

# Subverting the hegemony of risk: vulnerability and transformation among Australian show children

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Background**

Australian show people traverse extensive coastal and inland circuits in eastern and northern Australia, bringing the delights of 'sideshow alley' to annual agricultural shows. The show people's mobility for most of the school year makes it difficult for their school-age children to attend 'regular' schools predicated on assumptions of fixed residence. This situation requires innovative approaches to educational provision if show children are not to be rendered vulnerable and at educational risk.

### **Purpose**

The research reported here investigated whether and how the establishment in 2000 of a specialized institution, the Queensland School for Travelling Show Children, was meeting the specialized educational and sociocultural contexts and needs of the show children three years after establishment.

### **Sample**

Participants in the study included the children, their parents and school and district educational personnel.

### **Design and methods**

The research employed a qualitative design, highlighting naturalistic inquiry and attending to participants' words as reflections of their worldviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in August 2003 in Brisbane and Southport (i.e. the capital city of the state, and a large coastal city in south-eastern Queensland) with 35 people: 20 children in two groups; six parents; seven staff members from the school; and two leaders of state education. Interview data were analysed by means of close textual reading of the transcripts and through identification of recurrent themes.

### **Results**

The results presented are that the principal discourses of vulnerability associated with the show children derive from the anti-nomadic assumptions and attitudes that constitute sedentarism—the centuries-old process by which permanent residence is constructed as 'natural' and 'normal' and mobility is positioned as 'deficit' and 'deviant'. The study's findings demonstrate that this process has become allied with a hegemony of risk rhetoric, whereby the uncontested dominance of taken-for-granted assumptions about the vulnerability of certain groups can potentially function to capture and control the show children's 'difference'. By contrast, the Queensland School for Travelling Show Children emerges from the analysis of the interview data as a vehicle for subverting that hegemony through its construction of an alternative system of schooling in which the children's mobility is 'the norm' and their 'difference' is the basis of creating new and transformative understandings of the purposes and forms of education.

### **Conclusions**

The main conclusion is that identification of children who are 'at risk' or 'vulnerable' needs to be placed in the broader context of their sociocultural positioning. If this positioning constructs them as 'deficit' or 'deviant', as with the sedentarist view of the Australian show children, it must be critiqued and subverted if its practice of schooling is hegemonic rather than transformative.

## Introduction

In many Western countries, the risks ascribed to vulnerable children and youth remain an abiding concern among service providers and media representatives alike. Children in care, juvenile offenders, students excluded from school and teenage parents are among groups of young people designated as potentially 'at risk' of exploitation and/or of not fulfilling their life chances and choices because their circumstances prevent their having access to or taking advantage of the same provision of services as is available to 'mainstream' children and youth.

This paper presents research with a group of young people who might be considered 'at risk': the children of the Australian travelling show communities. The mobility of these communities makes it very difficult for the show children to attend school while living at home; the alternative is for them to live in boarding-school, an option not financially viable for all show families and not acceptable to parents wishing to keep their children with them as they travel the circuits and learn the family business.

The establishment in 2000 of the Queensland School for Travelling Show Children has provided primary school show children with the opportunity simultaneously of living with their families and of working with the same group of teachers throughout the academic year. (There is currently no provision for early years education or secondary schooling at the school, with secondary age children attending boardingschool or local day-schools as their family circumstances allow.) This innovation in primary schooling provision constitutes a transformative reversal of the sedentarist or anti-nomadic discrimination that previously underpinned the invidious choice facing show families—boarding-school and family separation or family stability and interrupted schooling. Moreover, the analysis of the interview data reported here demonstrates that the discourses of risk and vulnerability reflect that sedentarist mindset rather than deriving from the show children's lived experience per se.

