated in the community of Harbourton, constructing farm workers as criminals, illegal immigrants, untrustworthy citizens and inadequate parents. Some of these stories were supported by representations in the town's newspaper and appeared to reflect wider societal stories about people with low socio-economic status. There were also stories that recognised the diverse cultural and linguistic resources of the itinerant farm workers and acknowledged the important economic role that the workers played within the district. These, however, appeared to be in the minority and did not seem to disrupt the negative stories that were in circulation.

Within the context of Harbourton State School, teachers recounted their efforts to cope with the annual enrolment of itinerant farm workers' children. As student numbers increased, they attempted to deal with what they perceived as inadequate levels of human and material resources, additional stress and increased workloads caused by larger classes, community apprehension about the effects of these changes on "permanent" (residentially-stable) students, and the increased cultural and linguistic diversity of the student population. Most teachers discussed itinerancy in terms of its negative impact on the school and on the education of residentially-stable students. Few teachers suggested that the annual enrolment of itinerant farm workers' children may have had positive effects.

The school did not have a set of processes that ensured the effective maintenance and sharing of itinerant children's academic records. Information transfer rarely occurred between schools, particularly when children crossed state borders and changed from one state education system to another, whilst the sharing of student information amongst teachers within Harbourton State School appeared to be haphazard. If children exited the school prior to teachers' preparation of report cards, then data about the children's learning or achievement levels were not added to the files kept in the school office. To further exacerbate matters, the available information highlighted the difficulties of trying to compare and make sense of data

produced by different literacy “tests” and presented in different forms. When information about students was shared by word-of-mouth amongst teachers, it tended to focus on students’ behavioural, rather than academic, attributes.

It appeared, therefore, that the lack of records about children’s previous literacy experiences, successes and difficulties would have impeded teachers’ attempts to meet the literacy learning needs of itinerant farm workers’ children. As Luke (1999) argued, effective literacy teaching requires teachers to assess “students, their communities, their lifeworlds,” make judgements about the “kinds of curriculum goals, knowledges, skills, practices” that they need, then to “jiggle, adjust, remediate, shape and build ... classroom pedagogies to get quality, educationally, intellectually and socially valuable outcomes” (pp.9-10). To ensure the efficacy of literacy education for itinerant farm workers’ children who enrol temporarily in schools, such processes need to occur swiftly and efficiently.

Many teachers reported that itinerant farm workers’ children did not do particularly well in school literacy learning. Although incomplete, the school’s academic records indicated that few of the children achieved high results on any measure of literacy. Most of the itinerant children who had sat for statewide literacy tests in 2001 had scored in the lower 25% of their state cohorts.¹¹¹ Many teachers explained the children’s low literacy levels by referring to the families’ lifestyles and language backgrounds.

Learning from the case studies

Using a collective case study approach (Stake, 1994, 1995), this research focused on six itinerant farm workers’ families: the Moala, Potai, Ata, Ozturk, Russell and Neilsen families. This approach provided access to rich and detailed data about a relatively small number of cases (see Chapters 8 to 11), whilst also enabling a reading across the cases for broader insights into the issues of educational itinerancy and literacy learning (in the next section of this chapter).

¹¹¹ As explained in previous chapters, the reporting procedures for the statewide Years 3, 5 and 7 Tests in 2001 located children in the top 25%, the middle 50% or the lower 25% of the state cohort.

Such an approach does not mean that I am attempting to generalise from the data or trying to argue that the six case study families or the teachers within the study were representative of all families or all teachers. My intention is to identify some of the social and discursive constructions that were apparent within the school, how these related to the social and cultural contexts of the school and the community, and how our understandings of these might inform pedagogical practice in relation to school literacy learning.

The case studies provided evidence that issues relating to educational itinerancy are complex. Indeed, itinerancy and educational itinerancy did not appear to be the same for all families; itinerant farm worker families were a heterogeneous group, and their experiences of being itinerant and their ways of managing their children's schooling were varied.

Similarly, teachers' narratives were diverse and multiple, drawing on a complex web of discourses to explain the progress of itinerant farm workers' children as literacy learners. Teachers' constructions of the Moala and Potai children (Chapter 8), for instance, highlighted some of the contradictory and stereotypical narratives that were told, particularly in relation to ethnicity, and suggested that teachers' responses to the "regulars," the students who re-enrolled at the school on an annual basis, were generally positive. The case studies of the Ata, Ozturk and Russell families (Chapter 9), none of whom were regulars, drew attention to deficit stories and the way that many teachers explained low literacy achievement by reference to the children's itinerancy. In contrast, the case study of Ryan Neilsen (Chapter 10) illustrated how difficult it was for teachers to make sense of a student who was behaviourally disruptive and itinerant, yet achieving near the top of his year-level cohort on some measures of literacy.

The families' narratives (Chapter 11) provided a different perspective on educational itinerancy. In presenting "another take" on the issues discussed by teachers, the chapter highlighted the way that families located their decisions regarding education within broader family concerns. The Moala, Ozturk and Neilsen families, for example, discussed the difficulties of balancing financial,

educational and sometimes health considerations, thus providing insights into some of the everyday aspects of being itinerant that impacted on their lives.

The families' stories also demonstrated how particular details of their lives were sometimes masked from the view of the community and the school. In the case of the Neilsen family, for example, efforts to "fit in" with the community – keeping tattoos covered and removing visible signs of farm work from their bodies before engaging in community activities – were deliberate strategies to encourage community acceptance. In the school context, however, the enthusiasm, diligence and effective communicative abilities of the Moala and Russell children unintentionally masked some of the difficulties that they were experiencing in literacy learning.

