ABSTRACT

"Learning on the Run" refers to the educational experiences of the primary school children travelling along the agricultural show 'circuits' in coastal and western Queensland. This thesis examines those educational experiences by drawing on the voices of the show children, their parents, their home tutors and their teachers from the Brisbane School of Distance Education, which from 1989 to 1999 implemented a specialised program of Traveller education for these children (in 2000 a separate school was established for them).

The thesis focuses on the interplay among marginalisation, resistance and transformation in the spaces of the show people's itinerancy. It deploys Michel de Certeau's (1984, 1986) concept of 'tactics of consumption' and Mikhail Bakhtin's (1986a) notions of 'outsidedness' and 'creative understanding' to interrogate the show people's engagement with their absence of place, the construction of their otherness and forms of seemingly unproblematic knowledge about their schooling. Data gathering techniques included semi-structured interviews with forty-two people between 1992 and 2000 in seven sites in Queensland – Mackay, Bundaberg (over two years), Emerald, Brisbane, Rockhampton and Yeppoon – and document collection.

The thesis's major finding is that the show people's resistance and transformation of their marginalising experiences have enabled them to initiate and implement a significant counternarrative to the traditional narrative (and associated stereotypes) attending their itinerancy. This counternarrative has underpinned a fundamental change in their schooling provision, from a structure that worked to marginalise and disempower them to a specialised form of Traveller education. This change contributes crucially to understanding and theorising the spaces of itinerancy, and highlights the broader significance of the Queensland show people's "learning on the run".
Learning on the Run:
Traveller Education for
Itinerant Show Children
in Coastal and Western Queensland

Patrick Alan Danaher

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy,
School of Education and Innovation,
Faculty of Education and Creative Arts,
Central Queensland University,
March 2001
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated with love and affection to

the memory of

MAURICE DANAHER

(28 September 1930 - 5 February 1988)

"Yet in my lineaments they trace
Some features of my father’s face."

Lord Byron, “Parisina"

"—Adieu, dit le renard. Voici mon secret. Il est très simple: on ne voit bien
qu’avec le cœur. L’essential est invisible pour les yeux. . . . C’est le temps que
tu as perdu pour ta rose quifait ta rose si importante. . . . Les hommes ont
oublié cette vérité . . . Mais tu ne dois pas l’oublier. Tu deviens responsable
pour toujours de ce que tu as apprivoisé. Tu es responsable de ta rose. . . ."

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, Le Petit Prince, pp. 72-74

“When he [José Arcadio Buendia] became an expert in the use and manipula-
tion of his instruments, he conceived a notion of space that allowed him to
navigate across unknown seas, to visit uninhabited territories, and to establish
relations with splendid beings without having to leave his study.”

Gabriel Garcia Márques, One Hundred Years of Solitude, p. 4
CONTENTS

Abstract 1
Dedication iii
Contents iv
List of Figures ix
Acknowledgements x
Declaration xvi
Selected Publications and Presentations Related to This Work xvii

Chapter One: The Problem and The Questions 1

1.1 The problem 2
1.2 The significance of the problem 4
1.3 The research questions 8
1.4 The outline of the thesis 11
1.5 A personal note 13

Chapter Two: The Review of the Literature 15

2.1 Overview of the chapter 16
2.2 Australian shows 17
2.3 Traveller education 35

2.3.1 The *dearth* of research 37
2.3.2 The prevalence of negative stereotyping 40
2.3.3 Some exceptional studies 55
### Chapter Three: The Conceptual Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Overview of the chapter</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>De Certeau’s concept of ‘tactics of consumption’</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.1</td>
<td><em>The practice of everyday life</em> (1984)</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Consumer production’</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘The tactics of practice’</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.2</td>
<td><em>Heterologies: Discourse on the other</em> (1986)</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.3</td>
<td>Applications and critiques of de Certeau’s work</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Strategies’ and ‘tactics’</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Place’ and ‘space’</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marginalisation and resistance</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Change and transformation</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Bakhtin’s notions of ‘outsidedness’ and ‘creative understanding’</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.2</td>
<td>Bakhtin and de Certeau</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.3</td>
<td>‘Outsidedness’ and ‘creative understanding’</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Synthesis of the conceptual framework</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Review of the chapter</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Chapter Four: The Research Design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Overview of the chapter</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Marginalisation, resistance and transformation and researching</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LEARNING ON THE RUN

