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### **Title**

Understanding urban Indigenous student mobility: Considerations for literacy educators

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### **Abstract**

Mobility is a well known characteristic of Indigenous Australians' lived experience and plays an important role in the maintenance of connections to family and country that are integral to Indigenous people's cultural and spiritual well-being (Commonwealth Department of Education Science and Training & Department of Defence, 2002). While some researchers have drawn attention to student mobility as a challenge for literacy teachers (Comber, 2003; Henderson, 2006) lesser explored are literacy practices that 'close the gap' for Indigenous students, particularly, mobile Indigenous students attending urban schools. This paper explores current research about the mobility of Indigenous students and contextualises the challenges faced by primary school literacy teachers working in school and community settings characterised by high mobility, Indigeneity and socio-economic disadvantage. It highlights the significant gaps in research available to inform practice in literacy teaching that meets the needs of mobile Indigenous students attending urban schools. It then discusses a participatory action research project underway in regional Queensland that aims to document effective literacy teaching practices for mobile urban Indigenous students. Finally, it offers some preliminary insights as emergent in the action research project to date.

### **Keywords**

Indigenous students, student mobility, literacy teaching, primary schools

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## **Understanding urban Indigenous student mobility: Considerations for literacy educators**

### **Introduction**

Across the world schools are grappling with issues of high student mobility. While many students attend the same school for the duration of their schooling, up to 25% of Queensland children change schools each year (Education Queensland Curriculum Division, 2007), many enrolling at non-standard times, that is during the course of the school year. In a recent study in regional Queensland, Hill and Lynch (2008) noted extraordinary levels of student mobility, particularly within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cohort. This finding has highlighted the need for further research into the ways that teachers can work to meet the literacy learning needs of mobile Indigenous students, particularly those experiencing multiple disadvantages.

In this paper I present an overview of literature from a range of fields, that is, Indigenous population mobility, student mobility and Indigenous education, that provides a basis from which to generate an understanding of the challenges to be met if teachers are to 'close the gap' for mobile Indigenous students in urban schools. Also, I describe a research project that aims to investigate and document literacy teaching practices that are effective for this particular cohort of students.

### **Indigenous mobility**

Indigenous mobility is an extremely complex issue, embedded in a history of colonisation, racism and marginalisation, with socio-cultural and socio-economic effects still being played out today. One aspect of colonisation was the effort by early Australian governments, through legislation and administration, to control the mobility of the Indigenous peoples whose nomadic lifestyle was at odds with the colonisers' notions of civilisation and economic development (Gray, 2004; Prout, 2008). While these control mechanisms no longer exist, the marginalisation of Indigenous mobility as legitimate cultural practice continues through public policy that fails to accommodate the cultural needs and expectations of the people. High mobility is often connected with socio-economic disadvantage, thereby creating a complex inter-relationship between socio-economic and socio-cultural factors. Although mobility is known to characterise the lived experience of many Indigenous people, very little is known about contemporary practice. As Taylor (1996 as cited in Newbould 2004, p. 117) notes,

“while the fact of frequent mobility among Indigenous people is acknowledged, the facts remain largely unknown”.

Most available research indicates that Indigenous Australians have higher rates of mobility and different patterns of mobility to the non-Indigenous population. While the ABS describes the macro patterns of the mobility of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians as reasonably similar (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008), Taylor (2006, p. 11) notes that “Indigenous people change their usual place of residence at consistently higher rates than the rest of the population” and explains that the difference in views arises because there is a higher proportion of younger people in the Indigenous population and when “Indigenous rates are age-standardised against the total population, the difference in rates is much reduced”. Not only are moves more frequent, they are also shorter in distance and much shorter in duration (temporary) than those of non-Indigenous Australians (Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, 2006; Kinfu, 2005; Taylor & Bell, 2004), with different social and economic ‘push and pull’ factors (Taylor & Bell, 2004) inducing a pattern of migration “characterised by family rather than labor (sic) mobility” (Kinfu, 2005, p. 20).

Prout (2008, pp. 7-8) draws on existing Indigenous mobility studies to summarise Indigenous temporary mobility practices. She identifies three processes (or directions) of temporary mobility: circulation, bi-local or multi-local and perpetual movement.

