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Urban Renewal, Migration and Memories: The Affordances of Place-based Pedagogies for Developing Immigrant Students' Literate Repertoires

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Urban Renewal, Migration and Memories: The Affordances of Place-based Pedagogies for Developing Immigrant Students' Literate Repertoires

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Abstract

This paper explores the affordances of place-based pedagogies for developing immigrant primary school students' literate repertoires in the context of a long-term urban renewal project. It draws on data sets collected with teachers and students over a ten year period of collaborative research. These research projects have been informed by poststructuralist theories of space and time, educational research which considers the political, social and spatial relations inherent in literate practices and theories of place-based pedagogy. Longitudinal case studies, collaborative practitioner inquiry and classroom-based design experiments have been employed over the period of investigation. Data include student and teacher produced artefacts in range of media and modes portraying young people's relationships with place(s), real and imagined, at different times. This paper draws upon class sets of students' autobiographical writing and memory-related work. New theorizations of 'space' in the social sciences which emphasize the 'produced' nature of 'space' hold out significant potential for re-inventing critical literacies in school sites, when young people are invited and supported to imagine, argue for and make real material changes to the school buildings, structures, grounds, and even the use of space by different groups. We argue that young people's relationships with place(s) across time can provide rich resources for developing literate repertoires. Such activity allows for different youth subjectivities not constrained by dominant developmental discourses and opens up possibilities for engagement with spatial literacies and architectural discourses and practices normally reserved for adults and professionals.

Keywords: Literacy, place, pedagogy, architecture, migration, memories

Remodelación Urbana, Migraciones y Memorias: Las Posibilidades de las Pedagogías Emplazadas en el Lugar en el Desarrollo de los Repertorios de Alfabetización de los Estudiantes Inmigrantes

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Resumen

Este artículo explora las posibilidades de las pedagogías basadas en el espacio para desarrollar repertorios de alfabetización para estudiantes de educación primaria en el contexto de un proyecto de remodelación urbana a largo plazo. Este estudio se basa en los datos recogidos con profesorado y estudiantes después de diez años de investigación colaborativa. Estos proyectos de investigación se basaron en teorías postestructuralistas del espacio y del tiempo, en base a investigaciones educativas que consideran las relaciones espaciales, sociales y políticas inherentes a las prácticas de alfabetización y teorías de las pedagogías basadas en el espacio. Se utilizaron durante el período de investigación estudios de caso longitudinales, trabajo colaborativo con profesionales y experimentos de diseño emplazados en la clase. Las nuevas teorías del espacio en las ciencias sociales que enfatizan la naturaleza "producida" del espacio contiene un potencial significativo para re-inventar alfabetizaciones en espacios escolares, cuando se invita a jóvenes y se les apoya a imaginar, argumentar y realizar cambios materiales reales en los edificios de los centros educativos, en sus estructuras, suelos e incluso en el uso del espacio por diferentes grupos. Argumentamos, pues, cómo las relaciones con los jóvenes pueden proveer recursos ricos para desarrollar repertorios de alfabetización. Este tipo de actividades promueve diferentes subjetividades jóvenes no encorsetadas por los discursos de desarrollo dominantes y abre las posibilidades de participación en espacios de alfabetización, discursos arquitectónicos y prácticas normalmente reservadas para adultos y profesionales.

Palabras clave: Alfabetización, espacio, pedagogía, arquitectura, migraciones, memorias

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Many people who re-settle in Australia as refugees or immigrants find themselves in sites of change, in places of urban renewal or in regional and rural towns undergoing transformations and seeking new workers. Hence children who may have already experienced a life of ongoing migration may reach their destination only to find that their new dwelling place is also subject to continuing re-development. This is the case in the inner western suburbs of Adelaide South Australia where the Westwood Urban renewal project represents Australia's largest urban renewal project to date. For over a decade schools in these changing communities have needed to re-invent themselves to address the learning needs of a constantly changing population living in changing material conditions, with the demolition and rebuilding of housing and services literally happening around them.

The affordances of place-based pedagogies for developing immigrant primary school students' literate repertoires in the context of long-term urban renewal in this highly multicultural area are explored here. While educators informed by normative views of development often see change as disruptive, young people's experiences of life in different places can equally be seen as a resource, indeed as laying the ground work for resilient learning. A range of poststructuralist theories of space, place and time which foreground the politics and the constructedness of place and the dynamic nature of identity work underpin our research and development projects with teachers. Yet we also draw upon pedagogical approaches which are grounded in redressing the material inequities of young people's everyday lives and the consequences of those inequities on their educational trajectories. Our research combines approaches to critical literacy and place-based pedagogies which typically remain separate in educational research (Gruenewald, 2003), but which offer potentially rich educational experiences for students with diverse linguistic, cultural and geographically located histories. We argue that theorised and rigorous place-based approaches can enable migrant and refugee children to draw on past memories and imagined futures to produce complex and engaging texts and develop expanded repertoires of literate practice.