## Background

Australian show people traverse thousands of kilometres in extensive coastal and inland circuits in eastern and northern Australia, bringing the delights of 'sideshow alley' to annual agricultural shows. The show people's mobility for most of the school year makes it difficult for their school-age children to attend 'regular' schools predicated on assumptions of fixed residence (Danaher et al., 1998). This situation requires innovative approaches to educational provision if show children are not to be rendered vulnerable and at educational risk. Previous generations of show people had been faced with the following six schooling options for their children (Danaher, 2001, p. 255):

1. sending their children to local schools along the show circuits;
2. sending their children to boarding-schools;
3. not sending their children to local or boarding-schools, but instead teaching them correspondence lessons on the show circuits;
4. coming off the show circuits and finding alternative employment for the duration of their children's education, so that the children could attend local schools;
5. remaining on the show circuits and sending their children to live with relatives and attend local schools;
6. not sending their children to school at all.

None of these options suited the distinctive educational and sociocultural contexts and needs of the show people, and all of them reflected the pervasive influence of a schooling system predicated on the fixed residence of students and teachers and hence on the anti-nomadic discrimination associated with sedentarism (McVeigh, 1997).

The purpose of the research reported here was to investigate whether and how the establishment of the Queensland School for Travelling Show Children in 2000 was attuned to these specialized educational and sociocultural contexts and needs of the show children three years after that establishment. These contexts were focused on the show people's mobility and their tendency to pass on the family business (such as running particular 'joints' or 'rides' like ferris wheels) from one generation to the next. These contexts also created the necessity for children to travel on the circuits and to live with their families, learning the business in situ, as well as the requirement for their schooling to sit side by side with their socialization as potential business owners and managers. Fulfilling these needs was crucial not only for the children's formal and informal schooling, but also for the sustainability of the show circuits and the continuance of the rich cultural heritage embedded in those circuits.

It is important to note here that like any group the show community is heterogeneous and has internal divisions and varying degrees of cultural and financial capital: the four occupational groups on the circuits have been identified as members of the Showmen's Guild of Australasia, the 'itinerants', the 'workers' and the 'horsey people' (Danaher et al., 1998, p. 2). Inevitably some members of this community are more or less likely to be 'at risk' or 'vulnerable' than others. Indeed, this point reinforces the argument advanced in this paper, that the mere fact of being mobile does not in itself render show people—individually or collectively—at risk and that the association between mobility and vulnerability is far more contingent and nuanced than an essentialized and deficit view of mobility makes possible.

## **Literature review**

There is a dual risk in researching and writing about the education of Travellers of falling into a different but equally debilitating conceptual trap lurking on either side of evocations of Travellers' lives. On one side lies the temptation to exoticize those lives and construct them as filled with escapist excitement—the joys and adventures of living on the open road sought after by Mr Toad in Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*. On the other side lies the more common tendency to position Travellers as 'other' to what is 'mainstream' or 'normal', thereby constructing their mobility as 'different', 'deviant' and 'deficit'. This tendency has proved remarkably resilient in a long line of studies of Traveller education from the 1950s (e.g. Swendson, 1958) right up until the 1990s (Danaher, 2001, pp. 40–55) and into the early 2000s (e.g. Edwards, 2003); although the educational discourse deployed has varied according to prevailing thought, the constant underlying assumption has been that mobility is a 'problem' that benign educational policy-makers must 'solve' in order to enhance the learning outcomes and life chances of learners who would otherwise be at risk of 'failure'.

It is important to avoid and eschew the risks of both these conceptual traps. Certainly nothing is to be gained by representing Traveller communities as sites of endearing and enduring happiness that are unproblematic because they have found the nirvana that permanently settled residents are seeking without success. At the same time, starting with the assumption that face-to-face education in permanent

locations is the 'norm' in comparison with which mobile communities are found to be lacking is likely to produce inadequate and even destructive educational policy and provision.

It is appropriate here to reflect on the intersection of two powerful ideas that throw this issue of conceptualizing Traveller education into unexpected relief and that suggest a different way forward. One idea is McVeigh's (1997) evocation of how mobile communities are marginalized and stigmatized by means of sedentarism or anti-nomadic discrimination. 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). By contrast, an antisentarist project would contest and transform the core elements of sedentarism—essentialization, pathologization and naturalization—and link them with key elements of the proposed alternative and transformative pedagogies of mobility: disruption, dialogue and difference (Danaher et al., 2004).

