Indigenous Population Mobilities and School Achievement: International Educational Research Itineraries, Issues and Implications

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Abstract

This paper situates the articles in this special theme issue of the *International Journal of Educational Research* within the broader global literature regarding the educational experiences and opportunities of mobile communities. The paper distils those articles' contributions to extending current understandings about the specific *itineraries* of Indigenous pupils in northern Australia, the underlying *issues* of Indigeneity and school achievement, and the consequent *implications* for international and comparative educational research. In so doing, the paper links the particular analyses outlined in the articles and the associated sites of their research with wider debates in contemporary scholarship pertaining to education and mobilities, including the complexity and contentiousness of evidentiary data sets and of accompanying schooling policy and provision frameworks.

Introduction

In 2000 I guest edited a special theme issue of this journal about the education of particular groups of mobile learners (Danaher, 2000a). That issue essayed a mapping of the international diversity attending current research into Traveller and nomadic education – specifically among and with six types of mobile communities (nomadic pastoralists, migrant fisherpeople, fairground/showground people, Gypsy Travellers, barge people and circus people) in six countries (Nigeria, India, Scotland, England, the Netherlands and Australia).

In the guest editor's introduction to that theme issue (Danaher, 2000b), I articulated a number of propositions that resonate with the current special theme issue of the journal:
- Communities whose members are mobile for at least some parts of their lives are widespread and live on every settled continent throughout the world.
- Most if not all such communities experience some form of marginalisation on account of their deviation from the norm of fixed, permanent residence that has held sway since the invention of agriculture and that accelerated after the industrial revolution.
- That marginalisation has a direct and continuing impact on mobile learners' formal compulsory educational experiences and opportunities, arising from the schooling system's being predicated on pupils conforming to the norm of fixed, permanent residence.
- It is vital for international and comparative educational research to develop worldwide understandings of the diversity of types of mobile communities in order to extend the field conceptually and also to enhance the educational outcomes of mobile learners.

- A key element of those worldwide understandings is the elaboration of in-depth, richly textured, highly contextualised studies that also link with broader theoretical, methodological and practical issues in the field under review.

11 years later these propositions have been taken up and given new life and fresh meaning in relation to a crucial domain of international educational research: the complex and contentious link between Indigenous population mobilities and school achievement. This special theme issue of the journal presents five detailed accounts of that link in different parts of northern Australia, with the final article (Prout & Hill, this issue) synthesising the issue's findings and outlining a project for subsequent research.

My task in this opening article to this special theme issue is threefold:
- to identify the distinctive *itineraries* (understood here as specific patterns of traversing physical spaces) exhibited by the particular mobile communities represented in this theme issue and to connect those itineraries to broader debates in the contemporary mobilities literature
- to distil the underlying *issues* portrayed by the articles' authors and to associate them with wider scholarship pertaining to Indigeneity and school achievement
- to elaborate some of the *implications* for international and comparative educational research arising from these itineraries and issues.

In enacting this threefold task, I seek to highlight the significance of the succeeding articles and of the theme issue as a whole. As will be seen, while the case studies in the theme issue are focused on different locations within northern Australia, they have profound resonance with comparable and diverse research from around the world. Equally importantly, and as I outline below, the findings of the respective authors as summarised by Prout and Hill (this issue) constitute a vital contribution to extending the field of research concerned with the education of mobile learners. The theme issue has much to say of enduring relevance about access and equity for marginalised and minority school pupil populations, and in particular the vital sub-strand of this scholarship that considers highly mobile pupil population groups. In so doing, the theme issue deploys the distinctive interdisciplinary nature of the theoretical and empirical approaches taken within the articles presented here: bringing together scholars with expertise in demography, economics, education and geography to present *in situ* data and narratives of the interface between education and mobilities at various geographical sites and localities across Australia's north. At the same time, as this paper articulates, those data and narratives have highly developed value for international and comparative educational research that extends far beyond their geographical boundaries.

Itineraries
Mapping the itineraries of particular mobile communities is crucial to understanding the specific defining features of the forms of mobility in which they engage. Furthermore, as the articles in this special theme issue make clear, that mapping is vital to identifying the types of formal educational provision that those communities are and are not able to access easily, if at all.

