

CHAPTER EIGHT

SOME ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS

“I do not really wish to conclude and sum up, rounding off the argument so as to dump it in a nutshell on the reader. A lot more could be said about any of the topics I have touched upon. . . . I have meant to ask the questions, to break the frame. . . . The point is not a set of answers, but making possible a different practice.”

Kappeler, 1986; cited in Lather, 1992, p. 95

*“In research the horizon recedes as we advance, and is no nearer at sixty than it was at twenty. As the power of endurance weakens with age, the urgency of the pursuit **grows** more intense. . . . **And** research **is** always incomplete.”*

Mark Pattison, *Isaac Casaubon*, chap. 10

8.1 The problem addressed and the research questions answered

In the introduction to this thesis, I enunciated the problem to be explored in the study in this way: what does the Queensland show children's educational provision reveal about the intersection of education and marginalisation, resistance and transformation, as well as about broader issues in Australian Traveller education? The intention was to elaborate some of the dimensions and implications of that highly evocative and redolent phrase, "*learning on the run*".

Furthermore, I stated the three research questions that would frame the conduct of the investigation carried out to address this research problem:

- "*How do the show people experience marginalisation?*"
- "*How do the show people resist their marginalised status?*"
- "*How do the show people transform their marginalising experiences and resistant practices?*"

This study therefore assigned prominence to the three concepts of marginalisation, resistance and transformation in relation to both the Queensland show people and the physical and symbolic spaces of itinerancy. That is, I perceive itinerancy as simultaneously the site of undoubted neglect of and discrimination against travelling people and of the possibilities of a more productive and equitable educational provision for those people.

In Chapter Two of the thesis, I surveyed the current literature in two areas: Australian shows; and Traveller education. I identified varying manifestations of ambivalence, marginalisation, resistance and transformation associated with the literature on Australian shows, particularly in terms of the relations between itinerant and local people. I also discerned considerable ambivalence, marginalisation, resistance and transformation in the literature on Traveller education, with the majority of studies continuing to conform to the features of either an ‘unproblematic othering’ or an ‘unproblematic celebration’ of itinerancy, with respectively assumptions of itinerancy being a ‘deficit’ lifestyle and therefore education having a ‘remedial’ function, or else an excessive emphasis on the exotic fascination of living an itinerant lifestyle. By contrast, there is also a growing body of literature predicated on itinerant people’s rights to pursue the lifestyle that they wished and to have equitable access to appropriate educational provision. The existing literature on Australian shows and Traveller education also creates a space for my intended contribution to that literature arising from this intensive study of Queensland show people’s experiences of ‘learning on the run’.

A significant part of that intended contribution relates to my application to the empirical site outlined above of the conceptual framework articulated in Chapter Three. That framework was centred on the derivation of a mutually engaged and responsive interplay between Michel de Certeau’s concept of ‘tactics of consumption’, whereby show people seek to change the often uncomprehending and sometimes hostile ‘spaces’ through which they travel into ‘places’ of their own, and Mikhail Bakhtin’s notions of ‘outsidedness’ and ‘creative understanding’, whereby the show people’s interactions with others assist them in changing ‘the rules of the games’ that construct them **as**

disadvantaged. This conceptual framework has the particular value of throwing into stark relief the marginalised, resistant and transformative aspects of ‘learning on the run’.

Chapter Four applied ‘tactics of consumption’, ‘outsidedness’ and ‘creative understanding’, and marginalisation, resistance and transformation, to the study’s research design. I explained my own ambivalence about the study’s potential for replicating, as well as contesting, the show people’s disadvantaged situation, and I argued that de Certeau’s concept of ‘tactics of consumption’, and his two binary categories of ‘consumption’/‘reading’ and ‘production’/‘writing’, provided a way of understanding my relations with the show people and a justification for the asserted trustworthiness of my analysis of their interview data. I further asserted that Bakhtin’s notions of ‘outsidedness’ and ‘creative understanding’ helped to explain the show people’s interactions with both myself and the staff members of the Brisbane School of Distance Education. **So** ambivalence was posited as a potentially productive approach to both the research design’s ethical and political dimensions and the data gathering techniques, which consisted of semi-structured interviews with forty-two people and an analysis of relevant documents. **As** I elaborate below, ‘learning on the run’ is a descriptor that can be applied **as** much to me as a researcher as it can to the Queensland show people.

