

## AN INVASION OF GREEN-STAINED FARM WORKERS FROM OUTER SPACE(S)? OR A RURAL COMMUNITY STRUGGLING WITH ISSUES OF ITINERANCY?

Robyn Henderson  
School of Cultural and Language Studies in Education  
Queensland University of Technology

### ABSTRACT

*This paper investigates stories that are told in a North Queensland rural community about the arrival of itinerant farm workers for the winter harvesting season. Permanent residents often represent this annual event as an invasion of the community by undesirable people who break the law, exacerbate racial tensions and take jobs from locals. Such stories are also heard in the community's schools where significant numbers of itinerant children enrol during the harvesting season. In the face of sometimes hostile reception from permanent residents of the community, many itinerant families work hard to 'fit in', trying to ensure positive experiences for their children. This paper explores some of the stories that circulate and examines the way that negative perceptions of itinerant families tend to restrict the community's capacity to recognise the benefits that families could contribute to community life.*

### INTRODUCTION

Many rural districts across Australia rely on an itinerant workforce to facilitate the harvesting of annual crops. Indeed, in the eastern states of Australia, large numbers of itinerant farm workers<sup>1</sup> traverse state borders each year, moving between the winter harvesting season of North Queensland and the summer harvesting season of southern New South Wales and Victoria. Many rural workers travel as family groups, with their children attending schools in the farming districts where work is available. For the children of itinerant farm workers, this means moving in and out of schools, and sometimes in and out of education systems, two or more times a year.

Historically, itinerant peoples have been ostracised, even persecuted, and at times exoticised (Danaher, 2000b; 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 that of the novel and movie *Chocolat* (Hallström, 2002; Harris, 1999) and television series like *Carnivàle* which was shown recently on the ABC (Knauf, 2003). Mobility or itinerancy is often identified as a binary opposition to residential stability or sedentarism, so that those "who take their home with them, instead of living in settled neighbourhoods, 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).

Logic that takes up these dualistic notions often seems to call on geographical metaphors, whereby space or place helps to mark out social and cultural differences. Those who are spatially located within a 'settled community' may see themselves as insiders who share particular types of social and cultural knowledges, whilst identifying those who are mobile as outsiders or 'other' (Cragg & Thrift, 2000; Erickson, 2001). Erickson (2001) offers the metaphor of cultural boundaries and borders to explain how cultural differences can mark out lines of difference, including differences in power and social prestige. He argues that a cultural boundary refers to the presence of a cultural difference, but a cultural border is a social construction that identifies the presence or absence of particular types of cultural knowledge. If residential stability and itinerancy – the ways in which particular families have chosen to live their lives – are accepted as sociocultural practices, then the 'border' of a settled community, in a physical sense, may very well become a cultural border that works to exclude those who have taken up an itinerant lifestyle.

Until recently in the Australian context, educational issues in relation to itinerant farm worker families and their children had not been a specific research focus in studies that have investigated educational itinerancy, even though such families often rated a mention with "other seasonal employees" (Moriarty & Danaher, 1998, p. 8; see also Danaher, 2000a; Fields, 1997; Welch, 1987). Recent educational research (e.g., Henderson, 2001, 2004), however, has demonstrated that, within one school context at least, itinerant farm workers' children are often constructed by teachers as 'problem children' or as coming from 'problem families'.

Deficit constructions like these tend to ignore notions of productive diversity (Janks, 2005; The New London Group, 1996) and lead instead to the implementation of compensatory approaches that aim to 'fix' or remediate deficient children. Such approaches may very well be effective for some children some of the time. However, they can also be problematic, as they tend to avoid questions about the role of school processes, curriculum or pedagogy in students' educational successes and failures (Alloway & Gilbert, 1998; Comber, 1997; Henderson, 2001; Thomson, 2002); they tend to focus narrowly on individual children rather than taking a wider contextual view (Hill, Comber, Loudon, Rivalland & Reid, 1998); and they often neglect issues relating to equitable access (Fullerton, Danaher, Moriarty & Danaher, 2004; Henderson, 2004). As a preliminary investigation into these issues, this paper opens up discussion about productive diversity in relation to itinerant farm workers' families. It aims to use a wide lens, moving beyond the school context that itinerant farm children enter, and to examine the wider social and cultural contexts that constitute their families' temporary 'homes'.