INSIGHTS INTO EDUCATIONAL ITINERANCY AND LITERACY LEARNING

In this section, I read across the case study chapters to offer some tentative and partial insights into educational itinerancy and literacy learning. This section thus moves beyond the specific details that informed the summaries of the data chapters and highlights insights of a more general nature. It begins by discussing the prevalence of deficit constructions of itinerant farm workers and their families within the school context.

A prevalence of deficit constructions

Although this thesis has shown that teachers shifted within a complex discursive web – at times consistently and at other times contradictorily – to construct and position the itinerant children and their families, deficit stories appeared to be dominant in the school context and in teachers' explanations of students' literacy learning. On some occasions, teachers linked the children's generally low literacy performances to social, behavioural, learning and developmental problems. At other times, the children's achievement levels and behaviours were blamed on their parents, who were deemed to be working too many hours and to therefore be too tired to provide adequate supervision, care, or home literacy experiences for their children.

Most teachers identified itinerancy as one of the significant issues that impacted on the literacy learning of itinerant children and regarded low literacy results at school as predictable consequences of an itinerant lifestyle and of other factors related to the children's circumstances, including ethnicity, language backgrounds and parental characteristics. Many teachers appeared to conceptualise cultural and linguistic diversity in terms of its negative impact on children's school literacy performances, and not as a productive classroom resource that could benefit the literacy learning of all children (cf The New London Group, 1996).

However, constructions of itinerant farm worker families as deficient were also reminiscent of the negative stories about farm workers that were circulating in the community of Harbourton and of stories about low socio-economic families that have been reported in other research (e.g. Carrington & Luke, 2003; Comber, 1998; Henderson, 2002; Hicks, 2002; Lewis, 2001). Neither teachers nor members of Harbourton's community talked explicitly about social class or poverty, yet these factors appeared to be woven into their constructions of itinerant farm workers' families (cf Lewis, 2001). In describing the children's parents, teachers drew on a cluster of characteristics, some of which were fairly specific to farm workers, such as occupation and lifestyle, and others that have been applied more generally to families of low socio-economic status, such as being time-poor, tired and in possession of limited material resources (Comber, 1998; Henderson, 2002; Hicks, 2002; Lewis, 2001). It appeared that teachers used some, but not necessarily all, of these traits as indicators that children were not likely to achieve particularly well in literacy learning.

Negative constructions of itinerant farm workers and their children appeared to be part of an oppositional logic, whereby residentially-stable families were represented as possessing positive traits that itinerant children supposedly did not have. Although such constructions tended to be stereotypical, encompassing all itinerant families and representing them as an homogenous group, it was apparent that teachers' stories about itinerant families drew on a complex array of factors, including itinerancy, ethnicity, cultural and linguistic differences, socio-economic status, gender and teachers' familiarity with the children's families. As has been noted elsewhere, multiple and intersecting factors tend to feature in the social and

cultural constructions that are used to make sense of literacy learning and literacy learners (e.g. Comber et al., 2001a; Hill et al., 1998a, 2002; Lewis, 2001; Luke, 1999; Martinez, 2000; Nichols & Broadhurst, 2002).

The deficit and stereotypical narratives that were evident in the school context paralleled stories that circulated in the community of Harbourton and broader societal stories that were promulgated by the media. In these stories, those who were culturally and linguistically different – including people living in poverty, immigrants, and ethnic groups who looked different or whose languages, customs and religions were dissimilar from hegemonic practices – were blamed for not fitting perceived social norms (cf Peel, 2003; Shobe, 2002; Singh, 2000; Tsolidis, 2001).

Within the school context, deficit discourses appeared to represent commonsense knowledges that regarded children's inappropriate behaviours, actions and under-achievement in literacy learning as predictable and "natural" consequences of children's and parents' choices of lifestyle, attitudes and behaviours. Taken-for-granted assumptions about the negative impact of an itinerant lifestyle on children's schooling, for example, meant that families were frequently viewed as culpable for the problems or difficulties that the children experienced at school.

Because of the long hours required of farm workers during the harvesting season, farm worker parents had few opportunities to attend the school or to play an active or visible role in the daily operations of classrooms. Consequently, teachers generally had limited direct contact with the parents and were not privy to the types of decisions that families had to make or to the angst that some families experienced in relation to those decisions. In the absence of information that might have directly challenged deficit discourses in the school context, and with negative views prevalent in the broader community, it appeared that teachers may have been constrained by the stories that were available.

The invisibility of some practices

When teachers focused narrowly on the deficiencies of children and families in relation to literacy learning, it appeared that the effects of context and issues outside of school were hidden from view (cf Comber, 1998; Malin, 1990a, 1990b). It also became apparent that children's strengths or capabilities that did not match the valued and normalised practices of schooling were sometimes invisible, especially when teachers focused on children's perceived deficiencies (cf Kocatepe, 2004; Malin, 1990a; Thomson, 2002). For example, Kalisi Potai appeared to have strengths in the home context, yet was perceived negatively by some teachers (see Chapter 8). Similarly, Ryan Neilsen's results on some literacy measures suggested that his abilities in literacy learning may have been invisible when teachers were focusing on his non-compliance with school rules (see Chapter 10).