I provided answers to the study’s three research questions in Chapters Five, Six and Seven. In Chapter Five, I used de Certeau’s (1984) notion of ‘strategies of marginalisation’ to identify and critique the show people’s marginalising experiences. Specifically, the chapter examined three key attributes of strategies of marginalisation directed against the show people:

their absence of place; the construction of their otherness in relation to the settled community; and forms of unproblematic knowledge about the ‘proper’ location and provision of schooling. In combination, these three elements of marginalisation provided the impetus for the show people’s resistance and transformation of their marginalised situation, and is therefore integral to their ‘learning on the run’.

I used Chapter Six to explore the show people’s ongoing efforts to resist their marginalised status. I identified their resistant practices by means of applying de Certeau’s (1984) concept of ‘tactics of consumption’, aided by his notion of ‘space’. Specifically, I argued that the show people resist their ascribed absence of place through their multiple experiences and understandings of ‘home’. Furthermore, they resist their constructed otherness by giving the term ‘showies’ a positive valence to counteract the negative stereotypes ascribed to it by others, disrupting the ‘showie’–‘non-showie’ dichotomy and giving the term ‘mugs’ a negative valence as a tactic of reversal. They also resist forms of seemingly unproblematic knowledge about their schooling through their lobbying for, and consumption of, a specialised educational program operated by the Brisbane School of Distance Education. The show people’s resistant practices are therefore as integral as the strategies of marginalisation identified in Chapter Five to their ‘learning on the run’.

In Chapter Seven, I analysed the show people’s efforts to move beyond the resistance of marginalisation to the transformation of the spaces of their itinerancy. I applied Bakhtin’s (1986a) notions of ‘outsidedness’ and ‘creative understanding’ to explain how the show people have succeeded in making fundamental changes to ‘the rules of the game’ governing their

previous educational options and have succeeded in creating a new terrain of Australian Traveller education. Specifically, I analysed the words of home tutors and teachers from the Brisbane School of Distance Education to demonstrate how the show people have transformed their ascribed absence of place into a place of their own and hence into a location of power by extending to those others their multiple experiences and understandings of 'home'. They have also transformed the constructions of their otherness into a valuing of their difference by communicating to those others the positive valence of the term 'showies'. Moreover, they have transformed forms of seemingly unproblematic knowledge about the appropriate forms and places of educating itinerant people by successfully lobbying for a separate school for their children. From this perspective, the show people's transformative actions, whereby they turn the 'spaces' of itinerancy into 'places' through their exploitation of outsideness and their facilitation of creative understanding, are a fundamental component of their 'learning on the run'.

8.2 The personal note revisited

At the end of Chapter One of this thesis, I inserted "*A personal note*" that outlined some autobiographical information. The intention was to emphasise from the outset my awareness of the usually implicit relationship between a research project and the researcher's subjectivity, and moreover of the potential for that subjectivity to be complicit in replicating the existing disadvantage of a group of 'research subjects' or of otherwise not doing them positive good. I have explored this matter elsewhere in somewhat greater

length (Danaher, 1998b), and I consider below the implications of the issue for possible future directions in Traveller education research. Here I shall focus on my continuing and changing relationship with the research project.

Throughout this thesis, my musings on this issue of potential complicity have constituted a set of antiphons in a minor key to the focus – the verses in major chords – on the show people’s marginalisation, resistance and transformation. That is, I have made explicit on occasions my ambivalence about particular matters, such as the ethical and political dimensions of the study’s research design. Thus I have drawn attention to the resistant and transformative elements of the spaces of the show people’s itinerancy while striving to challenge the marginalising elements of those same spaces. At the same time, some feelings of ambivalence about doing so are occasioned by my awareness that getting the balance between these polarities ‘right’ is always difficult (Kenny, 1997). So an important part of my own ‘learning on the run’ in writing this thesis has been a growing understanding that such ambivalence is likely to remain with me about the study, and moreover that such ambivalence can have positive effects.