## THE CONTEXT

The research reported in this paper is part of a larger study that is investigating the social and discursive construction of farm workers' children as school literacy learners. The study focuses on one primary school in the coastal, North Queensland town of Harbourton (a pseudonym), where the annual winter harvests of vegetable crops provides work for large numbers of farm workers. Many of the farm workers are itinerant, moving every year between the summer harvesting season of Victoria or New South Wales and the winter harvesting season of North Queensland. The annual

harvesting season transforms Harbourton from a sleepy and deserted township in the hot, dry summer months into a busy and thriving farming community during the warm winter and spring months. With the enrolment of up to 60 itinerant farm workers' children (approximately a 10% increase in enrolments), the school is also affected by the harvesting season.

Each year, the arrival of itinerant farm workers in the community of Harbourton provides an economic boost to the town. Indeed, the farm workers who live temporarily in the town may be directly responsible for the economic survival of many of Harbourton's businesses. Over recent years, with the downsizing and closure of a number of local industries, accompanied by high levels of unemployment that are at times almost double the national average (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2002; "Jobless increase", 2001), the economic future of Harbourton has appeared uncertain.

The influx of itinerant farm workers coincides with the seasonal metamorphosis of Harbourton into what could be called a rural idyll, with its naturally beautiful beaches and warm winter weather. However, as Kraack and Kenway (2002) pointed out, rural idylls are often conceived as communities that enjoy "an innocent and harmonious existence, away from the moral-corruption of city life" and are "antithetical to urban life" (p. 146). In light of the constructions of itinerant peoples that were identified at the beginning of this paper (see Danaher, 2000b; Frankham, 1994; Henderson, 2001, 2004; Ivatts, 2000; Kenny, 1997; Staines, 1999), this paper investigates how Harbourton's permanent population made sense of the influx of farm workers who travel, not from urban areas, but from rural areas both within and beyond state borders.

This paper looks beyond the school gate and into the community of Harbourton, where the itinerant families take up temporary residence. It thus focuses on the community context and on the types of stories about farm workers that circulated there. Data about the community context were collected over a two-year period and included a media study and a series of interviews with business people who interacted with farm workers in the course of their business activities.<sup>11</sup> As part of the media study, all references to farm workers that appeared in the town's biweekly newspaper were recorded and analysed, providing an opportunity to see how itinerant farm workers were constructed and presented to the community by the local press.

This paper also explores some of the stories told by the members of one itinerant farm worker family about their attempts to 'fit in' with the community during two winter harvesting seasons in Harbourton. The Neilsens (a pseudonym) were an Anglo family from New Zealand who had come to Australia with plans to earn enough money to pay off their house in New Zealand and to return home with a financially secure future. This case study family – Lisa and Dave Neilsen and their primary school-aged son Ryan – was interviewed on numerous occasions during the two harvesting seasons that they lived in Harbourton. The data from the case study family are also supported by interview data from teachers at the school that Ryan Neilsen attended.

In using a case study approach, this paper provides details of some of one family's lived experiences whilst residing temporarily in Harbourton and allows the richness and complexity of real-life situations and social relationships to be investigated (Burns, 1994; Merriam, 2001). The intention of the paper is not to provide a case study that is

typical of all itinerant families, but to offer insights into one case as a way of opening discussion about issues relevant to itinerancy.

The data are presented as narratives, because 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 (Errante, 2000; Gilbert, 1993, 2000; Golden, 1997) (see also Motley, Rossi & King, this issue). 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). Whilst generalisations cannot be drawn from a single case study, the focus on the one family provides an opportunity for the experiences and views of members of the family to be examined in conjunction with the voices of some of the more permanent residents of the community (Denscombe, 1998).

## THE COMMUNITY CONTEXT

The media study examined the representations of farm workers that were communicated to the community through the local press. Because most of the references to farm workers appeared in the court news section, a grim picture was presented to the community, implying that some, if not many, farm workers were law-breakers. Over the two years, 163 of the 1093 people who were identified in the court news by name and occupation were farm workers.<sup>iii</sup> This represented 14.91% of reported court appearances, a figure that far exceeded that of any other occupational group.