The school's actions in relation to students identified as "ESL" provided further examples of the apparent invisibility of particular student traits. In general, classroom teachers and the designated ESL teachers tended to focus on the difficulties that ESL students experienced with English literacy learning. Because the children were conceptualised in terms of what they could not do, their strengths, including their bilingualism and specific knowledges of their home languages, appeared to be irrelevant in the school setting. Even the use of the "ESL" label for this particular group of children seemed problematic. Despite the children's diversity being evident in the range of languages and the English dialects they used (cf Barnett, 2001), the term "ESL" tended to highlight their deficits and to homogenise their diverse linguistic resources. Furthermore, teachers did not mention the children's dialectal differences at all.

Many teachers seemed to engage with cause-effect or deficit logic, whereby children's itinerancy, ESL background or low socio-economic status was regarded as an indicator of potentially unsuccessful literacy learning. As with Comber's (1997a; see also Comber & Kamler, 2004) "poverty = illiteracy" equation, this logic locates the responsibility for literacy learning in circumstances beyond teachers' control. Generally, teachers are not in a position to change families' itinerant lifestyles, language backgrounds or socio-economic status. However, once teachers take up such logic, considerations of mainstream curriculum or schooling practices

as explanations of underachievement in literacy learning seem to become redundant (Alloway & Gilbert, 1998).

Alternatives to deficit constructions

Deficit discourses were not the only discourses accessed by teachers. Indeed, some itinerant children – in particular, Leilani, Sepi and Sina Moala (see Chapter 8) and Kirra and Lexie Russell (see Chapter 9) – were described by teachers in positive terms most of the time. However, teachers' positive comments about these children focused mostly on evidence that the children had taken up the normative practices of being “good” students – their grooming, classroom behaviours, good manners, strong work ethic and ability to fit in with school practices – and not on literacy learning per se.

However, there were exceptions. In the cases of Mustafa Ata (see Chapter 9) and Ryan Neilsen (see Chapter 10), there were teachers who identified positive traits and used these to move the students towards productive literacy learning. Ms O'Sullivan, for example (see Chapter 9), appeared to be a resistant reader within the school context and constructed the itinerant students in her class, including Mustafa, as well-mannered, challenging and stimulating. Ms Anderson (see Chapter 10) focused on Ryan's multiple subjectivities and worked to disrupt deficit discourses, thereby accessing pedagogical options that helped to engage Ryan in school literacy learning.

Although the situations regarding Mustafa and Ryan were quite different, Ms O'Sullivan and Ms Anderson had engaged these students in school literacy learning. It appeared that both teachers had been able to resist the deficit discourses that circulated in the school and the community, and to achieve what Kamler and Comber (2005) described as “the kind of pedagogic, curriculum and people work required for connecting and reconnecting students with literacy” (p.7). In contrast, teachers who subscribed to deficit views had struggled to find pedagogical options that worked for these specific students.

Within the context of Harbourton State School, many teachers – including Mr Connington who taught both Mustafa and Ryan (see Chapters 9 and 10) – appeared

to be entrenched in a culture of deficit logic. Nevertheless, a comment from Ryan's father suggested that Mr Connington had tried to make a space for working positively with Ryan (see Chapter 11). His comment highlighted what may have been one small attempt to "turn around to students and their families and to see them differently" (Kamler & Comber, 2005, p.9).

Low academic expectations

Even though some of the itinerant children were described as having positive traits, many teachers had low expectations of what itinerant farm workers' children could achieve in school literacy learning. As has already been noted, teachers identified a range of factors relating to the children's circumstances, including their itinerancy, ethnicity, language background, the extent to which they complied with the school's standards of behaviour, and characteristics of the parents, as limiting the children's achievements in literacy learning.

The itinerant children's absences from the school and for sections of the established curriculum or intervention programs – regardless of whether they were attending another school or not – did indeed make it appear that the children missed valuable learning time. However, most teachers did not identify curriculum discontinuity as an issue for itinerant children, even though many itinerant families moved from one state to another and their children moved in and out of educational systems with different school entry ages, transition points, curriculum, and even handwriting styles (Curriculum Corporation 1998). Instead, teachers tended to conceptualise the arrival of the itinerant students in terms of its impact on the school, hence expressing concern about the administrative difficulties that resulted from their enrolments.

The difficulties of understanding families' social practices

Despite the prevalence of deficit discourses in the school context, there were occasions when teachers regarded some itinerant parents positively. Mr and Mrs Moala, for example, were considered "good" parents who did the "right thing" by their children, making certain that they complied with school practices, ensuring that their homework was done, and timing the family's departure from Harbourton to coincide with the end of the school year (see Chapter 11). Although the Moala

family's visible involvement in community activities, along with their status as "regulars" who returned annually to Harbourton, may have contributed to their acceptance by the community, none of these practices seemed to make a difference to the Moala children's literacy achievements. In particular, their twin boys Sepi and Sina struggled with school literacy learning.

As indicated by the data in Chapter 11, the actions and practices of the other families were at times invisible to school personnel and, on some occasions, teachers misread the intentions of families' practices. These findings raise questions about the assumptions that teachers made and how many of the stories that criticised farm workers and their families were generalisations based on a small number of cases or were founded on assumptions based on inaccurate information.

My interviews with the six case study families also highlighted aspects of their lifestyles that were generally not visible to teachers. Although the families supported school processes and wanted their children to succeed educationally, their decisions were made in conjunction with broad family issues, including health, welfare and financial considerations. This meant that education, including literacy learning, sometimes did not get the priority that teachers might have thought it deserved.

In general, the teachers talked about itinerant children in terms of their "fit" with normalised school practices and made very few references to the differences in school practices that the children may have encountered as they moved from school to school and from one education system to another. Some children and parents, however, were cognisant of the difficulties that were experienced and seemed well-placed to talk about these. Several of the children, for instance, discussed the social difficulties of moving into a new school and indicated that they had sometimes misled teachers into believing that they were coping quite well, even though they were finding the transition to be demanding.