This paper draws from data sets collected with teachers and students in collaborative research spanning more than a decade. These research projects have been informed by poststructuralist theories of space and time (Dillabough, 2009; Foucault, 1979; 1980; Lefebvre, 1991; Lemke, 2000; Soja, 1996), the sociology of childhood (Uprichard, 2008), educational research which considers the political, social and spatial relations inherent in literate practices (Comber & Nixon, 2008; Hull & Schulz, 2001; Leander & Sheehy, 2004; New London Group, 1996), and theories of place-based pedagogy (Gruenewald, 2003; Gruenewald & Smith, 2008). In particular Foucault's notion that we are freer than we feel, and that wherever there is power there is resistance, underpins some of the place-based pedagogical work accomplished by teachers in the course of these projects. Rather than understanding the school only as a disciplinary site, we consider *spaces of freedom* within the everyday situated worlds of school (Foucault, 1980). Theorizations of 'space' in the social sciences which emphasize the 'produced' nature of 'space' (Lefebvre, 1991; Soja, 1996) hold out significant potential for re-inventing critical literacies in school sites, if young people are invited and supported to imagine, argue for and make real material changes to the school buildings, structures, grounds, and even to argue for the use of space by different groups. Such activity allows for different youth subjectivities not constrained by dominant developmental discourses and opens up possibilities for engagement with spatial literacies and architectural discourses and practices normally reserved for adults and professionals (Comber, Nixon, Ashmore, Loo & Cook, 2006; Horelli, 2006).

Recent theorizations of literacy (Janks, 2010; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; New London Group, 1996) have emphasized the potential of design, both the potential of teachers designing rather than implementing other people's curriculum, and the potential of teachers making the space and time for young people to engage in complex multi-modal design work of their own as part of their literacy curriculum. The work reported here includes both teachers and students working as designers and producers of complex texts, in part based on memory and in part based upon their new learning as recently arrived Australian citizens in school.

The Studies: Collaborative Research on Critical Literacy, Place and Learner Identities

We have undertaken classroom research with teachers about critical literacy and learner identities for over twenty years, including longitudinal case studies (Comber et al., 2002), collaborative practitioner inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) and classroom-based design experiments (Cobb, Confrey, di Sessa, Lehrer & Schauble, 2003). Over the last decade we have become more interested in the pedagogical affordances of place for extending diverse learners' literate repertoires and worked closely with a small group of teachers who were continually concerned with young people developing a sense of belonging in school and community that did not negate other identities and histories (see Nixon, Comber, Grant & Wells, 2011).

This paper is based on data from a series of small studies^I (Comber & Nixon, 2011; Comber & Nixon, 2008; Comber, Badger, Barnett, Nixon & Pitt, 2006) and an ongoing related project, including the same teacher-researchers, *New Literacy demands in the middle years: Learning from Design Experiments*^{II}. Here we draw on data from a small collaborative study – *Critical literacy: redesigning school learning in high poverty communities* – conducted in two primary schools where the teachers were designing place-based pedagogies to engage their students, many of whom were recently arrived refugees from a range of countries, including Sudan. Raphael's auto-biography, discussed below, was produced in the context of that study. In the larger ongoing project, a design-based experiment approach (Cobb, Confrey, di Sessa, Lehrer & Schauble, 2003) was employed involving three stages over a school year with teacher-researchers from three schools.

1. Informed exploration. Teachers and students engage in discussion about a possible place in the school or local area they would like to research and/or change. Teachers design a curriculum plan to research the place utilising relevant cross-disciplinary knowledge and sources of information and devise rich literacy tasks in relation to an action plan for the place informed by the students' and teacher's investigations. Specific outcomes at nominated milestones are negotiated.

2. Enactment. Implementation of detailed design-experiment in the classroom context. Teachers and students examine what is entailed in implementing place-based pedagogies and associated relevant rich literacy tasks, especially multi-modal environmental communications.
3. Evaluation. Teachers assess students' learning across a range of relevant tasks before and after the intervention.

In 2010 a new school was being built in one of the schools. Three primary schools were to be closed and their students and some of the teacher workforce amalgamated into one large school. Clearly this was the 'perfect site' for teachers and students to engage in place-based pedagogy and critical literacy. Data generated by this project included student and teacher produced artefacts in range of media and modes portraying people's past and present relationships with the school. The data discussed here includes excerpts from a student and teacher produced book entitled *Memories: Ridley Grove Primary School 2010* (Wells, 2010).

Memory work, oral history and auto-ethnography are familiar approaches in cultural studies and qualitative research in the social sciences (McLeod & Thomson, 2009) and sometimes employed in schools as a way for young people to learn about the local community or older people's experience. However children's own memories have not been seriously explored as resources for assembling literate repertoires; more specifically their experiences of mobility and migration have frequently been seen as a hindrance to education rather than an asset. Young people's capacities to act as journalists engaging with and recording elements of change have also been under-tapped in schools. In what follows we briefly explore the pedagogical affordances of place-based memory work for developing immigrant children's literate repertoires.

