

# CHAPTER TWO

## THE REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

*“Itinerancy is also a problem of international importance and not one peculiar to Australia. Mobility and distance are synonymous with the educational disadvantage of children.”*

Lally, 1993, p. 202

*“I would make the same argument for all children – the necessity for parents and teachers to work together to let the children have the chance to learn from both and then move onto be truly themselves. . . . I argue it particularly for Gypsy and Traveller children because for them the tensions are greater, the hostility they can face is more intense, the stereotyping is more negative, history weighs more heavily on them and they have been too long at the margins.”*

Kiddle, 1999, p. 156

## 2.1 Overview of the chapter

The purpose of this chapter is to present a detailed and critical review of selected sections of the literature relevant to the research problem outlined in Chapter One. The aim is to identify what has already been written about the context in which the problem is situated, and to discern the strengths and limitations of those writings. This will assist the substantive section of this study in contributing results that are original and of interest to other researchers.

The chapter is divided into the following major sections:

- Australian shows
- Traveller education.

In each section, the intention is to review the existing literature critically, identify its strengths and limitations, and indicate how this thesis can contribute to addressing those limitations. Thus I seek to establish a point of departure for my own research, which **as** I noted in Chapter One is conceived **as** a counternarrative to traditional ways of understanding – **as** demonstrated in the existing literature – Australian shows and Traveller education.

In particular, I established in the previous chapter my focus on three key organising concepts throughout the thesis: marginalisation, resistance and transformation. Those same concepts constitute the framework informing this chapter's interrogation of the existing literature. My goal is to present this study **as** a counternarrative to the stereotypical and marginalising images of itinerant people, and particularly of the Australian show people, contained in a

large proportion of existing studies of Australian shows and of Australian and European Traveller education. Similarly, I seek to position the study as akin to, and contributing to, the still small but steadily growing literature that emphasises the resistant and transformative potential of itinerant people and their education.

## 2.2 Australian shows

It is appropriate to acknowledge at the outset of this account of the literature pertaining to Australian shows that lack of space precludes my inclusion here of the detailed study of the literature relating to British fairs that I undertook in an earlier draft of the thesis. Suffice to say that many striking parallels between the lives and educational experiences of Australian show people and British fairground people were revealed, with the themes of marginalisation, resistance and transformation being very strongly in evidence.

Similarly, the thesis has not interrogated the literature relating to North American carnivals. Partly this is because Australian ‘showies’ generally portray themselves **as** being significantly different from their North American counterparts. Frank Foster, one of Bill Morgan’s (1995) informants, identified a crucial element of that difference: *“But in the history of American showman [sic] their business is basically, and mainly, run by tent men, even today they still have their tent shows”* (p. 136).

A practical difficulty with interrogating the North American literature is a difference in terminology. There the term ‘migrant’ is used to refer to occupational Travellers, such as Mexican fruit pickers working in the southern United States of America, as well as being used in the more conventional sense to denote people who travel from one country to another, without necessarily being itinerant. This difference in terminology prompted a British researcher in Traveller education to assert that there is no North American equivalent of the European literature on occupational Travellers (Pullin, personal communication, 1996) – although that year marked the publication of the edited book *Children of la frontera* (Flores, 1996).

Therefore, although I am aware of the existence of both the Showmen’s Guild of Great Britain and the Outdoor Amusement Business Association (founded in 1964) in the United States of America, and of the latter’s affiliation with several Showmen’s Associations in individual states (<http://www.oaba.org/index.htm>, 1996), I acknowledge that a limitation of this thesis is that an intensive examination of the British and North American literatures on fairs and carnivals respectively has been postponed until an appropriate future occasion.

Within the parameters set by that limitation, then, the literature about Australian agricultural shows can be characterised as scattered and fragmented – much as Australian show people are often depicted by the ‘mainstream’

literature.’ This characterisation creates a point of entry and of departure for my study, which aims in part to synthesise and extend certain key elements of the literature about shows and show people. The most substantial Australian literature emanates from the Showmen’s Guild of Australasia. The Victorian Showmen’s Guild’s quarterly magazine, *The Outdoor Showman*, includes articles of interest to travelling show people in Australia and New Zealand, such as reports on major shows, references to legislation pertaining to equipment registration and advertisements for rides (like the ferris wheel) and ‘joints’ (like the laughing clowns). A regular feature is devoted to circuses.

Several articles in *The Outdoor Showman* reflect the ‘showies’ conviction that they have a specialised and valuable lifestyle – a conviction that, as the data analysis chapters of this thesis demonstrate, has considerable impact on their attitudes to and experiences of marginalisation, resistance and transformation. For example, a New Zealand ‘showie’ wrote in the ‘Letters’ page:

*We can be perceived by others as strange. We are both divided and united. Anywhere in the world you would be greeted warmly by show families without prejudice. I read letters from old show people worldwide and the stories are similar to our own. Sad that their friends have*

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<sup>1</sup> The same is true of studies of circuses, another group of occupational Travellers. The European literature is substantial and steadily growing; the Australian literature is relatively fragmented and the academic dimension of that literature is largely dominated by the writings of a single author, Mark St Leon (see for example Cannon with St Leon, 1997; Ramsland with St Leon, 1993; St Leon, 2000).

*passed on and happy that **our** new generations are coming through to carry on with this wonderful profession.* (Ashworth, 1997, p. 7)

The fact that this letter was written by a New Zealander gives special point to the assertion that “*We can be perceived by others **as** strange*”. In other words, being rejected by one’s fellow citizens contrasts with a sense of identification with ‘showies’ in other countries. This is a construction of marginalisation with which ‘mainstream’ Australia would not be familiar. The last sentence of the paragraph emphasises the importance of passing on the cultural traditions of “*this wonderful profession*” to the members of “*our new generations*”.

Similar feelings were evident in Lew Osborne’s (1997) retrospective essay “*Behind the loudspeakers, toffee apples and fairyfloss*”. For example, he referred to:

*The thoughts of a young boy that ~~take~~ me back to when **as** a Showie kid going to school, inundated with questions about the show. What’s the best ride? The fastest one? Will it **make me** sick? What’s your dad got at the show? The questions that went on. I felt important, commanding this unbelievable respect **from** kids that normally wouldn’t give me the time **of** day.* (1997, p. 21)

Here the contrast is between an identification among children of a shared delight in the excitement and glamour of the show **and** an awareness that those same children “*normally wouldn’t give me the time **of** day*”. This sense of being marginalised on the basis of a perceived ‘difference’ and ‘strangeness’ is a major theme of Chapter Five. Similarly, Chapter Six takes up the ways in

which show people actively resist, rather than passively accept, that experience of being marginalised.

Chapter Seven elaborates the notion of transformation to both marginalisation and resistance of and by show people. Osborne (1997) identified the source of change within the show circuits that contributes to that transformation: competition among ‘showies’ for the money of the ‘locals’ attending the shows.

*Showmen for 70 plus years have lived and breathed this competition factor improving their business, knowing full well that if they don't the operator across the alley will. Looking for the next thrill ride from America that will turn heads or buying the best plush toys. What will be the most popular one this year? The monkey or the big wrinkleface dog to put on their games.* (1997, p. 21)

This account of internal competition driving change on the showgrounds is a timely reminder that there is no such phenomenon as a ‘typical showie’, despite the linguistic convenience of using this term. Chapter Six analyses the ways in which the multiplicity of experiences of being a ‘showie’ helps to strengthen the show people’s resistance of their marginalised identities.

Osborne’s (1997) essay ended with a characteristic call to unity among ‘showies’:

*The atmosphere, this magic that is created is unique to shows and can only get better as we strive to hold a place in a rapidly changing world and it's happening right now, behind the loudspeakers, toffee apples and fairyfloss. (1997, p. 21)*

This rhetorical flourish is characteristic of many of the show people's statements recorded in the data analysis chapters. The intention is clearly to depict Australian shows as "unique" in creating "this magic", which is evoked by such images as "the loudspeakers, toffee apples and fairy floss". The optimistic belief in progress – "this magic. . . can only get better" – contrasts with the slightly ominous reference to the need to "strive to hold a place in a rapidly changing world". This last point is particularly important. The writer has constructed "a place" as the show people's 'portion', their equitable share of the available resources. That "place" exists independently of the show people's itinerant lifestyle, which means that their "place" changes from one week to the next. These themes – multiple understandings of terms like "place", using those terms to assert a right to consuming available resources and in the process to engage and hopefully to transform the understandings of resource providers – are elaborated throughout the data analysis chapters of this thesis. The thesis thereby extends the existing literature, by providing an analytical and a conceptual dimension to terms of that kind used by and about show people.

Written in a similar vein to *The Outdoor Showman*, Bob Morgan's (1995) book *The showies: Revelations of Australian outdoor side-showmen* is a celebratory text that recorded the life stories of several 'showies' who



*“are fairly representative and reflect the history of their industry” (p. xvi).<sup>2</sup>*

A major theme of the book was the distinctive contribution made by these individuals to Australia’s cultural history. One chapter dealt with Jack Allan, who joined the show in 1928 at the age of fourteen and who developed a very successful career as, among other roles, a ‘spruiker’ (a ‘front man’ charged with attracting the crowds to a particular act) and a promoter of the wrestler Chief Little Wolf. In a representative passage about Jack and his wife Dawn, Morgan (1995) wrote:

*...they have the satisfaction of knowing that they were a part of those magnificent people who brought so much joy and entertainment to the multitude of Australians who were so dependent on them and their kind for decades – from the Depression days of the 1930s through the dark days of the Second World War, and into the post-war years leading up to the advent of television. (p. 112)*

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In presenting selected quotation from *The showies*, I am conscious of the methodological injunction of Duncan Dallas, author of *The travelling people* (1971):

*Due allowance must be made for the exaggeration with which any old man who has achieved a respectable prosperity tends to view the hardships of his youth, yet equally we must be cautious of dismissing as fantasy the vicissitudes which a more protected age finds hard to credit. (p. 3)*

In any case, it is precisely the voices of the show people such as those presented in *The showies*, and the constructions of ‘reality’ that they represent, with which I am concerned in this thesis.