Many of the teachers' stories about itinerant families were tentative, based on apparent suppositions, and the information that I gained from families during interviews sometimes challenged the assumptions that teachers or community members had made. For example, several of the families discussed their efforts to

fit in with the community of Harbourton. Although these actions were not obvious to members of the community, several of the families indicated their willingness to be seen as part of the community rather than as outsiders, particularly in light of the discrimination that they believed existed. Insights from the families indicated the inaccuracy of many of the negative and stereotypical stories that seemed so prevalent within the community and school contexts.

Responding to the enrolment of itinerant farm workers' children

The case studies highlighted the importance of teachers being able to respond quickly and effectively to the enrolment of itinerant farm workers' children, especially since the children's families were temporary residents of Harbourton and there was the possibility that they might depart at short notice. For Ryan Neilsen, for example, considerable learning time was lost to behaviour management before his abilities and strengths in aspects of literacy learning were noticed.

The case studies also emphasised the necessity for teachers to have curricular and pedagogical knowledges that would allow them to offer immediate and efficient literacy instruction that catered explicitly and appropriately for the children's learning needs. For some of the case study children, especially the Ata, Ozturk, Moala and Potai children who were bilingual, teachers seemed unable to recognise and diagnose the difficulties that the children were experiencing. As a result, they also appeared to be struggling to make pedagogical decisions that were critical for the children's successes in literacy learning.

It was as though the school's focus on the administrative difficulties caused by the enrolment of itinerant children had helped to sideline important pedagogical issues. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the swift and efficient assessment of students' literacy learning and the production and implementation of responsive literacy programs were necessary to ensure the children's successes in school literacy learning (Alloway & Gilbert, 1998; Luke 1999, 2003; The New London Group, 1996).

REVIEWING THE RESEARCH

Looking back: Considering the limitations

As already indicated, this research project opened up a “new” topic for discussion in the field of literacy research. It was not, however, new for the school site, where school personnel had been agonising over the “problems” caused by the annual influx of itinerant farm workers’ children for many years. Although some school personnel may have hoped that this project would offer some sure-fire solutions to perceived problems, it has been but a first foray into the field. Nevertheless, it has opened up spaces for talking about the school literacy learning of a group of students who, in general, had not been doing particularly well in school literacy learning.

One limitation of this research is that the term “literacy” and its relationship to the key learning area of “English” were not problematised as part of the data collection process. Although the review of literacy research at the beginning of this thesis identified literacy as a plural concept and I used the term “school literacy” to refer to literacy learning within the school context, I acknowledge that I have not attempted to tease out the terms in a specific way. Nevertheless, I think that there is much to be learned from the teachers’ uses of the terms “literacy” and “English.” Most teachers conflated the two areas and this was especially noticeable when they talked about students’ results, as discussions of “literacy” invariably involved reference to results that appeared on report cards under the label of “English.” When talking about literacy, teachers’ references to other key learning areas were quite limited.

Although the voices of teachers, children and parents are heard in this thesis, the research has an educational purpose and focus, and I have directed feedback towards those working in the school context. Since the beginning of the research process, I have given copies of all publications to the school, thus keeping school personnel informed as to what I was thinking, how I was interpreting data, and what I was presenting to academic and educational forums. I am mindful, though, that I have not provided the same level of feedback to the parents or children who participated and, as a result, they have not had opportunities to engage in further

discussion about the project. However, I am aware that the families' willingness to share their experiences of being itinerant farm workers has strengthened this study by showing how commonsensical knowledges in the school context can represent (and misrepresent) the diversity of their experiences.

One of my reasons for using a case study approach was that I wanted to engage with the rich details, diversity and complexity of the issues surrounding the children's itinerancy. However, I am conscious that a focus on only six families in one school site could be regarded as a limitation of the research. Nevertheless, I am confident that the detailed information from the six case studies has provided significant insights that would not necessarily have been forthcoming from a large-scale quantitative study or from a more broadly based qualitative study. As the sole researcher in this situation, I have been able to ensure levels of data reliability that are not always possible in multi-researcher studies. However, I recognise that there would always be a limit to the amount of data that a single researcher could effectively collect, transcribe and analyse, and that I was necessarily limited by the time constraints imposed by my doctoral program.

I am also aware that there were many other stories that could have been told about the data and that processes of selection were in operation during all stages of the research, from my selection of particular families and particular days to collect data, through to my selection of data for retelling and analysing. In trying to move as seamlessly as possible through the dimensions of critical discourse analysis (description, interpretation and explanation), thus weaving together aspects of textual, discursive and social analysis (see Fairclough, 1989, 2001c), I hope that the narratives of the data do not appear too organised or too simple. Although I have tried to give a sense of some of the contradictions and disjunctions that appeared, in some respects the "messiness" of the data has been lost in its retelling.

Finding ways forward: Implications

In Chapter 1, I explained that this thesis was going to engage with aspects of what is "getting done" in relation to the literacy learning of itinerant farm workers' children. However, in considering some of the implications of this thesis, I wish to now consider what Luke (2002b) described as "the sticky matter of what

educationally *is to be done*" (p.54, emphasis added). In light of the complexities and multiplicities that were evident throughout the data, it would be unrealistic to expect that there is a "quick fix" that will ensure literacy success for all educationally itinerant children. However, the insights of this research offer some starting points for a reflexive and responsive approach to literacy learning for students who experience education differently from residentially-stable students.