Raphael's Story: Autobiographical Writing in Year 5

Raphael was in a Year 5/6 class at a western suburb school situated in the urban renewal area. The western suburbs are home to an extremely culturally diverse community, including Aboriginal families, recently

arrived immigrants and refugees, and first and second generation immigrant families. For example Raphael's class included Aboriginal, Ivory Coast, Malaysian, Sudanese, Chinese, Macedonian, Vietnamese, Cambodian and Anglo-Australian young people. 65% of students were classified as speaking English as a second language and 68% of students qualified for School Card, an indicator of poverty. In common with many classmates, Raphael's family had arrived in Australia having already lived elsewhere and, as such, they arrived with rich memories of life in different places.

As an introduction to her work on people in changing places over time, Raphael's teacher, Ruth Trimboli, had spent considerable time reading auto-biographies including *Born to Run* (Freeman, 2007), the auto-biography of successful Aboriginal Australian Olympic runner Cathy Freeman, and oral histories, including *Pilawuk: When I was young*, the story of an Aboriginal Australian woman who was part of the Stolen Generation who were taken from their parents as children (Brian, 1996). In using such literature Trimboli hoped young people would come to appreciate the importance of country to Indigenous people as, from her perspective as a literacy educator, she aimed to introduce them to different genres for portraying stories and memories of people in places.

Trimboli also assisted students to interrogate their memories, to research their own placed histories, cultures and mobilities as part of their preparation for writing an auto-biography. Each student in the class interviewed or surveyed parents, siblings and extended family and examined family archives. Students' cultural, linguistic, geographic and historical experiences were treated as serious data from which elements could be selected to tell their stories. The ultimate aim of this task was to publish the word-processed auto-biographies with a photo of their author on coloured card and to display these on the walls of the classroom so that all students could read the class set.

We share excerpts from Raphael's auto-biography (full text appended) in order to demonstrate the ways in which memories of places (real and imagined) can become rich resources for students' writing. Raphael's auto-biography recounts his experiences at key life transitions in specific times and places. The text proceeds in terms of key events: his birth, his brothers' birth, notification of permission to immigrate, the farewell party and flight to Australia, starting school

(with 3 changes in the first 3 years), making a home in the western suburbs initially accommodating a large extended family, taking a holiday, and finally imagining a future as an adult beyond school. That is, on one level the narrative proceeds chronologically and mirrors the passing of time.

However, the place-based nature of this assignment also resulted in an unusually lengthy and detailed piece for Raphael. There is evidence of sophisticated vocabulary and rhetorical constructions and other signs of significant mastery of conventional ‘schooled’ literacy skills. There are also amusing sub-plots, such as the farewell party prank, and tropes that transfer across places and time, namely the fruit trees. Trimboli commented: “Raphael was often a very reluctant writer/worker, but was very motivated to write about his life!” His mobility and his history of experience in particular times and places afforded rich material from which to craft a compelling text. His story of family migration tends to down-play the challenges faced in the move such as finding friends. This tendency to represent immigration and life in Australia in a positive light has been noted by other researchers working with refugee children from Sudan (Matthews & Singh, 2009). Young people from Africa tend to present an optimistic picture of their lives – past and present – despite many having suffered considerable trauma.

Before discussing some of the engaging aspects of his autobiography, we first summarise how Raphael has ‘placed’ and ‘timed’ his account.

Place	Time - Span	Event
Border of Uganda and Sudan	Spring 1995	Birth
Border of Uganda and Sudan	20th June 2001	Permission to immigrate to Australia
Village in home country Africa	23rd June 2001	Farewell party
Qantas Flight: Madagascar, Perth, Sydney, Adelaide	25th June 2001	Migrating to Australia

Gilles Street Pennington Ridley Grove	July 2001 September 2001-Dec 2003 Jan 2004 - 2007	Schooling in Adelaide, Australia
Richmond Ridley Grove	June 2001-2007	Living in the Adelaide suburbs
Richmond Torrensville West Hindmarsh Henley Beach Road MacDonald Avenue	June 2001-2007	Streets and suburbs where members of his extended family lived
Launceston, Tasmania and surrounds	2005	Visit to family and tourism

Raphael's initial account is based on his family history, as told to him by his parents, from his own birth in his great-grandfather's house on the border of Sudan and Uganda, to his aunty and uncle coming to visit, an event which we are told is recorded in family photos. His account brings together the material and the symbolic. For example, a key incident in the opening of the narrative recounts the occasion, just before they departed for Australia, when his mother planted a tree on his sixth birthday to commemorate his birth in that place six years earlier. He also recalls that the best thing he did with his father was to build a small cottage for the family 'to spend time together'. He has strong memories of the natural world in Africa and reports that 'we used to be like farmers'; he recalls the types of fruits that grew there and even a thieving baboon that stole the family's corn. The theme of the natural world and agricultural produce is revisited later in the narrative in the context of his description of backyard fruit and vegetables in the Torrensville and MacDonald Avenue houses of his relatives and in the landscape in Tasmania where he visited family.