This close identification between ‘showies’ and central events in Australian history is intended to emphasise the size of the contribution that show people continue to make to Australia’s cultural life. This integral association contrasts with other passages in *The showies* in which Morgan emphasised the feelings of his selection of ‘showies’ that they were marginalised from ‘mainstream’ Australian society. This was particularly evident in their recollections of their schooling experiences. For example, Frank Foster, ~~born~~ in 1927 and “a member of one of Australia’s oldest and best known show business families” (p. 113), had the following recollection of his school days (which, in view of its encapsulation of several themes underpinning this thesis, is worth quoting in full):

*Well, believe it or not basically I had very little schooling at all. I was self taught, we went from school to school. This was no fault of my parents[,] it was just the way things were in those days. I went to each public school that we could make it to, but. . .the roads were so bad in those days it could take three to four days to get to a show and town.*

*By the time we got into a town it might be Thursday and then you’d go and see the local school and they just couldn’t be bothered with you. The teacher would tell you to sit in the class and if you couldn’t pick up the work it was too bad. With the result that by the time you had to move on it almost proved a waste of everyone’s time.*

*Then we got correspondence courses and for a while that was all right, but going from town to town the mail was never able to catch up. Some of those outback places we would have left before the mail arrived. I remember one time the teacher from the correspondence school wrote*

*to my mum and said, "Frank's work is all right but I wish he'd stop using too much bread". Everyone used to help me, and to rub out words we used bread – there were so many different handwriting styles in my work they must have thought I was Chinese! Now at my stage of life I look back on those early days and wonder how much better off I might have been had the education system for we travelling people been a better one.*

*Again on reflection, in those days your education was on how to survive and what you did for a living, there was no need to be an academic, your education, believe it or not, was your craft and how you huddled things – such things as what to do when the rent is too dear for a show! By that I mean, if you get on a showgrounds you know a good position from a bad one. You don't need a college education for that, nor do you need a college education to know how to get the pitch for an act up there on the platform. All you know you have to work for it. The average person walks around a fairground or showground and may think we get it easy but it's never that way. Mostly we live out of doors, and we have to forgo a lot of other things that other people have. (p. 123)*

Several comments can be made about this memoir of one 'showie's' educational experiences. The general and crucial point underpinning those comments is that the literature on Australian shows examined in this section of the chapter has shaped the design of the thesis, not by accident, but rather by my deliberate structuring of interview questions to ensure that the issues that recur in the literature – including the three themes in Foster's recollec-

tions (cited in Morgan, 1995) identified below – are acknowledged and used to extend existing knowledge about Australian show people. (Chapter Four elaborates the study's research design and makes these links among that design, current literature and the study's conceptual framework explicit.)

Firstly, many of the show people whose voices are heard in Chapter Five recollect the same kinds of difficulties associated with travelling from school to school and dealing with teachers who were ill-equipped to engage with these temporary visitors. The sense is very strongly of incomprehension, apathy and possibly distrust or dislike on the part of the 'locals' against the 'showies' – all crucial elements of the show people's marginalisation.

Secondly, Foster's reference to receiving family assistance with his "*correspondence courses*" evokes the multi-age learning and peer tutoring that are strong features of current educational provision for the Queensland show children. This reference also emphasises the continuing involvement of show parents in their children's education, either through their employment of a home tutor or through their taking that role themselves. This valuing of formal education, and the preparedness of family members to provide assistance in completing this important **task**, echo Foster's recollection of the fact that "*Everyone used to help me*".

Thirdly, this valuing of formal education sits somewhat uneasily beside a distinction between 'book' and 'real' learning. This can be seen in Foster's assertions that "*You don't need a college education*" to decide "*what to do when the rent is too dear for a show!*" or "*to know how to get the pitch for an act up there on the platform*". Foster's pride in this arcane 'situated learning' was reflected in the comments of many of my interviewees, who also

concurred with Foster that show life is difficult and *“we have to forgo a lot of other things that other people have”*. The point to emphasise here is that Foster’s constructions of his educational experiences were firmly located in the context of his working life and the cultural traditions surrounding that life. This same context and these same traditions also animate the voices of the show people heard in the data analysis chapters of this thesis, and form the framework for understanding the show people’s accounts of marginalisation, resistance and transformation on the show circuits. As such, I build on and extend significantly this crucial dimension of the literature in this thesis.

Many of these themes were also exemplified in *Sideshow alley* (Broome with Jackomos, 1998), a collaboration between Australian historian Richard Broome and Indigenous Australian travelling boxer and wrestler Alick Jackomos. The authors’ account of the rise and fall of ‘sideshow alley’ referred not to the joints and rides that that term evokes today, but instead to the ‘alley of wonder’ that comprised animal acts, boxing troupes (many of whose members were Indigenous Australians), ‘freak’ shows and illusion acts. The authors emphasised the resistant agency of the itinerant inhabitants of ‘sideshow alley’, arguing that their extended family provided a refuge from a marginalising broader community and a recognition of skills that were not valued outside the ‘alley’:

*A dominant theme of the book is that Sideshow Alley was a place of power for its participants. This may seem surprising given that showpeople were viewed by the rest of society with both fear and wonder, and as outcasts. However, showpeople evolved their own culture over generations and this enabled them to forge their own self-*

*assured identities and a unique way of life. Those who fought in the boxing tents in Sideshow Alley were often seen as victims of low wages, a hard life and too many punches. Despite this view, they too relished their unique life, felt powerful being tent boxers, and they look back on it as a golden age in their lives. Seen in their own terms there are few victims in Sideshow Alley.* (p. viii)

This thesis certainly eschews a portrayal of show people as “victims”, and aspires to communicate their experiences of marginalisation, resistance and transformation “in their own terms”. At the same time, Broome and Jackomos recognised that ambivalence was evident in other Australians’ views of the inhabitants of ‘sideshow alley’:

*Sideshow Alley was also a place of power for other Australians. Those who did not visit it demonised it as a powerful place of low and dangerous entertainment. Those who frequented Sideshow Alley found it a powerful source of wonder in their lives. For both groups it helped to shape their identities by gazing at difference; because human identities are formed partly by knowing, seeing and experiencing difference. We know who we are, in both a positive and a negative sense, by that which we are, as well as by that which we are not.* (p. viii)

For me, ambivalence lies at the centre of these ‘mixed feelings’ about difference. Ambivalence can be enlisted to further the strategies of marginalisation, if the ‘fear’ of difference is emphasised and exploited. Alternatively, ambivalence can be deployed to facilitate the agency of those who are marginalised and accordingly assist them to resist and transform and thereby become more powerful. So “a dominant theme” of Broome with

Jackomos's historical account of 'sideshow alley' from the 1870s to the 1950s and 1960s is played out in this thesis in the context of contemporary concerns. This is another vital respect in which the thesis is conceived as contributing to and extending the store of knowledge about Australian show people.

I turn now to consider how 'showies' are depicted in a small number of Australian newspaper and magazine articles. The intention is to record some elements of popular constructions of how 'locals' are held to regard shows and 'showies'. In June 1996, when the show came to Rockhampton, a provincial city in Central Queensland, Ken Coombe, the president of the Rockhampton Agricultural Society, was interviewed for a local newspaper.

*Mr Coombe said the show provided an important social and economic function.*

*He said the show's rural component was an essential element in the success of the show which offered the opportunity for town and country residents to exchange views and talents. . .*

*Mr Coombe said the Rockhampton Show incorporated a lot of tradition while remaining progressive and responsive to what the community wanted. ("Show offers the best of town and country", 1996, p. 6)*

These remarks underline the symbiotic – *albeit* sometimes tense – relationship between show people and show societies. A major attraction for many people to attend the show each year is undoubtedly the delights of sideshow alley and items like fairy floss and show bags. So the show societies

depend on the ‘showies’ to provide these attractions, which are helpful and perhaps even necessary to entice people to view local products in the paddocks and the pavilions. Yet the ‘showies’ rely on the show societies for the logistical support and the organisational framework required to conduct the annual show.

Coombe’s reference to “*a lot of tradition*” echoed another sentence in the article: “*Visitors passing through the gates follow in the footsteps of a marvellous tradition as they enter the annual show to marvel at this year’s latest attractions*” (“Show offers the best of town and country”, 1996, p. 6). This complements statements by some of the interviewees in *The showies* (Morgan, 1995): local people should attend the show because it is part of a significant rural tradition that celebrates rural life and strengthens the solidarity of living in a rural community. Suggestively show people themselves received no mention in this article, implying that ‘showies’ do not spring immediately to ‘locals’ minds as being an integral part of this significant rural tradition. This invisibility carries over into scholarly constructions of itinerant people, as the next section of the chapter demonstrates. This thesis is intended to counteract, as far as possible within the study’s parameters, the marginalising impact of that popular and academic invisibility – an approach that accords with Terry Evans’ (1998) assertion:

*In many respects, show children can be seen as travelling the margins of modern Australian society, living and learning as their families earn their livelihood providing the facilities and services which keep the country shows alive. (p. xii)*



The week before the publication of the interview with Ken Coombe was 'show time' in Gladstone, a port city in Central Queensland south of Rockhampton. The local newspaper marked this event by featuring an article about a travelling show family. The article was entitled incorrectly "*Codey is circus' fifth generation traveller*" (1996), the misconception that shows and circuses are synonymous evidently extending to newspaper subeditors. Beginning with the statement, "*Codey Miller represents the fifth generation of a family which has chosen to make travelling with the show a way of life*" (p. 1), the article featured an interview with Richard Miller, who contrasted his own schooling experiences ("*In his day the [show] children had to attend school at their various stops along the way*" [p. 2]) with those of his grandchildren: "*His grandchildren and the 30 or so other students who travel with the show now have a teacher who travels with them and teaches them from 9am to 3pm*" (p. 1).