The other idea is Swadener's (2000) assertion of the hegemony of risk (see also Anteliz et al., 2004). Swadener and Lubeck (1995) argued that discourses of risk are ideological processes that entail the identification of putative causes and possible remedies of variously constituted 'problems' pertaining to particular groups who are considered 'at risk' (see Rowan, 2004, p. 22). Subsequently, Swadener (2000) contended that there is a direct link between 'the rhetoric of "children and families at risk"' and 'the currently popular language for describing those who are socially excluded or at risk of failure in various systems or contexts' (p. 117; emphasis in original). Swadener distilled a number of questions designed to contest the assumptions underpinning 'the hegemony of the risk rhetoric and ideology' (p. 118)—such 'hegemony' being manifested in her contention that 'the term "at risk" has become a buzzword, and is often added to the title of proposals in order to increase the likelihood of funding' (p. 118).

There are three crucial corollaries of juxtaposing these two ideas of sedentarism and the hegemony of risk. The first is that policy-makers and researchers must be cautious and vigilant in order to ensure that the discourse of risk does not function as an agent of sedentarism and a vehicle for the capture and submission of the transformative potential of the anti-sentarist pedagogies of mobility noted above.

The second is that this caution and vigilance should not lead policy-makers and researchers to downplay or overlook the point that Traveller children are rendered vulnerable from certain significant respects, not so much by their mobility as by the inflexible structures of mass formal schooling predicated on assumptions of permanent residence.

The third is that Traveller education that aspires to be subversive and transformative must continually negotiate pathways between these dual conceptual and practical risks that enable the children and their families and communities to be more empowered and less vulnerable. The analysis presented in this paper interrogates the Queensland School for Travelling Show Children in terms of its capacity to negotiate such pathways and to bring about such outcomes.

## **Research design**

The research reported in this paper is part of a much larger study into the education

of Australian Travellers that has continued since 1992. Distinct stages in the research have focused on the education of Travellers, both children and adults, who belong to agricultural show or circus communities that work throughout Queensland and other parts of Australia. Throughout its 15-year history, the research has been extensively reported at conferences (including nine refereed conference proceedings papers) and in other publications (one book, approximately 20 refereed journal articles and approximately 20 chapters in edited books). Before details are provided about the data collection and analysis procedures, it is appropriate to describe relevant contextual information.

The 2003 stage of the research shows a clear break from earlier stages; it was the first time that parents, teachers, senior educators and other staff connected with the Queensland School for Travelling Show Children, as well as the children themselves, were interviewed after the establishment of the travelling school in 2000. This period in the history of the education of show people in Australia is connected with the most significant improvement in educational opportunities and outcomes ever experienced by Travellers in Australia. The Queensland School for Travelling Show Children is unique not just in Australia, but also internationally. The school has attracted interest overseas because of the extensive distances that it travels and because it provides children with state-of-the-art facilities and the commitment and dedication of education personnel that together ensure access to quality, continuous education.

Physically, the school consists of what could be described as two classrooms on wheels. Each classroom looks much like any other primary school classroom when it is stationary and in use. Groups of desks and chairs take up the middle of the room, while there is storage space around the edges. Posters that aid the learning process, children's work and whiteboards, as well as computers linked to the Internet via a satellite dish on the roof, are other features. Children, parents and visitors walk up several steps to be greeted by two teaching partners for each classroom. The teachers are contracted for two years and, during that time, accompany the children and their families on one of the show circuits. The classrooms, which are packed and unpacked at each location in a process led by a driver, meet at the same location periodically but otherwise follow their own circuits. The vans were located in the grounds of a local school when the researchers conducted the interviews for this stage of the study. While the children of other occupational Travellers such as circus people and seasonal workers could join the school, in practice this has not happened to date, largely because the Showmen's Guild of Australasia has developed a regularity and predictability of movement around predetermined circuits that is significantly different from the more individualistic and opportunistic itineraries of other mobile communities. The provision of the school for one mobile community therefore raises some questions and has implications for the equitable allocation of resources that are part of a broader debate about the appropriate mix between the segregated and integrated provision of contemporary schooling.