4.3 ‘Tactics of consumption’ and researching Traveller education 182
4.4 ‘Outsidedness’ and ‘creative understanding’ and researching Traveller education 190
4.5 The ethical and political dimensions of the study 197
4.6 The research design of the study 207
4.7 The data gathering techniques of the study 209
  4.7.1 Semi-structured interviews 209
  4.7.2 Document collection 212
4.8 The delimitations and limitations of the study 213
4.9 Review of the chapter 215

Chapter Five: Research Question One: The Show People’s Experiences of Marginalisation 218

5.1 Overview of the chapter 219
5.2 Strategies of marginalisation 222
5.3 Absence of place 228
5.4 Constructions of otherness 238
5.5 Forms of unproblematic knowledge 251
  5.5.1 Sending show children to local schools on the show circuits 257
  5.5.2 Sending show children to boarding schools 264
  5.5.3 Teaching show children correspondence lessons on the show circuits 265
  5.5.4 Show people coming off the circuits and sending their children to local schools 269
Chapter Six: Research Question Two: The Show People's Practices of Resistance

6.1 Overview of the chapter
6.2 Tactics of resistance
6.3 Resisting absence of place: "Where is home to you?"
6.4 Resisting constructions of otherness: 'Showies', 'locals' and 'mugs'
   6.4.1 Giving 'showies' a positive valence
   6.4.2 Disrupting the 'showie'-'non-showie' dichotomy
   6.4.3 Giving 'mugs' a negative valence
6.5 Resisting forms of unproblematic knowledge: The Brisbane School of Distance Education program
   6.5.1 Establishing the program
   6.5.2 Consuming the program
6.6 Review of the chapter

Chapter Seven: Research Question Three: The Show People's Transformation of Their Marginalising Experiences and Resistant Practices

7.1 Overview of the chapter
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>Outsidedness, creative understanding and transformation</td>
<td>341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>Transforming absence of place: A place of their own</td>
<td>346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>Transforming constructions of otherness: Valuing difference</td>
<td>352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>Transforming forms of unproblematic knowledge: A separate show school</td>
<td>362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>Review of the chapter</td>
<td>370</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter Eight Some Answers to the Questions 373

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>The problem addressed and the research questions answered</td>
<td>374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>The personal note revisited</td>
<td>378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>Possible directions for future research</td>
<td>381</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References 386

Appendix A Semi-Structured Interview Schedule 407
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>The conceptual framework of the study</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Phases in the study’s research design</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Interviews conducted for the study</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many individuals and groups have provided invaluable assistance in the writing of this thesis. The relationship between research student and supervisor is a curiously intimate one, requiring the supervisor to challenge and encourage in equal measure. Dr Leonie Rowan fulfilled the manifold responsibilities of associate, and more recently principal, supervisor with commendable grace, patience and good humour. She applied her enviable knowledge of poststructuralist theory, particularly the work of Michel de Certeau and Mikhail Bakhtin, to assist my elaboration of the study’s conceptual framework, and she tolerated with a smile my often naive questions. She also insisted on an appropriate integration of theory, method and data analysis, and she facilitated my efforts to attain that goal. In short, the thesis would not have been completed without Dr Rowan’s support.

Professor Leo Bartlett, who was my principal supervisor for most of the study, took time from his extremely busy schedule to read my tentative drafts, to focus my thinking and to suggest potentially fruitful ways of proceeding. His questions and criticisms have greatly enhanced my understanding of educational research. This is only a small part of his enormous contribution to establishing and nourishing a research culture in the then Faculty of Education at Central Queensland University, in his former role as Foundation Professor and Dean in that faculty. Professor Bartlett’s support was also instrumental in my being awarded a bursary of six months by Central Queensland University.
Four well-disposed spirits – Ms Phyllida Coombes, Dr Geoffrey Danaher, Ms Lucy Jarzabkowski and Dr Máirín Kenny – undertook the tedious but greatly appreciated task of painstakingly reading late drafts of the text. Their efforts contributed immeasurably to the improvement of that text.