I feel supported in making this statement by the view expressed by Kenway and Willis with Blackmore and Rennie (1998) – to which, as I noted in Chapter Four, I would add the descriptor ‘self-reflective’:

*We know that our preferences **for** action and **our** knowledge are situated, partial and interested. They arise **from** our biographies, our different theoretical, institutional, geographic and time locations.* (p. xii)

In other words, my personal note at the beginning of the thesis, this reflection on that note at the end of the thesis and my musings on my ambivalence about conducting this study are all ‘grist to the mill’ of making researchers’ subjectivities more, not less, visible in investigating Traveller education. This kind of approach helps readers to evaluate the ‘truth claims’ made in studies such as this, and also keeps ‘on the agenda’ issues such as researchers’ roles in replicating or contesting the marginalisation of itinerant people.

As I stated in Chapter Four, I take heart also from the following observation of Trinh T. Minh-ha (1990):

*Inevitably, a work is always a **form of** tangible closure. But closures need not close off; they can be doors opening onto other closures and functioning as ongoing passages to an elsewhere (-within-here). . . . What needs to be reconsidered are these widely adopted and imposed **forms of** closure whose main function is simply to wrap up a product and facilitate consumption. They create neither a space of serenity nor **of** fecundity **for** the mind and body to rest and grow; rather, they naturalize the zone **of** conformity, where freedom consists of filling in to one’s taste and monetary capacity, the pre-assigned slots. (p. 329)*

My desire is that I have written this thesis in ways that encourage ‘tactics of consumption’ by the reader, and practices of ‘outsidedness’ and ‘creative understanding’ with the reader, that will allow temporary and tentative closures rather than an imposed closure designed “*to wrap up a product and facilitate consumption*”. Such temporary and tentative closures are far more in keeping with the various conceptual, methodological and empirical lessons that I have learned ‘on the run’ about the constituent spaces of itinerancy.

8.3 Possible directions for future research

Focussing on the constituent spaces of itinerancy also suggests some possible directions for future research in Traveller education – or ways whereby ‘learning on the run’ can be applied to the broader field in which I have positioned this study. A useful starting point in this process is Kiddle’s (1999) call for a new “*terrain*” to be developed in Traveller education in England:

Education and pride in themselves is the power that parents and teachers can jointly give to the children – a power to develop self-esteem, a power ~~for~~ choice, a power to defend against exploitation. . . . I have no illusion about the immense difficulties that presents ~~for~~ both parents and teachers, Traveller and non-Traveller, but I do not care to contemplate the alternative future for the children. (p. 156)

Thus for Kiddle (1999) Traveller educational provision and research have an imperative to transform educational opportunities for Travellers whereby they have “*power*”. Kenny’s (1997) “*vision statement*” (p. 296) for Traveller education also focussed on the political dimension:

Traveller children, in collaboration with emancipatory teachers, will acquire the knowledge and skills needed ~~for~~ emancipatory practice. They will learn to clarify who their enemies are, and direct their resistance with increasing accuracy. Teachers and parents will establish reciprocal relationships in schools and in a developing, politically and culturally

dynamic Traveller society. Thus, the patronage which, in situations of internal colonialism informs relations between the dominant and subordinated ethnic groups, will be confronted and replaced with mutually respectful, dialogic relations. (pp. 296-297)

The reference to “*mutually respectful, dialogic relations*”, and the implication that such relations depend on a transformation of the political dimension of Traveller education, resonate with this study’s analysis of the ‘tactics of consumption’, ‘outsidedness’ and ‘creative understanding’ manifested in the Queensland show people’s marginalisation, resistance and transformation associated with their itinerancy. As I noted in Chapter Four, that reference and that implication also highlight the enduring importance of Traveller educational research having a “*transformative*” function as enunciated by Anyanwu (1998):

Transformative research is a systematic inquiry into the real conditions which create oppression or hinder self-determination. It produces reflective knowledge which helps people to identify their situation and in doing so, to change such [a] situation for the better. (p. 45)