## **Interviews**

Several participants in the study who were observed and interviewed over a seven-day period in August 2003 were also interviewed in previous stages of the research, prior to the establishment of the school. Thirty-five people were interviewed in 2003. They consisted of 20 children, who were interviewed in two groups, seven staff members, two senior educators connected with the school or schooling system and six parents. The sample was almost exhaustive of those people connected with the school; one

other person was ill and unable to be interviewed.

The research employed what Somekh and Lewin (2005) would regard as a qualitative design, highlighting naturalistic inquiry and attending to participants' words as reflections of their worldviews. The interviews were mostly conducted on site at the school, which was at the time located in the grounds of a primary school in Brisbane, before it was dismantled and moved to the next site (Southport, a town situated on the Gold Coast, to the south-east of Brisbane), where some interviews were also conducted. Individual researchers conducted some interviews but other interviews were conducted with between two and four researchers present. Similarly, some participants were interviewed on their own, while others were interviewed in small or larger groups. Individual preferences of the interviewees as well as opportunity dictated the circumstances around the interviews. All participants were willing to have their interviews recorded, so that the researchers could concentrate on what was being said rather than having to take notes.

## **Data analysis**

Analysis of the interviews continued throughout the data-gathering period and beyond. Data provided information about the operations and role of the school, perceptions around the educational needs of children today, ideas for further improvements in the effectiveness of education provided to show children and issues that non-show people need to know about with regard to the show people and their education.

Each evening, after the interviews were complete, the researchers listened to the interview tapes together, discussed observations and compared understandings and interpretations. This ongoing interrogation of the data enabled the identification of themes (Potter & Wetherell, 1989), as well as convergences and divergences in experiences or perceptions of the participants. The tapes were later transcribed for further analysis.

## **Results**

As noted above, data were selected for analysis on the basis of their relevance and utility in informing the researchers about the capacity of the Queensland School for Travelling Show Children to respond to the distinctive educational and sociocultural contexts and needs of the show children. This section of the paper presents the results of the study, while the following section interprets those results in terms of their possible implications for understanding vulnerability and transformation among Australian show children and hence for subverting the hegemony of risk.

### **Educational contexts and needs**

The context whereby formal schooling was juxtaposed with the routines and rigours of living and working on the show circuits also shaped the teachers' relationships with the community. Students called teachers by their first names, and teachers made the effort to visit the show and to interact with the families at the showgrounds or in recreational activities at the locations that they visited. This created a very close and mutually supportive atmosphere. As one teacher noted of the students:

They feel more relaxed on that first-name basis, and I feel that . . . it's similar to a mother. You have kids calling you 'Mum' or 'Auntie' or something like that. It's quite cute really, that sort of thing. They have a fondness for you. But also you get so

excited when you have a child who is getting 2 out of 10 for their spelling; one day they get 9 out of 10. You get so happy for them because you just think of the cycle of illiteracy before then. How much better is that? They've actually learned something. We're on the phone to Mum, and they're so proud of it, so proud of the effort that the kids put in.

It was evident that both parents and teachers placed a particular emphasis on the provision of core skills in reading, writing and arithmetic. The teachers were very conscious of the need to immerse both the children and their families in literacy. As one educational official commented:

You're immersing everybody in every aspect of literacy whether it's verbal or auditory or print-based; whether it's from using computers; whether it's a digital camera.