*... each might be conceptualised in relation to the notion of a ‘home-base’. The first matches Zelinsky’s definition of circulation:*

*... a great variety of movements usually short-term, repetitive, or cyclical in character, but all having in common the lack of any declared intention of a permanent or long lasting change in residence (Zelinsky 1971: 226).*

*This type of mobility, common in Melanesian contexts (Chapman & Prothero 1985), involves continual returns to a ‘home-base’ after frequent journeys away. The home-base may be a particular community, town, or settlement. The second process of Indigenous short-term mobility is known as bi-local or multi-local residence. This type of mobility involves continual movement between two or more ‘home-bases’ in more than one community, town or settlement. These two or more locales may be viewed as extensions of one another: places in which an individual might be considered usually resident (e.g. Burns 2006). The third process of Indigenous short-term mobility identified in the literature is perpetual movement between a series of locales within which an individual has family. This form of mobility involves no particular physical home-base. ‘Home’ is embedded within a social network of relatedness rather than a specific geographic region or locale (Taylor 1992).*

The available literature indicates that these patterns of Indigenous mobility are broadly consistent across localities and groups, however, it must be noted that very little is known about the mobility of urban Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders with much more research focused on the mobility experiences of remote and very remote Aboriginals (Prout, 2008).

Literature on Torres Strait Islander mobility is particularly limited. Until the end of World War II Torres Strait Islanders were required by law to live in the Torres Strait archipelago, however, since then there has been large scale movement to the mainland (Taylor & Bell, 2004) and now a large Torres Strait Islander population is living in 'diaspora' on the mainland (Taylor, 2006). ABS (2008) statistics from the 2006 census indicate that of the 53 300 people who identified as Torres Strait Islander (including 20 200 of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin) 15% lived in the Torres Strait Indigenous Region, 46% lived in the rest of Queensland (mainly the regional cities of Cairns and Townsville) and 39% lived in the remainder of Australia. However, there does not appear to be any reliable research that clearly describes current mobility patterns of Torres Strait Islander people in either urban or remote locations other than identifying the general movement of families and/or students to the mainland for employment opportunities or secondary education. Taylor (2006) notes that the only secondary school in the Torres Strait region is located on Thursday Island and many students attend boarding schools or live with friends or relatives on the mainland for their secondary education. Arthur, Hughes, McGrath, and Wasaga (2004) suggest that this pattern of schooling helps establish the pattern and frequency of mainland visits later in life. Their research indicated that it was not uncommon for students to attend multiple schools during their stay on the mainland with 15% of those surveyed attending three or more schools. Their research did not, however, include the factors that led to high levels of student mobility.

The mobility of urban Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people is under researched (Prout, 2008). What is known is that "Indigenous people in urban areas are more likely to be younger, poorer, be unemployed, in poor health, and have had less formal education and more contact with the justice system than their non Indigenous neighbours" (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, 2001, p. viii). And, while high levels of mobility are known to characterise the lived experience of the majority of urban Indigenous Australians, there are scant details on the facts. Housing research indicates that in urban and regional centres (where 75% of Indigenous Australians reside) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008) kinship relationships and obligations play an important role in movement, but mobility is also linked to economic and social pressures, with housing affordability, entrenched poverty and family violence contributing to housing instability. This housing instability often results in either homelessness or movement between kinfolk, often in overcrowded arrangements (Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, 2008).

Although mobility can be considered an integral part of Indigenous life this is not to say that all Indigenous people are mobile all the time. Research highlights the existence of a non-mobile core of household members. For example, in three waves of surveys conducted in Kuranda (in regional North Queensland) between 1999 and 2001, 37% of respondents had remained living in the same house (Henry & Smith, 2002). However, again very little is known about these relatively non-mobile people (both urban and remote) and the factors that shape their

decisions to remain sedentary. Prout (2008, p. vii) underscores the paucity of research in the area of urban Indigenous mobility when she writes, : “There remain significant research gaps regarding Indigenous temporary mobility in urban settings, movement associated with mainstream economic engagement, and the characteristics of ‘core’ population”.

