

The intersections of ethnicity, gender and an itinerant lifestyle: Deconstructing teachers' narratives and thinking about the possibilities of transformative action

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Abstract

This chapter considers teachers' narratives about itinerant farm workers' children who were enrolled temporarily in a primary school in a rural area of north-eastern Australia. The stories are analysed using a linguistic and social analysis that considers the context within which the stories were constructed. Itinerant farm workers' children underachieve in literacy learning and the data suggest that the deficit discourses that circulate within the school help to marginalise the children and to maintain inequitable learning outcomes. The chapter concludes with some suggestions for transformative action within schools, to ensure equality and equitable outcomes for students.

Introduction

School literacy learning is regarded highly in today's climate of accountability. International measures, including PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment, see Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development nd) and PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study, see Lynch School of Education 2010), provide comparative measures of educational achievement across nations. In Australia, the results of national literacy tests (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority 2010) are reported on the My School website (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority 2011), which provides data that allow schools to "compare themselves with other schools that serve similar students."

The specific focus on schools "that serve similar students" highlights the way that contextual factors, such as socio-economic status, cultural background, linguistic background and gender, are implicated in students' literacy achievement levels. As Makin (2007, 5) noted, "children from cultural minority groups or minority language backgrounds and children living in poverty" are "at particular risk of low literacy achievement in schools." There is certainly evidence that these "gross demographics," to use the term that Kalantzis, Cope and the Learning by Design Project Group (2005, 44) coined for these dimensions, influence how teachers make sense of their students and their capabilities to learn school literacies. The "persistent problem of inequitable outcomes" (Comber 2007, 18) is one that warrants ongoing investigation, if we are serious about ensuring equitable opportunities and educational trajectories for all students.

We have known for a long time that social membership, in terms of ethnicity, social class, gender, or combinations of these factors, can influence the successes that children achieve in school literacy learning. The term *ethnicity* is, according to Bhopal (2004,), an "imprecise and fluid" term based on the Greek word *ethnos*, meaning a nation. It refers to "the group to which people belong, and/or are perceived to belong," generally referring ancestral origins, geographical origins, cultural traditions, such as customs, beliefs and religion, and language/s

(Bhopal, 2004; Tsolidis, 2001). In the Australian context, the term *ethnicity* is used in preference to *race*.

Indeed, teachers often use ethnicity, social class and gender as points of reference, creating narratives about why some students in the school context succeed and others do not. One result can be narratives of blame – stories that blame students for not bringing appropriate understandings to school, or stories that blame parents for being deficient in caring for their children and negligent in not preparing them for school literacy learning. According to Henderson and Woods (2012, 116), “deficit stories are often beliefs: the belief that poor people are lazy, that girls are better than boys at English, or that a child wearing dirty clothes cannot learn.” Yet beliefs or stories like these can help to perpetuate stereotypical views and assumptions about children and families, particularly those who are poor or culturally diverse. As Comber (2007, 13) pointed out, such stories become “the ‘truth’ about ‘these kids’.” The consequences of such stories are often negative, because they provide commonsense understandings which reinforce educational inequality.

The prevalence of deficit discourses has been acknowledged in the considerable body of research that has attempted to find ways of “turning around” (Kamler and Comber 2005) and “moving beyond” (Henderson, 2001) these discourses (e.g., Comber and Kamler, 2005; Gonzales, Moll, and Amanti, 2005; Henderson and Woods, 2012). In this chapter, however, I return to look more closely at deficit discourses and how they work to discursively construct students who seem to be marginalised within the context of a particular school.

I begin by discussing literacy learning and its relevance to the children of itinerant farm workers. I draw on empirical evidence from a research study that was conducted in a primary school located in a rural community in Australia’s north-east. Through examining the discourses that teachers use when talking about itinerant farm workers’ children and their successes or otherwise in school literacy learning, I investigate the intersectionality of social class, ethnicity and gender in the teachers’ narratives. The chapter concludes by considering some possibilities for transformative action, arguing that a reconceptualisation of itinerancy could help to disrupt deficit views and assist teachers to focus on responsive, flexible and enabling pedagogies that will work for all students.