Although this was an accurate – *albeit* abbreviated – account of the education program implemented for the show children by the Brisbane School of Distance Education, what interests me here is the construction of this phenomenon of attending school "*from 9am to 3pm*" as a special event worthy of relatively lengthy mention in a brief article. Again we encounter the ambivalence attending many of the interactions between 'showies' and 'non-showies': on the one hand attending school on a regular basis is constructed as something that 'showies' and 'locals' now have in common, yet on the other hand this is contrasted with Richard Miller's own schooling experiences, which marked his family and him as essentially different from 'normal' Australian families. This textual treatment is part of a superficial celebration of

the exotic lifestyle of itinerant people that is no less marginalising than constructing those people as ‘other’ to sedentary people.

This same ambivalence was manifested in a longer article (Olszewski, 1995) about show children in *The Australasian Post*, a popular magazine. The combination of seemingly discordant images in the headline “*Carnivals with class*” was followed by the subheading “*Showkids don’t have to learn on the road any more. . . school follows them around*” (p. 2). This suggestion of a previously disadvantaged group just now ‘catching up’ with their ‘normal’ peers was carried into the beginning of the article.

*It’s one of Australia’s most unusual classrooms, a tiny caravan that travels backwards and forwards across Australia each year.*

*But to Wendy Lou Stewart it’s the world’s most important classroom – because it’s her very own.*

*Wendy Lou reckons she’s just another ordinary Aussie schoolkid, but to people who don’t understand the way of life she’s regarded as different.*

*Until recently, Wendy and her mates were considered outsiders, and denied things lots of kids take for granted, especially a good education.*

*Wendy Lou is a “showies” kid – her mum and dad travel the agricultural show network and make a living by running a sideshow shooting gallery.*

*Showies are a special group of people and some of them, the “aristocrats” of the show circuit, have been running their stalls for two or three generations.*

*The showies keep to themselves, many families often inter-marrying, which is probably a legacy of the way they’ve been regarded over decades by townsfolk who have shunned them as sort-ofgypsies, not to be trusted.*

*If you can cross the barrier and actually get to meet the showies, you discover that behind the gruff exteriors they’re warm-hearted, fascinatingfolk.*

*Many are successful small-business people. Some are downright wealthy. (p. 1)*

These paragraphs traverse the gamut of possible constructions of Australian show people. ‘Showies’ are represented as barred by their itinerancy from enjoying what most Australians take for granted, “*especially a good education*”. Furthermore, they are marginalised because of decades of being regarded by ‘locals’ as “*diflerent*”, “*outsiders*” and “*sort-ofgypsies, not to be trusted*”. The construction of marginalisation gives way to that of a ‘minority group’, by possessing “*one of Australia’s most unusual classrooms*” and by being “*a special group of people*”. The putative identification of ‘showies’ with ‘mainstream Australia’ comes in the revelation that “*beyond the gruff exteriors they’re warm-hearted, fascinating folk*”. Finally, the suggestion that show people are an Clite with privileges not available to other Australians is contained in the references to “*the ‘aris-*

*tocrats' of the show circuit, [who] have been running their stalls for two or three generations", and to some of the 'showies' being "downright wealthy".*

The point to emphasise about these constructions is that they reveal that 'showies' do not 'fit the mould' of itinerant people constructed by people who are not, and usually never will be, itinerant. They seem to the journalist – and through him to the readers of *The Australasian Post* – to be fascinatingly shifting and fluid in seeming from one perspective to be 'exotic' and 'strange', from another to be 'just like us', from another to be shamefully disadvantaged, from another to enjoy 'the best of both worlds' – travelling and operating successful businesses.

These somewhat confused and conflicting constructions of show people for popular consumption articulate with the earlier quotations from *The Outdoor Showman* and *The showies* (Morgan, 1995). These quotations demonstrate that 'showies' themselves consume and 'make use' of such constructions, and engage directly with their 'difference' from 'locals', in order to disrupt marginalising stereotypes of show people and transform people's understandings of the multiple elements of 'showie' identity. This crucial issue is acknowledged and built upon in the thesis, which goes beyond ambivalent description to a critical analysis of the ambivalence and its relationship to the production and contestation of marginalisation. As the data analysis chapters will indicate, these 'tactics of consumption' and this focus on 'outsidedness' and 'creative understanding' provide an appropriate framework for conceptualising, not only the show people's marginalisation, but also their resistance and transformation of that marginalisation.

The principal finding of this section of the literature review, then, has been to locate these processes of marginalisation, resistance and transformation directly in the ‘showies’ and popular accounts of Australian shows. Furthermore, I have staked a claim for the thesis’s original and substantial contribution to knowledge, as a significant extension of the existing literature on Australian shows and show people, particularly their educational experiences and opportunities. Equally importantly, the study is conceived as a counternarrative to the marginalising stereotypes still prevalent in most ‘mainstream’ renditions of the show people’s lifestyle and culture. It is therefore designed to contribute to filling some fundamental gaps and attaching sound to some crucial silences in the established understandings of the show people and their education.

## **2.3 Traveller education**

As with the literature on Australian shows, the literature on Traveller education has been for a long time, and largely remains, scattered and fragmentary. As I elaborate later in this section, there is a strong tradition of educational provision for, although less so of research into, Travellers in Europe; as I indicated above, there is a limited literature about American itinerant ‘migrant’ people’s education (Flores, 1996); the Nigerian National Commission for Nomadic Education has conducted a vigorous research program into educating nomadic pastoralists and migrant fisherpeople (see for example Tahir, 1991; Tahir & Muhammad, 1998; Umar & Tahir, 2000); there are a few studies of nomadic pastoralists in Asian countries such as India (Dyer, 2000;

2000; Dyer & Choksi, 1998) and Mongolia (Robinson, 1999); and relatively little has been written about Australian Travellers.

This scattered international coverage illustrates important and substantive differences among different groups of itinerant people. I have concentrated in this study on the literature relating to occupational Travellers, rather than to other itinerant groups such as Gypsy Travellers, military personnel (who, as Duffy [1987] pointed out, exhibit significant differences from other kinds of Travellers) and New Age Travellers. However, I refer to literature about those groups if they appear to have particular implications for researching the education of occupational Travellers.

This critical review of selected literature about Traveller education is framed around the interplay among the thesis's organising concepts: marginalisation, resistance and transformation. I argue that much of the literature is posited on blinkered and unexamined assumptions that actually contribute to Travellers' ongoing marginalisation. By contrast, a small but growing number of studies, mainly from the late 1990s, directly challenge the marginalising assumptions of earlier (and in some cases continuing) literature, and focus instead on Travellers' agency and the possibilities of alternative, more enabling educational provision and research. This thesis is located unequivocally in the community of research formed by those exceptional studies.

The review is organised around the following themes:

- the dearth of research
- the prevalence of negative stereotyping

- some exceptional studies.

### 2.3.1 The dearth of research

Two comments about the literature on Traveller education can be made immediately: not very much has been published; and what little is published – with some significant exceptions, detailed below – tends to portray – and to marginalise – occupational Travellers as unfortunate ‘victims’ of an ‘unnatural’ lifestyle. This situation was graphically summarised by Lucassen, Willems and Cottar (1998) in their review of the literature in a related field:

*The student of European history who searches for Gypsies will find them only in footnotes. Today we still know little about how they worked and lived in the past. The same holds true for itinerant groups in general.* (p. 1)

With regard to the extent and scope of the literature, no single text attempting comprehensively to identify and categorise various itinerant groups was encountered, apart from the specialised publications of the European Federation for the Education of the Children of the Occupational Travellers, which I discuss below. Indeed, the literature can be characterised as focusing separately on a number of such groups, particularly defence force personnel (in Australia and North America) and Gypsies (in the United Kingdom), but also including caravan park dwellers, fruit pickers and other seasonal employees, and circus workers (see for example Ramsland with St Leon, 1993). These items tend to be isolated articles appearing in journals dealing with general social concerns; a special issue of the *Journal of Social Issues*

devoted to residential mobility (Shumaker & Stokols, 1982) was a noteworthy exception to this observation.

The absence of a substantial literature is especially surprising given that fifteen per cent of the Australian (Rahmani, 1985) and twenty per cent of the American (Shumaker & Stokols, 1982) populations were estimated as being itinerant in the early 1980s. More recently, a journal article published in 1987 (Welch, 1987) had the dramatic title "*As many as 100,000 Australian school children move school each year*". In the same year, Harrington (1987) referred to "*530,000 migrant [itinerant] students*" (p. 36) in the United States of America. Miller and Cherry (1991) reported that, in the United States of America, "*Mobility projects remain at approximately 20%*" (p. 52). Fields (1997) reported literature that indicated that Australia's population is "*one of the most highly mobile in the world*" (p. 45), and that between 1986 and 1991 forty-six per cent of children aged between five and nine years, and thirty-eight per cent of children aged between ten and fourteen years, changed their permanent location at least once (p. 45).

Despite these statistics, only limited research has been conducted into Traveller education since then. For example, itinerant children were conspicuous by their absence from Keith Harry's (1991) review of the distance education literature, which conceived of distance education students as living permanently in one place, at a distance from the source of instruction.