Part of the significance of this theme issue therefore lies in the extensive and intensive analyses of different mobile groups' itineraries and related forms of mobility in northern Australia that it contains. The extensiveness of those analyses is confirmed by the fact that they traverse two Australian states (Western Australia and Queensland) and one Australian territory (the Northern Territory), within which they range from the tourist town of Broome

in northwestern Western Australia (Prout & Yap, this issue) to schools in regional North Queensland and outer metropolitan Brisbane (Navin, Hill & Doyle, this issue) to the remote and predominantly Aboriginal town Wadeye in the Northern Territory (Taylor, this issue) to a large provincial city in North Queensland (Doyle & Prout, this issue; Hill, Lynch, & Dalley-Trim, this issue). The intensiveness of those analyses is reflected in the detailed statistical examination of school attendance records and the depth of the associated quantitative and qualitative interpretations of the available evidence base.

At the same time, it is appropriate to note that another part of the theme issue's significance derives from the methodological problems that it highlights in obtaining accurate, comprehensive and reliable data about school pupils' movements in and out of schools, with crucial implications for policy-making about and provision of schooling – a point that I elaborate below.

Despite this important caveat, some of the features of the patterns of movements across physical spaces exhibited by the various Indigenous communities outlined in the articles in this theme issue included the following:

- The intensity of frequency of movement (Prout & Yap, this issue)
- The circularity of direction of movement (Prout & Yap, this issue)
- The frequent disconnection between movement and the school experience or environment (Prout & Yap, this issue)
- An appearance to outsiders of an unpatterned character of the direction and/or the duration of movement (Prout & Yip, this issue)
- Very high mobility rates for some Indigenous school pupils (Navin, Hill, & Doyle, this issue)
- A combination of localised movement and movement from a specific geographical location (Navin, Hill, & Doyle, this issue)
- A pattern of short stays in particular schools (Navin, Hill, & Doyle, this issue)
- Some pupils' mobility exhibiting the negatively valenced metaphor "churn/ing" (Navin, Hill, & Doyle, this issue; Hill, Lynch, & Dalley-Trim, this issue)
- A prevalence of short absences from school, particularly in secondary school and especially in remote areas of Australia (Taylor, this issue)
- A pattern of non-attendance at school that was often not related to mobility (Taylor, this issue)
- An apparent but uncertain link between patterns of mobility and school achievement (Doyle & Prout, this issue; Hill, Lynch, & Dalley-Trim, this issue)
- The close connectedness between movement and place "within regions of belonging" (Prout & Hill, this issue).

This selected listing of key characteristics of these Indigenous communities' forms of mobility gives us some understanding of the complexity and diversity of those communities' itineraries – a point that reinforces the need to read each distilled feature against the detailed and highly contextualised backdrop of each Indigenous community or set of communities presented in each article in this theme issue. Each of these characteristics could generate a detailed and comprehensive policy response in its own right; in combination, several of these characteristics appear to contradict one another and to cancel one another out. Even allowing for the divergent patterns of mobility evident in such geographically dispersed locations as northwestern Western Australia (Prout & Yap, this issue), regional North Queensland and outer metropolitan Brisbane (Navin, Hill & Doyle, this issue), and the remote Northern

Territory (Taylor, this issue), the differences outweigh the similarities and emphasise the ongoing need for theoretical, methodological, policy and practice approaches that attend to the locational specificity as well as to the national and international trends in relation to Indigenous population mobilities and school achievement.

Similarly, the articles in this theme issue identified an equally complex and diverse set of reasons for the forms of mobility demonstrated by the Indigenous communities in northern Australia. An equally selective list of motivations adduced in the succeeding articles included the following:

- The impact of "relational and institutional push-pull factors" (Prout & Yap, this issue); for example, "'Pull' factors might … include the need to access health services in a larger urban centre, while 'push' factors might relate to … overcrowding in housing" (Navin, Hill, & Doyle, this issue)
- The impact of "socio-cultural needs and obligations" (Prout & Yap, this issue)
- Factors outside the school such as "poverty, overcrowding, neglect, substance abuse, [and] alcohol [abuse]" (Prout & Yap, this issue), as well as "family dynamics … [and] housing circumstances" and "historical connections to place and accessing regional services" (Navin, Hill, & Doyle, this issue)
- Factors inside the school such as "feelings of alienation and shame in the school environment … , and being teased for not fitting in or having the right school resources" (Prout & Yap, this issue)
- A posited link between "issues surrounding school attendance" (including but not restricted to mobility) and broader issues related to "local governance, socialization and community development" (Taylor, this issue)
- A posited link between teachers developing more contextualised and nuanced understandings of the reasons for Indigenous pupils' mobilities and generating more effective professional development for those teachers' interactions with their Indigenous mobile pupils (Hill, Lynch, & Dalley-Trim, this issue)
- A posited link between some forms of Indigenous mobility and "efforts to gain or maintain strong social, cultural, emotional and economic tethers" (Prout & Hill, this issue)
- "Reactionary mobilities" such as fulfilling the social obligations related to the illnesses or deaths of relatives (Prout & Hill, this issue)
- Motivations derived from a "rootedness to place and the network of life within place" (Prout & Hill, this issue)
- Motivations reflecting "both rationality of purpose and a set of deeply entrenched connections regarding relatedness" (Prout & Hill, this issue).