Itinerant farm workers’ children, literacy learning and considerations of equity

Over a number of years, I have conducted research in relation to the literacy learning of itinerant farm workers’ children. In Australia, as in other countries, many workers who undertake manual farm labour travel from location to location to pick crops. However, the size of the country means that families sometimes travel large distances and work during winter harvesting seasons in the north and summer harvesting seasons in the south. Many farm workers bring their families with them and their children move in and out of schools in various locations. As part of these relocations, many children cross state borders and have to fit into different education systems in different states. These present a range of differences that often translate into difficulties for itinerant children, including different school starting ages, different curricula and even different handwriting styles.

My research has shown that many itinerant farm workers' children underachieve in literacy learning. Indeed, as an example, the data of one school, that enrolls up to 60 itinerant farm workers' children each winter, indicate that up to 75 per cent of this particular group of children perform in the lowest 25 per cent of the school population (Henderson, 2005). Such low results suggest that there is a need to further investigate the relationships and interactions between an itinerant lifestyle and literacy learning in the school context.

Since the early 1980s, research in the literacy field has given us a way of understanding why children from particular backgrounds do not achieve as well as other children in the classroom. Shirley Brice Heath's (1983) seminal study in the US, which investigated two small working class communities located on the edge of a middle class cotton milling town, indicated that children's language socialisation at home influenced their success or otherwise at school. As Heath (1983, 368, 349) explained, some children arrive at school having had "hundreds of thousands of occasions for practicing the skills and espousing the values the schools transmit," while others "fall quickly into a pattern of failure." In other words, Heath's (1983, 343) work highlighted the advantage that can occur when children have had opportunities to engage with the particular social practices and the specific "ways with words" of schools and institutions.

Similar explanations have been evident in more recent literacy research, where understandings about literacy are grounded in a cultural-critical perspective. From this perspective, literacy is understood as a plural concept and the learning of literacies is about access to, and participation in, particular social and cultural practices. As Freebody (2007, 3) highlighted, "what passes for effective literacy education can differ depending on the culture, history and technologies of social groups, and ... represents only one possible scholarly tradition." To be successful in school literacy learning, children need to display culturally-preferred ways of engaging in literacy practices, including talking, listening, behaving, reading and writing. This suggests that group membership, in terms of gender, social class, ethnicity, geographical location, or combinations of these factors, can determine the types of literacy that are accessed in homes and communities, and this can therefore influence the successes available to children in the school context. Indeed, it often means that there are "a wealth of literacy practices in the lives of those often considered by the educational establishment to be 'deprived' of literacy" (Gregory and Williams 2000, 203; see also Carrington and Luke, 2003; Gonzales et al. 2005; Purcell-Gates 2008).

This way of thinking about literacy learning suggests that schools valorise, and "measure and reward, a certain set of family and personal attributes" (Gilbert 2000, 10). This becomes an important point when we consider the literacy learning of children who belong to minority cultures and are culturally or linguistically different from what might constitute the "norm" of a particular school. Tsolidis (2001, 13) noted that ethnicity and its associated traits, including "language, customs, beliefs, religion or generally those characteristics which create and reproduce a cultural identity" are often tied to incidents of racism and social exclusion. Despite the way that "*everyone* has an ethnicity" (Santoro 2007, 86), it appears that members of ethnic minorities are often noticed because of their difference/s from others (Whitehouse and Colvin 2001).

What, then, does this mean in relation to school literacy learning and opportunities for children to achieve equitable learning outcomes? Thomson (2002) used the metaphor of a virtual schoolbag to indicate that children bring to school a bag “full of things they have already learned at home, with their friends, and in and from the world in which they live” (p. 1). Yet, schools often seem to operate in ways that result in some children being unable to unpack the contents of their virtual schoolbag for use in the classroom. When children’s strengths are invisible, their weaknesses are highlighted, thus allowing stories about “these kids,” “these parents” and “these neighbourhoods” (Henderson and Woods 2012, 126) to become taken-for-granted “truths.”

Unfortunately, deficit discourses are prevalent in school contexts (e.g., see Comber 2007; Comber and Kamler 2004; Harris 2008; Henderson and Woods 2012; Honan 2006). When some families are regarded as “lacking what society deems to be the educational, social and cultural basics,” schools often respond by offering a redistributive justice (Gale 2000, 255). This involves the shifting of resources so that students have opportunities for equitable access and participation in schooling (Fraser 1997). In the case of literacy learning, those who are underachieving might be provided with remedial instruction or intervention programs. Indeed, these compensatory efforts to “reform the children” seem to make sense when “the source of the trouble is seen to lie outside of the parameters of ‘schooling as usual’” (Alloway and Gilbert 1998, 254). A problem with such approaches is that school processes are left unquestioned.