The farewell party is given extraordinary status in his narrative: 'I will never forget it to the day I die.' In terms of the text, it is here that a sub-plot is introduced, recalling the playing of 'a really dangerous

game' – a version of chaisey played in teams of 6 in tall trees in the jungle. According to Raphael one of his friends fell about 15 metres to the ground breaking an arm and a leg. Raphael was 6 at the time of this event and 12 when he wrote his auto-biography. Clearly he has researched the events in conversation with his family to supplement his own memories. What results becomes part of the family folklore and part of what can be represented to his peers at Ridley Grove Primary School as an entertaining and believable account.

The Qantas flights to Australia are also given considerable attention, from his crying on leaving, interrupted by the exhilaration of getting on the plane, followed by his fears that the plane might crash or he might fall out. The flight is clearly Raphael's first plane flight and the emotional and embodied nature of that experience appears to have stayed with him. His research allows him to fill his account with details and facts about the actual timing of flights, a refueling stop at Madagascar, seeing the iconic Sydney Opera House from the air, the amount of petrol carried by a jumbo jet, and so on. There is a mixture here of information supplied by family members, Raphael's own memories and wider research.

The journey to Australia and the account of the arrival are then followed with details of the movements of his extended family from one suburb to another, and one state to another, and the details of who travels with whom. There is sense of ongoing mobility and also connectedness with extended family beyond the local. 'My auntie and cousins came to live in Adelaide because they used to live in Tasmania My uncle Josh, my brother Wallie and I visited them back in 2005'. We also get a sense of Raphael's local travels across the inner western suburbs: 'Me and my two brothers go to visit my uncle and he lives in Henley Beach Road'. Raphael's auto-biography is characterized by movement from his jungle story, to the immigration story, the Qantas flight and ongoing local travels across the city and suburbs.

This piece of writing also shows that Raphael has been learning school-valued literary skills and techniques and that he takes considerable license in the ways that he makes meaning in order to engage his readers. For example, there is evidence that he both imitates and experiments with rhetorical strategies used by published authors in fiction ('in the lovely season of spring 1995, a boy was about to be

born'; 'the celebration was a success'), in first-person narratives ('believe it or not ...'; 'Well if you read this biography ..') and in non-fiction writing ('Did you know that a jumbo jet ...'). At the same time, he uses the kinds of devices that the teacher has probably explained are used to construct autobiographies, including ways to express times past ('In the lovely season of ...'; 'I still remember ...') and clauses that indicate the passing of time ('when the delay was over').

Finally, there are also traces in this text that Raphael's developing identity is connected with not only the remembered and embellished local particulars of places but also the more global aspects of popular culture. Travelling on an international airline introduced him to a world that 'looked and smelled fantastic', and where he was able to experience the pleasures of 'yummy food and cool music while my sisters were watching movies'. By the end of the narrative we know that living in Australia and being exposed to popular media culture (video games and 'gangster car' culture) had helped him develop an ambition shared by many teenage boys across the globe which is 'to earn enough money so I can buy a car and put a new engine, spoiler, two huge mufflers, level six and Nitrous plus a really cool Gangster paint job'.

The opportunity to research his coming to Australia and to this western suburbs school has allowed this young man to re-visit his past in conversation with his family and to recall key events. In crafting his auto-biography Raphael exercises power in the way he takes up the narrator voice, selecting what to reveal in terms of facts, what to include and/or embellish. In one sense his memories and those of his family, and what he selects for telling, are beyond the teacher's influence. In other words the teacher is not in a position to know better. Of course his teacher can and did make suggestions about what the auto-biography entails as a genre and how to improve his writing, by enriching it with imagery and details. Yet the final text allows Raphael considerable room to play. Memories – those of his family members and his own – become a resource for making meaning, even as he thinks about and imagines his future beyond the classroom. This is the identity work carried out by all young people. As Dillabough and Kennelly (2010) point out, "Young people necessarily navigate the gaps between memory, projection and possible futures" (p. 44).

While refugee and immigrant young people cannot avoid such identity work, it is rarely seen as a resource for schooling. Yet young people who have already negotiated life in different places and dealt with the demands of immigration may have considerable resilience and diverse sets of experiences to draw upon in assembling new literacies. However, often they are treated as if the reverse were true – as if they lack language, lack experience.

