Building Excitement for Literacy Learning through Collaboration: Empowering Mobile and other Vulnerable Students in the Twenty-First Century

Barbara McNeil

Assistant Professor,
University of Regina,
Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada

Abstract

Research indicates that there are a growing number of socio-economically-disadvantaged students who are caught in a pattern of changing schools frequently in North America. These mobile or transient students often struggle in school. This paper describes a study whose purpose was to support the literacy growth and development of mobile students in an urban community school in Canada. The study sought to build excitement for and engagement with school literacy through collaboration among a researcher, classroom teacher and a teacher-librarian.

Introduction

The 21st century offers hope that schools will achieve the goal of greater social justice and equity by helping to empower all students to be successful in and through literacy. A not much discussed group that needs such assistance consists of predominantly poor, urban elementary school students who for a variety of reasons change schools frequently. Overtime, the instabilities and discontinuities caused by mobility ruptures the students' connection to schools, threatens their literacy growth, and weakens the quality of their educational experiences. In response to the needs of such mobile learners, this paper describes a classroom-based qualitative study in which a classroom teacher, a teacher-librarian, and a researcher (the author) collaborated and used a set of innovative approaches to build excitement and foster the literacy growth of mobile learners. In this study, the teacher and the teacher-librarian positioned themselves to be allies of some of the most at-risk and vulnerable students at the school and situated the school library as a site of empowerment and equity.

Purpose of the Study

The contemporary paradigm of school is rooted in the idea that students need to have continuous exposure to instruction and involvement with teachers and peers in classroom activities to receive the maximum benefit of the instructional program. Such notions of attendance and relatively stable engagement with teachers, peers, and curriculum are challenged by increasing levels of student mobility in some communities. In this paper, the mobile students I am concerned with, are learners who are caught in a unconventional pattern of changing schools frequently and who are also from backgrounds of socioeconomic disadvantage and lack of English or dominant language fluency. Over time, student mobility disrupts learning experiences and positions these vulnerable students to lose rather than succeed scholastically (Alexander, Entswile & Dauber, 1996; Kerbow, 1992; 1996; Lash and Kirkpatrick, 1990; Liechty, 1994; Ligon & Paredes, 1992; Ream, 2001; Wasserman, 2001; Wright, 1999).

Research by Bruno and Isken (1996), Sanderson (2003) and McNeil (2006), indicate that teachers perceive that mobile students tend to be disengaged from learning, exhibited negative attitudes toward school, had weak academic foundations, and did not excel in literacy—speaking, reading and writing the dominant language of school. This research sought to support the literacy growth and development of mobile students by building excitement for literacy using extensive and explicit literacy instruction (McNeil, 2006).

Building excitement for literacy speaks to what happens as a result of the relational, dialogic, interactional engagement among a community of readers and talkers. It is the strong interest, anticipation, exuberance, activity, and knowledge that is produced and contested among and between learners and teachers as they speak, listen, read, write, critically analyze and respond to texts and the contexts of the material world. Extensive instruction is premised on the view that quantity matters and refers to the amount of time teachers and students

need to spend on school literacy activities. Explicit instruction refers to a problem-posing pedagogical stance that seeks to render visible cultural, ideological, and social codes encoded and embedded in language and images used in textual production. In addition, explicit instruction means guiding and supporting students as they apply their knowledge of the world to reading the word and using the word to read the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

Theoretical Framework
This study is rooted in critical social theory and critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970; McLaren, 2009) as it applies to literacy (Shor, 2009). Freire (1970) advocated a liberating, problem-posing education based on *praxis*—reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it for the betterment of all. Building on Freire's work, McLaren (2009) points out that "critical theorists begin with the premise that *men and women are essentially unfree and inhabit a world rife with contradictions and asymmetries of power and privilege*" (2009, p. 61). With regard to schooling, McLaren draws attention to its dialectical nature and invites us to see "the school not simply as an arena of indoctrination or socialization or a site of instruction, but also as a cultural terrain that promotes student empowerment and self-transformation" (2009, p. 62). Furthermore, McLaren argues that "any worthwhile theory of schooling *must be partisan*. That is, it must be fundamentally tied to a struggle for a qualitatively better life for all through the construction of a society based on nonexploitative relations and social justice" (McLaren, 2009, p. 62).

For critical theorists, literacy—that is, critical literacy can be seen as a tool for liberating and transforming social action. Shor (2009) for instance points out that critical literacy is "for questioning power relations, discourses, and identities in a world not yet finished, just or humane" (p. 282). Going further, Shor (2009) states that "critical literacy is language use that questions the social construction of the self" (p. 292).