Currently, Australian schools are under enormous pressure to improve student outcomes on national literacy tests (Woods 2012). Although many Australian students are achieving well on these tests and there has been an ongoing focus on equity issues in policy and practice, it seems that “our poorest and most disadvantaged children are being left behind” (Henderson and Woods 2012, 113). As Comber (2007) explained, the effects of schooling can be differential and this suggests that further investigation is warranted as a way of understanding how inequities and inequalities are established and sustained. We need to understand the “how” before we look for ways of ensuring equitable outcomes. According to Woods (2012, 191), this task is both necessary and important: “Teaching in socially-just ways to produce a quality and equitable literacy program has never been more difficult – or more vital.”

The study, its context and the re-analysis of data

In this chapter, I return to data that I collected as part of a study that investigated the literacy learning of itinerant farm workers’ children. The study was conducted in a primary school located in a rural community in the north-east of Australia. The community was surrounded by a farming area which attracted a large itinerant workforce during the winter harvesting season. At that time of the year, up to 60 children, who accompanied their farm worker parents to the town, were enrolled at the school. This influx of students impacted on the school in a variety of ways; it often meant that classes had to be rearranged and that extra staff and teachers were required. Additionally, there was a noticeable change to the ethnicities that were evident in the student population.

The school’s population was diverse and the school was known for its willingness to recognise this diversity. Indeed, approximately 20 per cent of the school’s students identified as Indigenous students and every morning three flags were raised: the Australian, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island flags. As farm worker families arrived in the town for the winter harvesting season,

children of Turkish, Tongan, Samoan and Korean backgrounds, along with children from white ethnic backgrounds, joined the school. Between 70 and 80 per cent of the itinerant farm workers' children were learning English as an additional language. There was no doubt that the children's arrival increased the cultural and linguistic diversity of the school's student population. Some of these children were "regulars" who had been returning to the school in the winter of each year; some children came from families who mixed periods of itinerancy with intervening periods of residential stability and had attended the school sometime in the past, while another group had enrolled for the first time in this location.

In thinking about issues of equity and how they relate to literacy teaching, I decided to revisit teachers' discursive constructions of itinerant children and, in particular, to identify interviews where teachers discussed children's ethnicity. I wanted to explore how teachers talked about particular children they taught and how the points of reference that they used could represent children in particular ways. Woods (2012) highlighted the importance of teachers providing both high quality and high equity teaching practice in classrooms: high quality in relation to students' achievement levels, and high equity in terms of ensuring that all students have fair and equitable opportunities to reach their potential. If teachers are to provide quality literacy teaching, then we need to know how their representations of children enable and constrain particular ways of teaching, to begin a process of thinking about how teachers might best work towards a socially-just pedagogy.

To begin this process, I reviewed the data from my previous research. I looked for sections of the teachers' interview data that told a story of ongoing or past events (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008) and had some consideration of the children's ethnicity. From the data, I identified what could be called three small stories (Bamberg 2006) that had been told by teachers about itinerant children. These stories – Narratives 1, 2 and 3 – provided a small data set that could be re-analysed.

The re-analysis of the three narratives is framed within cultural-critical understandings of literacy and has as its starting point the text-interaction-context model from Fairclough's (2001) critical discourse analytical approach. This model interweaves social, discourse and linguistic theories and highlights the way that language use is a form of social practice. The analysis of the selected narratives, then, can investigate both the linguistic and the social, as well as the relationship between individuals and social structures. This seems particularly relevant to understanding school literacy learning and its valorization of particular practices.

One aspect of the teachers' narratives that I particularly wanted to explore was the interaction/s of ethnicity, gender and itinerancy as points of reference. I recognised that issues of social class and gender might be of interest to teachers, as farm workers do manual labour and many people in the community surrounding the school seemed to regard farm work as a masculine occupation. Additionally, the interrelationships or intersectionality of ethnicity, social class and gender has been a particular topic of discussion in feminist literature since the work of Crenshaw (1991) and draws attention to "the simultaneous and interacting effects" of these as "categories of difference" (Hancock 2007, 63).

I recognise that the data I have selected are limited – only three small stories out of a much larger data set. My aim, however, is to indicate the points of reference used by teachers as they constructed itinerant children as literacy learners and how they represented children in particular ways.

Narrative 1: A boy who mightn't read at home

Narrative 1 comes from an interview with a teacher who talked about Mustafa, a student who identified himself as Turkish.