The court news headlines further emphasised links between farm workers and crime. For example, headlines that announced “Farmhand loses gun and drive licences”, “Seasonal worker jailed” or “Damaging sign costs picker \$700” provided regular reminders that at least some farm workers engaged in activities that were against the law. Whilst the newspaper did not report all court appearances, the regularity with which farm workers were named and identified as law-breakers is likely to have played a significant role in community perceptions. This is particularly important in light of the media’s role in constructing, reproducing and legitimating social beliefs and values (Smitherman-Donaldson & van Dijk, 1988; van Dijk, 1988, 1999).

Other sections of the newspaper also helped to reinforce the message that house-breaking and theft increased during the harvesting season and that the perpetrators of crime were ‘alien’ rather than local residents. A Crime File article, for example, reported a Senior Sergeant of Harbourton Police as saying that “people should be more security conscious at this time of year”. Although not directly naming or blaming itinerant workers, the reference to “this time of year” implied 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 a week after the Crime File article 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 'name' itinerant farm workers, it alluded to characteristics that residents of Harbourton associated with them. Despite its tentative tone, the letter linked crime and a range of undesirable attributes (e.g., untrustworthy, unscrupulous) to "non-locals", a term readily associated with itinerant workers within the context of Harbourton. Even the reference to "downright un-Aussie" may have been an allusion to the ethnicity of many of the itinerant farm workers, many of whom were Turkish, Samoan, Tongan, Maori and Vietnamese.

Recent writing about cultural discrimination in Australia has suggested that a "new racist discourse" has emerged in response to the 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). Such stories suggested that the town had been invaded and contaminated by 'alien' itinerant farm workers who had come from outer space(s), or places outside Harbourton, had brought both cultural and linguistic diversity to the town and were seen to have a negative impact on the community.

Indeed, farm workers were an obvious group of outsiders in the town. They were easily distinguished as they worked in the fields on the outskirts of the town during the day and they were visibly 'marked' (see Davies & Hunt, 2000) by dust, sun exposure and green stain from tomato plants when they returned to the town in the afternoon. Thus the linking of the police officer's comment to a group of people who were easily recognised as "green-stained aliens" would appear to have been a commonsense conclusion for those living in that context. Apart from the visual markers of their occupation, it was not unusual for farm workers to be marked also by particular odours – the smell of sweat, of particular crops and of pesticides. When interviewed, the bank representative identified such markers as sometimes problematical for businesses:

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)

In many of the interviews with business people from the community of Harbourton, itinerant farm workers were constructed as a group of outsiders, from outer space(s), who impacted on the community of Harbourton. The stories, however, were varied. On the one hand, there were stories that identified itinerant farm workers as essential to the economic survival of the community. It was argued that the harvest could not be picked, packed and sent to market without itinerant labour, and many community businesses, including hotels, accommodation and fast food providers and supermarkets, relied on the increased custom of the harvesting season to augment sales.

On the other hand, some stories identified itinerant farm workers as inadequate parents, bad citizens and responsible for a lowering of community standards. These appeared to be stereotypical generalisations, based sometimes on a single example and sometimes

on supposition. For example, one interviewee said, "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, interview transcript). Another interviewee compared itinerant children with the residentially stable children at a childcare centre, explaining 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 ... I imagine it's the same at school. (Real estate agent, interview transcript)

Other stories linked a range of undesirable traits to an itinerant lifestyle. For example:

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)

These were the stories that appeared to be prevalent. Indeed, when the researcher talked to residents about the research project, a common response to hearing that it involved farm workers was advice that social workers, guidance officers and what residents called the Department of Family Services (officially called the Queensland Department of Families) be interviewed as well. There seemed to be a commonsense belief that extensive official records would substantiate the stories that were in circulation. However, follow-up to this advice suggested that this was not the case. When the issue was raised with a representative of the Department of Families, his response indicated that the department had minimal interaction with itinerant families.

Many of the stories circulating in the community of Harbourton seemed to work towards keeping those who were 'new' to the community on the outside or on the margins of community life. By regarding the arrival of itinerant farm workers as an invasion of the community by undesirable people who break the law, exacerbate racial tensions and take jobs from locals, at least some community residents seemed to draw on an us/them binary, focusing on the way that itinerant farm workers were different from and alien to those who were residentially stable.