Indigenous mobility is a multifaceted issue – with both positive and negative ‘push and pull’ factors motivating movement. Of the limited research that exists, the majority focuses on remote lifestyles and the socio-cultural drivers of mobility (Prout, 2008) and very little is understood about the complexities imposed by factors associated with urbanisation and socio-economic disadvantage. Given that three-quarters of Indigenous Australians live in urbanised areas and are concentrated in areas marked by socio-economic disadvantage (Atkinson, Taylor, & Walter, 2008) the lack of research knowledge has serious implications for policy, teacher practice and ultimately students’ literacy outcomes. This is not an issue that can be reduced to a binary of mobility as ‘bad’ and stability as ‘good’ behaviour – this would only serve to marginalise and even negate the centrality of kinship relationships in Indigenous culture. This is relatively unknown territory, both conceptually and practically, and an important area for emerging research.

### **Indigenous education**

In their extensive review of contemporary research into Indigenous education outcomes, Mellor and Corrigan (2004) draw attention to the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the “limitations of the suitability and applicability of research and policy that egregiously assumes an undifferentiated whole when considering Indigenous people” (p. 3). In comparison to other fields of educational research, there exists a limited literature base in respect to research into Indigenous literacy education – with most of the research in the field having been conducted in remote and very remote settings (Frigo, et al., 2003). In the light of the above ‘warning’ it would seem that there is indeed a very limited research base to inform literacy teaching practices for Indigenous students attending urban schools.

However, this is not to say that no literature exists. But, research findings show that although researchers active in this field [such as Harris and Malin (1994), Berry and Hudson (1997) and others] have published books, reports and journal articles outlining literacy teaching practices that have been shown to make a difference in Indigenous students in urban and/or remote contexts, this knowledge has not filtered through to classroom teachers (Perso, 2003 as cited in Frigo, et al., 2003), who, as was noted previously, do not feel equipped to meet the needs of Indigenous students (Tripcony, 2000).

In the document *Australian Direction in Indigenous Education* (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 2006) it is proposed that Indigenous education has, until now, been ‘bolted on’ rather than ‘built into’ mainstream efforts – thus leading to Indigenous education “becoming the province of specialists and committed

individuals instead of systems as a whole” (p. 16). Perhaps it is the systemic sidelining of Indigenous education into short-term, program driven interventions that is a disincentive for mainstream teachers to reconceptualise their pedagogies to meet the needs of Indigenous students in urban schools. Clearly, there is an urgent need for locally contextualised professional learning in order to overcome this significant barrier to improving student outcomes.

Tripcony (2002) summarises the key findings of several Queensland research projects to draw attention to the fundamental challenges facing educators in planning and delivering relevant school programs for Indigenous children. She highlights four key challenges:

- *Values* – Particularly the tensions of maintaining major cultural touchstones in an increasingly globalised society largely underpinned by western values.
- *Indigenous students’ lack of dominant cultural capital* – While Indigenous students bring with them rich cultural capital it is rarely the sort valued by the formal education system (Buckskin, 2002 as cited in Tripcony, 2002)
- *English language and literacy* – Particularly the communication misunderstandings that arise when children and families possess different cultural and linguistic backgrounds to educators. Also, the challenge of effectively using students’ existing linguistic resources to develop skills within dominant culture and language settings.
- *Teacher education* – Programs that enable educators to acquire the relevant skills and knowledge for meeting the educational needs of Indigenous students.

These themes are echoed throughout the literature in various combinations with varying emphases, and other literature (Harrison, 2007; Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 2006; Sarra, 2008) shows that overcoming deficit views is also a significant challenge to improving outcomes for Indigenous students. The recurrent themes from the literature are summarised in the following table:

<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Authors</b>
Cultural and language differences	Tripcony (2002); Clancy & Simpson (2002); Malin, 1990
Lacking dominant cultural capital	Sarra (2008); Tripcony (2002);
Systemic issues (eg staffing, inconsistent programs, short term ‘interventions’)	Sarra (2008); Tripcony (2002); Mellor and Corrigan (2004)
Appropriate curriculum and pedagogy	Mellor and Corrigan (2004)
Deficit views	Harrison, 2007; Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), 2006; Sarra, 2008)

While the challenges in Indigenous education are well documented there is also research, largely case studies, that highlights the potential of positive, evidence based practice (see McRae, et al., 2000). Further insight into the complex area of Indigenous education is found in the work of Martin Nakata (Nakata, 2007a, 2007b). Nakata, in his discussions of the lived

realities of Torres Strait Islanders, offers a means of re-conceptualising the space between cultures away from “binary (op)positions such as ‘black-white’, ‘them-us’, ‘traditional-Western’ and ‘Islander-mainstream’” towards a more productive notion of a “cultural interface” (Nakata, 2007a, p. 200). He characterises this as:

*a multi-layered and multi-dimensional space of dynamic relations constituted by the intersections of time, place, distance, different systems of thought, competing and contesting discourses within and between different knowledge traditions, and different systems of social, economic and political organisation ... that provides the conditions that shape thinking, understanding, knowledge, identities, history and change in a constant state of process (Nakata, 2007a, p. 199).*

### **Student mobility**

There is a significant body of international research that suggests that mobility is potentially damaging to students both emotionally and academically. However, not all research indicates mobility has a negative impact for students. For some students changing schools develops social skills, resilience and personal growth as well as providing the benefits of a ‘fresh start’ for students who may have been experiencing various difficulties. It may also release children from problematic or dangerous situations (DEST & DoD, 2002). In the case of Indigenous students, mobility is seen as essential to the maintenance of important connections to family and country that are integral to cultural and spiritual well-being (DEST & DoD, 2002; Prout, 2008).

However, western child development theories support the notion that mobility is likely to have a negative impact on the social and emotional wellbeing of students. Bronfenbrenner (1979) sees instability and unpredictability in family life as a destructive force in a child’s development and argues that “the degree of stability, consistency, and predictability over time in any element or level of the systems constituting an ecology of human development is critical for the effective operation of the system” (Bronfenbrenner, 1989, p. 241), in this case the school environment. Experience tells us that relationships build over time and that interruptions and relocation must disrupt the establishment of relationships with peers and teachers. Berthelsen (2006) notes that moving schools in the formative years disrupts the building of identities, social skills and capacities to develop strong relationships with both adults and peers as well as the foundational competencies for later academic achievement.

Research into whether mobility has a negative impact on academic achievement is not conclusive, largely because the mobile cohort is rarely disaggregated and reasons for mobility are seldom identified. To date much of the research has centred around the collective achievement of schools, high mobility versus low mobility, on national tests. Research studies that do not control for background characteristics suggest that mobile students have lower

achievement scores than non-mobile students. For example, Demie et al. (2005, p. 132) reference a body of work (Alston, 2000; Demie, 2002; and Demie & Strand, 2004) to support their claim that “there is now evidence that mobile students attain lower results than stable students who have had an uninterrupted education in the same school”. However, the picture changes when background characteristics are taken into account. For example, while Strand & Demie (2006) found that educational mobility is “strongly associated with low attainment in national end of Key Stage 2 tests in English, mathematics and science” (p. 563), it was “no longer significant” when background characteristics such as sex, ethnicity, socio-economic status and previous achievement were taken into account. Nevertheless, the weight of research suggests that there is a negative correlation between mobility and student achievement, particularly for highly mobile students (Fields, 1997; Henderson, 2008; Rumberger, 2003; Sanderson, 2003) and that further research is needed in this area.

Various reasons are attributed to the lower levels of attainment experienced by mobile students. These include the psychological disruption of relocation (Rumberger, 2003), the aforementioned disruption to foundational learning, and the discontinuity of instruction (Heinlein & Shinn, 2000; Mehanna & Reynolds, 2004; Rhodes, 2008; Strand & Demie, 2006). That mobility disrupts the cohesive flow of instruction is evident – especially when students are moving across state borders. Content, teaching methods, rules and procedures, school cultures and ‘ways of doing school’ (Lynch, 2008) vary from school to school, thus creating barriers to transition and achievement (Mehanna & Reynolds, 2004; Rhodes, 2008).

While, as indicated above, there exists a body of research that suggests that the impact of mobility is potentially problematic, more recent work (Henderson, 2008) suggests that while negative conceptualisations of the impacts of mobility are common, this is not necessarily the case. The available research demonstrates that mobile students are not an homogenous group and that changing schools impacts on different cohorts of students in different ways (DEST & DoD, 2002; Heinlein & Shinn, 2000; Strand & Demie, 2006).