Well he mightn't be exposed to much written material at home, might spend a bit of time in front of the box instead of reading. His parents mightn't supply him with any reading books. His only reading might be at school, so that would slow him down. It might mean that his parents aren't helping him choose books in English. If they're not shooting down to the library to get books themselves, because there's probably not many Turkish books in the library here, and also, because they're itinerant, I imagine what they bring is what they can fit in the car. So you don't bring your library, if you fill one up. So yeah, perhaps there's limited books at home, maybe two or three books period, the Turkish bible or whatever, so that could be it. And then, you know, like so many kids, I think he's into computer games and TV and stuff like that, not reading.

The teacher's narrative highlights the possibility that Mustafa is a boy who might not read at home. Mustafa's ethnicity is named throughout the story, as "Turkish," with mention of "Turkish books" and "the Turkish bible." However, Mustafa's family is also described in terms of what the teacher thinks it is not doing; in particular, the teacher suggested that the family was not "helping him choose books in English."

However, the teacher's description of Mustafa's family is also couched in other negatives: "mightn't be exposed to much written material at home," "mightn't supply him with any reading books," and "perhaps there's limited books at home." While many of the teacher's comments are speculations, as indicated by the use of the words *mighn't* and *perhaps*, they suggest that the teacher's points of reference include both cultural practices and linguistic characteristics. The teacher implies that there are differences between Mustafa's family and other families and that these are constraining his success at school. Yet, the teacher also suggests that Mustafa is like "many kids," since he seems to like "computer and TV and stuff like that."

Although this is but one small story from the teacher's interview where he talked about itinerant children in his class, it appears that he drew on multiple points of reference and that at times he made what might be construed as contradictory statements about Mustafa's similarity or otherwise to other children in the class. The teacher also referred to the family's itinerant lifestyle, when he said that "because they're itinerant, I imagine what they bring is what they can fit in the car." Overall, what seems to be evident is that Mustafa's literacy difficulties in the classroom can be attributed to his family. According to the teacher, the family does not have printed materials in the home, does not carry books in the car, and does not help him to choose books in English to read. It is also implied that they allow him to watch too much television and to play too many computer games.

Narrative 2: Boys at the lower end of the scale

Narrative 2 is a small story told by a teacher who had several itinerant farm workers' children enrolled in her class. The teacher's story referred particularly to Zafer, a student who identified as Turkish, and Sepi, a student whose parents were Tongan.

They're at the lower end of the class scale, but they're not the bottom. You'd expect them, second language, talking another language at home, then coming to school, but they're not the bottom ... The moving around has to influence, and the coming across states, has to influence, because we don't have the same standard in each state. They come to school regularly. I don't know if that's the same down south. But up here they rarely have any days at home. So both, I assume that their parents see education as important, which puts them one step above some of the others in the class ... They both want to do well. They both want to please, probably more so Sepi than Zafer. But both want to do well. They have all the right attitudes to help them with learning. They're not sitting saying I've missed the boat. I've never heard them say it's too hard or I can't do it. They're not sitting there waiting for you to come. Maybe that's because they have had so much moving from a young age, so that every time they come in, they find it so much easier to survive. I think Zafer is much more reluctant, probably because of nationality, with their view on female teachers or on females, yeah, having a female teacher. And Zafer doesn't want to be seen as having difficulty. Even when you ask him, are you right, are you having a problem there, he says he's fine. Whereas you'd ask Sepi if he's having a problem, and he looks at you and says yes, can you just, just giving him that prompting. It's hard, it could be just personality, or it could be cultural.

The teacher emphasised that both Zafer and Sepi were “at the lower end of the class scale” in terms of their academic achievement in literacy learning, but she stressed that they were “not the bottom” in her class. She did not fully articulate her academic expectations about the two boys, but she implied that their second language learner status would influence their achievement levels and that they were doing better than she would have expected.

Towards the end of the small story, the teacher commented on a difference between Sepi and Zafer. She has noticed that Zafer “doesn't want to be seen as having difficulty,” whereas Sepi did not seem to be concerned by this. Her words suggest that she does not know the origins of this difference: “it could be just personality, or it could be cultural.” This follows statements that grouped the two boys into the one category of “second language” learners, and it suggests that one attribute alone did not provide a point of reference for the teacher.