This theme of a dearth of research about Traveller education was reiterated by several commentators, although surprisingly this recognition did not seem to prompt them to remedy the perceived deficiency. One example was the comment by Blair, Marchant and Medway (1984) that "*there is no*



*comprehensive body of literature*” (p. 251) about the impact of itinerancy on children, and another was the observation of Brown and Orthner (1990) that “*Despite the fact that millions of family relocations occur each year, we are only beginning to understand the effects of these moves on the youngest members of these households*” (p. 380). In confirming this deficiency, these commentators often identify particular questions that they believed should inform such research. After stating baldly, “*Much remains unknown about mobility*”, Shumaker and Stokols (1982) argued:

*We need to explore the processes that mediate people’s decisions to remain in an area or to move, and how these processes relate to the health of individuals and communities.* (p. 2; emphasis in original)

One conclusion of a meeting of specialists in itinerant education (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, 1989, paragraph 62(a)) was the claimed need for “*a general international policy for the collection of data*” about itinerant children.

*This is necessary to ensure researches [sic] at national and international levels and to establish an international data bank on the conditions governing the education of nomads, for dissemination of information, for proper planning and implementation of their education projects.*

According to Duffy (1987):

*The complexity of the many issues associated with mobility, and the very uncertainty of its real magnitude and extent throughout the school-age population, pose difficulties in the interpretation of the available*

*research findings. No clear picture of the problems of mobility and methods for coping with them emerges from the literature. . . (p. 544)*

On this basis, “More research into the effects of mobility on the psychosocial development of children” was warranted. Birch, Lally and Tomlinson (1986) complained:

*Evidence accumulated from several decades of research. . . [into itinerancy] has not provided any firm insights into long-term consequences of itinerancy for school learning. If anything the results are either indeterminate or contradictory.*

Clearly this study is seen as making a substantial contribution to redressing the imbalance resulting from this dearth of research. Its particular anticipated significance lies in its intended status as a counternarrative to traditional ‘stories’ about Australian show people and about itinerant people more broadly. It is in that guise that it is proposed to supplement and augment the still too few studies of Traveller resistance and transformation analysed in a later subsection of this chapter. Equally clearly, the thesis is premised on the belief that this is a valuable area of analysis – one with highly significant implications for show children in particular, but also for understandings of marginalisation generally.

### **2.3.2 The prevalence of negative stereotyping**

According to Lucassen and his colleagues (1998):

*Our knowledge has been severely restricted not only because of historical negligence, but also because of two closely connected paradigms, one which views Gypsies and other itinerant groups as criminal, marginal and poor, and another which focuses almost exclusively on their alleged common ethnic identity and origin. (p. 2)*

Furthermore, they referred to “*the inclination to view itinerant groups predominantly as down and out riff-raff*” (p. 2).

In terms of the negative portrayals of Traveller education that this “*inclination*” is likely to promote, while academic educationists might very well eschew the prejudices outlined in the previous subsection in favour of an ‘objective’ understanding of itinerancy as a complex social phenomenon, they do not necessarily produce more ‘balanced’ accounts of the educational dimensions and implications of itinerancy. On the contrary, many of the assumptions that position fixed residence as ‘normal’ and itinerancy as ‘abnormal’ carry over into the literature dealing with the schooling experiences of itinerant children – and doing so helps to perpetuate the marginalisation of those children.

This construction of the ‘itinerant:abnormal’ homology was implicit in the definition of ‘itinerant children’ presented by the compilers of the *Australian thesaurus of education descriptors* (Lavender & Findlay, **1984**):

*Children who move frequently with their families from one semipermanent location to another – includes children of military personnel, construction workers, gipsies, etc. (p. 114)*

Attempting to include the widely varying experiences and patterns of itinerancy in a single, brief definition such as this is not effective. In this case, for example, the significant differences between the show people's organisational strength that derives from the Showmen's Guild of Australasia and the 'extended family' basis of operating most Australian circuses are elided in the almost throwaway "*etc.*". The inadequacy of this definition derives from its implicit assumption that 'the norm' is permanent location, and the corollary belief that if people are unfortunate enough to have to move at least they can enjoy the benefits of moving "*from one semipermanent location to another*". In other words, the location (or what de Certeau [1984] would call 'the place') is privileged, and in the process any understanding that moving is potentially pleasurable and enabling is elided.

This depiction of itinerancy as 'abnormal' characterised the majority of studies in the 1960s and 1970s – and has continued as a theme in some research in the 1990s. To be a travelling student in that period was to be the recipient of considerable academic concern, verging on pity. Swendson (1958) used a gardening metaphor, by comparing itinerant students to the processes of "*transplanting vegetables, flowers, or nursery stock*" (p. 332). She acknowledged that for children "*The results of the transition are infinitely more important than the results of moving plants, but many of the relationships are parallel*" (p. 332). She concluded by emphasising the ameliorative role that education could perform for such an itinerant child:

*Best of all, like the well-adjusted plant, he [sic passim] sends out new shoots of growth. In school achievement, in social relations, and in personal development, he blossoms into fuller living and learning. When*

*these signs appear, the teacher knows that the transplanted child has taken root and is at home. (p. 334)*

Levine (1966), an American clinic psychologist, hypothesised that “any move represents both a problem in adaptation ~~for~~ children, and an opportunity~~for~~ the development of preventative mental health programs” (p. 62). Although he acknowledged, “While it seems reasonable to expect a relationship between the frequency of moves and academic performance, some studies do not obtain the expected [negative] result. . .” (p. 67), his overall finding was emphatic in relation to the connections between itinerancy and school adjustment: “The problem is clear, but the solution is far from obvious” (p. 68).

The response by Morris, Pestaner and Nelson (1967) to a confounding in their research of their hypotheses about the different achievement levels of itinerant and non-itinerant students was to point to what they assumed were the contaminating effects of “individual prediction and personality variables” (p. 78). The authors identified “the etiologically significant variable” in the link between itinerancy and academic achievement ~~as~~ likely to be “the value system and motivation of the child and his [sic passim] family; i. e., what kind of child tends to improve, or retain his status with mobility and what kind ~~of~~ child suffers a decrement with mobility?” (p. 78). They expressed their frustration that “Analyses in the research literature on mobility, to date, do not contribute to this vexing problem” (p. 78). As I elaborate below, I regard these kinds of “Analyses” ~~as~~ misconceived and as contributing little to a genuine understanding of the educational needs and

aspirations of itinerant people. This is therefore a literature that I disavow rather than one upon which I seek to build.

Two other and extreme explications of the assumption that itinerancy is a mostly negative experience (a proposition from which I vigorously dissent in this thesis) also appeared in 1967. One was the *Plowden report* (Plowden, 1967), which designated Gypsies as “*Britain’s most educationally deprived group*”. The other, which itself used the term “*extreme*” to refer to a particular group of itinerant people, was a study of Gypsy education in Britain:

*. . . although the group of children involved is too small to justify a discussion of this length in the body of our Report, the children’s educational needs are nevertheless extreme and largely unmet. Moreover the economic and social handicaps of the group from which they come arise to a large extent from the fact that successive generations of gipsy children are deprived of the education that would enable them to compete on equal terms with the rest of the community. Extreme as they are, the needs of gipsy children cannot be effectively met by measures of the kind we recommend for the more general problems of urban deprivation.* (Adams & Smith, 1967, p. 595)

In the early and mid 1970s, the Swedish psychologist Joseph Schaller published several studies relating itinerancy to such issues as emotional wellbeing and school behaviour. Often his studies reported contradictory findings. For example, “*Research results on the relations of residential change to mental health are inconsistent*” (Schaller, 1972, p. 5), and “*There are children who suffer from a move, but also children who benefit from it*”

(Schaller, 1975, p. 3). Schaller's response to this inconsistency conformed to that of most writers on Traveller education: he questioned the research design of the studies (1972, p. 5), or he emphasised the apparently unequivocal negative associations of itinerancy: *"These results show clearly that geographic mobility is related to poor school adjustment, especially peer relations"* (1975, p. 3). The following statement encapsulated his overall view of itinerancy: *"It is very important to recognise this potential social problem and to try to help the child during the adjustment process after a family move"* (p. 3).

Whalen and Fried (1973) extrapolated from the results of their tests of itinerant and non-itinerant senior high school students in Livermore, California that *"a relationship does exist between mobility and achievement"* (p. 165). They acknowledged that this relationship could be either positive or negative, so that *"It is possible that the interests and attitudes of higher intelligence students are stimulated by frequent geographic relocations"*, and *"Less capable students may find frequent moves too bewildering to cope with"* (p. 165). (Long [1975] made a similar finding, hypothesising that *"Interstate migration is most likely to be undertaken by well-educated persons whose children tend to do well in school"* [p. 369], but he also noted that *"Except for children of college graduates, . . . increasing frequency of interstate migration is associated with increasing likelihood of a child's being enrolled below the modal grade"* [p. 373].) Nevertheless, their overall conclusion was in keeping with the 'problem' and 'difficulty' discourse that characterises most studies of Traveller education: *"Because we live in such a highly mobile society, educators and counselors should be aware of the*

*problems faced by their mobile students and be ready to help those who find more difficulty in adjusting to new school settings” (p. 165).*

Commentators in the 1980s and 1990s would hesitate to use words such as “*extreme*”, “*handicaps*” and “*deprivation*” in relation to itinerancy. These underlying preconceptions nevertheless continue to characterise the tenor of most contemporary writings on Traveller education. For example, King-Stoops (1980), in presenting her list of “*Goals for Migrant [Itinerant] Education*” (p. 16), referred to the children of seasonal fruit pickers in the United States of America, and related the statement of Carlos, one such child, that he did not want to become a lettuce picker like his father. According to King-Stoops, “*Neither does the school want to see Carlos end up as a lettuce picker. The school’s ultimate goal for Carlos is to have him get as much intellectual and social distance between himself and the lettuce fields as he is able*” (p. 16). This aim contrasts starkly with the determination of the Queensland show people to maximise their children’s access to formal education without threatening the continuation of their cultural traditions. Such a contrast reflects the point that, while this kind of literature can be useful, it fails to address the broader questions with which I am concerned regarding culturally produced understandings of marginalisation and disadvantage, and the ways in which marginalising effects *can* be challenged without the abandonment of a particular lifestyle.