## ONE FAMILY'S PERSPECTIVE

Interviews with the case study family, the Neilsens, suggested that many of the stereotypical stories that circulated in the community did not apply to them. Nevertheless, the members of the family were aware of the derogatory stories about farm workers that were circulating and indicated that they were making a deliberate attempt to 'fit in' with the community. They explained that they were trying to ensure that the community had no reason to criticise them, because they wanted their son Ryan to be able to live and attend school in a community where the family was welcome.

The Neilsens discussed personal experiences of discrimination. For example, finding accommodation for their first harvesting season in Harbourton had been extremely difficult and had provided them with some insights into what it meant to be an itinerant farm worker in Harbourton. Dave and Lisa Neilsen explained:

- 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.

This example illustrates the way that some of the stereotypical stories that were circulating in the community of Harbourton were sometimes played out in everyday business practices. It appeared that stories, which were constructed around a permanent-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'.

The Neilsens described their attempts to blend in with Harbourton 'locals' whenever they could. One of their strategies was to remove 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. As they 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.

The Neilsens also decided that it was better not to publicise cultural practices that may have upset or offended the more permanent residents of Harbourton. To this end, they decided that whilst in Harbourton they would keep their numerous tattoos hidden from public view. They explained that visible tattoos were "not always socially acceptable" and sometimes "employers won't give you a job" because:

- 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.

Whilst the concessions made by the Neilsens probably went unnoticed by members of Harbourton's community, they demonstrated the efforts the family made to improve their 'fit' with the community and to diminish the effects of difference (see also Holden, this issue). As Bessant (1995) pointed out, it is not unusual for traits such as "a propensity to commit crime, the use of body tattoos, and a life-style which is inherently threatening to the wider society" to be used to represent a social "underclass" (p. 39).

Nevertheless, there were times when elements of the Neilsens' stories seemed to match stories that were circulating in the community. For example, Dave and Lisa discussed how tired they had become towards the end of the harvesting season:

- 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.
- RESEARCHER: 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 wind's sweeping all over you, and you're sweating, and the sun, it just takes it right out of you.

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 – the Neilsens reported that their use of leisure time had changed. 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. Although the indoor activities helped the Neilsens spend time together, they may also have helped to maintain the family's invisibility to the local community. It was as if they were visible when they fitted 'bad parenting' stereotypes, but invisible at other times. Whilst engaged in indoor family activities, which were out of sight to residentially stable members of the community, the Neilsens' practices remained invisible and thus did not disrupt the stereotypical stories that were circulating.

While in Harbourton, Lisa Neilsen attended a parenting course organised by the school's guidance officer and conducted at night. Lisa and Dave were always positive about the school that Ryan attended, and Lisa was equally positive about the course. She did, however, acknowledge the difficulties of attending a course at night while working long hours in the fields during the day:

Because it's from seven to nine at night, and you know, I get up at twenty to five in the morning and by eight o'clock I'm sitting there like, and I said to the lady, "Look, I can't watch the video and write things as well". I said, "That's just not me. I'm one thing or the other. I just go blank". I come home and do it most of the time.

As with many of the other social and cultural practices of the family, Ryan's teachers were possibly unaware of Lisa's efforts to learn more about parenting. Dave and Lisa were both aware that the hours required of farm workers made it almost impossible to be involved in activities at their son's school during the day. Nevertheless, they were keen for Ryan to do well at school. They explained that they had neither enjoyed school nor been successful and that they did not want Ryan to follow their example:

- 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 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.

## THE SCHOOL CONTEXT AS A PLACE OR SPACE OF CONTACT

The two sets of data described in the previous sections of this paper indicate stories from different perspectives. On the one hand, there were community and media stories that raised significant questions about the moral worth and integrity of farm workers, positioning them as law-breakers, inadequate citizens and uncaring parents who came from outside the community and impacted negatively on those who lived permanently in the town. On the other hand, the members of the case study family offered evidence of the difficulties of taking up temporary residence in Harbourton and of their attempts to fit into community life.