This study has highlighted the prevalence of deficit discourses. Deficit logic that blames children and their families for literacy underachievement locates "the problem" outside the school setting and beyond the control of teachers. Because this view is constraining and likely to be counter-productive, there is a need, then, to rethink or to "turn around" deficit logic (Comber & Kamler, 2004, p.295; see also Alloway & Gilbert, 1998; Comber, 1997a), and a reconceptualisation of educational itinerancy, in relation to literacy learning, seems like a useful place to start.

The study indicated that being educationally itinerant was not the same for all families and that some of the teachers' assumptions about itinerant families were based on limited information. This suggests that teachers need to know much more about educational itinerancy, how experiences of being educationally itinerant differ, and what such experiences might mean for school literacy learning. Opportunities, space and time are needed for classroom teachers and other school personnel to talk with the families of itinerant children about their experiences and to develop some shared understandings about itinerancy and how it relates to the children's literacy learning (Hicks, 2002). Such an approach would move away from an understanding of itinerancy as "an unfortunate 'problem' that must be 'solved' or 'escaped' (Danaher & Danaher, 2000, p.28) towards discussions about access, participation and socially-just literacy curriculum and pedagogy.

This means, then, that instead of asking how schools can "fix up" itinerant students, school personnel must be able to address the more difficult issue of how taken-for-granted school practices might change in light of the experiences of itinerant families. Teachers of literacy need ways of contesting and disrupting deficit thinking, to enable a re-examination of their assumptions about particular children

and their families (Comber & Kamler, 2004; Kamler & Comber, 2005). As Hicks (2002) noted, a reconceptualisation like this requires “a moral shift, a willingness to open oneself up to the possibility of *seeing* those who differ from us” and it is “very hard work, but work that lies at the heart of teaching” (p.152). However, as the situation at Harbourton State School indicated, such work requires more than individual teacher efforts to ensure that the culture of deficit logic is replaced by a more productive approach to literacy teaching and learning. The contestation of deficit assumptions and the construction and maintenance of a different school culture requires the establishment of strong professional learning communities, in association with strong school leadership and teachers’ willingness to commit to a long-term and intellectually demanding project (Alloway & Gilbert, 1998; Comber & Kamler, 2004; Kamler & Comber, 2005; Luke, 2003).

Part of the process of seeing difference is to recognise that itinerant farm workers’ children may very well be “differently literate” (Carrington & Luke, 2003; Dudley-Marling & Murphy, 1997; Gregory & Williams, 2000; Heath, 1982, 1983; Luke & Kale, 1983). A cultural-critical view of literacy learning advocates the use of a “wide lens” to take social and cultural contexts into consideration (Hill et al., 1998a, p.13). This means looking beyond children in classrooms towards the social and cultural contexts of families and the multiple educational contexts and home contexts that they experience. The challenge for teachers is to identify the literacy strengths that itinerant children bring to school. This is quite a different process from check-listing what it is that the students cannot do. In terms of Thomson’s (2002) metaphor, it means identifying the linguistic and cultural resources that children carry in their virtual schoolbags.

These moves are the first steps towards recognising, valuing and using difference as a productive resource and enacting a recognitive social justice (Gale, 2000; Gutiérrez et al., 2002; Janks, 2005; The New London Group, 1996; Volk & de Acosta, 2001). However, teachers must also be mindful of the importance for all students to have access to mainstream literacy practices and to develop a broad repertoire of practices for negotiating current and future literacies (Department of Education, Queensland, 2000a; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Luke 2003; Nakata, 2003; The New London Group, 1996).

As already indicated, such work is likely to be conceptually demanding and to require serious intellectual engagement (Alloway & Gilbert, 1998; Comber & Kamler, 2004; Kamler & Comber, 2005; Luke, 2003). As Comber and Kamler (2004) pointed out, to simply “celebrate what children can do and ignore what they cannot do” is not enough (p.307). By disrupting deficit views and moving beyond the commonsense argument that itinerancy has a negative effect on literacy learning, teachers have a chance at the “theory-busting, theory building and paradigm shift” that Luke (2003, p.61) argued is necessary, and to effect transformative action (Janks, 2005). In moving beyond the view that under-achievement is inevitable or predictable for itinerant students, teachers should be better placed to focus on responsive and flexible pedagogies for enabling children to achieve demonstrable and sustainable learning outcomes in school literacy learning. Such moves would also allow a review of how teachers might work with children who are learning English as an additional language.

Another consideration for school personnel relates to the stories that circulated in the community of Harbourton. Many of the teachers’ interviews indicated intertextual and interdiscursive links to community and wider societal narratives. Although stories in the broader contexts might be seen to constrain the types of stories that were told in the school context, the theorisation of the social world underlying this thesis (see Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Fairclough, 1989, 2001c) offers a dialectical understanding that notes the potential for social change. I acknowledged from the outset that there were social justice issues embedded in the conceptualisation of this research, and a commitment to social justice implies a desire to enact change, by overcoming barriers to access and participation and ensuring equitable learning opportunities and outcomes. Although the disruption of deficit discourses within the school context is a desirable place to start, school action needs to be accompanied by much wider social action.

To this end, there needs to be a consideration of how localised action within the school might begin to influence community perceptions. Although working on issues related to homophobia and violence, not on literacy issues, Beckett, Tweed and Fisher (1999) demonstrated how this might be done. In their case, change was achieved through classroom action, through a whole-school approach that involved

teachers, students, non-teaching staff and members of the school's Parents and Citizens' Association, and through "politicising" the children to work with their parents and other family members (p.266). In relation to the literacy learning of itinerant farm workers' children, opportunities to raise community awareness about farm worker families and to build on the positive stories that are already in circulation could work towards much broader social justice goals (Beckett, Tweed & Fisher, 1999; Hicks, 2002). By helping to disrupt the dominant negative stories, such efforts should begin the challenging process of countering discrimination and developing respect for difference and diversity.