An equally marked contrast was evident in an account of Operation SAIL (“Students Assimilated Into Learning”) (Panagos, Holmes, Thurman, Yard & Spaner, 1981, p. 452), an innovative orientation program for new students in a Missouri suburban school district. The program’s three components included



teacher professional development, parental orientation and involvement, and student development in cognitive and affective domains (p. 453). On the one hand, the program was described very positively, and was shown to have “*significant gains within the academic domains*” (p. 463) (although the gains in the affective domains were found to be “*minimal*” [p. 463]). On the other hand, the students involved in the program, who had been selected on the basis of having migrated from the inner city areas and who therefore exhibited limited patterns of itinerancy, were constructed as “*new students with educational deficits [who] can be remediated and assimilated into the mainstream of their new school district*” (p. 467). In other words, the well-conceived educational program was judged by its effectiveness in remedying the students’ “*educational deficits*”. That those “*deficits*” were constructed as linking itinerancy (even in a limited form) to poverty, low socio-economic status and people of colour reflects many of the preconceptions of the literature on Traveller education (and confirms the synthesis cited earlier by Lucassen and his colleagues [1998] of the “*two closely connected paradigm*” [p. 2] that have perpetuated negative stereotypes about itinerant people for centuries).

In the same way, Blair, Marchant and Medway (1984) reported on a program that they had developed for mobile military parents to assist their children to assimilate into new schools. Generalising from the effectiveness of that program, the authors concluded, in terms that again linked itinerancy with “*school problem*” that school personnel must work to “*reduce*”:

*By recognizing the needs of families in transition, counselors and psychologists in schools can broaden their roles to serve a needed function, namely, the provision of planned consultation and training services designed to reduce the number of children exhibiting school problems because of relocation. (p. 258)*

Taking up some of the themes of the *Plowden report* (Plowden, 1967) in the United Kingdom, *Education for all* (Swann, 1985) included Travellers in a report devoted to the education of children from ethnic minority groups in that country, prompted by concerns by West Indian parents about their children's education (p. vii). Fairground and circus children were excluded from the section of the report dealing with Travellers because of lack of resources rather than because they did not conform to the criterion of "*ethnic minority groups*" (p. 748, note 11). However, *Education for all* included a 1983 discussion paper from the English Department of Education and Science that emphasised that "*Fairground and circus children experience particular problems in maintaining continuity of education, because their families move so frequently*" (p. 759). The correlation in this construction is clear: the itinerant parents are the cause of their children's educational "*problems*", which the Department is thereby required to address.

Rahmani (1985) developed the concept of "*turbulence*" to describe the harmful effects on the children of service personnel of continually transferring from one school to another. Particular problems have been identified as including parental perceptions of inconsistencies in State based educational delivery (Duffy, 1986), and teachers' and itinerant students' preconceptions

about one another and the children's schooling experiences (Mills, 1985, 1986a, 1986b, 1986c).

All of this indicates that there is a great deal of emphasis almost exclusively on what is 'wrong' with itinerancy. Indeed, the usually unspoken assumption and starting point for these accounts is that itinerancy is inherently problematic and scandalous. This false assumption creates a scholarly 'blind spot': literature predicated on this assumption fails to address, or even to acknowledge, the issue of what is 'wrong' with a 'mainstream' education that can represent itinerancy only in negative terms of 'deviance' and 'lack'. This thesis, by contrast, seeks to highlight that 'blind spot' and to turn the spotlight onto 'mainstream' education that routinely marginalises the education of Travellers but that potentially can help to make Traveller education transformative and enabling.

In a similar vein to other studies that described education programs in terms of 'remedying' the 'educational deficit' involved in itinerancy, Harrington (1987) listed some of the elements of that 'deficit': "*Migrant [itinerant] children are among the most vulnerable in America's classrooms. Theirs is a history of poverty, mobility, cultural alienation, and low expectations becoming self-fulfilling prophecies*" (p. 37). Although he acknowledged that itinerant students' strengths included "*resiliency, resourcefulness, and responsiveness*" (p. 38), Harrington's overriding construction of itinerancy as educationally harmful was encapsulated in his pleasure at recording one fruit picking family's ambitions to graduate from high school and attend college: "*Alex and his siblings will be bucking the statistics, which show that about 90 percent of migrant [itinerant] kids follow*

*their parents into the fields. But kids like Alex are the success stories that remind all educators what is possible” (p. 39).* For Harrington, “success stories” and itinerancy were mutually exclusive phenomena.

A group of specialists in itinerant education at a UNESCO sponsored conference in 1989 asserted:

*The education of the children of nomadic, migrant and itinerant groups has been considered a major problem needing the attention and consideration of governments and national and international organisations. It is the firm belief that, without a prompt consideration of this problem, at a time when other children of sedentary groups are advancing in science and technology, the children of mobile groups will be marginalised for lack of adequate preparation to cope with the changes of the future. This will create an impediment to them and to others.* (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, 1989, paragraph 53)

Miller and Cherry (1991) presented a series of strategies designed to assist itinerant students to adjust to their new schools. In doing so, they acknowledged that itinerancy influenced those students in different ways, and that more intelligent students often found itinerancy an intellectually stimulating experience (pp. 15 and 51). Nevertheless, the dominant discourse in their publication constructed itinerancy as ‘stressful’ and ‘difficult’ and as creating educational challenges that schools must address. For example, “Frequent moves do not reduce the stress associated with relocation” (p. 17), “Children who move about are at risk socially and emotionally” (p. 51) and “The special needs of these mobile children demands schools and

parents accept the responsibility *for* addressing the needs” (p. 52). Once again ‘blame’ for the ‘problem’ was directed at itinerant families, rather than at educational systems, even though schools were identified *as* carrying the burden of ameliorating the educational side effects of this undesirable lifestyle.

Miller and Cherry drew a particularly bleak picture in relation to the educational opportunities of the children of itinerant fruit picking families: “*Migratory children face challenges and stresses unique to their nomadic way of life*” (p. 13). The authors also noted that “*Although these youngsters pass from state to state, they acquire little knowledge of the places they pass through since most of the travel is done at night*” (p. 14). By contrast, the Queensland show families travel mostly during the day, and many of them comment on the educational uses to which this travel is put.

Despite their complaint about the dearth of research into itinerant education, Birch, Lally and Tomlinson (1986, p. 1) felt sufficiently emboldened to hypothesise that “*frequent changes of schools will be disruptive to the social and intellectual development of children*”. Their own preliminary research (1986, p. 21) suggested that itinerancy “*may have a cumulative negative effect on academic achievement*”.

Lally’s (1993, pp. 201-202) summary of the study in which he had earlier been involved (Birch, Lally & Tomlinson, 1986) drew a bleak, even depressing, picture of itinerant education:

*1. Itinerancy poses a world-wide educational problem. The research evidence is conclusive in suggesting that children in itinerant families are disadvantaged educationally, compared with stable-resident family populations. Furthermore, it is the younger child who is most adversely [affected]. . . . Hence not only is there a special problem faced by the itinerant child, it is one which has to be addressed at the earliest possible age, in the pre-school and early school years.*

*2. Parents ~~of~~ itinerant families may themselves have come ~~from~~ itinerant families and, ~~f~~ so, it is also likely that they may have had limited access to post-school educational provisions. . .*

*3. It is symptomatic ~~of~~ the attention paid to itinerant families that Australian statistics are not available to determine their number. . .*

*4. Itinerancy is not merely a feature ~~of~~ the tyranny ~~of~~ distance such as Australia experiences. It is also a feature ~~of~~ the major metropolitan centres which contain most ~~of the~~ country's population. The caravan parks and other evidence ~~of~~ mobility support this contention. . .*

*Itinerancy ~~is~~ also a problem ~~of~~ international importance and not one peculiar to Australia. Mobility and distance are synonymous with the educational disadvantage ~~of~~ children.*

The last point in Lally's list echoed an earlier finding by Smith, Husbands and Street (1969). These authors argued that "pupil mobility has significant retarding influences upon intellectual achievement among slum children", and that this relationship between mobility and achievement "is greater before third grade than afterwards" (p. 269). The authors **claimed** to

draw on “*an extensive tradition of research pointing to the fact that mobility itself has basically disruptive properties*” (p. 270), which could be considered to underscore the marginalised status of itinerant students.

Further discussion of the negative connotations of educational itinerancy was included in Binns’ (1990) account of recent attempts to expand the provision of Traveller education in the United Kingdom, in a clause of the Education Reform Act of 1988. He alleged that Traveller children were at least potentially liable to greater rather than reduced marginalisation, contrary to the original intention of the policy makers, because local management of schools increased pressure to discourage school attendance by lower achieving students at schools competing for government grants. Similarly, with the introduction of the National Curriculum:

*Teachers will find an extra difficulty in having to cater for pupils who have missed out on large areas of school experience. . . . A sudden influx of numbers of unschooled, unskilled pupils could completely disrupt the teacher’s planned progress through the levels of the Key Stages for the class.* (1990, p. 257)

Binns (1990) acknowledged that both local management of schools and the introduction of the National Curriculum also had the potential to assist the educational provision for Traveller children. The point to emphasise here is that Traveller education is portrayed as unstable and subject to the uncertainties – if not the vagaries – of broader government policy and educational change. An associated assumption by the educational system is that itinerant students are automatically disposed to be less academically successful than

their permanently resident peers – clearly a supremely unhelpful assumption if the aim is to disrupt and reduce the marginalisation of itinerant people.