As with the patterns of mobility of Indigenous school pupils in Australia outlined above, so too with the reasons for those patterns: the complexity and diversity illustrate a rich tapestry of human interactions with one another and their environments, yet they also defy easy analysis and policy prescriptions. For instance, some motivations are responsive to family circumstances and relatives' health, while others are more proactive and strategic. Similarly, some reasons are centred on the school environment and are hence more likely to be (although not necessarily) amenable to action by schools, but several others derive from situations that are separate from school life and are difficult if not impossible for schools to influence.

Specifically in relation to the expectation that Indigenous communities are likely to be more mobile than their non-Indigenous counterparts, some of the theme issue contributions' findings fulfil that expectation while others challenge it. This was evocatively encapsulated by Prout and Hill (this issue) as follows:

> … there are Indigenous people – both adults and children – who have no particular residence but move within a network of relations, in various locales, with whom they are equally at home. At the other end of the spectrum, there are Indigenous people who live permanently in one locale.

By contrast, Taylor (this issue) summarised the situation thus: " … rates of absence from a home area are markedly higher for Indigenous children in remote areas compared to Indigenous children elsewhere, and … they are much higher for Indigenous children everywhere compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts". Yet as Taylor (this issue) also observed: " … by far the majority of Indigenous school-age children are not mobile but sedentary in the sense that they are mostly resident at any one time within their school catchment area". At the same time, being sedentary for many of these children did not equate to attending school or to achievement (as defined by such performance measures as standardised tests) if they did attend school – a point that is elaborated in the next section.

The succeeding articles simultaneously link their respective findings to contemporary international scholarship about the relationship between Indigeneity and mobility and extend that scholarship in significant ways. Ethnicity is certainly one of the major dimensions of historical and current manifestations of mobilities, along with occupation and lifestyle (Kenny & Danaher, 2009), with groups such as Gypsy Travellers and Roma or Romani exhibiting various forms of mobility in Australia (Morrow, 2009), England (Kiddle, 2009; Levinson, 2009), Ireland (Kenny & Binchy, 2009) and Spain (Souto-Otero, 2009), and each of these communities reporting similar disconnections between home and school to those outlined in this theme issue.

This similarity was encapsulated in the following account of reindeer herders in the Russian Republic of Sakha (Yakutia):

> The mobility of the indigenous population of the North made *settlement* schools a serious problem on a number of counts. Separated from their parents, nomadic children were not taught traditional skills essential to the maintenance of traditional ways. Additionally and predictably, the children missed their parents, which negatively influenced their studies. Each spring, most nomadic parents–either by force or by persuasion–took the children out of school and brought them to the reindeer herd till the end of the school year in May. The teachers reluctantly let the children go on the condition that the parents continue the school program with the children. Since the nomad parents had neither the time nor the proper training for teaching academic subjects, indigenous children fell behind in their studies. (Robbek, Gabysheva, Nikitina, & Sitnikova, 2009, p. 74; *emphasis in original*)

On the one hand, Robbek *et al.*'s rendition of the lives of the Yakutian reindeer herder children and their parents resonated strongly with at least some of the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities whose experiences are recounted in this theme issue. This resonance relates particularly to the link between each community's Indigeneity and a set of complex manifestations of mobility, as well as to the fundamental contradiction between those manifestations and the schooling system's presumption of fixed, permanent residence. On the other hand, the preceding discussion has highlighted the multiple forms of mobility enacted by the various Indigenous Australian groups in addition to the diverse

reasons for such mobility. In other words, the articles in this theme issue simultaneously articulate with, and help to extend, existing understandings of the Indigeneity–mobility relationship as gleaned from current international educational research in the field.