Staff members of the Central Queensland University Library provided prompt and courteous service. Ms Beverley Corness, former liaison librarian with the then Faculty of Education, and Ms Mary Bevis, current holder of that position, were interested and encouraging. Ms Cathy Dennis, inter-library loans officer, coped well with my requests for abstruse items.

I am grateful to the organisers of and the participants in the annual symposia of the Central Queensland University Postgraduate Student Association. I acknowledge also the searching questions posed by audience members at other conferences where I have discussed the study. These events gave me an opportunity to sharpen my thinking and to respond to the questions of interested outsiders.

I was greatly assisted in writing this thesis by virtue of its forming part of a larger collaborative research project with my fellow members of the former Professional Growth Research and Teaching Group in the then Faculty of Education at Central Queensland University. My thanks go to Dr Geoffrey Danaher, Dr Paul Duncum, Mr Peter Hallinan, Mr Ian Kindt, Ms Patricia Moran, Dr Beverley Moriarty, Dr Ken Purnell, Mr Colin Rose, Mr Robert Thompson, Ms Christine Woodrow and Mr Doug Wyer. Of these, Messrs. Hallinan, Kindt, Rose, Thompson and Wyer and Drs Danaher and Moriarty constitute, with myself, the past and present core of the Australian Traveller education research project at Central Queensland University.
Taped interviews recorded as part of the aforementioned broader project and on which I drew for this study were expertly transcribed by Dr Geoffrey Danaher, Ms Bonita Frank and Ms Pam Gale.

Several individuals discussed the study or the broader project to which it relates with me and provided information and sometimes advice, in person and more often in correspondence. In this regard, I am indebted to Associate Professor Chris Bigum, Dr Ron Blaber, Mr John Bowman, Dr Ian Buchanan, Ms Helen Currie, Professor Roger Dale, Dr Caroline Dyer, Professor Terry Evans, Mr Keith Harry, Ms Pat Holmes, Mr Tom Jenkin, Dr Elizabeth Jordan, Professor Stephen Kemmis, Dr Máirín Kenny, Ms Cathy Kiddle, Mr Ludo Knaepkens, Mr Ken Lee, Mr Robert T. Pullin, Mr Nello Raciti, Ms Ursula Scholten, Ms Tracy Smith, Mr Mark St Leon, Mr Emile Steffann, Professor Gidado Tahir, Dr Abdurrahman Umar, Mr Ruud van de Rakt, Mr Wim van de Steeg, Associate Professor Bill Warren and Mr Matthew Weinstein. Ms Maryanne Lynch provided invaluable editorial advice on a related project that incidentally enhanced the presentation of this study.

Associate Professor Robert Baker provided the impetus for the study, by musing aloud one day, "I wonder where and when the show children go to school". His receipt (with Mr Peter Hallinan) of a University Research Grant (awarded through the Research Centre for Open and Distance Learning at Central Queensland University) provided the initial funding for the research, which was supplemented by funding by the former Faculty of Education and a second University Research Grant awarded through the Research Centre for Open and Distance Learning. Associate Professor Baker also performed the
role of supervisor of the thesis until his move to become Director of the Centre for Education at Southern Cross University.