A recent Australian commentator on itinerancy (Fields, 1995, 1997) echoed most of the themes identified in this subsection. For example, he claimed in one article, *“The findings of this study are strongly indicative of mobility having adverse effects on both the social and academic achievement of young adolescents”* (1995, p. 30). Similarly, in another paper he noted, *“It is widely believed that children who change schools frequently are adversely affected by the experience. Research on the effects of student mobility seems to support this belief”* (1997, p. 47). Fields acknowledged that *“There have been contrary findings, however, and this has led some researchers to describe the link between mobility and school adjustment as ‘inconsistent’.. ‘mixed’.. and ‘inconclusive’..”* (1997, p. 47). Despite this qualification, he concluded his article with the following comment about the Australian literature: *“What is missing is a broad recognition of the significance of the problem [of itinerancy] as a social and educational issue. Such recognition should be the impetus for a far greater resolve to do something about it”* (1997, p. 53). In many ways very little has changed in the perceptions of itinerancy from the studies in the 1960s and 1970s reported at the beginning of this subsection.

I have not intended in this subsection to suggest that itinerancy is a universally happy and educationally valuable experience. On the contrary, in the data analysis chapters many show people refer to the difficulties of occupational travelling. My intention has been to highlight constructions in the literature of itinerancy as inherently educationally disabling, creating



‘deficits’ and ‘gaps’ that formal education must work hard to address and remedy. I have sought to relate these constructions to a deeply embedded stereotype that views itinerants **as** deviating from accepted social ‘norms’ associated with permanent residence. As the data analysis chapters demonstrate, it is precisely this marginalising stereotype that the Queensland show people actively resist and seek to transform into a more enabling and satisfying form of educational provision. It follows that this is a section of the literature – and a major and in some ways still dominant one at that – from which I depart in this thesis; indeed, I pose a very different framework for looking at the issues of itinerancy and Traveller education.

### 2.3.3 Some exceptional studies

Despite the prevalence of marginalising stereotypes about itinerant people identified above, a small but growing number of publications has departed from the pervasive view of Traveller education **as** inherently disadvantageous to participants. From the perspective of this thesis, these publications have contributed to a necessary resistance and intended transformation of the marginalisation too often associated with itinerancy and Traveller education.

The earliest example that I encountered was written by an American primary school principal (Evans, 1966), who deduced from itinerant and non-itinerant students’ scores on achievement tests that itinerant students performed consistently, but not significantly, more effectively in arithmetic, reading, science and social science than their non-itinerant **peers**. Arguing that *“mobility does not have an adverse effect upon the academic achievement of*

*those students who have experienced it” (p. 22), Evans’s concluding words make a salutary contrast to the stereotypes perpetuated by considerably more recent studies:*

*If moving must be considered a “handicap,” **as** we have traditionally thought it is, then this study shows definite ability on the part of the mobile students to adjust. The resiliency so evident in the bones of the youngster seems to manifest itself in his [sic passim] personality, and thus he is able to bounce back **from** the “handicap” and achieve acceptably. (p. 22)*

Barrett and Noble (1973) applied a questionnaire and the Louisville Behavior Check List to one hundred and fifty-nine families in Louisville in the United States of America to establish whether mothers’ fears about the impact of long distance moves on their children were realised. The researchers found that *“The results ~~of~~ this study suggest that anxiety about negative effects of moving on the emotional adjustment ~~of~~ children represented by this sample were largely unfounded”* (p. 187). Furthermore, emphasising social agency in a similar way to this thesis, the researchers concluded:

*Within the limits ~~of~~ this study, it is **our** view that the long distance move should be laid to rest as a specific variable in children’s disorders. It seems more appropriate to us **for** families who face a move to **focus** on their adaptive strategies rather than to seek out ways to avoid “stress.”* (p. 188)

Continuing this theme of resisting and seeking to transform the marginalising stereotype of itinerancy, while conducting research into British Traveller education, Reiss (1975, p. 2) felt

*...increasing apprehension about the almost universal view expressed by teachers that Travellers and their children were suffering from acute verbal deprivation which was, in many cases, seen as an insurmountable obstacle to educational progress.*

With tongue firmly in cheek, Reiss (1975, p. 3) described the discipline of education in the early 1970s:

*There was more interest than ever before in the world's distinctive minority groups. . . . The ubiquitous European Gipsies and travellers, the fairground and circus showmen, and the bargees of Europe could be looked upon as another fascinating area for action and research. The days of concentration on the 'normal' child were over.*

Presenting a summary of his findings, Reiss (1975, p. 8) cautioned against the automatic designation of itinerant people as “disadvantaged”:

*Though Travellers often reveal classic symptoms of severe social and cultural deprivation, they cannot easily be placed within the general spectrum of the disadvantaged. Their unique and fascinating case presents a very real challenge to teachers and administrators.*

Continuing this cautionary tone, Lacey and Blane (1979) concluded from their meta-analysis of studies of itinerancy:

*The simple assumption. . .that more geographic mobility necessarily means an impairment of academic attainment can be shown to be erroneous. The direct effect of mobility is likely to be small and be itself affected by the social context and reasons for mobility. (p. 200)*

Lacey and Blane (1979) warned in particular against generalising to all itinerant groups from the various studies of children of military personnel, on the grounds that to do so “ignores the complex interrelationship of social class factors and educational attainment and the confounding variables within the mobility matrix” (p. 205).

Brett (1982) discussed a study of three hundred and fifty United States families whose jobs were highly mobile, compared with three samples of non-mobile people. Her interest lay in discerning the relationship between the participants’ mobility and their sense of wellbeing. Her study found that mobile people were generally similar to non-mobile people in relation to the work, self, marriage and family life, and standard of living dimensions of their wellbeing. On the other hand, “the only data that consistently separated the mobile sample from the comparison samples” (p. 460) pertained to a higher level of dissatisfaction with social relationships for both mobile adults and children. Brett’s conclusion was accordingly positive about the link between mobility and wellbeing:

*Few families in the transfer sample believed moving is easy. However, the data from this study show that despite their mobility, these families were as satisfied with all aspects of their lives, except social relationships, as were stable families. (p. 462)*

Talung a positive view of what others have perceived **as** the drawbacks of Traveller education, Pullin (1985), himself a member of a longstanding Yorkshire fairground family, cited a British school principal whose school was attended by show children:

*The Travellers are a breath **of** fresh air in the school. With their supportive home backgrounds, they are courteous, co-operative, hard-working and want to learn. They know **who** they are, **what** they are **and** where **they** are going.* (p. 2; emphasis in original)

Pullin (1985) commented about this statement, “*This will certainly have an important bearing on formulating appropriate aims and methods in providing an appropriate education for these children*” (p. 2). In other words, the positive attributes of itinerancy, such **as** the show children’s social maturity and personal confidence, need to be enhanced rather than eroded by the schooling provided for them. The alternative is the situation described by one of Pullin’s informants: “*Because of **my** people’s wandering about most **of** the year, our children don’t get the education they should*” (p. 1).

Pullin’s (1985) set of case studies began with “*a success story*” that in his view “*convincingly illustrates what an individual can achieve, given determination and support from people in a position to advise and assist others to achieve their educational potential and ambitions*” (p. 4). This “*success story*” concerned a young woman who left school early but whose thirst for academic knowledge led her, against considerable odds, to return to secondary school, complete a degree in economics and begin a preservice teacher education course. Pullin’s comment on this “*success story*” reflected

his construction of itinerancy as not inherently disabling but rather as the potential site of the exercise of individual agency:

*Whether or not she returns to follow her traditional life of a travelling showman [sic] following the completion of her university studies or pursues a career outside showland is insignificant. She will have realised her personal potential and ambition and can **choose** to return or not return as a free agent. She is now able to make a **free, rational** choice, the **most** important gift of education.* (p. 6; emphasis in original)

The then Queensland Department of Education Northern Region (1992) provided a somewhat grudging acknowledgment that itinerancy was not necessarily intrinsically disadvantageous to participants: “*There are both positive and negative aspects to moving, and care should be taken to ensure that mobility is not always seen as a ‘problem’*” (Book 1, p. 10).

