

# Schools as Meeting Places: Critical and Inclusive Literacies in Changing Local Environments

In 1995, I started to undertake a series of longitudinal case studies of children's literacy development in three low socioeconomic areas in South Australia. I was interested in the kinds of literacies made available in contrastive school contexts and what different children took up over time (Nixon & Comber, 2006). One of the schools that had a reputation for its innovative literacy curriculum and pedagogy was located in the highly multicultural, high-poverty, inner-western suburbs of Adelaide (one of the poorest areas in urban Australia); this area was soon to undergo a massive urban renewal project. There I met early childhood teacher Marg Wells and her principal, Frank Cairns, and we began an ongoing collaborative and reciprocal research relationship, which has now extended across their work in three schools. Sometimes our grants were modest and sufficient only to assist with teacher-release time and the collection of teachers' and children's artefacts; other times, classroom observations and interviews were supported; on one occasion, the funding was largely devoted to the design and development of a school garden.

The project reported here focused on New Literacy Demands in the Middle Years and employed a design-based research approach (Cobb, Confrey, di Sessa, Lehrer, & Schauble, 2003). The teachers explicitly researched the affordances of place-based pedagogy for students' literacy learning. They collected baseline data regarding students' written and oral language capabilities, designed a series of classroom innovations, and then collected follow-up student data. Here, I focus on only one element of a year's work—the collective research and production of two class books of memories of the school—as an illustration of the potential of mak-

ing place the object of study for critical and inclusive literacy curriculum.

Schools bring people together—children, parents, caregivers, volunteers, community members, teachers, and administrators—as more or less willing participants in an education process. Many children experience major discontinuities between their lives in- and out-of-school, and such differences impact literacy teaching and learning in both predictable and unpredictable ways (Hull & Schulz, 2001). Many parents are reluctant to come into the school if their own memories of schooling are less than positive. Some teachers find themselves teaching in neighbourhoods where they themselves are strangers. Yet, as leading literacy researchers have demonstrated in careers dedicated to building culturally inclusive and dynamic literacy curricula (Au & Mason, 1981; Au & Raphael, 2011; Heath, 1983, 2010; Luke, 2011; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Moll, 2001), it is possible for educators to help children assemble dynamic and complex literate repertoires whilst ensuring respect for their existing social and cultural practices.

However, educators are now facing unprecedented accountability demands, which can reduce their capacities to respond to difference (Luke, 2011). Policy borrowing that results in the application of standardized grids of specification to different learners rarely has positive consequences for marginalised students (Lingard, 2010; Luke, 2011), and such borrowing assumes that student performance across generic competencies is unproblematic. Standardization of education through mandated testing of selected measurable practices denies the specificity of teachers' work and students' learning, and ignores context. Not surprisingly

in an era of rampant standardization, which downplays the significance of different contexts, the affordances of *place* as a source of learning are frequently ignored, or worse, are seen as deficit, and policy tends to proceed as if implementation were not locally situated.

I draw on feminist geographer Doreen Massey's (2005, p. 130) notion of places as relational and changing; she sees places as "*spatio-temporal*

*events*" that require ongoing negotiation. Doing so allows us to re-think what constitutes a school community and what different people bring to that community. Whilst inspired by Massey's sense of the "spatial as an arena for possibility" that "leaves openings for something new" (Massey, 2005, p.

109), I recognise the persistence of the "grammar of schooling" (Tyack & Cuban, 1995), its resistance to reform, and its sheer relentlessness as a disciplinary institution (Foucault, 1977). Yet I want to advocate for educators to take responsibility for making school/places "community spaces," in the sense that all spaces are socially negotiated and hence more or less welcoming to different participants. Marginalised parents, for instance, frequently report feeling alienated from school sites.

Schools are material places located in geographic sites, with different social, cultural, and physical histories and characteristics that are dynamic and subject to change. Schools are places in the sense that they are purpose-built (or adapted) structures for educating youth. The typical experience of children in post-industrialised nations is attendance at a designated elementary school, often a neighbourhood school. Yet international research suggests that the *neighborhood school* is being erased as the result of neoliberal educational forces (Lipman, 2011; Lupton, 2003; Sanchez, 2011).

The physical and metaphorical significance of "the school" as a particular kind of place captures people's imaginations, as evidenced by the popular-

ity of the genre of school stories across ages and cultures, such as the Harry Potter phenomenon, which is built upon an "imaginary materiality" (Cresswell, 2004, p. 7). The obviousness of the school as a particular kind of built (or adapted) environment in a particular location leads us to take it for granted, yet children's (and teachers') everyday experience in school spaces is embodied, psychological, emotional, and specific. The work of geographers may offer a fresh perspective in helping us to see the school as a particular kind of place, offering specific kinds of spaces—social, cultural, and physical.

I begin by introducing Massey's approach to place and space and review recent discussions of community. Then, I briefly summarise key features of the long-term collaborative research on which this paper is based; I have conducted this research with teachers, young people, and community members in western Adelaide in the context of urban renewal. I explain that across the projects, the students were positioned as researchers, designers, and journalists. Finally, I focus on a recent project where these teachers deliberately explored the affordances of place-based pedagogies for the development of students' literate repertoires.