Memories

In 2010 in embarking on the *New literacy demand in the Middle years* project, teachers Ruth Trimboli and Marg Wells once again used literature to convey complex ideas about place, identity and time, by sharing books such as *My Place* (Wheatley, 1988), which portrays the history of a particular place in Sydney Australia from the perspective of culturally different children who lived there at different times (in the original edition from 1788 [colonization] – 1988). Teachers used this book to introduce the culturally diverse young people in their classrooms to a particular perspective on the history of a place, in particular those of Indigenous people, but also from the points of view of other groups of people who had immigrated to Australia. Other children's literature which was generative for their pedagogy included Jeannie Baker's (2004) *Belonging*, which visually depicts urban renewal and re-greening of the landscape, and *Window*, which also depicts through collage how a neighbourhood changes over generations through the view from a window (Baker, 1991). They also used Aboriginal author and illustrator Elaine Russell's (2001) *A is for Aunty*, which through an alphabet book recounting stories of Aboriginal people in specific places, gives young people a sense of the importance of place to Indigenous people and the Stolen Generation's experiences in places with family. In these ways the teachers brought in complex notions about the politics of places.

In addition, in developing their design experiments, they were influenced by the work of place-based educators. For example Trimboli specifically referred to the book *Place and community-based education in schools* (Smith & Sobel, 2010). As she put it:

Place-based education is learning that is rooted in what is local—the unique history, environment, culture and so on ... of a particular place. I think the histories of people in a place are important to that place and are really a part of that place.... investigations of the lives of people in their own communities and their histories become a cultural aspect of that place where they are now living and learning.

I think it is important that kids still value their culture even though they are now living somewhere else. It's important that they don't forget their past, and that they see that their past history is as important as anyone else's, and that history is not just about the people who went to war, governed a country, or discovered something, and that other people will be interested to read it. I wanted them to develop and maintain a pride in who they are.

Educational researchers have noted the ways in which elite private schools build on tradition, intergenerational family networks and the production of artefacts in the school and beyond which promote its distinction. Frequently the resources for such work are not available in schools serving poor populations. However the production of collective memories through year books, photographs and other memorabilia is now more readily accessible with the advent of new technologies which allow for easier self-publication. The teachers with whom we have worked for nearly two decades in the western suburbs were conscious that Ridley Grove Primary School was going to be demolished at the end of 2010 and that a new larger school (with a new name and identity and enrolling children from 2 other primary schools which were also being closed), decided to involve their students in conducting oral history interviews with current and previous staff and students to record, edit and publish a record of the school in a number of formats including 2 books. Here we focus on Marg Wells' book which was the culmination of her year-long design-based experiment which focused on how the learning areas of the current school were used and students' relationships with various places within the school (including the playgrounds, the Grove Gardens, the library, media studies room, the activity room, the canteen, their classroom, the Vietnamese room, the time-out room and so on). As part of developing children's understandings of the built environment they also conducted research across the curriculum focusing on the question:

Is **What** a building looks like affected by **What** it is used for and **Who** uses it?

We do not attempt to summarise the complex work across the curriculum that was accomplished by this teacher and her class in investigating these questions. However one goal was to enhance the children's capacities for and confidence with oral communication, given that many were learning English as a second language. Her literacy program included many opportunities for drama, for speaking and performing in front of the class and the school, readers' theatre and activities which required them to rehearse for speaking informally and formally in public. Wells explains.

[Trimboli and I] shared a similar goal; to develop competent, confident communicators who can understand and embrace change. To do this I positioned my students as 'researchers'. Over the course of the year the literacy skills needed to research and document the new development were taught, practised, developed and built on. By researching what was happening I wanted my students to not only gain knowledge, experience, literacy skills and confidence but I also wanted them to be more prepared for the move to the new school next year and to cope with the change.

How I developed these skills in Term 3 was in a topic I called 'Talking Walls'. The children conducted interviews to collect and record 'Memories' from the staff and students at Ridley Grove School in 2010 and make them into a book.

Drawing on the popular song title 'If walls could talk', and, inspired in part by Nadia Wheatley's *My Place*, Wells prepared her Year 4/5 students to interview current teachers and students about their memories of Ridley Grove Primary School. This positioning students as researchers is a key move in critical literacy (Comber, 1994) and orients students to question what is going on and why things are the way they are. Part way through this work, children from Wells' class outlined what they were doing at a school assembly:

This term our topic is interviews. We are becoming journalists. This topic helps us with our speaking skills, confidence, listening skills

and note-taking skills. We are interviewing all staff members, all teachers and some students. Room 15 has to be very organized by setting their interview times with staff and teachers. We work in pairs ... and use an interview checklist. We are doing this because it is the last year of Ridley Grove and we want to keep the memories alive.

The children's report to the school assembly makes it clear that they have actively taken up their roles as researchers and journalists and they fully understand the contexts for their work as memory gatherers in the school's last year. At a conference for middle years teachers later that year Wells outlined the details of her approach:

- All current staff and a selection of students from reception to year 7 were interviewed (48 staff and 58 students).
- Students formulated the questions for a general questionnaire that was given to all people before their interview so they had time to think and write down some notes. During the interview students asked questions and took notes for clarification.
- The data collection process was long, involved and demanding. Students worked with a buddy to carry out these tasks. They had to make appointments, keep a timetable, carry out interviews, take photos and/or recordings, write the information into a text, save it in a 'Memories' file on the computer, check their work and show it to the person they interviewed for approval, complete a checklist of tasks, complete a self-assessment sheet and get feedback from the staff members they interviewed.
- The number of interviews carried out by each group, and the person chosen to be interviewed, varied depending on the literacy level of the student.
- All interviews and photos have been put together in the 'Memories' book, a 'feel good' book that captures everyone's thoughts and memories. This book is finished and will go into the new school.