Brown and Orthner (1990) studied the experiences of itinerancy of seven hundred and twenty early adolescents from five communities in the United States of America, in an effort to trace the connection between mobility and personal wellbeing (measured in terms of self-esteem, alienation, depression and life satisfaction) in this age group. They were particularly interested in the gender dimension of this connection. Contrary to much of the literature on mobility and adolescence, Brown and Orthner found that the only significantly lower measure was mobile girls’ general life satisfaction, which led the researchers to hypothesise “*that females may require more time to make substantial adaptation to relocations and that high mobility rates may inhibit that capability*” (p. 378). On the other hand, the researchers’ overall conclusion conveyed a positive view of itinerancy: “*The present study’s*

*findings that substantial changes in self-worth were not found to result from moving may offer some hope to parents and others who are concerned with dramatic psychological effects following a work-induced family relocation” (p. 378).*

Lee and Warren (1991) explored the sophisticated alternative conception of education developed by the Romanis or Gypsies, a group often compared with occupational Travellers such as show people, and with its own substantial literature that is outside the provenance of this thesis. This educational conception is derived from Sophistic and Socratic traditions and the ideas of Georges Sorel and quantitative instrumentalism (whereby “*The Romani is quite happy to be trained. But this is always and everywhere only to the extent that this training reinforces Romani life*” [p. 319; emphasis in original]), and is based on a crucial distinction between education and schooling. Lee and Warren’s concluding note (1991, p. 322) was infectiously admiring:

*Perhaps a boast expressed by the Romanis – but one with a large element of truth and one which few Gaje [non-Romani] would feel confident to make – captures the value they place on their own education system, and is a fitting note on which to end: “You could put me down anywhere in the world and I could make a living”.*

Máirín Kenny’s book *The routes of resistance: Travellers and second-level schooling* (1997) provided an admirable of educational provision for Irish Travellers in one school. Kenny’s approach, drawing on theorists such as Bourdieu, Giddens and Giroux, was to examine the posited links between the Travellers’ ethnicity and their practices of resistance in the educational setting that she investigated. In the process, she sought to shift the focus of

attention from “*the all too commonly discussed ‘Traveller problem’*” to what she termed “*the provider problem*” (p. 7). In doing so, Kenny consciously eschewed “[s]ub-culture of poverty theory” in favour of “*ethnicity theory*” as “*the most powerful framework to date for analysis of issues relating to Irish Travellers*” (p. 59), and, with clear parallels to the approach taken in this study, she focussed on how Irish Traveller children’s identity (including their ethnic identity) animated their resistance – and potentially their transformation – of marginalising schooling practices.

In an exemplary demonstration of teacher-as-researcher and reflective practitioner, Cathy Kiddle, Coordinator of the Devon County Council Traveller Education Consortium in the United Kingdom, has drawn on her life experiences as an educator of both fairground children and Gypsy Travellers to highlight the erroneousness of ‘deficit’ assumptions about Travellers. In *Travelling children: A voice for themselves* (Kiddle, 1999), she traced negative educational experiences to the prevailing discriminatory stereotypes ascribed to Travellers, yet she also demonstrated the mutual benefits accruing from positive educational experiences based on reciprocal trust and understanding (a theme that she continued in Kiddle, 2000). (A similar approach was taken by Elizabeth Jordan [2000] with her research into Scottish Traveller families, and also by Ursula Scholten [2000] about the education of Dutch bargee people.) Earlier (Kiddle, 1981) she had used her account of living in a caravan to work for a touring theatre company to emphasise the fundamental link between itinerancy and educational provision – or lack thereof.



Although the education of nomadic pastoralists and fisherpeople is outside the province of this study, it is pertinent to note the work of the Nigerian National Commission for Nomadic Education. Established in 1990, the Commission has carried out an effective lobbying of the Nigerian government to enhance educational provision for those two groups. The Commission distributes a biannual magazine called *Nomadic Education News*, and in 1998 published the inaugural issue of a planned annual journal entitled *Journal of Nomadic Studies*. In addition, the Commission has also published monographs about nomadic education in Nigeria (Ezewu & Tahir, 1997; Tahir, 1991; Tahir & Muhammad, 1998) and more broadly in Africa (Tahir, 1997). Consciously eschewing a 'deficit' approach to conceptualising nomadism, the Commission locates nomadic education in the context of the culture, economics, history and politics of nomadic people and in the broader perspective of a developing country that continues to position itself as a postcolonial nation. A similarly socially critical approach underpins the work of Caroline Dyer (2000; Dyer & Choksi, 1998) in her research into Indian nomadic pastoralists, and also Bernadette Robinson's (1999) study of the education of Mongolian nomadic pastoralists.

Another group of itinerant people who are outside the parameters of this thesis are the Gypsy Travellers. Nevertheless it is important to note the pioneering work of the Gypsy Research Centre in Paris, which was established at about the same time as the European Federation for the Education of the Children of the Occupational Travellers, which I discuss below. Under the leadership of Jean-Pierre Liégeois, the Gypsy Research Centre has lobbied the European Commission to help to improve the life chances of European Gypsy Travellers, including the enhancement of educational

provision, partly through its regular publication *Interface* and partly through monographs that it has published or sponsored (Advisory Council for the Education of Romany and Other Travellers, 1993; Liégeois, 1998). The dominant discourse underpinning the Centre's activities has been the previous and ongoing discrimination against European Gypsy Travellers and the denial of their equal human rights.

The resistant and transformative potential of studies such as those promoted by the Gypsy Research Centre, and indeed such as this thesis aspires to be, was realised in a recent publication by the Leeds Travellers Education Service (Saunders, Clarke, Kendall, Lee, Lee & Matthews, 2000). Entitled *Gypsies and Travellers in their own words: Words and pictures of travelling life*, the ~~book~~ featured lively, amusing and often moving accounts by Gypsy Travellers from the Leeds area of England of their lives and their educational experiences. The movement from being 'written out of' official and academic discourse to producing their own text demonstrates the power of constantly circulating counternarratives to the traditional 'stories' about itinerant people.

A particularly significant contribution to the literature on Gypsy Travellers, with strong resonances with this thesis, was McVeigh's (1997) effort to engage in what he called "[t]heorising sedentarism", whereby "*the roots of anti-nomadism*" (p. 7) could be laid bare. McVeigh defined sedentarism "~~as~~ *that system of ideas and practices which serves to normalise and reproduce sedentary ~~modes~~ of existence and pathologise and repress nomadic ~~modes~~ of existence*" (p. 9). This definition sets in sharp focus, and helps to explain, the various negative assumptions and stereotypes underpin-

ning many conventional studies of Traveller education. McVeigh's analysis has the virtue of a historical grounding that demonstrates that these assumptions and stereotypes have a very lengthy provenance, having been evident in different ways in the transition to agriculture, the fall of the Roman Empire and the move to industrialisation. The contemporary marginalisation of Australian show people elaborated in Chapter Five thus has a much older heritage than the beginning of British colonisation in Australia in 1788.

McVeigh's (1997) analysis is helpful also in strengthening and putting in a broader historical and sociological perspective the two logical extremes of 'unproblematic othering' and 'unproblematic celebration' posited below. Following McVeigh, the major point to emphasise here is that both these extremes are equally destructive and antithetical to accurate representations and understandings of itinerant people. According to McVeigh:

*It is wrong to use notions which reproduce the dichotomy between 'good' Travellers (ethnic, exotic, romantic, free) and bad travellers (non-ethnic, dispossessed and debased sedentaries, subcultures of poverty). In fact, the suggested dichotomy between the construction of the romanticised 'RaggleTaggle Gypsy' and the pathologised 'itinerant' is a false one. Both simultaneously inform Contemporary ideas about, and the treatment of, all nomadic peoples. (p. 15; emphasis in original)*

Furthermore, McVeigh (1997) argued that, as well as both these "romanticised" and "pathologised" constructions of itinerant people (which parallel respectively the 'unproblematic celebration' and 'unproblematic othering' identified at the end of this section of the chapter) underpinning "contemporary ideas about, and the treatment of" those people, those same

constructions feed equally ineluctably and deleteriously into ideas about what should be 'done about' those people.

*Thus both 'liberal' and 'reactionary' sedentarisms have posited 'final solutions' to the 'problem of nomads' which actively seek their annihilation. Because of this the historical and contemporary treatment of nomads should not be dichotomised as repressive extermination versus sympathetic assimilation. Rather both approaches have been part of a complex dialectic committed to a 'final solution' to the 'problem of nomads'. (p. 22)*

While some observers might find McVeigh's (1997) reference to "a 'final solution'" extreme, such a reference emphasises the seriousness and the significance of the kind of analysis undertaken in this thesis. It also reflects the extremely high 'stakes' involved in Traveller education, whereby inappropriate schooling provision *can* shade all too readily from "sympathetic assimilation" into "repressive extermination" – or from "sympathetic incorporation" into "unsympathetic repression" as McVeigh also named these processes (p. 23). Certainly such inappropriate provision contributes crucially to the ongoing marginalisation of Australian show people, as Chapter Five demonstrates.

The European Federation for the Education of the Children of the Occupational Travellers (EFECOT) was established in 1988 (the year before the beginning of the specialised education program for the Queensland show children). Based in Brussels, Belgium, EFECOT is financially supported by various funds provided by the European Commission and uses its connections with other bureaucrats to promote the educational interests of European

occupational Travellers. Its four target groups are fairground children, circus children, bargee children (who live on the barges that ply their trade in Europe's inland waterways) and the children of seasonal fruit pickers (added latterly).

The reason for examining selected EFECOT publications in this literature review is twofold. Firstly, these publications provide a stark contrast to most of the literature on Traveller education that constructs itinerancy as a 'problem' to be 'solved'. EFECOT's approach is generally to insist that the occupational Travellers' itinerant lifestyle is an intrinsically valuable and worthwhile set of experiences, and that educational systems need to change to make specialised and appropriate provision for these people.

Secondly, EFECOT has established a very effective lobbying base to promote the interests of European occupational Travellers. Its congresses are attended by ministers for education of several European countries and high level officials in the European Commission. It has forged close links with leading practitioners of Traveller education in such countries as the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. While Australian show people still experience disruptions to the educational provision for their children when they cross state boundaries, EFECOT has contributed to a reduction in disruption to European occupational Travellers who routinely cross international borders as part of their employment.

In addition to its regular journal *Newsline*, many of the EFECOT publications are administrative, such as work programs and annual reports, and developmental, such as the strategy to evaluate the TOPILOT project (*"To OPTimize the Individual Learning process of Occupational*

*Travellers*”), whereby telematics technology using CD-i were provided to travelling families, initially in four subject areas in Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom (Botke & Willems, 1996; Marks & Pullin, 1996). Other publications consist of handbooks for teachers of travelling students, and reports of the outcomes of meetings convened by EFECOT (see for example Bernaert, 1997; Knaepkens, Van Ryckeghem & Verheyen, 1993; Pullin, 1994).