Issues
The previous section having elaborated the distinctive itineraries of the various mobile communities represented in this theme issue (including some instances of immobility), this section explores the underlying issues identified by the theme issue authors arising from those itineraries. In particular, the contentious link between Indigeneity and school achievement, and by extension between mobility and school achievement, is examined.

As with Indigeneity and mobility, so too with Indigeneity and school achievement: the authors in the theme issue have highlighted considerable complexity and diversity attending the supposed connections between these two phenomena, as well as the multifaceted character of school achievement. At the outset, however, it is important to note that locationally contextualised and pedagogically situated approaches to school achievement do not figure prominently in the succeeding articles (in contrast to the authors' common calls for contextualised and situated initiatives in schooling provision for Indigenous Australian pupils). This is because of the continuing and growing influence of broader global and national sociocultural and political forces associated with neoliberalism (Doyle & Prout, this issue; Hill, Lynch, & Dalley-Trim, this issue; Prout & Hill, this issue), with concomitant developments such as heightened school and teacher accountability and high stakes standardised testing of pupils (Navin, Hill, & Doyle, this issue; Doyle & Prout, this issue). This is vital to acknowledge and understand because it significantly reduces the diversity and narrows the focus of what is understood as "school achievement" and hence restricts the capacity for Indigenous pupils and their families and teachers to imagine and enact more inclusive and relevant forms of such achievement. (It is interesting that, although they are very different, both caveats outlined in the previous and in this section relate to measurement – respectively of mobility and of school achievement. This point underscores the interrelatedness of the two concepts, as I elaborate below.)

This caveat about defining and measuring school achievement having been acknowledged, as well as the contributors' appropriate cautions about not being able to generalise from their localised studies, I turn now to distil some of the characteristics of such achievement analysed by the authors in this theme issue related to Indigeneity:
- The politicised character of school and systemic achievement data, with implications for funding and other resource-based decisions, impacting on Indigenous and non-Indigenous pupils alike (Prout & Yap, this issue)
- A surprising lack of empirical evidence of a positive link between school attendance and achievement (Taylor, this issue)
- A lack of consensus about this link's applicability to Indigenous pupils (Doyle & Prout, this issue)
- The significant impact of short-term mobility by Indigenous pupils on ways in which schools measure those pupils' achievement (Doyle & Prout, this issue)
- The incapacity of standardised test results to articulate in meaningful and nuanced ways with the school achievement of individual Indigenous pupils or of the cohorts to which they belong (Doyle & Prout, this issue)
- Indigeneity appearing to be a stronger influence than mobility on school achievement (Doyle & Prout, this issue)

- International concerns about low school achievement for Indigenous mobile pupils (Hill, Lynch, & Dalley-Trim, this issue).

Clearly the complexity and diversity (and also the apparent and sometimes real contradictions) attending Indigenous pupils' patterns of mobility extend to their experiences of school achievement. As noted above, part of the multifaceted character of the relationship between Indigeneity and school achievement is evident in lack of school attendance by many Indigenous non-mobile pupils and in lack of achievement (as measured by standardised tests) if they did attend school (Taylor, this issue).

Likewise some of the contributors to this theme issue identified multifaceted links between mobility and school achievement, as follows:
- An asserted connection between mobility and early school engagement, so that mobile learners who disengaged from schooling in the first three years of formal education were disadvantaged (Navin, Hill, & Doyle, this issue)
- The politicised character of school achievement data in relation to mobile pupils (Doyle & Prout, this issue)
- An apparently stronger relationship between mobility and school achievement for younger than for older pupils (Doyle & Prout, this issue)
- The complexity of the relationship between mobility and school achievement and the difficulty of adducing a causal link between the two (Doyle & Prout, this issue)
- The relationship between mobility and school achievement appearing to be stronger for non-Indigenous than for Indigenous pupils (Doyle & Prout, this issue)
- The relationship between mobility and school achievement appearing to be stronger for numeracy than for literacy (Doyle & Prout, this issue)
- International concerns about low school achievement for mobile pupils, whether Indigenous or not (Hill, Lynch, & Dalley-Trim, this issue)
- The difficulty of demonstrating a one-to-one correspondence between mobility and low school achievement (Hill, Lynch, & Dalley-Trim, this issue).

Once again complexity and diversity are to the fore in seeking to unravel the connections between mobility and school achievement. As I noted above, efforts to define and measure these two concepts highlight their theoretical, methodological, policy and practice interrelatedness, yet such efforts are inevitably reductionist and often run counter to the finely grained and necessarily nuanced accounts provided in this theme issue.