It seemed that the long hours required of farm workers were an obstacle to building positive relationships with members of Harbourton's permanent community, and the resilience of deficit stories about farm workers, which were circulating in the community, offered another barrier. For itinerant families with school-aged children, however, schools might offer a place and space of contact where some of these issues might be negotiated.

Within the school context in Harbourton, some teachers had taken up the deficit discourses that seemed so prevalent in the community. One teacher, for example, explained, "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." Although stories like this one seemed to parallel the community stories that identified itinerant parents as inadequate, these were not the only stories that were told within the school context. Some teachers offered positive constructions of itinerant children. One teacher, for example, said that "I found that generally with the itinerant children that they are much more mature, socially much more mature as well, very capable, and I'm very sorry to have seen them go." The teacher went on to argue that itinerant children "have a more interesting life probably, and it's more challenging, more stimulating and it seems to show".

Even though positive stories were in the minority, the potential for using diversity as a productive resource was evident (Janks, 2005; The New London Group, 1996). The children from itinerant farm workers' families brought cultural and linguistic diversity to the school, along with first hand knowledge of places outside Harbourton. Students like Ryan Neilsen had experienced life in other countries and were experienced national and international travellers. They were often adept at making new friends and at achieving smooth transitions into new schools and classes.

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This paper has provided only a brief account of some of the stories that circulate when itinerant farm workers from outer space(s) arrive in a rural community for the harvesting season. By presenting two perspectives, it has offered insights into the potential for misunderstandings and unproductive relationships. In particular, community stories that focused on the perceived deficits of itinerant farm workers helped to maintain a residentially stable/itinerant binary that marked out the differences between permanent and temporary residents.

The negative perceptions of itinerant families that were apparent in some of the stories in circulation may have restricted the community's capacity to recognise the benefits that families like the Neilsens could contribute to community life. Nevertheless, there appeared to be a potential for productive relationships between the established community and the temporary visitors who were so necessary to the local economy. Teachers who recognise the strengths that itinerant children and their families bring to the schools they attend are well placed to develop positive relationships with the families and to provide quality educational experiences for both residentially stable and itinerant children.

The potential for diversity to be used as a resource offers a starting point for considering the future sustainability of rural communities like Harbourton (see also Hughes, Holden and Cleary, this issue). Although the town's newspaper has reported regularly on efforts to increase the available jobs in the community – thus demonstrating how conscious the community has been of the need for economic sustainability – there has been little evidence of attention to other community resources that might value-add to such efforts. Allison and Douglas (2004) pointed out that a reframing of rural Australia – including considerations of the available resources and skills, social and cultural capital and social support capabilities – will help to broaden the possibilities for sustainable futures. They argued for community-based learning experiences that would enable communities to engage with the sustainability dilemmas and issues that are currently facing regional and rural Australia.

For the community of Harbourton, part of the solution may very well lie in the itinerant workforce that arrives annually and in the potential that it offers for productive contributions to social and economic networks (Allison & Douglas, 2004; Hartley, 2004). With an itinerant workforce that brings a diverse range of resources into the town on an annual basis, the community has an available pool of resources which, despite its value to the community's economy, is often identified as 'other' or as on the margins of the community. If the community could move beyond deficit explanations and instead focus on the strengths of itinerant families, then the likelihood of building productive community relationships might be enhanced (Henderson, 2001; Smyth & Down, 2004).

Schools may be the key to utilising such diversity and helping to turn around the negative stories that seemed to proliferate in the community. As concerned parents, the Neilsens were keen for their son to be educationally successful and Lisa Nielsen demonstrated that she recognised the value of educational opportunities for people like herself. Although Allison and Douglas (2004) argued that opportunities for learning do not have to occur within traditional formal education, there is no reason why formal schooling could not act as a catalyst for building productive relationships between

permanent and temporary residents. As Fullerton, Danaher, Moriarty and Danaher (2004) demonstrated, the take-up of multiliteracies pedagogy in some schools is helping to forge links between schools and communities, with school learning providing opportunities to engage with “workplace futures, public futures, and community futures” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 7).