The other major category of EFECOT publications is surveys of particular groups of occupational Travellers, sometimes in specific countries. Representative examples of such publications include *The education of fairground children in the European Community* (Knaepkens, 1989), *Survey: The number, age and geographical distribution of children of show and circus families in the Republic of Ireland* (Magee, 1992) and *The secondary education of circus and fairground children: Addressing discontinuity of learning through information provision and distance learning: Report on the United Kingdom Project A4(B7)* (The European Federation for the Education of the Children of the Occupational Travellers, 1994).

These publications are typically detailed, painstaking and thorough. They are also almost entirely empirically grounded, with no explicit theoretical framework guiding the collection and analysis of the data that they report. Furthermore, the orientation of the research is almost exclusively quantitative, with an abundance of statistics and an absence of voices of individual occupational Travellers. This is perfectly appropriate, given the bureaucratic environment in which EFECOT operates, where the explication of outcomes and the measurement of achievement of those outcomes are integral elements

of EFECOT's interactions with other agencies in the European Commission. This work also makes a valuable contribution to research into Traveller education and itinerancy more generally, by providing information about such matters **as** the number of itinerants and the extent of their itinerancy.

On the basis of the stereotypical and marginalising literature analysed in the previous subsection of this chapter, it would seem that little has changed in the thirty-four years since Morris, Pestaner and Nelson (1967) observed: "*Perhapsmobility studies generally have suffered not ~~from~~a deficient but ~~from~~an absent theoretical basis*" (p. 78). The exceptional studies canvassed in this subsection, however, indicate that there is a growing recognition of the need to move beyond marginalisation and to conduct research in ways that will resist and hopefully transform the easy assumption that itinerancy is 'deviant' or 'problematic'.

It is certainly that spirit of resistance and hopeful transformation that animates the ongoing and growing contribution to the literature on Traveller education by my colleagues and myself at Central Queensland University. A representative list of **our** publications appears just before Chapter One of this thesis, and includes the edited book *Beyond the ferris wheel: Educating Queensland show children* (Danaher, 1998a) and more recently the editing of a theme issue of the *International Journal of Educational Research* pertaining to Traveller and nomadic education in several different countries (Danaher, 2000b). Although we would certainly not claim to be free at the outset of the research in 1992 from many of the negative assumptions and stereotypes attending the education of itinerant people, since then we have concentrated increasingly on articulating and disrupting those assumptions and stereotypes,

which are central and crucial to the continuing marginalisation of the Australian show people. While this thesis is separate from that research project, it is consistent with, and both extends and makes appropriate use of concepts and theories deployed through, that work.

The main findings of this selective review of research into Traveller education are **as** follows:

- Relatively little has been published about Traveller education, in comparison with other **areas** of educational research. This highlights the crucial point that, just **as** itinerant people move ‘across’ physical spaces, their itinerancy has rendered them largely invisible to academic attention and recognition. This invisibility reinforces the related and equally vital point that where itinerancy occurs, marginalisation follows close behind. This thesis is intended to contribute both to redressing that invisibility and to demonstrating that that attribution of marginalisation is neither appropriate nor inevitable.
- Most studies are written with the assumption that itinerancy differs from the ‘norm’ of fixed residence and schooling, thereby creating inherent educational ‘problems’ for travelling students. As I noted above, this might be termed an ‘unproblematic othering’ of itinerant people, by constructing them **as** automatically ‘other’ to ‘normal’ people and hence **as** the cause of the educational ‘problem’ of schooling for Travellers. This thesis is avowedly founded in opposition to this ‘unproblematic othering’, which lies at the heart of the marginalisation of itinerant people and which stands squarely between them and equitable access to educational **services**.



- A small number of more ‘enlightened’ studies either recognises the heterogeneity of itinerancy or values the diversity of experiences and lifestyles that make up itinerancy. As shall become clear, this thesis is conceived as contributing to and extending that valuing, partly by representing itinerancy as the site of potential transformation and positive outcomes for itinerant people.
- At the same time, despite the few excellent studies noted above, there is a possible tendency for some more positive representations of itinerancy to display what might be termed the ‘unproblematic celebration’ of this distinctive lifestyle. This is the logical opposite of ‘unproblematic othering’: by highlighting the exotic ‘difference’ of itinerant people, such studies might suggest that itinerancy is a uniformly easy and enjoyable set of experiences. (In a sense ‘unproblematic celebration’ parallels the Romantic notion of the ‘noble savage’ as ‘unproblematic othering’ parallels the stereotype of the ‘ignoble savage’: both reflect equally distorted and deleterious images of Indigenous peoples or in this case of occupational Travellers.) This thesis takes issue with that kind of construction, which in certain respects is as suspect and dangerous as ‘unproblematic othering’, because it diminishes the struggles routinely faced by itinerant people and ignores the vital point that those struggles arise because itinerancy is devalued in comparison with sedentarism.

The literature on Traveller education – with some noteworthy exceptions – therefore has some major deficiencies. In particular, the correlation of itinerancy with ‘educational deficit’ is likely to replicate the marginalisation of

travelling students that these same studies ostensibly seek to ameliorate. As I have written elsewhere (Danaher, 2000c):

*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” or a “solution.” (p. 224)*

This “*deficit model*” constructs Traveller education as a ‘problem’ produced from the perspective of those who occupy the official ‘place’ of education (a point that I elaborate in the next chapter).

By contrast, this thesis constructs the itinerancy of the Queensland show people as creating opportunities for distinctive educational experiences for participants, and for the assertion of a powerful cultural identity in educational domains, thereby promoting resistance and transformation and a counternarrative about itinerancy and Traveller education. I regard this as a highly significant contribution to the literature on Traveller education.

## 2.4 Review of the chapter

This chapter has presented a critical review of two sets of literature:

- Australian shows
- Traveller education.

In each set, the intention was to evaluate the strengths and limitations of selected existing literature and to suggest entry points whereby this thesis could contribute significantly to knowledge.

With regard to Australian shows, the review demonstrated that these cultural forms have a long history and are associated with various experiences of itinerancy. That same itinerancy was identified **as** the source of considerable and enduring ambivalence in the relations between itinerant and local people: a sense of identification and of having a shared purpose in the activities arranged around a show was offset by mutual suspicion and misunderstanding. The ongoing and deleterious effect of that ambivalence was sustained marginalisation of show people and their lifestyle. This thesis analyses that marginalisation **as** it characterises and influences the interactions between the Queensland show people and others with whom they have regular contact, including the staff members of the Brisbane School of Distance Education.

That same marginalisation was held to characterise much of the literature on Traveller education. On the one hand, many studies characterise Traveller education **as** a positive response to the specialised educational needs of occupational Travellers such **as** the Queensland show people. On the other hand, this characterisation often derives from a construction of itinerancy **as** 'deficit', 'different' and 'disabling'. Notable exceptions to this general trend recognised itinerancy **as** a valid lifestyle and **as** a source of resistance and potential transformation of the marginalising dominant discourse. This thesis provides an intensive examination of one site in which itinerancy engages with these three enduring themes of marginalisation, resistance and transformation.

In doing so, it presents a counternarrative to traditional understandings of itinerant people and their education, and it contributes significantly to addressing the gaps and silences identified above in the existing literature.

To elaborate on the significance of that contribution, I return to a point that I made at the end of the previous section of this chapter. There I posited two logical extremes in the literature on Traveller education, which I termed an ‘unproblematic othering’ and an ‘unproblematic celebration’ of itinerancy. The former constructs itinerancy **as** a ‘problem’ and a ‘deviation’ from the ‘norm’ of sedentarism, and accordingly tends to ‘blame the victim’, by suggesting that itinerant people cause the ‘problem’ of lack of educational access by their perverse determination on living an ‘unnatural’ lifestyle. The latter constructs itinerancy as a set of exotic and exciting experiences; it displays a fascination with the ‘difference’ of an ‘unusual’ lifestyle. Yet it is equally deficient in understanding itinerancy, which is still conceived through a frame of ‘difference’ – *albeit* a more positively valued ‘difference’ – from the ‘norm’ of sedentarism. (Clearly the exceptional studies that I identified in the last part of the previous section do not engage in this ‘unproblematic celebration’, and they certainly eschew ‘unproblematic othering’.)

My final point in this chapter is that both these logical extremes are seriously inadequate for achieving a genuine understanding of itinerancy and of Traveller education. In juxtaposition, they suggest an ‘either/or’ dichotomy in the field: ‘either’ itinerant people automatically have negative experiences, ‘or’ they experience uniform and unalloyed excitement and pleasure, on account of their lifestyle (yet both poles of the dichotomy contribute directly to the ongoing marginalisation of itinerant people). This thesis rejects

completely that dichotomy, and posits instead a 'both/and' approach to understanding itinerancy and Traveller education. Such an approach accepts that itinerancy, like any manifestation of the human condition, entails both positive and negative experiences and possibilities. What is important is an acceptance of the dynamism and fluidity of those experiences and possibilities, in keeping with the physical mobility of itinerancy. This approach has the crucial advantage of moving beyond the twin conceptual perils of fixed marginalisation and superficial exoticisation. Instead, the recognition of the deep and enduring links between itinerancy and marginalisation is leavened by an awareness of the possibility of resistance and transformation of that marginalisation. Even more significantly, this approach allows for a fuller appreciation not only of the education of the specific group considered here but also of 'disadvantaged' groups more generally.

I turn in the next chapter to present and justify this thesis's conceptual framework. Through its application to the show children's education program, that framework demonstrates its viability in significantly extending understandings of itinerancy. In the process, a more dynamic and fluid comprehension of Traveller education, informed by this study of 'learning on the run', can be developed.