In this study, I adopted stances and used texts and approaches that would engender the development of critical literacy as a social and cultural practice among the students. I wanted them to understand the world in which they lived and their place in it so that they would see the transformative possibilities of literacy in that world.

The School
Meadowland* Community Elementary School is a Pre-K to 8 school with a population of fewer than 150 students. The school is located in a diverse working class neighbourhood in a mid-sized city in the province of Saskatchewan, Canada.

Like all community schools in Saskatchewan, Meadowland Community School is guided by the philosophy of "Building Communities of Hope". As a provincially designated and funded "Community School," Meadowland operates within an established framework specifically developed for such schools. This framework states that

> Community Schools endeavour to provide children and youth with a learning environment and program that is culturally affirming and that respects and reflects their histories, experiences, and educational needs. As well, they provide innovative, caring, and effective responses to the learning needs of children and youth…Community Schools recognize that children come to school as whole beings and understand the reciprocity between difficulties they experience at home or in school and how they impact on the well-being and success of children and youth. They take into account the cultural and socio-economic life experiences of children and youth, and provide the comprehensive range of supports needed for students to learn (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2004, p. 7).

The foregoing principles and philosophies were important considerations in the Grade 5/6 classroom and school library in which my research project was conducted from September 2009 to May 2010. Along with the above, it is generally recognized that community schools exist in communities where

> [s]ignificant numbers of children and youth come to school with complex social, emotional, physical, health, and developmental challenges that present barriers to their learning. Factors such as poverty, family breakdown, violence and abuse, teen pregnancy, and substance abuse can have a serious impact

on children's educational experience, compromising their opportunities for success in school and later in life (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2004, p. 11).

In addition, informal discussions with school administrators and teachers revealed that community schools such as Meadowland experience high levels of student mobility/transience. During the research project, information obtained at the school indicated that it experienced high levels of student mobility. Over the course of my stay at the school, students moved in and out of the classroom to which I was assigned.

Through the assistance of school principal and the classroom teacher, I was a participant observer in a Grade 5/6 classroom at Meadowland Community School, three times per week from October 2009 until May 2010. Each session with the students lasted thirty minutes and involved collaboration with the teacher and teacher-librarian.

Collaboration
Collaboration flowed from two sources at Meadowland Community School. The first source of collaboration flowed from the professional socialization of the teacher-librarian. I anticipated that the school library would be a site of collaboration as it is a fundamental marker of school librarianship (American Association of School Librarians & Association for Educational Communications and Technology, 1998; Kearney, 2000; International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 2006; Turner & Riedling, 2003). Doll (2005), for instance, explains that "collaboration means that the school library media specialist (teacher-librarian) and teachers in the school will work together to plan for, design, teach, and evaluate instructional events for students" (p. 4). When I arrived at Meadowland Community School, I found that the teacher-librarian was indeed positioned as a collaborator—a curriculum partner whose responsibility involved helping teachers to teach and children to learn.

The philosophy of collaboration that guides community schools represented the second source of the collaboration that I founded at Meadowland. One of the "principles" of community schools for instance, is "collaboration and openness" among school, families, and non-school actors in order to meet the multiple and high needs of the students who attend such schools (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, p. 4). My research project benefited from the ethos of collaboration that permeated the school.

Methodology
This was a qualitative case study (Merriam, 1998; Merriam & associates, 2002) that took the view that "reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds." Throughout the research I was a participant observer (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002; Woods, 1986; 1996) and interacted directly with a classroom teacher, a teacher-librarian, and students. The case(s) were the teacher, the teacher-librarian and the students involved in the study.

Data Collection
Data was collected through: (1) semi-structured interviews with the classroom teacher and teacher-librarian, (2) participant observation from being in the classroom and school library, and (3) document analysis (samples of student work). With regard to participant observation in the classroom, the teacher was of considerable importance since I was an active participant "in order to have a first-hand encounter of the phenomenon" that interested me (Merriam & associates, 2002, p. 13). As I worked with the students, the classroom teacher made written notes of what transpired during each lesson and then discussed it with me at the end of the lesson. Furthermore, in order to track my own observations of what took place during my lessons with the students, I maintained a research log/journal. Typically, I wrote in my research journal following my reading sessions with the students.