While no direct relationship between student mobility and student achievement has been definitively demonstrated in the research, the indication is that negative impacts are more likely to occur for students who are already experiencing other factors (such as low socio-economic status) that place them at an educational disadvantage. Research from Australia presents mobility as a ‘compounding’ factor whereby:

*high levels of mobility compound other factors that have a negative impact on learning outcomes, and student learning has an inverse relationship with mobility, with the higher the mobility the less likely that learning at age appropriate levels is expected to occur. (DEST & DoD, 2002, p. 129)*

The report goes on to suggest, “if mobility occurs in significantly high levels, it might itself become the major cause of learning difficulties” (DEST & DoD, 2002, p. 28). As the socio-economic disadvantage of Indigenous Australians is well documented, it is highly likely that

high levels of student mobility may play a strong role in limiting educational 'success' for urban Indigenous students.

### **Teaching literacy in contexts characterised by mobility, Indigeneity and socio-economic disadvantage**

For teachers to construct an effective literacy teaching program in a classroom context characterised by mobility, Indigeneity and poverty takes considerable professionalism that integrates an understanding of the socio-cultural backgrounds of students as well as a strong theoretical understanding of literacy and literacy teaching and learning (Wilkinson, 2005).

Comber et al. (2001, p. 273) argue that literacy development is "contingent on a number of interrelated factors, both in the home and in the school environments". Through a recent longitudinal ethnographic study they determined that the effects of poverty cannot be ignored and that students' home lives must be taken into account – but they clearly state that deficit equations about literacy and poverty must be actively resisted and that schools must work with what students bring with them to build the discursive resources and literate practices that they do not possess.

They argue that the following factors within the school make a difference to what children learn:

The recognition factor	The extent to which what children do counts and they can see that it counts
The resource factor	The extent to which schools have the human and material resources they need
The curriculum factor	The quality, scope and depth of what is made available
The pedagogical factor	The quality of teacher instructional talk, teacher-student relationships and assessment practices
The take-up factor	The extent to which children appropriate literate practices and school authorised discourses
The translation factor	The extent to which children can make use of and assemble repertoires of practice which they can use in new situations"

(Comber, et al., 2001, p. 273)

### **Research underway**

It can be seen that there are significant gaps in the research available to guide policy makers and educators about what are effective literacy teaching and learning practices for mobile Indigenous students. The gaps in the research have significant implications for Indigenous students and their opportunities for 'success'. Further, without evidence-based research from which to draw, teachers are arguably under-resourced to provide the quality teaching essential to improving student outcomes. In one survey of Queensland teachers, for example, it was found that only 7% felt they were adequately prepared to meet the needs of Indigenous students (Tripcony, 2000). If we are to have any hope of "closing the gap" in literacy achievement it is imperative to support teachers in collaborative, contextualised and

productive professional learning situations where they have the opportunities to transform their teaching practice through reflection, theorisation and experimentation (Cloonan, 2007).

While much has been researched and written about literacy and effective literacy teaching the area remains contested and highly political. The weight of research supports the notion that effective literacy teaching occurs when teachers engage in theoretically informed practice that responds to the many layers of students' social and cultural histories (Comber & Reid, 2006; Wilkinson, 2005).

The research project currently underway is using participatory action research (Kemmis, 2008; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005) to investigate which literacy teaching practices are effective for a particularly under-researched cohort of students – highly mobile Indigenous students attending urban schools. The research project is being conducted with the participation of three early years classroom teachers (two year three teachers and one year one teacher), the head of curriculum, and the mobility support teacher<sup>1</sup> working in a regional Queensland state primary school. Two of the teachers have been teaching in this school for over fifteen years and in other contexts prior to this and the third is a beginning teacher who completed her pre-service program interstate. Both the head of curriculum and the mobility support teacher have extensive classroom experience but have been working in non-classroom roles in recent years. The school serves a community characterised by low socio-economic indicators (including low rates of home ownership compared to national averages), a high proportion of Indigenous students (almost 40%) and extraordinary rates of mobility when benchmarked against international standards (Hill & Lynch, 2008). Through the processes of participatory action research, the group is collectively reflecting upon and examining literacy teaching practices. The first stage of the process in which the participants reflect upon their current practices and the situations in which they practice (Kemmis, 2008) is reported here. While the research project is still in the early stages, some findings are beginning to emerge. These will not be discussed in great depth, as there is still much work to be done, but these preliminary findings serve to highlight the complex work being undertaken in classrooms characterised by mobility, socio-economic disadvantage and Indigeneity.