There are several resonances between this theme issue's multiple engagements with the contentious links among Indigeneity, mobility and school achievement and contemporary international scholarship in this field. For example, " … Scottish national statistics about Gypsy and Traveller pupils inevitably present an inaccurate picture of pupils, their attendance and their achievements" (Padfield & Cameron, 2009, p. 37). There was evidence of similar deficit views held by some teachers of Australian non-Indigenous mobile pupils whose ethnicity positioned them as speakers of English as a Second Language (Henderson, 2009). Likewise some of the complex connections between school attendance and school achievement were evident among Australian Romani families, including the finding that:

> Those children and adults who appear to have had the most success with education, measurable by the years of schooling received and the degree of literacy achieved, are those who have had the chance to receive schooling outside the mainstream system. (Morrow, 2009, p. 98)

At the same time, the articles in this theme issue have made a major contribution to extending current understandings of the issues of Indigeneity and school achievement, whether linked with mobility or not. Indeed, that contribution consists partly of the multiple ways in which individual articles have explicitly unravelled and analysed the relative polarities and weightings in relation to Indigeneity, mobility and school achievement. Despite the ongoing lack of consensus in the field, the articles' detailed and locationally specific accounts have demonstrated how the connections and disconnections among these phenomena are played out in particular places with certain contextualised consequences.

Implications
Finally I articulate some of the implications for international and comparative educational research arising from the itineraries of the Indigenous pupils and the associated issues discussed in the previous sections of the paper. While readers of this theme issue will undoubtedly identify many such implications, I have restricted my discussion to three:

- The complexity and contentiousness of evidentiary data sets
- Strategies to enhance the educational outcomes of mobile pupils
- The character and imperatives of future research in this field.

As with the itineraries and issues outlined above, these selected implications also highlight the theme issue's significant contribution to existing knowledge and to extending the horizons of our understandings and actions in relation to Indigenous population mobilities and school achievement.

As I noted above, a key element of the theme issue's importance follows from its identification and elaboration of specific methodological problems related to obtaining accurate, comprehensive and reliable data about school pupils' movements in and out of schools. For example, pupil mobility is frequently defined by means of the *Joiners Plus Leavers* measure (Dobson, Henthorne & Lynas, 2000):

$$((\text{pupils joining schools} + \text{pupils leaving school})/\text{total school roll}) \times 100$$

(see Doyle & Prout, this issue). However, as Navin, Hill, and Doyle (this issue) have remarked: " … whilst the *Joiners Plus Leavers (JPL)* measure captures much more movement of Indigenous students, there are still those mobile students who may be 'invisible' to this micro analysis" for a number of practical reasons that generalised definitions are unable to account for. One specific instance of patterns of mobility being more fluid than school system data sets was the lack of integration between the school attendance records of the Northern Territory Catholic Education Office and the Northern Territory Department of Education, so that information was not available about pupils moving between schools in these two education systems (Taylor, this issue).

More broadly, " … cohorts of students are defined by assumptions of stability rather than actualised points in time and space, while the lived experience and learning trajectories of mobile students remain invisible to the evidence framework" (Doyle & Prout, this issue). This key point was elaborated by Doyle and Prout (this issue), who also identified mobility data sets as an important potential innovation in engaging with mobile learners:

> While the data from this small-scale study cannot be generalised to a broader scale, they highlight important limitations in the way student performance data are currently reported, and the impact of mobility on these data. At the same time, they also provide an innovative blueprint that could be applied on a larger scale, of using local evidence to develop a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between mobility and

student achievement, as well as mobility and school performance. Whilst it is a difficult and time consuming task, data can be generated and then subjected to statistical analyses that quantify the knowable, and unknown, extent of these relationships.

A second crucial implication of the theme issue is the various examples that it presents of strategies designed to enhance the educational outcomes of Indigenous pupils in northern Australia (and by extension in other parts of Australia and internationally). Examples of these strategies include the employment of School-based Attendance Officers in the Kimberley region of Western Australia (Prout & Yap, this issue), and Mobility Support Teachers working closely with Indigenous Education Workers in selected schools in Queensland (Navin, Hill, & Doyle, this issue; Hill, Lynch, & Dalley-Trim, this issue).