There is not space here to do justice to the complexity of the design of Wells' curriculum and pedagogy. Throughout the year students also observed the physical changes occurring on their school grounds and

interviewed the project manager regularly about what was occurring within the newly built walls which they were unable to see from outside. With guidance from him and their teacher, through Powerpoint displays including photographs and designs, they were introduced to the discourses and practices of architects, planners, project managers and so on. Importantly they were encouraged to question all aspects of the design and the use of space and even successfully challenged the lack of a space for drama and performance (Comber & Nixon, 2011). While collecting the memories of others about the old school, they were simultaneously witnessing the building of the new school and hearing about its design features. It is important to understand that Wells' approach focused on present, past and future equally. She believed students could learn about and prepare for change by rich engagement in the school's history and its current changing dimensions and imagining themselves into its future.

The resulting published book *Memories* is 50 pages in length. Most pages have several photographs of staff and/or students and quotations from the interviews recorded by Wells' students. Wells produced the book based on the students' written summaries of interviews they conducted, drawn from field notes and audio-recordings. From the point of view of Wells' original goals for students' language and literacy development, becoming researchers and journalists positioned them as powerful observers and listeners who needed to attend to their speaking and listening in order to guarantee the quality of the memories recorded. Below we refer briefly to just two pages from the book, which indicate how the multicultural make-up of the school was the object of comment for a number of respondents.

On one page of the book, the school counsellor is reported as telling students that she has enjoyed the cultural diversity at the school, noting that over the years there have been 'new cultural groups appearing. We have more cultural groups represented now than ever before. Indian and African students have only been here in the last few years'. Several other pages are specifically devoted to this aspect of the school. For example, on a page dedicated to ESL teaching and learning, the ESL teacher is reported as having 'enjoyed working with children from all around the world and watching them become good English speakers'. On the same page, the memories of two ESL tutors are also included:

[They] have lots of fond memories of Ridley Grove. They have spent time with students from a variety of backgrounds and have learnt many things from them. They enjoyed the reconciliation events and loved watching Blessing dancing on the basketball court and walking to the rhythm of African drumming.

Finally, the memories of Blessing—the dancing African boy mentioned by the tutors—are featured on this page. For him, a strong memory of the school has been working with the ESL teacher and making progress with learning to read and write standard Australian English: ‘she helps me with my literacy. I am getting better at adjectives and pronouns.’

Other pages featuring a range of LOTE and language and bilingual teachers testify not only to the linguistic and cultural diversity of the school but also to the significant impact on teachers and learners of collective experiences such as drama productions, ‘culturally colourful end-of-year celebrations’ and Christmas concerts. For example, the bilingual support officer reports that she:

will always remember the first Cultural Festival she organized. The Vietnamese dance was hard work but she had a great time. She also enjoyed the play “Shrek” and a lot of other performances.

The Chinese language teacher also highlights the importance of embodied and collective performance in her happy memories of the school:

Her memory of Ridley Grove is the time she spends with her students and when they work together to do singing practice. She also enjoyed the Christmas concert and Melbourne Cup [annual national horse racing event] celebrations.

Wells as the over-arching editor in charge of the book has produced a book with her class of students as co-researchers. The entire process ensured multiple opportunities for exploring the affordances of teaching and learning in a culturally diverse school.

Since this research we have increasingly been inspired by feminist geographer Doreen Massey's notion of *meeting places* – how in contemporary globalizing societies people are *thrown together* in places and need to negotiate ways of relating with each other and indeed with places. From our perspectives schools are indeed meeting places. Massey writes:

Place ...does change us..., not through some visceral belonging... but through the *practising* of place, the negotiating of intersecting trajectories; place as an arena where negotiation is forced upon us. (Massey, 2005, p. 154).

Culturally diverse school communities certainly require negotiation, but they also hold within their walls the potential for significant learning, especially when teachers make place and the changing and relational nature of place the object of study, as was the case reported here. In reflecting on her design-based experiment, Wells commented on the students' learning:

Student literacy skills have improved, but they may have improved anyway, following a more conservative curriculum. But what I have seen is the growth in self-belief. Students are more confident, organised, independent, interested, motivated and involved in their learning.

Wells' hopes for the students exceeded normative approaches to improved literacy performance. While improvements were achieved what she was seeking transcended what could be measured. She was ambitious in her aims to have the students understand, but not fear change, understand people's attachment to places and institutions, and understand that the way buildings are designed is not neutral, that it makes a difference to what can be done there, that even the authorised plan can be contested. Such a pedagogical vision contrasts sharply with Foucault's critique of the school building as part of a wider apparatus for containing, measuring and managing the child subject – the disciplinary institution. In appropriating the discursive practices of oral history and memory telling Wells and Trimboli hope to open up insider

story-telling and knowing positions to their young journalists; their aim is to lessen the silencing and alienation that can accompany immigration and re-settlement through ongoing activities designed to build the classroom as a meeting-place and to develop a collective identity and sense of belonging.