At the same time, there was a concern that the standardized testing required by the state educational authority was an inappropriate instrument to measure progress in literacy, as the children's literacy rates were compared with the rates of others across Queensland, rather than being evaluated in terms of their own development. Testing based around standards and norms did not readily accommodate a culture that was seeking to break a cycle of illiteracy that had endured over many generations. Fitting the standardized testing into the more flexible procedures of the show school, wherein weekend teaching compensated for the time devoted to travelling from one location to another, was also difficult.

The parents who participated in the study perceived the school as an educational institution that was increasingly being instantiated into the rhythms of mobility that the show community had developed over generations and was thereby helping to counter the experiences of formal illiteracy and educational marginalization that had taken place during that period. Previously, the show children didn't fit in because the class were halfway through the year into the work . . . Our kids would come along, and then they'd just give them separate work because they were only going to be there for the week and, in consequence: They weren't really getting a set routine . . . They never felt a part of the classroom. It was just Third World conditions for schoolwork, and we had to do something about it.

By contrast, the show school's establishment made for a welcome continuity and stability for the children:

It's more stabilizing having the [mobile] classroom. It's better for the children; they settle.

The whole lot of them seem to be going ahead a lot better since we had this school. They seem to be happier; they seem to want to go to school.

More broadly, there was a perception that a kind of pedagogical inversion was taking place with at least some children teaching their parents formal literacy skills through such means as explaining current ways of teaching particular concepts or topics:

I'm learning things from my son. He's teaching me things, the way he's being taught and the way I was taught.

This had led to some talk between the principal and the parents:

. . . about having night classes for the parents . . . Our kids are exceeding us, and there are so many people that weren't educated, never had the opportunity.



## **Sociocultural contexts and needs**

Here we discuss the data in relation to the broader sociocultural context of the show community. From that perspective, the show community's cultural heritage was considered a crucial element of their sociocultural context and the school was regarded as potentially playing a useful role in helping to perpetuate that heritage. Indeed, the school has provided a communal space that is no longer so commonplace within the show community. As two of the parents noted:

one of the best things about growing up in the show [was] just sitting around the campfire, listening to these fantastic stories. We still have campfires and that, and the older people sit around, and they tell their stories.

On the other hand, teachers and educational officials remarked that, while a tradition in the past had been to gather around the campfire to tell stories and share experiences, with the advent of technological aids such as satellite television and personal computers it was now more common for families to stay inside their caravans. In this sense, in addition to responding to the risks associated with the status of the show community as 'other' and vulnerable, the school is engaging with the same tensions that are impinging on settled society: the diminishing of community life owing to forces of atomization such as technology; the pressure for wealth creation; and the economic and social inequities resultant from this.

Teachers reported that families and children were conscious of the need to respond to these challenges by using educational provision to extend their skills base. They observed that roles such as engineers, accountants, lawyers and teachers would be important within the show community in the future. As one teacher commented:

That will be wonderful to see a teacher come back with the show school who is from the show circuit.

Another responded:

I just think it would be great, because they'd fully understand what sort of life it is. Similarly, the parents were insistent that the school needed to provide their children with broader career options than the parents had experienced, and they felt that the school was succeeding in meeting this need:

It gives them a choice. I didn't have a choice . . . They have a choice now: if they don't want to continue in this business, they're educated and they have a choice to do something different.

The teachers observed that gender played a role in relation to risk-taking within the community. One educational official commented that the women were the risk-takers. They were more open than men in acknowledging their own level of illiteracy and also prepared to confront the risks involved in bringing the school into being.

The parents also felt that the school was effective in fulfilling a requirement not imposed on most educational institutions: as a site for dispelling some of the negative myths and stereotypes that 'locals' and 'showies' held about each other. Despite the school's specialized educational provision, this breaking down of these myths and stereotypes takes place when the school vans are located in school grounds along the show circuits and for an extended period in a publicly visible part of the Brisbane Exhibition, the largest and longest show in Queensland held each August, with plenty of opportunities for informal interaction between show and local children; for example:

Then the local children too, instead of our kids being outsiders, all they want to know is what's happening inside the trailer. They're more curious to find out what goes on with our children instead of chasing them away [and] making them outsiders. They

want to become part of the classroom in a lot of [the] schools [that the show school visits], I've noticed. They have little tours through there with them.