Potential for further research

Because this research has investigated a previously unexplored area in an Australian context, there are multiple opportunities for further research. With regards to itinerant farm workers' children, follow-up investigations about educational itinerancy and its relationship to literacy learning could look beyond the one school site of this study to multiple school contexts, other state education systems and other sectors of schooling.

Some recent Australian literacy research (e.g. Hill et al., 1998a, 1998b, 2002) has used a longitudinal approach, reporting that children's literacy development does not necessarily follow predictable or sequential pathways, that different factors influence literacy development at different times, and that early differences in literacy achievement often persist and influence later development. This would suggest that a tracking of the literacy learning of itinerant farm workers' children over time, and from place to place, might offer useful data for understanding how factors relating to educational itinerancy intersect with literacy development. In light of the unpredictable nature of farm work (see Chapters 5 and 11), such a project would no doubt involve some interesting challenges in terms of data collection.

Most Australian studies that have investigated specific groups of itinerant children – including research on defence force children (e.g. Rahmani, 1985) and show and circus children (e.g. Danaher, 1998b, 1999) – have focused on broad educational issues and not on specific aspects of literacy learning. When literacy achievement

has been a consideration in studies of itinerancy or mobility (e.g. Birch & Lally, 1994; Fields, 1995; McCarthy, 1991), it has mostly been conceptualised in terms of standardised test scores. This means that there is considerable scope for research that takes a cultural-critical approach to literacy learning.

Additionally, it would seem timely to investigate much broader questions relating to the capacity of schools to work productively with an apparently mobile Australian society (see Chapter 3). With mobility now tagged as a current educational issue for Australian schools and with relevant educational policy still formative (see Chapter 3), a sound research base would appear to be a necessary prerequisite to future policy development. Recent moves by the Australian federal government to ensure national consistency in schooling (e.g. see Nelson, 2003a, 2003b, 2004b, 2004c) have highlighted the folly of having eight separate and quite different education systems catering for a student population that is small relative to other countries. However, as this study has indicated, the introduction of nationally consistent starting ages, curriculum and matriculation requirements will not address all of the issues that were identified as impacting on the literacy education of itinerant students.

Finally, issues raised in this thesis suggested numerous specific topics for further research. To keep this discussion short, however, I will mention only two possibilities for further investigation. Firstly, an investigation of children's use of non-standard dialects of English may enhance understanding about the ways that teachers "read" students, especially since this research suggested that teachers' perceptions of socio-economic status may have been influenced by the students' dialects. Secondly, the records of the itinerant students' literacy achievements at Harbourton State School, although incomplete, indicated apparent differences between students' extremely low results on statewide tests of literacy and their apparently better results on school-based measures, as well as between what teachers said about students' progress and the ratings they gave on report cards. Whilst such issues raise questions about the aspects of literacy that are being investigated by particular literacy assessments, I also wonder what sense is made of the different types of assessment by parents and what readings they make of

teachers' results and comments. These considerations warrant further investigation and clarification.

FINAL WORDS

Through an investigation of the social and discursive construction of itinerant farm workers' children as literacy learners, this thesis has offered some initial insights into the fields of educational itinerancy and its relationship to literacy learning. In suggesting the implications of these insights, I recommended a reconceptualisation of educational itinerancy within the field of literacy learning. I also argued that there was potential for those in the school context to raise awareness within the wider community and to act on some of the social justice issues that had become evident.

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¹¹² To ensure the anonymity of the participants of the current research, the pseudonym "Harbourton" has been used as the name of the town and appears in the names of the school (Harbourton State School) and the local newspaper (*The Harbourton Bulletin*). This means that some documents listed in this reference list, particularly policy documents from Harbourton State School and newspaper articles from *The Harbourton Bulletin*, cannot be traced. Access to these primary documents may be obtained from the author. However, access will be dependent on a guarantee that participant anonymity will be maintained.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A	Information letter to parents/guardians
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APPENDIX A

Information letter to parents/guardians

*James Cook University, School of Education
Project: Literacy learning and
the children of itinerant seasonal horticultural workers*

15 September, 2000

Dear Parent or Guardian

This is to invite you and your child to participate in a study being conducted by Robyn Henderson of the School of Education, James Cook University. The study has the full support of the principal of your child's school. Participation, of course, is entirely voluntary.

The study will look at how children cope with changing schools and at how well schools support all children in literacy learning. Information from parents is really useful and could make a difference to the ways that schools cater for children.

I plan to work with four families who have children in either Year 4 or Year 5. If the children return to the same school in 2001 and 2002, then I would like to follow these children as they move into the older year levels of primary school. I plan to observe the children in class during their first week at the school. This will apply only to 2001 and 2002. I will also interview the children individually and will ask them about how they feel about the tasks that they are asked to do in literacy lessons. There will be two interviews in 2000, three in 2001 and one in 2002.

I would also like to interview you about how your child copes with moving schools and about your perceptions of your child's literacy learning. There will be two interviews in this year, two in 2001 and one in 2002.

I seek your involvement in my study and your permission for your son/daughter to be involved. All information will be kept strictly confidential, data will be safely stored, then destroyed after the study has been finalised, and no real names will be used in the project. If you would like to talk to me at any time, I can be contacted through the school (Phone 4786 9555) or at James Cook University (Phone 4781 4761).