Concluding Remarks: Memory as a Resource for Writing

Wells' observations lead us to our concluding remarks in considering the affordance of place-based pedagogies for developing immigrant students' literate repertoires. We are aware that the data discussed could benefit significantly from further linguistic and content analysis. We have no wish to romanticize or overstate the effects of this small-scale collaborative research. However we do want to conclude by returning to a key tenet of critical literacy as captured some time ago by writing researcher Barbara Kamler who argued that: 'Writing, is never simply a skill, but is deeply constitutive of subjectivity' (Kamler, 2001, p. 54). Kamler's insight is particularly relevant to the case we wish to make here. As Wells modestly notes above, the students' measurable literacy skills did improve quite markedly during the period of the study; yet equally, if not more significant, were the durable shifts in their learning dispositions and their sense of belonging. Ultimately this is what will count for them in their educational trajectories and future lives.

The invitation to engage in writing about memories here, in the case of Raphael and in the research for the *Memories* book, is not motivated to bring the personal 'into the corrective space of the school' (Patterson 1993, p. 66), nor to make it the object of surveillance, nor to make it the site for therapeutic activity (Kamler, 2001), all criticisms that were made by feminist poststructuralist researchers of progressive approaches to writing pedagogy which made use of the writer's life worlds in order that it could be seen, noted and repaired. Also informed by Foucault, Hunter (1988) argued that child-centred pedagogies and normative social training operate together in forms of modern literacy pedagogy, contributing to the management of increasingly diverse populations, where the relationship between the English teacher and students is a key site for disciplinary practices and training in technologies of the self. The result was that English teaching was reduced to a series of binary

choices: freedom vs sophisticated social control, culture vs morality and personal growth vs useful skill.

In contrast, the work that was done in the context of place-based pedagogy in the school reported here made place and change the objects of study. Writers, texts designers (teachers and students alike) enjoyed considerable freedom in contriving the stories to be told, the representations to be included. Rather than being stuck in the local, this version of *place*, in Massey's sense, is already global as already relational.

If we really imagine 'local places' relationally – as meeting places – then those relations may go around the world. In that sense 'the global' is just as 'real' and 'grounded', even just as 'everyday', as is the so-called local place (Massey, 2005).

The inevitable thrown-togetherness of classroom and school populations in sites of urban renewal makes it an unpredictable, unmanageable arena for social action. While some educators despair in the face of such uncertainty and governments try to address diversity by insisting on common standards, some teachers are able to work with the 'interjecting trajectories' (Massey, 2005) in creative and productive ways. Switching the pedagogical focus is an evener; it serves to position people similarly. Everyone can speak and write about place. Focusing on the shared changing spaces of the neighbourhood and the school itself further builds common ground for collaborative research, documenting and publication.

Our observations indicate people's relationships with place(s) across time, including children's memories and those of family and community, can provide rich resources for developing literate repertoires. Constituting the individual and collective memories of people who work and learn in schools as assets is part of a wider agenda to contest deficit discourses which circulate about poor and culturally diverse communities and the schools located therein (Comber & Kamler, 2004; Dooley, 2011). As Dooley (2011) has pointed out, how teachers attribute capability to learners becomes crucial to the curriculum and pedagogy that is enacted in the classroom and the range of learning opportunities young people are afforded. If teachers continue

to assume that immigrant and refugee children have no language or no experience from which to draw, or alternatively see their experience only in terms of a traumatic background to be forgotten, then the classroom learning community is subsequently impoverished. In the process of exploring memories -their own and those of their family and the wider school community- Raphael and his school-mates were able to accomplish positive identity work associated with respect for their histories. They were also able to forge improved connections with the school and neighbourhood as they learned about the history of the school and its former and current inhabitants. Their positioning as autobiographers and journalists required their full intellectual participation in the classroom. They were no longer relegated to passive observation or seen as people without valuable knowledge to contribute.

Notes

¹ Some of the relevant projects focusing on place and literacy include in 2009, *Investigating literacy, Year 4-9*, Helen Nixon, Barbara Comber and Rosie Kerin, funded by Department of Education and Children's Services; in 2006 and 2007, *Critical literacy: redesigning school learning in high poverty communities*, Barbara Comber and Helen Nixon funded by the Australian Literacy Educators' Association; in 2003 and 2004, *Urban renewal from the inside-out: Students and community involvement in re-designing and re-constructing school spaces in a poor neighbourhood*, Barbara Comber, Helen Nixon, Jackie Cook and Stephen Loo, funded by Myer Foundation

ⁱⁱ *New literacy demands in the middle years: learning from design experiments* is an Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Project (No. LP0990692) between the Queensland University of Technology and the University of South Australia, The University of Sydney, The Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS)(SA) and the Australian Education Union (AEU) SA Branch. Chief investigators are Barbara Comber (QUT), Peter Freebody (The University of Sydney) and Helen Nixon (QUT). Partner investigator is Victoria Carrington (the University of East Anglia, UK). Research Fellow is Anne-Marie Morgan (the University of South Australia).