From a wider perspective, Hill, Lynch and Dalley-Trim (this issue) adumbrated a useful set of categories for classifying support initiatives for Indigenous mobile pupils:
- The provision of targeted support directly to mobile students
- The establishment of separate or "segregated" … schooling tailored to the needs of mobile students
- An attempt to reframe 'mainstream' schools.

Clearly each of these categories has particular potential strengths and limitations that need to be set beside the likely or hoped for benefits of such initiatives for Indigenous pupils. Moreover, each category is linked with a broader set of policy discourses such as "social inclusion" and "new equity" (Prout & Hill, this issue) that highlight their complexity and contentiousness without making their enactment any easier. For example, an initiative that has been developed in Australia and internationally (Danaher & Umar, 2010) but that does not receive much attention in this theme issue is open and distance schooling. While such schooling has been used in several countries for mobile pupils (Danaher, Moriarty, & Danaher, 2009), it is imbricated with specific assumptions about learning and teaching that might not align closely with the particular patterns of mobility exhibited by Indigenous mobile pupils in Australia, for example.

A third vital implication of the theme issue relates to the character and imperatives of future research in the field of Indigenous population mobilities and school achievement. A key element of that implication lies in the multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches to researching mobilities demonstrated so effectively in the succeeding articles. Given that the education of mobile learners might be depicted as a "wicked problem", and that "Indigenous disadvantage" has been identified explicitly as such (Australian Public Service Commission, 2007, p. 2), it is worthwhile to record the asserted features of such a "problem" type:
- Wicked problems are difficult to clearly define.
- Wicked problems have many interdependencies and are often multi-causal.
- Attempts to address wicked problems often lead to unforeseen circumstances.
- Wicked problems are often not stable.
- Wicked problems usually have no clear solution.
- Wicked problems are socially complex.
- Wicked problems hardly ever sit conveniently within the responsibility of any one organisation.
- Wicked problems involve changing behaviour. (Australian Public Service Commission, 2007, pp. 3-4)

This list of characteristics of wicked problems resonates strongly with many of the propositions pursued in the succeeding articles, and at least partly helps to explain why the underlying situations depicted so clearly and eloquently by the contributors to this theme issue are often longstanding and seemingly intractable. At the same time, it is important to note – and to endorse – the cautious optimism evident in many of the articles, particularly when specific strategies for enhancing Indigenous pupils' school achievement outcomes are outlined.

These features of wicked problems also provide some useful criteria for evaluating the theme issue guest editors' suggestions for "Setting the Future Research Agenda" (Prout & Hill, this issue) in this particular field. Specifically they identify the following as worthy of elaboration:

> Indigenous perspectives on the intersection between mobility and schooling; the impact of developmental stages on Indigenous mobility and schooling; measures of Indigenous student mobility; strategies for engaging with highly mobile Indigenous students and whom these strategies serve; and analyses of the primarily neo-liberal policy frameworks within which Indigenous student mobilities are enacted. (Prout & Hill, this issue)

Against the backdrop of the characteristics of wicked problems listed above, Prout and Hill (this issue) have provided us with an eminently sensible framework for future research directions and imperatives in relation to Indigenous mobile pupils and their learning outcomes. Inevitably other topics could be added to this list, such as building locally, regionally and nationally comparative studies that would highlight the international relevance of localised research findings and that could simultaneously augment the political standing and the community acceptance of those findings. Certainly there is plenty here for researchers across the range of disciplines represented in this theme issue to do for decades into the future.

Conclusion
Like the Indigenous mobile pupils whose patterns of mobility are analysed in the succeeding articles, the itineraries taken by the authors of those articles have traversed broadly ranging and widely varying terrains – not just the geographical locations of two states and one territory in northern Australia but also the contested conceptual and discursive fields of research into Indigeneity, mobilities and school achievement. In so doing, this special theme issue has explored both extensively and intensively several issues arising from the intersections of these fields as well as a number of implications of those issues, among others for policy-making and provision related to contemporary schooling.

Much has changed since the publication 11 years ago of the earlier special theme issue of this journal cited at the beginning of this paper (Danaher, 2000a), including in the international and comparative educational research field that this theme issue contributes substantially to extending. At the same time, many elements of the 'wicked problem' (Australian Public Service Commission, 2007) that is the interface between mobilities and formal education, and also between Indigeneity and school achievement, remain intact. I applaud the theme issue guest editors and the contributing authors for helping to shine new light onto the multiple terrains of that interface and thereby for helping to enhance current understandings of, and to fashion innovative solutions to, this particular wicked problem.

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