Thank you.

Robyn Henderson

APPENDIX B

References to farm workers in *The Harbourton Bulletin*, 2000-2001¹¹³

DIRECT REFERENCES

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Clements, M. (2000, June 9). Strike [Letter to the editor]. *The Harbourton Bulletin*, p.2.

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¹¹³ This list includes articles, letters to the editor and cartoons, but excludes the court news, even though that was the section of *The Harbourton Bulletin* that contained the majority of references to farm workers. The court news is discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

INDIRECT REFERENCES

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OBLIQUE REFERENCES

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Letter to the editor:

Gadget, D., & MacKenzie, N. (2001, August 3). Visitors feel unwelcome [Letter to the editor]. *The Harbourton Bulletin*, p.2.

APPENDIX C

The literacy section of the report card used for Years 2-7 students at Harbourton State School in 2001

Behaviour level	Achievement			Effort		
Gold Silver 1 2 3 4	Advanced	Developing satisfactorily	Emerging	Consistently high	Satisfactorily	Greater effort needed
ENGLISH						
Reading						
Comprehension						
Fluency						
Writing						
Composing						
Spelling						
Editing skills						
Word knowledge						
Handwriting						
Listening/speaking						
Listens and follows directions						
Speaks with confidence						
Speaks clearly and fluently						
Participates in discussion						

APPENDIX D

Report card comments referring to aspects of itinerancy – 2000 and 2001

SEMESTER 1, 2000

- Year 2 [Student's name] seems to be capable of current work load but does require constant encouragement to complete tasks. [Student's name] is still settling in to our class and does at times need to be reminded of classroom protocol.
- Year 3 [Student's name] is a friendly and co-operative student. She has settled well into the class and is producing very pleasing work.
- Year 3 It is difficult to make an accurate evaluation of [student's name]'s work since he has not been with us too long. However, he has adjusted well and applies himself to his work.
- Year 5 [Student's name] has settled well in our class and is a courteous and co-operative student.