Data Analysis
Merriam points out that in "qualitative research, data analysis is *simultaneous* (emphasis in original) with data collection" (2002, p. 14). Thus I initiated the process of analysis soon after the study was launched—with initial observations as a participant, the first conversations, the first interview, and generally, the first interactions I had with the research participants. Simultaneous data collection and analysis allowed me to be responsive to the

dynamic and organic context of the classroom and to make adjustments along the way rather than waiting until all the data had been collected.

I analyzed the data by examining and comparing data sets (transcribed interview, research journal and notes made by the classroom teacher) "while looking for common patterns across the data" (Merriam and associates, 2002, p. 14). Because student mobility and its influence on school literacy is a complex educational phenomenon that considers socio-economics, race, gender, class, language, and culture, I made use of "ethnographic analysis" (Merriam, 1998, p. 56). This was done in order to offer a "sociocultural interpretation of the data" as it was very congruent with the goals of the research study (Merriam and associates, 2002 p. 9).

The Reading and Writing Context Prior to the Research Intervention
When I arrived at the school in September 2009, the principal and the teacher had made a decision to use guided reading and writing (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001) to provide students with extensive literacy instruction. The teacher had divided the 26 students in the class into three groups: reading, writing and word study. The groups met three times per week. The groups followed a school calendar and rotated among three leaders. The teacher-librarian had responsibility for teaching writing, the classroom teacher had responsibility for teaching reading, and an educational assistant was responsible for the word study component under the supervision of the teacher. The teacher collaborated with the research project by transferring her reading group to me and took on an observing and a listening role. Thus, I became responsible for guided reading. I shared the outline of all my lessons with the teacher and she supported my work by remaining in the classroom while I worked with the students.

The teacher was vital to the research project as she scaffolded my entry into the classroom and the relationship I developed with the students. The students were able to trust me because the teacher activated trust by welcoming me and by turning the class over to me for thirty minutes three times per week. I benefited from the insights she shared about the class, individual students, and the school.

Prior to working with the reading groups directly, I observed the teacher for three weeks. I observed how she conducted her reading group so as to familiarize myself with her practices and took the opportunity to watch the students in action. During this time, I took note of the texts the teacher used for guided reading. They appeared to be leveled texts that were modestly illustrated. It was at this juncture that I decided to discuss with the teacher the idea of using carefully chosen children's picture books in my work with the students. The teacher consented and I proceeded.

The Intervention: Building Excitement for Literacy
Since previous research reported that teachers perceive that mobile or transient students do not exhibit strong interest in reading and writing (McNeil, 2006) and are generally disengaged from learning (Liechty, 1994; Sanderson, 2003), an important goal of the intervention was to build excitement for literacy. I adopted a four dimensional approach for doing so.

The First Dimension
The first dimension involved my use of a "humanizing pedagogy" based on a relationship of dialogue (Freire, 1970, p. 55) wherein the students would be encouraged to speak openly and freely as they participated in the joint construction of meaning based on the social and cultural differences of the students, the texts we read, and the social dreams we had for self and others. A humanist, dialogic, pedagogy is built on a caring relation characterized by what Noddings (2005) refers to as "engrossment and motivational displacement" (p. 15).

According to Noddings (2005), "engrossment" means "an open nonselective receptivity to the cared-for" (p. 15) and is similar to saying "that the soul empties itself of all its own contents in order to receive the other" (p. 16). With regard to "motivational displacement", Noddings (2005) suggests that it is "the sense that our motive energy is flowing toward others and their projects" (p. 16) and for me this meant that I positioned myself to lean in toward the students with compassionate purpose to work with and alongside them in literacy activities. This

humanizing, dialogic, and caring approach was carried out in small guided reading groups comprised of six or seven students that privileged a sociocultural approach (Vygotsky, 1996; Rogoff, 1990) to literacy learning.

My role in the reading groups was to provide guided assistance to the students and create conditions for them to assist each other. Significant emphasis was placed on guiding students to make connections between the textual world, their personal worlds, and the broader social world and it was in these moments that the students excelled.

The Second Dimension
The second dimension I employed stemmed from my many years of success and experience with the selection and use of culturally responsive, high quality picture books with older readers in classrooms and school libraries. Picture books work well with 21st century learners who are emerging in, are shaped by, and who also shape the thick visual culture that surrounds them—be it on the screens of the Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) they use, the television screens watched, advertisement seen on billboards, and the comics, and magazines they peruse or read.