I am very grateful to my friends and colleagues in the Faculty of Education and Creative Arts at Central Queensland University. They have ensured that ‘going to work’ is a fulfilling and enriching experience. I trust that it will not be thought amiss if I name some individuals whose assistance and friendship are particularly important to me:

- past and present members of the Faculty of Education and Creative Arts general office for enormous efficiency and professionalism leavened by good humour, particularly my current administrative assistant, Ms Sandi Weedon

- my three fellow Gooleys – former Associate Professor Robert Baker, Ms Bobby Harreveld and Ms Pat Moran – for great food and even better company

- Dr Trevor Gale, for his intellectual companionship and his commitment to social justice in theory and practice

- former Associate Professor Michael Garbutcheon Singh, for introducing me to the thought of Mikhail Bakhtin and amazing me with his industry and productivity

- my four fellow ‘lounge bar lizards’ – Ms Lynda Kennedy, Ms Jackie Newdick, the late Ms Angie Padfield and Dr Leonie Rowan – for participating with me in essential distractions from the daily grind.
I thank all the members of my family – Phyllida and Cedric Coombes, Michael and Haruko Danaher, Geoffrey Danaher, Christine Danaher and Reanna Urquhart, Jemima Coombes and Charlie Danaher – for their manifold interest, encouragement and support. My brother Dr Geoffrey Danaher was particularly helpful in suggesting some theoretical links between Michel de Certeau and Mikhail Bakhtin, and I benefited from reading his doctoral thesis (Danaher, 1995). My Venezuelan host family – Emilio A., Princess and Poockie Anteliz – provided a ‘home away from home’ that rekindled my energies to complete the project. My greatest regret is that the dedicatee of the thesis, and both my grandmothers, are unable to read the finished product.

My largest debt is to two groups of people. Firstly, the participants on the coastal and western Queensland show circuits – children, parents and home tutors – responded politely and tolerantly to the inquisitive researchers from Central Queensland University, whose annual incursion into one of the local show weeks they took in their stride. Mr Dick Dargin, current executive officer of the Showmen’s Guild of Australasia, and Mr Peter A. Johnstone, former holder of that position, have been encouraging of the research project and facilitated my contacts with other show people.

Secondly, I am very grateful for the ongoing support and the many kindnesses of Mr Bob Rasmussen, principal of the Brisbane School of Distance Education, and for the invaluable assistance of the teachers involved in the show children’s education program, especially Ms Cathie Fullerton, Ms Cathy O’Connor and Mr Duncan Robertson.
Specifically, I acknowledge with thanks the special assistance of the following individuals who granted me interviews or who otherwise contributed to the study: Mr Mark Adsett, Ms Robyn Allan, Ms Sarah Butler, Ms Jessamy Bell, Ms Sandra Bell, Ms Tammy Bell, Ms Kylie Boon, Mr Johnny Castle, Ms Priscilla Castle, Mr Luke Cheyne, Mr Greg Davenport, Ms Raelene Davis, Ms Nadine Eckert, Mr Josh Evans, Ms Cathie Fullerton, Ms Sarah Gill, Ms Jessica Gilmore, Ms Zoe Gilmore, Mr Christopher Hennessy, Ms Jessica Hennessy, Mr Luke Hennessy, Mr Peter A. Johnstone, Ms Jan Marshall, Mr Jesse McDonald, Ms Claire McPherson, Ms Robyn McPherson, Ms Kathleen Miller, Ms Julie Miller, Mr Liam Miller, Ms Cathy O’Connor, Mr Brod Pavier, Ms Nanette Pavier, Mr Damien Phillips, Ms Tyrie Phillips, Ms Briony Pink, Ms Kylie Pink, Mr Bob Rasmussen, Mr Duncan Robertson, Ms Kym Silver and Ms Jodie Wardle.

Both the groups identified above – show people and educators – were crucial to the success of the research project, and they contributed immeasurably to my growing understanding of “learning on the run”.
DECLARATION

I declare that the main text of this thesis is entirely my own work and that such work has not been previously submitted as a requirement for the award of a degree at Central Queensland University or any other institution of higher education.

(Patrick Danaher)

30 March 2001
SELECTED PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS RELATED TO THIS WORK


Danaher, P. A., Wyer, D. W., Rowan, L. O. & Hallinan, P. M. (1994). The role of course development and design in an itinerant schooling program: The perceptions of staff members of the School of Distance Education in
Brisbane, Queensland. In *Distance education: Windows on the future -- conference proceedings* (pp. 70-75). Wellington, New Zealand: New Zealand Correspondence School.


