

*Kids who move:  
Researching schooling for mobile  
students; rethinking pedagogy*

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# The context



Toowoomba





# An overview

- Initial research
- Subsequent research projects
- How I came to pedagogy
- Recent thinking

This seminar traces 17 years of research about mobile farm workers' school-aged children in the Australian context. This research began with an investigation into the the literacy learning of this particular group of mobile students. While the initial research highlighted the way that deficit discourses about mobile students circulated in schools and communities, later research has started to identify positive stories about how teachers cater for mobile students and about the types of pedagogies that might support 'new' students in classrooms. The thinking around 'new' students also relates to immigrant and refugee students, as they too are 'new' students who move into school contexts.

# Researching student mobility

- Initial interest in farm workers' children
- Later: the broader issue of mobility and its relationship to literacy learning and schooling more generally





# Initial research

- The social and discursive construction of itinerant farm workers' children as literacy learners
- highly skilled, unskilled workforce – many from Pacific Islands, Turkey, Vietnam
- north-south migration
- impact on children's schooling
- often invisible
- deficit discourses
- challenges for schooling



## The community & the parents

### The community:

- The arrival of the fruit pickers “increases the volume of stealings, drugs, and just normal arrests, street offences . . . just probably from an overindulgence of alcohol and drugs after working hours.”

### The families:

- It seemed that everything they showed us (rental accommodation) was either horrid and dirty and dingy, or like this, very expensive but adequate .... 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 in this town ... .



# The school

The teachers:

- “because they’re itinerant, I imagine what they bring is what they can fit in the car.”
- “I think it depends on the parents.”
- “the standard stereotype of the itinerant kid ... they’d be used to living rough” and “their showering habits may be rudimentary”
- “When we talk of itinerants, I mean straight away I seem to think of ESL, a major problem”
- “It might mean that his parents aren’t helping him choose books in English.”
- “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.”



Schools, education system,  
home, work, community

**Context**

**Interaction**

**Text**

Interviews  
observations

Explanation  
Interpretation  
Description

(Fairclough, 2001)





## Different views about one student, Kalisi

The teacher's story:

- Negligent parents
- No supervision of children
- Children hungry and not cared for

The parent's story:

- Family arrangements
- Care
- Prioritising education for their children



## Subsequent research

- Sabbatical – further research
- investigations of interventions in Scotland, Ireland and Illinois, USA
- A small study in a North Queensland school with a reputation for catering well for mobile students

### Migrant Education Program (USA):

- compensatory education
- summer schools for students
- family literacy programs – English classes for parents, parenting, connections to schools
- home visits for pre-school aged children



# Investigating pedagogy

The study I conducted in Australia:

- 'pedagogy' not discussed by teachers
- teachers modest about their work, but evidence of considerations in their teaching practices:
  - making students feel comfortable (social)
  - fast decisions to get students started (academic))

New research issues:

- Changes in types of student mobility:
  - technological developments in farming
  - cost of travel
- Changes in educational thinking – parental choice
- Effects of socio-economic factors
- How to investigate pedagogy
- Perhaps use video-stimulated recall



# Thinking and rethinking

Questions about me and my research:

- Was I mistaken?
- Was pedagogy for 'new' students a figment of my imagination?
- Was I not being observant enough when collecting classroom data?

Questions about teaching:

- Did teachers focus on the social rather than the academic?
- Had teachers normalised their academic strategies as part of their 'teaching as usual' routines?
- Could teachers simply not articulate their pedagogical decision-making?
- Was teachers' academic work invisible to them, as well as to me?



## Another research project

- a school with high student mobility
- recognised as a school that caters for students
- four teachers (from different year levels) willing to be involved – not so keen about the use of video
- six months of observations, 3-4 hours per week

The Year 1 teacher (Mrs Anderson):

Mrs A: I always feel nervous when you're in my classroom.

Me: Would you prefer that I didn't observe today? Would you like me to leave and come back another day?

Mrs A: No. I'm getting used to you being here, but I'm certainly not ready to be video-ed.



## Mrs Anderson's strategy

“You might have noticed that I asked Troy (pseudonym of a new student) the third question, not the first. That meant that he got to hear two answers from other students before he had to answer in front of the class.”

“The sentence task that I asked Emily (pseudonym) to create on the white board was easier than the ones I asked of Dylan and Kaiah (not new students). I don't know yet what level Emily is capable of working at, so I wanted an easier task where she could experience success.”

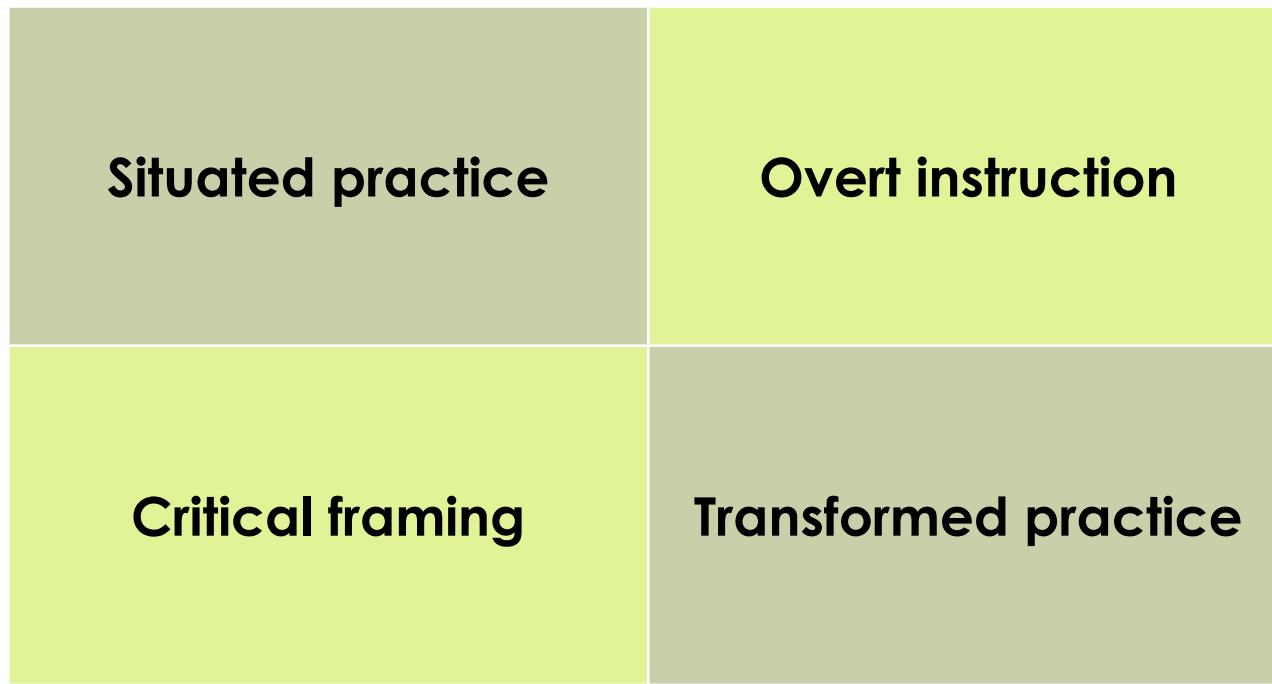


## Identifying teachers' strategies

- create a welcoming classroom and school environment:  
making student and parents feel welcome
- establish initial social support:  
buddy system, friendship groups
- check where the student's learning is at:  
informal opportunities for observations, talking with student  
and parents
- engage students in literacy learning:  
establish expectations, work from students' strengths



# Theorising pedagogy from a multiliteracies perspective



(The New London Group, 1996)





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