In addition, my discussions with the classroom teacher and the librarian revealed that there were struggling readers in the class and I reasoned that sufficiently rich and complex picture books would be able to meet the interests and needs of all the students. Carefully selected picture books offer a highly contextualized kind of reading for all but are particularly suited to the needs of learners who could benefit from the contextual cues and clues to meaning making afforded by the illustrations in such texts. In addition, the use of picture books is complementary to the dialogic approach that I believe is needed for critical literacy. As Bradford (2007) points out, picture books are a dialogic form in which meanings are produced through the interplay of verbal and visual texts (p. 65) and together they create possibilities for deep and multiple forms of textual readings. With this in mind, I embarked on my goal of building excitement for reading by being intentional and purposeful about text selection.

My choice of texts was guided by acknowledging that elementary students whose lives are marked by hardships stemming from socio-economic and other disadvantage require rich literature—especially literature that boasts stunning visual details that are integral to communicating literary elements such as character, plot, and setting. This is literature that would incite students imaginations and fantasy, stir up their sense of wonder and quest for knowledge, present them with narratives in which characters grapple with ethical ideas about life and living, and at the same time be books and texts that are pleasurable to read. Furthermore, it reflects my belief that it was important to choose literature that is encoded with discourses about relations of power, knowledge, gender, and ethical issues.

With the above considerations in mind, I, with the teacher's consent chose Ludmila Zeman's quest story trilogy about the epic of Gilgamesh, a legendary king of Mesopotamia who lived over 5000 years ago. The books in the picture book trilogy are: *Gilgamesh the King* (Zeman, 1992), *The Revenge of Ishtar* (Zeman, 1993), *and the Last Quest of Gilgamesh* (Zeman, 1995). I chose this particular picture book trilogy for its rich visual details, its accessible text, its engaging, character-bound narrative, its setting in a far away land that could be identified today, and because it offered readers an adventure story while presenting many opportunities to explore discourses about relations of power, gender, and a range of interesting ethical issues that confront human beings. From their reading of *Gilgamesh the King* (Zeman, 1992) the students learned about a despotic king who "had power and wealth" but was "not happy" and being without friends and all alone "grew bitter and cruel." We explored Gilgamesh's lack humanity and how his desire for power and glory led him to dehumanize his people by asking them to build a great wall around the city of Uruk. Through dialogue, the students were encouraged to take positions, to engage in counter-hegemonic readings of the texts and to envision an alternative social order based on equity and justice.

Over the course of my time with the students, they were captivated by the story as well as the mythical creatures featured in the illustrations and were motivated to learn more about them. That however was not all. Every reading session was filled with passion and engagement and this engagement was evident by students eagerly volunteering to read, posing questions, drawing the group's attention to details in illustrations, and reluctance to

stop our dialogue when the bell announced the end of the session. I believed that it was important to explicitly demonstrate that reading is and can be a very exciting and active process and to do this with students, who because of their pattern of schooling and other factors in their lives, tend to exhibit a lack of interest and engagement in reading. I was playful and encouraged the students to be so as well.

The Third Dimension
Along with the foregoing, the third dimension that I used involved adopting a qualitative stance to reading that was sensitive to the needs of learners whose multiple school changes made them reticent about school and engaging in classroom activities. Though difficult to articulate, I seek to describe those highly nuanced and embodied actions that I took to make the students comfortable with me, and now more than ever, I am convinced that they are necessary in the relational act of teaching. Such a qualitative approach involved developing a trusting relationship with the students as well as nurturing their sense of belonging. This meant sitting around a table with our books that linked us together as a community through joint activity construction; I did not physically set myself apart from the students. Interactivity was foundational to our work together. For example, I nodded and smiled as I actively listened to students while they shared their interpretations of the meaning of verbal and visual signs found in the text. Such actions encouraged the students to develop individual mastery and voice.

In the reading of the picture books, I was patient and took time to do two types of reading: reading the words and reading the visual images and alternating between the two so that the students could use both to construct meanings. This took time. "Tell me what you see and what you think it means" I often requested of them and through this, the students became proficient at reading and talking about the visual details on each page of the book.

In order to boost the confidence of the students, I smiled with them frequently and praised all their efforts by using such words as "well-done", "bravo", "great job", and by clapping when it was important and appropriate to do so. I encouraged the students to do the same when a member of group made a contribution to the discussion.

With the purpose of being dialogic, each group session consisted of rich talk based on using the elements of fiction (character, setting, plot, point of view, tone, and style) and literary devices (allegory, alliteration, climax, metaphor, personification, and simile) adapted to the needs of each reading group. The goal was to verbalize everything, to make the textual codes explicit to the students. For instance, when the students asked why the singer Shamat and the hunter did not refuse when Gilgamesh sent them to the forest to meet Enkidu (Gilgamesh's rival), this led to a discussions about the power of Gilgamesh, the role of women and workers in the society and the likely consequences of their refusal.