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Appendix

Raphael's Story (Original Spelling)

In the lovely season of spring 1995, a boy was about to be born. He was going to be named Raphael. When I was born my auntie and uncle came to see me at my great-grandfathers house which was near the border of Uganda and Sudan and that's where I was born. Three years later my little borther was born. He was cute because he was chubby. When I was a few months old I had so many picture taken and at home now I have every photo except 10 of them. On my six birthday me and my mum planted a small tree and she said "the person that gave me this plant it six years ago." I was so happy. On the 20th of June 2001 my families life was about to change forever. My mum got the certificate to come to Australia. We got pack and it took us about two days to get ready. On the 23 of June we had a huge party and almost the whole village came in party. The children went to play and we used to play a really dangerous game where you would have a team of six and go into the jungle and go high up in the tree and started playing chase. If one of your team mate get touched your whole team has to touch one player from the other team. One of my friends fell off a tree about 15 metres to the ground and broke his leg and arm. The celebration was a success except for the child that fell off the tree. I will never forget it until the day I die. Few hours before we left my whole family went to say goodbye to everyone we knew. The best thing I remember doing with my dad was building a small cottage for us to spend time together. Before we left on the 25th of June I remembered all the great time my family and I spent in Africa. We used to be like farmers you could see vegetables and fruits everywhere like peanuts, corn, potatoes, bananas, tomatoes, carrots, grapes, grapefruits and plenty more plants. I still remember this baboon that kept stealing our corn. Me and my sister gave it corn so it wouldn't steal a lot of them. It kept coming for more and more near the house every time. One day when we came from church it was sleeping in the house. When it woke up it saw some corn outside so it ran of and took the corn along with he/her. One day a group of people named the baboon hunters chased it away or even killed it know one knew. As we left to aboard the plant Qantas we waved our

final goodbye to everyone plus to my home country Africa. I cried and cried until we entered the plane it looked and smelled fantastic. I could hear the engines begin and got scared we meet crash. One of the attendants came and put on my seatbelt. When we were in the air I didn't want to touch the window because I thought I would fall out and die. We stopped at Madagascar for petrol. Did you know that a jumbo jet uses 220,000 litres of petrol per tank? We stayed for a few hours and it was still about 10min before the sun rise. We were on our way to Perth or Sydney. We were in the plane for hours but I didn't mind because they had yummy food and cool music while my sisters were watching movies. We went to Sydney because I could see the Sydney Opera House. From there we stayed for about 30min because there was a delay at Adelaide airport. When the delay was over we left and landed and around eleven o'clock. When we got out of the plane some of our relative were waiting for us as soon as they saw us they started singing a traditional song to welcome us. We got driven to the house that we were going to stay at. We lived at Richmond and went to Gill street primary school for two months because that's how long we stayed there. After that we moved here to Ridley Grove. My sisters and brothers plus myself went to Pennington primary for about two years. Now only one of my sister goes to the same school as me at Ridley Grove school. There used to be eleven people living in our house but now four of them live on their own. On the 26th June my family would be six years living in Australia. Ever since we left Africa I've improved my English and have lots of new friends. At first I found it hard to find friends because I couldn't speak English really good. I wasn't going to enter the classroom until I saw one of my friend there and he left my old school Pennington Juniors. Me and my two brothers go to visit my uncle and he lives in Henley Beach road while my two big sisters live with one of their friends in west Hidmash. My auntie and cousins came to live in Adelaide because they used to live in Tasmania in some town called Lonstastan. My uncle Josh, by brother Wallie and I visited them back in 2005. One year after or so they came to stay. My mum went looking for house they could stay in and they found a house in Torrensville. In the back yard was lots of fruit trees. They moved from there to MacDonald Avenue were there was oranges and other fruit trees on the road and when I go there I bring back some fruits. Tasmanian is a great place

peaceful streets and wonderful places to see. There are mountains that you could climb and if you get to the top it looks beautiful because you can see a beautiful lake and the city. I want to work really hard and become successful and have a good future with a good job and have a house plus a really nice car. My mum wants me to be an aircraft engineer or work as an engineer. The reason why I chose to work hard to become an engineer is so I can buy a car and put a new engine, spoiler, two huge mufflers, level six turbo and Nitrous plus a really Gangster paint job. My uncle loves cars and I love them because they are really cool. Believe it or not I want to pimp up my car because of a video game called "Need for Speed Underground". It inspired me to become an engineer so that I would know where the wires go and don't stuff up my car. Well if you read this biography you should know a lot about me and my ambition when I grow up.