Instead, the teacher moved across a range of points of reference. She highlighted Zafer as being a “much more reluctant” learner with a clear link to his nationality and “their view on female teachers and females.” It appears that ethnicity – in this case, nationality – intersects with gender in the teacher's discussion of Zafer. Although there is little elaboration of this point, the teacher seems to consider gender – a male student “having a female teacher” – to be an important influence on Zafer's behaviour. Immediately after commenting on the gender issue, the teacher states that “Zafer doesn't want to be seen as having difficulty.” It is not clear whether this comment is linked to gender or not.

The teacher also identified itinerancy as a point of reference in relation to the boys' schooling. This is stated in a matter of fact way: "moving around has to influence, and the coming across states has to influence." The teacher returned to itinerancy later in the story and suggested that moving regularly – "they have had so much moving from a young age" – might have built characteristics that helped them integrate into new classrooms. For example, she highlighted that both wanted to do well and were being capable of seeking assistance from others. It is evident that the teacher moved between a range of points of reference, weaving explanations about the boys' literacy learning as being linked to ethnicity, gender and itinerancy.

Narrative 3: The ESL teacher's small story about rough and tumble boys

Narrative 3 was told by the school's English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher, who provided individual language instruction for many of the itinerant students.

We find that a lot of the Samoan and Tongan boys are very aggressive in the playground ... I talked to [the deputy principal] and he said even the older boys [in a particular family] have terrible aggression levels and after school they fight kids in the playground. And the two young boys are the same. In their culture, I think, I don't know how to put it, they're not defensive, but in their personalities they're aggressive. I think it's part of their communication as well ... The boys have this aura of rough and tough. They seem to ooze that, whereas the girls don't ... I think they're fairly rough and tumbly in the playground. [Student's name] is really over the top.

The ESL teacher's story focused almost exclusively on Tongan and Samoan boys. Although the conversation established her understanding about the role of ethnicity, she identified what she regarded as a clear difference between Tongan and Samoan boys and their female counterparts. The teacher described the boys as "aggressive" and "rough and tumble," but she did not see those characteristics in the girls. Thus, ethnicity and gender were linked, with the teacher's description indicating that boys of a particular ethnicity were behaving differently from girls of "their culture."

A legitimacy was given to the story through the link to a conversation with the school's deputy principal. This seemed to enable the teacher's construction of some Samoan and Tongan boys to be generalised to the whole group. The generalisation was evident in the way she named "a lot of the Samoan and Tongan boys," "their culture," and "part of their communication." As with the other two narratives, this narrative demonstrated the interweaving points of reference, in this case, ethnicity and gender.

Reading across the narratives

Although only three small narratives were examined, it was evident in the analysis that teachers used points of reference that included much more than the children's ethnicity. In particular, they seemed to move between ethnicity, gender and itinerancy. When considered within the context of the larger study from which the narratives were drawn, the teachers' stories set these particular children apart from the mainstream population of the school. The students were identified as different from the white ethnic and Indigenous students who attended, they were itinerant rather than residentially-stable, and the intersection of these characteristics with gender identified them as different.

Narratives 1 and 3 were predominantly negative, setting up narratives of blame where a family or particular ethnic group was blamed for not providing appropriate educational support or for encouraging particular behavioural characteristics that were deemed inappropriate in the school context. In contrast, Narrative 2 presented a more favourable description of two itinerant students. However, despite the positives in this story – that Zafer and Sepi wanted to achieve academically and that their parents appeared to support education – they were described as low achievers. Their second language status and their itinerancy seemed to be regarded as taken-for-granted reasons for underachievement in literacy learning.

All three narratives suggest that the teachers had low expectations of the students' academic abilities. The teachers implied that low literacy results at school were predictable consequences of an itinerant lifestyle and of other factors related to the children's circumstances, including ethnicity, language backgrounds and parental characteristics. These stories had become "the truth" about itinerant students who attended the school and their underachievement had been normalised. In all three stories, teachers linked to factors which were seen to lie outside of the school's control – parents, culture and lifestyle.

However, these discursive constructions of itinerant farm workers' children and their families as deficient did not stand alone. They were reminiscent of the negative stories about farm workers that were circulating in the community that surrounded the school, as identified in the data from the larger study, and to a certain extent they acknowledge historical accounts of mobile peoples who have been ostracised and even persecuted (e.g., Frankham 1994; Staines 1999). They were also reminiscent of stories about low socio-economic families that have been reported in other research (e.g., Carrington and Luke 2003; Hamilton and Pitt 2009; Hicks 2002; Staines 1999). Although socio-economic status was not used by the teachers as an explicit point of reference when they were talking about the children, the stories focused on family and cultural differences that were regarded as outside what is considered mainstream.