The Fourth Dimension
The fourth dimension utilized in the intervention had to do with linking reading with writing in an approach similar to what Tom Romano (1987) calls "writing amid literature" (p. 131). Romano explains that

> Authors have written poetry of wide variety, plays about every social class, nonfiction of all sorts, fiction of countless styles, and other pieces that fit no single genre. All these forms are available for students to try in a literature class. And subject matter? If modern literature has taught us one thing, it is that any idea, experience, or emotion is a possible writing topic" (p. 131).

I discussed Romano's ideas with the teacher-librarian and she saw the value that a collaborative approach would have for the students. She was responsible for the guided writing program for the Grade 5/6 class with which I worked and had noted that when they came to the library, the students' conversations revealed the excitement and enthusiasm they had for the story about Gilgamesh. Therefore instead of organizing a separate, stand-alone writing program, the teacher-librarian explicitly created opportunities for the students to write about what they were reading and in this way, there was a positive and meaningful collaboration between the learning activities in the classroom and those that transpired in the library. The teacher-librarian revealed that the continuous opportunities the students had to talk about the stories of Gilgamesh in the reading groups made it easier for the

students to compose written pieces when she worked with them in the library. Being a part of a community of talkers helped the students to comprehend and internalize the stories and this continued in the library. Equipped with copies of books about the Gilgamesh saga, the teacher-librarian guided students in creating written responses to the story and in this way, became a teacher of reading, literature, and writing as well as information literacy—a true curriculum partner with the classroom teacher. During my time at the school, I received encouragement about my pedagogical practices from the teacher-librarian and offered similar support to her and this mutuality produced meaningful productive dialogues that informed our work with the students.

Findings

An important finding from this study is that the provision of extensive and explicit literacy instruction in guided reading and writing benefits from the kind of partnership a teacher-librarian is able to provide: sustained instructional support for all learners but especially to those who need it the most. The study challenges the notion that a lone classroom teacher operating on her own can provide the kind of guided, up-close, dialogic literacy support needed by many students.

The deep, provocative, rich and meaningful discussions that I had with the students at Meadowland School were made possible because of the small group framework that created space for each student to speak. Additionally, the thrice per week meetings extended opportunities for critical conversations. With guidance, the students found their voices in the small reading groups and with such empowerment used their voices to critically decode and deconstruct what they saw in the verbal and visual signs in the texts that they read and in the contexts of their lives.

With regard to building excitement for literacy, the study suggests that the purposeful and intentional selection of quality children's picture books can be successfully employed to build excitement and motivation for literacy. Moreover, the study suggests that picture books should not be overlooked for use with older readers in guided reading and writing or general instruction. The students' "enthusiastic" responses to the books used in this study were witnessed by the teacher, the teacher-librarian, and the school principal who commented on the students' "excitement about the story of Gilgamesh." The classroom teacher, teacher-librarian, and others reported that the students often spoke about the stories when I was not present in the school. The excitement of the students was frequently discussed at the school and was inspiring to watch. Furthermore, the data suggests that richly illustrated picture books that tell an engrossing story provide striving readers with opportunities for multiple forms of reading and that the use of visual details supported the students' textual reading and understanding of the elements of fiction. Also, I remarked that the attention we paid to the visual details in the texts helped to develop students' skills in visualization.

In addition, the teacher-librarian stated that she believed that the picture books used in the study offered less abstract reading material and provided literature rich in verbal and textual details that summoned the students interests and produced image-rich conversations about important issues. Similarly the classroom teacher reported that her students were so practiced in paying attention to the visual images in the picture books that whenever she discussed an item that contained an image the students reminded her to go back and "read the picture." The classroom teacher, the teacher-librarian and I found that the use of picture books (shorter, illustrated texts) facilitated the ease with which new students could engage with and grasp the story when they joined the class. Picture books made the transition to the reading world of the new classroom easier for those mobile students (and there were several) who joined the class as the research project progressed.

Also, the study revealed that reading instruction that inspires excitement and engagement from children who experience multiple ruptures in their schooling needs to be nested in a humanist, dialogic pedagogy of caring as suggested by Freire (1970) and Noddings (2005). Successful reading instruction for those who have been buffeted from one school to another requires the support of teachers and teacher librarians who place strong emphasis on entering a relation of caring and nurturance with the cared-for. Without such relational orientation toward the students, reading instruction is machinic and mechanical and not as productive as it could be.