Learning, then, can work towards rural engagement and towards enhanced community relations between school and community, and between permanent and temporary residents. As the New London Group (1996) pointed out, “[W]e cannot remake the world through schooling, but we can instantiate a vision” that creates “a transformed set of relationships and possibilities for social futures, a vision that is lived in schools” (p. 72). If itinerancy could be recognised for its contribution to local diversity and for its potential connections with other communities, then it may very well play a substantive role in the transformation (see also Umar, this issue) and sustainability of rural communities.

## REFERENCES

- Alloway, N., & Gilbert, P. 1998, Reading literacy test data: Benchmarking success? *The Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, 21(3), pp. 249-261.
- Allison, J., & Douglas, J. 2004, Beyond the agricultural paradigm in regional and rural Australia: Building capacity to create a preferred future. *Education in Rural Australia*, 14(2), pp. 2-15.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2002, *2001 Census of population and housing: Basic community profile - Harbourton* [Census profile]. <http://www.abs.gov.au> [Accessed 6 June 2002].
- Bessant, J. 1995, The discovery of an Australian "juvenile underclass". *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, 31(1), 32-48.
- Burnett, B. 2004, How does "othering" constitute cultural discrimination? In *New questions for contemporary teachers: Taking a socio-cultural approach to education*, eds. B. Burnett, D. Meadmore & G. Tait. Pearson Education Australia, Frenchs Forest, NSW.
- Burns, R. B. 1994, *Introduction to research methods* (2nd ed.). Longman Cheshire, Melbourne.
- Comber, B. 1997, Literacy, poverty, and schooling: Working against deficit equations. *English in Australia*, 119-120, pp. 22-34.
- Cope, B., & Kalantzis, M. 2000, Introduction: Multiliteracies, the beginnings of an idea. In *Multiliteracies: Literacy learning and the design of social futures*, eds. B. Cope & M. Kalantzis. Macmillan, Melbourne.
- Crang, M., & Thrift, N. 2000, Introduction. In *Thinking space*, eds. M. Crang & N. Thrift. Routledge, London.
- Danaher, P. A. 2000a, Guest editor's introduction. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 33(3), pp. 221-230.
- Danaher, P. A. 2000b, What's in a name? The "marginalisation" of itinerant people. *Journal of Nomadic Studies*, 3, pp. 67-71.
- Davies, B., & Hunt, R. 2000, Classroom competencies and marginal positioning. In *A body of writing 1990-1999*, ed. B. Davies. AltaMira Press, Walnut Creek, CA.
- Denscombe, M. 1998, *The good research guide for small-scale social research problems*. Open University Press, Buckingham.
- Erickson, F. 2001, Culture in society and in educational practices. In *Multicultural education: Issues and perspectives*, 4th ed., eds. J. A. Banks & C. A. McGee Banks. John Wiley & Sons, New York.
- Errante, A. 2000, But sometimes you're not part of the story: Oral histories and ways of remembering and telling. *Educational Researcher*, 29(2), pp. 16-27.
- Fields, B. A. 1997, Children on the move: The social and educational effects of family mobility. *Children Australia*, 22(3), pp. 4-9.
- Frankham, E. 1994, *The persecution of Travellers*. Paper presented at the Land, People and Freedom Conference, Peterborough, <http://www.geocities.com/Paris/5121/travellers.htm> [Accessed 3 March 2005].
- Fullerton, C., Danaher, G. R., Moriarty, B. J., & Danaher, P. A. 2004, A principal's perspective on multiliteracies in an Australian show community: Implications for learning as rural engagement. *Education in Rural Australia*, 14(2), pp. 69-81.
- Gilbert, P. 1993, Narrative as gendered social practice: In search of different story lines for language research. *Linguistics and Education*, 5, pp. 211-218.