Working towards educational equality

If we are serious about ensuring educational equality and equitable outcomes for all students, then the analysis of this very limited data set provides food for thought. The teachers' narratives demonstrated the complex ways that the itinerant students were constructed as literacy learners. Itinerancy, cultural backgrounds, linguistic backgrounds and gender all provided points of reference for the teachers' explanations. It was evident that students and parents who were culturally and linguistically different – those whose languages, customs and religions were dissimilar from hegemonic practices – were blamed for not fitting perceived social norms.

The deficit stories demonstrated taken-for-granted understandings that the itinerant children's lack of achievement in literacy learning was a commonsense result of their backgrounds and lifestyles. The cultural and linguistic diversity of the children and their experiences of moving from location to location were not identified by the teachers as starting points for the children's learning at school, nor were they seen as resources that could benefit the literacy learning of other children. Indeed, it appeared that the narrow focus of the stories meant that other characteristics of the children were rendered invisible. The children were conceptualised in terms of what they could not do and their strengths – which included their bilingualism and specific

knowledges of their home languages, experiences of travelling across states and moving in and out of schools – had become irrelevant in the school context.

In other words, the teachers' discursive constructions of the children constrained other ways of thinking and seemed to prevent them from thinking about a socially-just pedagogy for literacy learning. There was certainly evidence in the other data that I collected that one consequence of these representations of the children was a narrowing of teachers' pedagogical approaches. Because the students were understood to be deficient, then teachers drew on a remedial or "top up" approaches to learning, with the aim of "fixing" problems located in individual children.

In concluding this chapter, I would like to offer some ideas to suggest ways of overcoming what Gutiérrez, Morales and Martinez (2009, 238) called "the default scripts of risk, difference and deficiency." I want to make the point, however, that this is not about moving blame to teachers. It is about rethinking the defaults that are normalised within our society, as evidenced by not only the discourses circulating in schools, but also by those circulating in the broader community and in the media. Additionally, I do not think for one moment that this is easy to do. As Woods and I have already noted (see Henderson and Woods 2012, 123), "this is a difficult task, especially for teachers as they engage in the day-to-day, minute-by minute business of doing school." Yet, change is necessary if we are to have any chance of ensuring that students' outcomes are both high quality and high equity.

One recommendation is that we need to think about a reconceptualisation of itinerancy in relation to literacy learning. We need to know much more about the lived experiences of being itinerant and about the diversity of those experiences. This should help to move us away from stereotypical understandings of itinerancy as "an unfortunate 'problem' that must be 'solved' or 'escaped'" (Danaher and Danaher 2000, 28). A reconceptualisation would require school personnel to address the difficult issue of how taken-for-granted school practices might change in light of the experiences of itinerant families. As Hicks (2002, 152) pointed out, a reconceptualisation like this requires "a moral shift, a willingness to open oneself up to the possibility of *seeing* those who differ from us" and this is "very hard work." To contest deficit assumptions and to construct a different school culture requires strong professional learning communities. It also relies on strong school leadership and teachers' willingness to take on intellectually challenging work that is likely to be long-term (Alloway and Gilbert 1998; Comber and Kamler 2004, 2005; Henderson and Woods 2012; Luke 2003).

Some strategies for beginning this change have been identified elsewhere (see Comber and Kamler 2004, 2005; Henderson 2004; Henderson and Woods 2012). Recommendations include widening our view of children to include a broad range of contexts where children learn literacies, including home, communities and schools; avoiding deficit discourses and looking for positive ways of discursively constructing literacy learners; questioning assumptions about students and families; identifying students' strengths; and forming partnerships with students, their families and communities (see Henderson and Woods 2012, 123-127).

These possibilities for transformative action would help to disrupt deficit views and assist teachers to focus on pedagogies that would be responsive, flexible and enabling. Approaches that build on students' strengths and "turn around" deficit discourses (Comber and Kamler 2004,

2005) can offer more options for encouraging learning and are likely to be more productive (Gutiérrez et al. 2009; Henderson 2007; Henderson and Woods 2012; Janks 2005). It is through this type of work that we are likely to have some chance of ensuring that our pedagogies will work for students who are currently marginalised in school settings.

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