From that perspective, the findings of this thesis are intended to have just such a “*transformative*” function. My analysis of the interplay among marginalisation, resistance and transformation as the show people use ‘tactics of consumption’, ‘outsidedness’ and ‘creative understanding’ in efforts to make the spaces of itinerancy more congenial and meaningful highlighted aspects of their lives that constitute part of “*the real conditions which create oppression or hinder self-determination*”. At the same time, I pointed to conclusions that potentially might assist the show people “*to identify their*

*situation and in doing so, to change such [a] situation **for** the better".* I do not mean by this that I have communicated a particular opinion about the 'pros' and 'cons' of having a separate school, for example. I mean instead that this study, and future Traveller education research, can and should contribute to a developing body of knowledge about, and understanding and acceptance of, the specialised educational needs and aspirations of Travellers that will potentially create new and more enabling educational opportunities for them.

On a related matter, I indicated in Chapter One that claims are often made about open and distance learning as a possible panacea for addressing the educational needs of different kinds of learners. The significance of this study is that such claims must be counterbalanced by an intensive examination of the learning experiences of specific groups of learners. In the case of the show people, their resistance and transformation of their marginalisation – derived from and fuelled by their agency – enabled them to consume a particular distance education program on their own terms and in their own image. As I have said, this is not always the case, and so a healthy scepticism would seem the most appropriate approach to uncritical and unexamined assertions about the empowering capacity of open and distance learning.

As Kenny (1997) has pointed out, the development of knowledge about Traveller education has some parallels with ongoing research into the links between education and gender:

The shift in mindset is comparable to that involved in addressing issues related to gender equity: what was assumed to be the natural order of things was found to be a male construct, and it was not enough to

*simply make room within it for women. We need to realise that there is nothing natural about **our** sedentary life-style and all that it requires, any more than there is about reading from left to right. (p. 296)*

This denaturalisation of sedentarism provides a fitting and welcome riposte to McVeigh's (1997) reference to

*. . .a host of other less tangible ideas, actions and structures which construct being sedentary **as** the only possible mode of existence within contemporary society. (p. 9)*

Such a denaturalisation would have the associated benefit of promoting theoretical understandings of residence **as** having multiple forms, each equally valid and worthy of value. In this way, the spaces of itinerancy would become transformed into an infinity of places whose inhabitants would constantly move in and out and who would be connected by means of 'outsidedness' and 'creative understanding'.

As for my own more detailed "vision statement" (Kenny, 1997, p. 296) of Traveller education research, in 1996 I spoke the following words at an international seminar on open and distance learning for Traveller education organised by the European Federation for the Education of the Children of the Occupational Travellers (EFECOT):

*. . .an artistic analogy. . .is useful in helping me to view the education of the children of occupational Travellers **as** a number of adjoining panels in a very large landscape painting. The foreground depicts children learning in situ, with their teachers changing their conventional roles **as** the key figure in a permanent classroom. The middle ground shows the*

excited faces and the bright colours of a fairground ride or a circus tent, and the exhausted but contented demeanours of fruitpickers after a hard day's work. The background consists of the flat land and greenfields of western Europe in some panels and the Australian eucalypti stretching to undulating hills on the horizon in others. My colleagues and I hope that this seminar will bring closer to fruition the joining of the panels and the unveiling of the larger painting, so that the constants and the variables of educating the children of occupational Travellers around the world may be revealed. (Danaher, 1996, pp. 47-48)

This thesis has been conceived as contributing to “the joining of the panels and the unveiling of the larger painting” that depict the complexities and subtleties of itinerancy and Traveller education. The thesis’s contribution to that enterprise lies largely in its delineation of some of the physical and symbolic spaces of itinerancy and Traveller education, particularly the marginalising, resistant and transformative dimensions of those spaces. The thesis has demonstrated how the Queensland show people’s ‘tactics of consumption’, ‘outsidedness’ and ‘creative understanding’ enable them to resist and transform the marginalising spaces in which they are located, an achievement that reveals the continuing existence of, and the interplay among, marginalisation, agency and ambivalence for Travellers and Traveller education researchers alike. These, among others, are the important lessons of ‘learning on the run’.