## Discussion

The risk, then, for the show community has been in engaging constructively with educational experiences alien to their traditional values and aspirations. This risk has involved parents confronting their own illiteracy and using their children's education as a vehicle for improving reading and writing skills. The mothers have played a particularly significant role in addressing this risk, and in working with the school to create activities and spaces where the fathers can feel comfortable in engaging with the school and literacy programmes. And while we found in the data evidence that show children used labels to distinguish themselves from non-show children (in response to the term 'carnies', they would call the other children 'mugs'), a more enduring impression has been the way in which the children have embraced reading programmes and expressed a consciousness of the options open to them in terms of their future education, including university study, and the diversity of occupational roles and career paths associated with it.

Thus the anti-nomadic assumption that a mobile lifestyle necessarily imposes educational limitations on and impediments to career paths is challenged by the way that teachers and members of the show community articulate their aspirations. Indeed, it was evident that the educational officials were impressed that the protocols and procedures of regularized schooling were able to be instantiated within the rhythms and routines of show life to the extent that it was. When one educational official was asked what surprised him, he responded:

I think at times I still sit back and say, 'I'll be blown at just how this operates, and how we manage to put such a loose coupling around what is done to make it work' . . . It's just the fact that it all sort of hangs together and happens.

It is evident that the logistical challenges that the show community encounters on a day-to-day basis in moving from location to location, erecting and dismantling joints, and interacting with different members of the public on a range of levels have equipped them with skills and dispositions that have helped them to incorporate the school as part of this community. In turn, the challenge of running a school that works as a viable space within the show community has made officials and teachers attuned to the bigger picture of educational provision: the need for strong community links, flexibility and a cooperative approach. It is at the interface, then, between the school and the community that the anti-nomadic assumptions of deficit and deviance and the hegemony of risk and vulnerability collapse. In their place we find fresh possibilities for dialogue and accommodation across and between systems (those of the show and the school) and the mobilization of educational provision quite literally, on the one hand, and the show community's educational aspirations, on the other.

## Implications

The focus of this research was on whether and how the Queensland School for Travelling Show Children was meeting the specialized educational and sociocultural contexts and needs of the children in its care three years after its inception. The show school came into existence as a direct result of the show community's efforts over a number of years to convince an education system to change, even revolutionize, the way that it provided its services to a mobile population. The show community's success in gaining its specialized schooling was therefore significant not only because

its children gained the means to improved educational opportunities, but also because the school was willing and able to adapt to the lifestyle of a group whose mobility did not fit the 'natural' or 'normal' status of permanent residency. For the first time in the long history of the show community in Australia, antinomadic attitudes and assumptions around the community's mobility became less important. Assumptions that people who were mobile were deficit or deviant and had either to become fixed residents and attend school like other people or to be content with a system of schooling that did not meet their educational or sociocultural needs were suddenly brought into question. Instead the changes associated with the Queensland School for Travelling Show Children reflect a move from that anti-nomadism or sedentarism towards the more enabling and transformative pedagogies of disruption, dialogue and difference associated with anti-sedentarism (Danaher et al., 2004). The implications for the show community if it had not acted on its own behalf to lobby for a travelling school, therefore, were clear. Not only would the low literacy levels in the show community be perpetuated, but perhaps more importantly, the attitudes that constitute sedentarism and that underpin discourses of vulnerability and the hegemony of risk (Swadener, 2000) that, in this case, derive from that sedentarism rather than from the show people's lived experience per se would be reinforced. Indeed, the generation of show people who lobbied for a more appropriate form of education for its children took enormous risks themselves; the cycle of low literacy in which they were caught could have left them in a very vulnerable, weak position and blocked indefinitely any chances of succeeding on their children's behalf.