### **Practices currently deployed by teachers when working with mobile Indigenous students in an urban classroom:**

#### **Establishing trust**

All participants have indicated the crucial need to develop teacher-student trust and parent-teacher trust as soon as possible. Teachers report that, while relationships take time to build, there is no time to waste when mobility is a factor. Reaching out to families can be difficult,

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<sup>1</sup> Mobility Support Teacher is a trial position currently being piloted in 14 Queensland state primary schools. For further information on the role please see description at [http://cms.jcu.edu.au/education/research/JCUPRD\\_048040](http://cms.jcu.edu.au/education/research/JCUPRD_048040)

especially given the high possibility that parents have not had positive relationships with teachers during their own schooling (Harrison, 2008), and a number of strategies are used:

- Making informal contact at every opportunity but not talking about school, e.g. at the local shopping strip, at community events, on sports day or other school events.
- Using the services of the mobility support teacher to release the teacher for a welcoming chat with the family when a student commences in the classroom.
- Sending home photographs of the student working in the classroom. (Teachers add a magnetic strip to the photograph so it can easily be displayed in prominent places in the home, e.g. on the refrigerator).
- Having an 'open door' policy.
- Using the services of Indigenous Education Workers to ensure that the lines of communication are becoming established and to remain in touch with the realities of life for families in this community.

### **Understanding students' linguistic backgrounds**

Teachers reported that having accurate information on students' linguistic backgrounds was very important in planning for literacy teaching and learning. Indigenous students may not have Standard Australian English (SAE) as their first language, and in some cases SAE can be a third or fourth language. Teachers must be prepared to seek assistance from systemic supports and have a repertoire of teaching strategies for teaching English to students from non English speaking backgrounds.

### **Working with Indigenous education workers**

Teachers indicated that students often seem more 'relaxed' when working with Indigenous staff members. Also, Indigenous staff members connected to local networks are often able to assist with issues such as attendance, returning of forms and notes, health issues and home visits.

### **Immediate assessment of literate practices**

All participants have highlighted the essential need for the provision of accurate and timely information on what it is that students can do. While teachers note that standardised test results provide some useful information, what is most valued is the time to hear students read a variety of texts, to have conversations to establish oral language development, as well as viewing a variety of samples of written work. It is through these interactions and work samples that judgements are able to be made about the strengths students possess and how best to build on and extend their academic and discursive knowledge.

### **The central role of explicit pedagogies**

Each of the participants emphasise the importance of using explicit pedagogies, especially given the diversity of linguistic resources and the variety of schooling experiences students bring with them to the classroom. Teachers aim to ensure that students are aware of '*how to do literacy in this classroom*'.

### **Next steps**

Through our discussions, the participants are working towards a strong understanding of what works in this particular context and have begun documenting the innovations and re-designs of literacy pedagogy that are effective for mobile Indigenous students. The next step in the research is to clearly identify the challenges to effective literacy teaching and learning, challenges that, as a group, we have yet to successfully overcome. Following this, the participants will trial a range of strategies to establish what will and will not work. Through this work we will be able to document what Nakata refers to as "the nitty gritty issues that mess up the best intentions of teachers' work" (Nakata, 2003, p. 12) as well as identify potential solutions.

### **Conclusion**

This paper set out to examine current research literature pertaining to the mobility of Indigenous students and to describe the preliminary insights emergent in an action research project currently being undertaken in a North Queensland primary school. From the review of the literature it can be seen that while mobility is known to be a characteristic of the lived experiences of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, very little is understood about the motivations, patterns and potential impacts of mobility in urban Indigenous communities. As a consequence, there is little research available to guide policy makers and educators as they strive to 'close the gap' in educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students – and, of particular interest here, the literacy outcomes of these students.

The research project described in this paper aims to document what is known to work in a school characterised by poverty, Indigeneity and mobility, and by doing so, to disseminate these innovative pedagogies to educators in similar contexts. The work undertaken in the initial stages of the research project has shown that teachers currently deploy a range of strategies to ensure that mobile Indigenous students are actively engaged in literacy learning. As this research project unfolds it is anticipated that a clear understanding of the challenges and opportunities of working in this complex context will be clearly identified and a range of strategies will be trialled and evaluated, with the aim of providing a strong, evidence-based body of knowledge. This action research project will go some way towards filling the research gaps identified and, in doing so, informing policy makers and educators on effective literacy teaching practices for mobile Indigenous students attending urban schools.

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