- Gilbert, P. 22 March 2000, "The deepening divide?": *Choices for Australian education* [Professorial inaugural address]. Townsville.
- Golden, J. 1997, Narrative and the shaping of identity. In *Encyclopedia of language and education: Vol. 3. Oral discourse and education*, eds. B. Davies & D. Corson. Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht.
- Hallström, L. (Director) 2002, *Chocolat* [Movie]. Miramax, USA.
- Hartley, B. 2004, Multilingualism and local-global identities: Japanese language education in regional Australia. *Education in Rural Australia*, 14(2), pp. 27-38.
- Harris, J. 1999, *Chocolat*. Doubleday, London.
- Henderson, R. 2001, Student mobility: Moving beyond deficit views. *Australian Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 11(1), pp. 121-129.
- 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), pp. 293-310.
- Hill, S., Comber, B., Loudon, W., Rivalland, J., & Reid, J. 1998, *100 children go to school: Connections and disconnections in literacy development in the year prior to school and the first year of school*, Vol. 1. Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education, Training & Youth Affairs, Canberra.
- Ivatts, A. 2000, Foreword. In *Gypsies and Travellers in their own words: Words and pictures of Travelling life*, ed. P. Saunders, J. Clarke, S. Kendall, A. Lee, S. Lee & F. Matthews. Leeds Travellers Education Service Publishing Group, Leeds.
- Janks, H. 2005, Deconstruction and reconstruction: Diversity as a productive resource. *Discourse: Studies in the cultural politics of education*, 26(1), pp. 31-43.
- Jobless increase. Harbourton's figures almost double national average. 2001, January 17, *The Harbourton Bulletin*, p. 1.
- Kenny, M. 1997, *The routes of resistance: Travellers and second-level schooling*. Ashgate, Aldershot, England.
- Knauf, D. (Producer) 2003, *Carnivàle* [Television series]. Home Box Office, New York.
- Kraack, A., & Kenway, J. 2002, Place, time and stigmatised youthful identities: Bad boys in paradise. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 18(2), pp. 145-155.
- Merriam, S. B. 2001, *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco.
- Moriarty, B. J., & Danaher, P. A. 1998, Research into educational itinerancy. In *Beyond the Ferris wheel: Educating Queensland show children*, ed. P. A. Danaher. Central Queensland University Press, Rockhampton, Queensland.
- Smitherman-Donaldson, G., & van Dijk, T. A. 1988, Introduction: Words that hurt. In *Discourse and discrimination*, eds. G. Smitherman-Donaldson & T. A. van Dijk. Wayne State University, Detroit.
- Smyth, J., & Down, B. (2004). Beyond the divide: Individual, institutional and community capacity building in a Western Australian regional context. *Education in Rural Australia*, 14(2), pp. 54-68.
- Staines, S. 1999, *Travellers and the built environment*. [http://tash.gn.apc.org/trav\\_fft.htm](http://tash.gn.apc.org/trav_fft.htm) [Accessed 13 January 2005].
- The New London Group. 1996, A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures. *Harvard Educational Review*, 66(1), pp. 60-92.
- Thomson, P. 2002, *Schooling the rustbelt kids: Making the difference in changing times*. Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, NSW.

- van Dijk, T. A. 1988, How "they" hit the headlines: Ethnic minorities in the press. In *Discourse and discrimination*, eds. G. Smitherman-Donaldson & T. A. van Dijk. Wayne State University Press, Detroit.
- van Dijk, T. A. 1999, Discourse and the denial of racism, trans. G. Rayond & M. Adamson. In *The discourse reader*, eds. A. Jaworski & N. Coupland. Routledge, London.
- Welch, I. 1987, As many as 100,000 Australian children move school each year. *Curriculum Development in Australian Schools*, 4, pp. 43-44.
- Williams, L. 28 June 2000, Crime [Letter to the editor]. *The Harbourton Bulletin*, p. 2.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Robyn Henderson** is a Lecturer in primary literacy and language in the School of Cultural and Language Studies at the Queensland University of Technology. Her main research interests are in the areas of diversity and disadvantage. Email: [rw.henderson@qut.edu.au](mailto:rw.henderson@qut.edu.au)

<sup>i</sup> I have used the generic term 'farm worker', in an attempt to avoid the terms that tend to be regarded pejoratively – e.g., 'fruit picker', 'seasonal worker', 'farm labourer'.

<sup>ii</sup> Of fifteen business people who were invited to be interviewed nine agreed. They were a bank representative, a shire councillor, two growers, a real estate agent, a manager of a supermarket, a publican and representatives of the police and the post office. The community of Harbourton uses the term "grower" in preference to "farmer".

<sup>iii</sup> Data obtained as part of the media study were entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet under date, name, age, occupation and crime. The figures are an accurate record of the court proceedings that were reported in the newspaper and thus indicate the information that was presented to the readers of the newspaper.