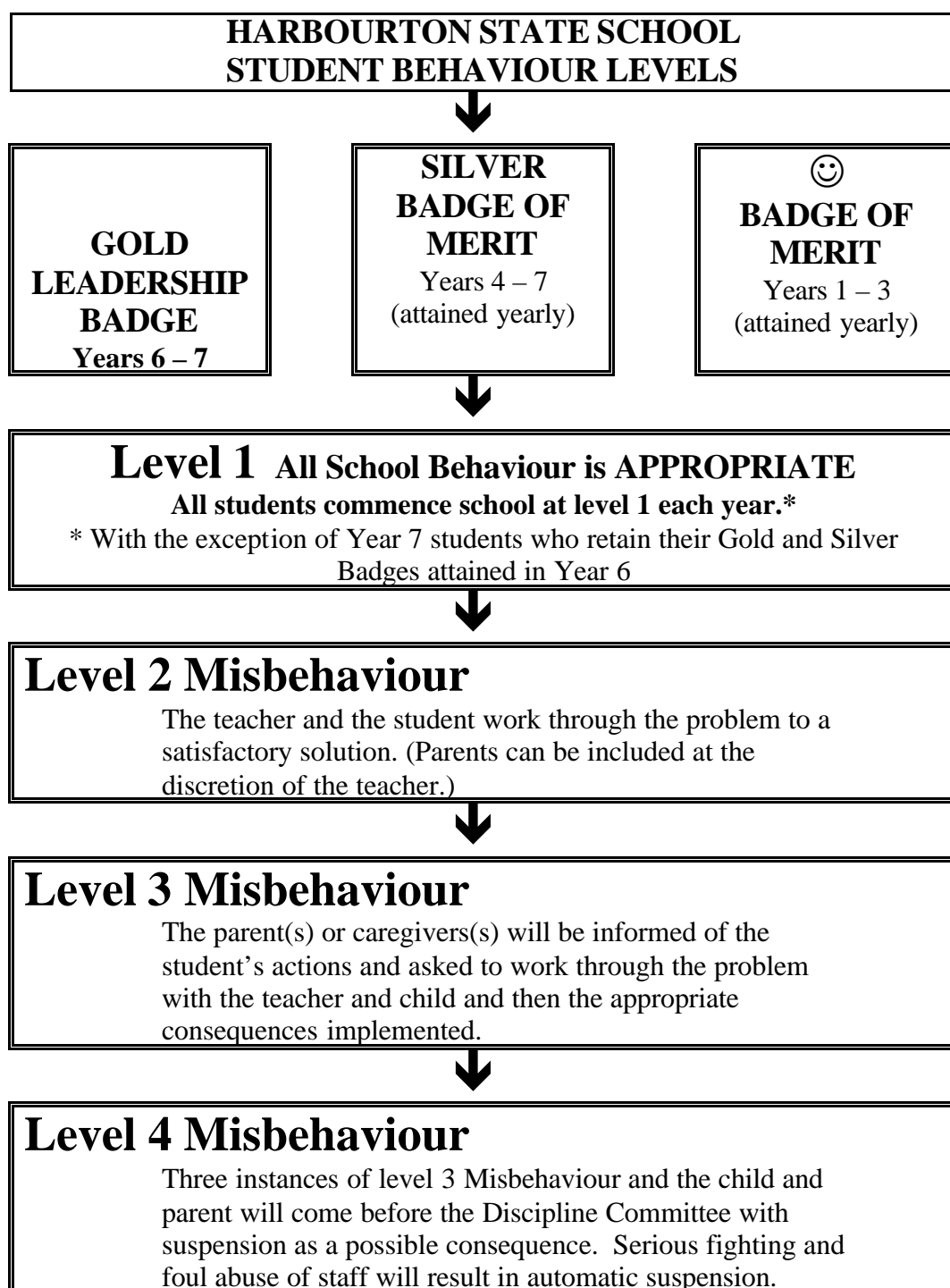
SEMESTER 1, 2001

- Year 1 It is difficult for me to give an accurate assessment of [student's name]'s progress due to him only being with us a short while.
- Year 1 [Student's name] is a pleasure to teach and has settled well into the routine.
- Year 3 [Student's name] has settled down well in this class. She is a pleasant pupil who gets on well with her peers.
- Year 5 [Student's name] has had considerable difficulty settling into Harbourton State this term. He has shown ability when he applies himself. With the right attitude I'm sure he will produce good results.

Year 5	[Student's name] has settled in well this term. He displays a positive attitude to his work and has achieved some pleasing results.
Year 5	[Student's name] has settled in well since his arrival this term. He applies himself to classroom tasks and displays a positive attitude to his work. Well done.
Year 5	All the students in our class were happy to see [student's name] return. He is a hardworking, friendly student who fits in easily to our classroom.
Year 5	[Student's name] is a hard working student who fits into a new classroom and routines very quickly. He is a keen, polite student who takes pride in his work.
Year 5	[Student's name] has settled in well this term. She displays a positive attitude to her work and strives to produce work of a good standard.
Year 6	[Student's name] is trying hard and adjusting well. He often seeks reassurance about the task in hand.
Year 6	[Student's name] has adjusted very well and is a diligent and motivated student.
Year 7	[Student's name] is settling into his new environment very well. Semester 2 will provide me with more data on which to base a more accurate reflection of his academic abilities.
Year 7	[Student's name] is settling into class as if she had never left. She needs to think before she speaks or acts as on occasions she has stated her thoughts and opinions without considering the effects of her actions. [Student's name] will continue to make steady progress as long as she continues to attempt all tasks presented to her.
Year 7	[Student's name] has settled into the class routine as if she has been here for the whole year. I appreciate [student's name]'s polite manner and her willingness to attempt all tasks presented to her. She is a constructive class member and her results will continue to improve while she maintains this attitude to work.

APPENDIX E

An excerpt from Harbourton State School's *Student behaviour management strategy*¹¹⁴



¹¹⁴ This excerpt comes from Harbourton State School's *Student behaviour management strategy* (see Harbourton State School, 2000, pp.2-3).

EXAMPLES

GOLD BADGE OF LEADERSHIP

This level of exceptional behaviour is available to students in Year's¹¹⁵ 6 and 7 who display leadership qualities, always wear the uniform and adhere to school rules.

Students are nominated for this award by teachers and must be interviewed by administration as part of the process.

Consequences include: Receives a Gold Leadership Badge, may nominate for school, class or sport captain, meet visiting dignitaries, represent the school community and school functions, receives an end of term behaviour certificate and attends class celebration activities.

SILVER OR ☺ BADGE OF MERIT

This level of behaviour will be awarded to all students who act appropriately in and out of the classroom, who are co-operative, responsible and show good sportsmanship.

Consequences include: Receives a Badge of Merit, is eligible to nominate for a class or sport captain, receives an end of term behaviour certificate and attends class celebration activities.

LEVEL 1 – APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR

This level of behaviour is assigned to all students at the commencement of each year, with the exception of Year 7 students with a Gold Badge or a Silver Badge attained in Year 6.

Level 1 students display appropriate behaviour both in class and in the playground.

Consequences include: Issue of Good Ones,¹¹⁶ receives an end of term behaviour certificate and attends class celebration activities.

LEVEL 2 MISBEHAVIOUR (Dealt with by teacher)

Examples of this level of misbehaviour include persistent, littering, annoying other children, minor disruptive classroom behaviour, chewing gum, spitting, riding bicycle in school grounds, use of inappropriate language etc.

Consequences include: Small detentions in the solution room, apologizing, completing additional work in own time etc. Does not receive an end of term behaviour certificate and exclusion from class celebration activities.

¹¹⁵ A number of typing and/or grammatical errors appear in this document, as per the original.

¹¹⁶ The “Good Ones” were award certificates that went into a weekly school draw at a school parade. The winners received prizes, usually a tuckshop voucher.

LEVEL 3 MISBEHAVIOUR (Dealt with by admin and teacher. Parent notified)

Examples of level 3 misbehaviour include persistent, disobedience, disruption to class, task refusal, insolence, theft, bullying, harassment, minor acts of violence, abusive/aggressive swearing.

Consequences include: Lunch time detentions in Solution Room (min. 5 days), removal of privileges, restrictions on sport, excursions, camps, special events, withdrawal from class where appropriate. Student place on Monitoring Card. Does not receive an end of term behaviour certificate and exclusion from class celebration activities.

LEVEL 4 – SEVERE MISBEHAVIOUR (Discipline Committee)

Examples of level 4 misbehaviour include:

BEHAVIOUR	CONSEQUENCE
A. Three level 3 occurrences within one month	Discipline Committee and suspension.
B. Major vandalism	Restitution for damage through school service.
C. Abusive swearing and/or aggressive behaviour towards staff	Automatic suspension. Further incidents will result in further suspension or exclusion from school.
D. Aggressive and violent fighting	Automatic suspension. Further incidents will result in further suspensions or exclusion from school.