In conjunction with the above, this study indicates that small reading and writing groups are an effective strategy for providing up-close support and intervention and mediation from teachers and peers and for interacting dialogically to construct meaning from texts. Excitement for literacy was at its highest through the interaction between and among the students and teacher as they engaged ideologically with the textual world and the contexts of their material worlds. The students gained their voices as they talked about relations of power in the text, on the playground and in society. These Grade 5/6 students relished the opportunities they had to talk about the substantive issues offered by the picture books: political oppression, subordination of social groups, the idea of humanization and how it occurs, the morality of revenge, a flying bull as an instrument of terror and occasion of terrorism (stated by a student), the ethics of caring for self, others, and animals, the search for the meaning of life, and much more. Believing in the limitless potential of students, the power of human agency, and the Vygotskian (1976) idea that learning spurs development, I provided the students with rich content and this stimulated interest and active engagement.

Overall, the data suggests that a combination of four key factors are important when planning literacy instruction that would be beneficial for mobile or transient elementary students who struggle in school literacy. These are: (1) the use of an intentional, humanist and caring pedagogy (2) extended periods of time for literacy and a facilitative sociocultural framework that privileges the social, interactional nature of learning such as the small, teacher-led reading and discussion groups used in the study (3) the employment of carefully selected texts that are language rich and that have a good balance of illustrations or visual details and (4) the adoption of a critical literacy in which the critical analysis of texts is linked to contexts in the material world with a vision of transforming such contexts for self and others for the sake of greater equity and justice.

In conjunction with the above, the study suggests that with the use of the four factors outlined above, it is possible to dislodge the disengagement and lack of interest in literacy that is exhibited by some mobile students. My experience with the students at Meadowland School reveals that mobile students have stories to tell and ideas and possibilities that they would like to explore. These provide an excellent foundation for building interest in school literacy as a tool for helping students to name the world of suffering that they know all too well.

Discussion
As I consider the phenomenon of student mobility as a factor that influences the scholastic achievement and life possibilities of learners already facing socioeconomic disadvantage, I recognize that this problem will not disappear anytime soon. Therefore, I believe that there is value in conducting studies that try to alleviate the suffering it causes for the human child that is at its centre. Though small, this study presents possibilities. It suggests that small group literacy instruction extended over three or more days per week may be an effective strategy in building excitement for and supporting the literacy development of mobile students who struggle in school. Moreover, an important learning that emanates from this study concerns the value of adopting a team approach that involves a teacher-librarian as a curriculum partner focused on helping vulnerable students such as those described in this study. A feature of school librarianship that encourages such an approach, is the ability of teacher-librarians to collaborate with classroom teachers and others to deliver instructional programs to large and small groups of students modeled after the approaches presented in this study. A teacher-librarian has an array of skills and strategies that can be put in the service of mobile students and other vulnerable students (e.g., knowledge of learners, curriculum, literature, literacy, the school community, and the society) and for the sake of equity and social justice for all learners, they should be deployed sooner rather than later.

This study represents a way of bringing attention to the needs of a growing group of students who need multiple forms of support. It draws attention to what can be done for mobile students during the short periods of time when they are at school but does not address the causes of student mobility nor how to eradicate them. As such, the study has a narrow focus. Nevertheless, it sheds a sliver of light on what can be done to support the literacy development of mobile and other vulnerable students through the use of pedagogies of care, compelling literature, and the critical analysis of texts and social contexts.

This study challenges the notion that transient students are inherently disinterested and cannot be challenged to engage in school literacy. I have presented an approach that works and that could be applied in classrooms and school libraries serving mobile or transient students.

In taking a wide-angled view, I conclude by stating that teacher-librarians in collaboration with teachers would do well to present and position the school library and its personnel as crucial to the goals of school districts and educational authorities in narrowing achievement gaps between students from different races, classes, and gender. The collaboration evidenced at Meadowland Community School points to an approach that could be used to support the performance outcomes and life possibilities of mobile and other socio-economically disadvantaged students.

*All names used in this paper are pseudonyms.

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Biographical Note
Dr. Barbara McNeil is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Language and Literacies, in the Faculty of Education at the University of Regina. Her current research interests include social justice in education, student mobility/transience, school librarianship, multicultural literature, multiliteracies, gender and reading, and drop-out prevention.