In considering the implications of this specialized provision of schooling, however, it must not be forgotten that, at the time of this stage of the study at least, there remained several unanswered questions around the children's continued education into secondary school and beyond. Clearly the place to break the cycle of literacy problems for this group of people was at the primary school level, where the basics of literacy are usually addressed. What would, or could, happen beyond primary school can only be conjectured at this time. Logic would suggest that the children, because of their expected improved literacy levels by the end of primary school, would have enhanced chances of coping with whatever options from those traditionally available to them that they accessed at secondary level. When the school was established, the children's ages represented the full primary age range. It would be expected that the children who would benefit most, and whose scores on later standardized tests administered across the state would most reflect that benefit, would be the children who started at the school in Year 1. It will be interesting to compare the achievements of these children with those children across the state who have the benefits of consistent and socioculturally relevant schooling from the beginning of their school days.

Questions about the effect of the specialized provision of primary school education on the future careers of show children need to be asked in the near future. As these children move progressively to positions in which they have real choices about their futures, as opposed to choices limited by their educational attainment, it is more likely that their increased competitiveness in the outside world will help break down the relative impact of stereotyped myths that previously dominated outside perceptions of the show community's world and impacted on relationships between show people and their non-show counterparts.

The data analysis presented here has been necessarily selective and in some ways has been able only to convey some tentative suggestions about the potentially transformative changes associated with the Queensland School for Travelling Show

Children, Indeed, expecting that a single institution will be able in a few years to disrupt and transform generations of marginalization and thereby to subvert the hegemony of risk as it has sought to position them is unrealistic—a longer timescale is needed to evaluate appropriately the school's effectiveness as the site of antisedentarism. At the same time, it is clear from the voices of the students, their parents and their teachers that the school has been effective in addressing the show children's distinctive educational and sociocultural needs and in the process in negotiating the pathway between sedentarism and the hegemony of risk.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has presented a particular perspective on the crucial issue of supporting vulnerable children and young people. That perspective has focused on the constraints and possibilities available to Australian show people in ensuring the access to formal education and attainment of their children and young people and in minimizing the risk of their not being able to experience such access and attainment.

The paper's argument has centred on the proposition that 'risk', 'need' and 'social inclusion' in the context of the show people derive from the anti-nomadic and hegemonic positioning of the show people as 'other' to permanently resident society rather than from the experience of mobility itself (although we did acknowledge the importance of eschewing a celebratory discourse of mobility). It follows that identification of children who are 'at risk' or 'vulnerable' needs to be placed in the broader context of their sociocultural positioning. If this positioning constructs them as 'deficit' or 'deviant', as with the sedentarist view of the Australian show children, it must be critiqued and subverted if its practice of schooling is hegemonic rather than transformative. This reinforces the need for a more contingent and nuanced understanding of the relationship between mobility and vulnerability if more enabling positions for mobile communities are to be possible in the future.

Although it has been in operation only for a relatively short time, the analysis presented here suggests that the Queensland School for Travelling Show Children has been successfully instantiated into the rhythms of living and learning on the show circuits and is beginning to contribute to important changes in the children's educational access and attainment, as well as assisting with the ongoing task of facilitating greater knowledge and understanding between 'showies' and 'locals'. In doing so, it provides evidence of doing what educational institutions ought to do—create and enact new and transformative understandings of the purposes and forms of education. Subverting the hegemony of risk in education for Australian show children therefore encapsulates much of broader significance in relation to vulnerability and transformation of and for contemporary children and young people.

While it is not possible to predict outcomes for individual show children, there are several reasons at least for a fair degree of optimism for the community as a whole. If past determination is any indication of the extent to which parents are likely to continue the resolve that they showed in acquiring the school in the first place, then it would seem reasonable to predict that the current generation of show children will be given the support that they need to face and shape a better future for themselves. The 2003 comment from a parent about the old system of schooling being 'Third World conditions for schoolwork' and that 'we had to do something about it' is reminiscent of the hard work and resolution that changed education for Queensland show children so dramatically, and the show people are not about to forget that history.

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