## Schools as Meeting Places and "Thrown-togetherness"

Massey (2005) writes: "Place as an ever-shifting constellation of trajectories poses the question of our thrown-togetherness" (p. 151). Making specific reference to place, she argues that "there can be no assumption of pre-given coherence, or a community or collective identity" and that "place demands negotiation" and "invention" (p. 141). She goes further to claim that "places pose in particular form the question of our living together" (p. 151). Her writing evokes a sense of contingency and particularity of where and how different people come to be together at specific times, but refuses a romantic return to the nostalgia of places; rather, she draws attention to the dynamic demands of the politics of places. She questions any assumed natural belonging to place.

In thinking about schools and classrooms, I find Massey's notion that places involve constella-

tions of trajectories, including those of the human and non-human worlds—“throwntogetherness”—extremely generative. Her stance does not resort to a theory of chaos where nothing can be done; rather, there is the sense that something must be done. Negotiation is not feared as a problem, but rather seen as an opportunity. Such an approach avoids the determinism that is so often associated with educational discourse about working-class or poor areas, and also the hopelessness, wrought by some theories of globalisation. She argues for exploring the *power-geometries* (Massey, 2005, p. 101) within which places are always located. Hence, being constituted as an “urban school” or a “disadvantaged school” can only be understood in relation to the wider economics and politics that produce poverty—in particular, areas of a city or in rural or regional places.

Massey’s conceptualisation of space avoids problematic static inertia. She explains:

This is space as the sphere of a dynamic simultaneity, constantly disconnected by new arrivals, constantly waiting to be determined (and therefore always under-determined) by the construction of new relations. It is always being made and always therefore, in a sense, unfinished. . . . (Massey, 2005, p. 107)

This approach allows a reimagining of the positive potential of schools—as institutions always under construction in terms of social relations that must be continuously negotiated—where different people are thrown together in a space located in a place and expected not only to get on but to learn together. Massey contests views of globalisation that defend place as a victim and that assume territorial traditions are unproblematic; she challenges versions of place that see it as a surface and ignore its ongoing dynamism. Her approach is to consider the specificities—how local–global politics and power relations are constructed in different places and situations.

Educational researchers increasingly recognise that *place* and *space* are not static contextual backdrops to the real action of school; rather, space and place may be constitutive of students’ subjectivities and learning trajectories (Gulson & Symes, 2007; Lipman, 2011; Lupton, 2003), and some recent

research has begun to explore the affordances of place for literacy learning (e.g., Comber, Nixon, & Reid, 2007; Sánchez, 2011; Charlton, et al., 2011). The key point is to recognize that “places” and “spaces” are dynamic and relational and shape people and their relations to themselves and each other, and to see these contingent relationships as potential positive sites for meeting and negotiation.

## Schools and Their Communities: Being Educated Somewhere

Young people are educated in particular places, by particular teachers, in specific classrooms, with particular cohorts of peers. How they come to be in that classroom in that school in that area at that time in all likelihood is contingent upon their family histories and needs (in terms of education, work, housing, affiliations, and so on); these, in turn, relate to regional, national, and global economies and political conditions.

While the term *community* conjures up a sense of belonging and neighbourhood, it may mask significant diversity, and indeed conflict, within an area. It also obscures the fact that places are not limited to the local, but always operating and constituting themselves in relation to others; they can be seen as “glocal,” as globalisation impacts mobility, communications, work, and leisure.

Moje’s (2000) seminal discussion of the definition of “community” in community-based literacy research highlights a series of problems. Among a number of questions she poses to herself as researcher, Moje asks: “What does it mean to study community? . . . Am I entering a defined geographical space? A psychological space?” (p. 78). By reviewing her understandings of one case student’s potential memberships in various communities—gang, ethnic, neighbourhood, adolescent, religious, and so on—and finding them all wanting—Moje identifies a degree of slippage in the use of the term “community.” She goes on to explain

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that neighbourhoods and groups are heterogeneous, mobile, and changing, and concludes that “community” can never be a stable category. Her review of related literature indicates that community was not well defined, and was used interchangeably with terms such as neighbourhood, culture, social-class groups, families, youth organizations, church, or intake area of a school. Indeed, *community literacies* often meant “non-school” literacies. She identified four main constructions of community literacies:

- a problem to be fixed
- an unknown to be described and interpreted
- a resource to be integrated
- an alternative to be repositioned

Moje suggests that literacy researchers need to take into account transnational and mobile communities and the ways in which people use new communication devices to sustain a sense of community across borders. If we take up the challenge offered by Massey to re-think places as sites of opportunity, we can think of schools as meeting places, sometimes for multiple communities, on a small but significant scale.

## **Making Place the Object of Study: Enabling Critical and Inclusive Literacies**

I now turn to the work of two classroom teacher-researchers with whom my colleagues and I have undertaken inquiries for almost two decades in the western suburbs of Adelaide, South Australia (Comber & Thomson, 2001; Comber & Nixon, 2008). Their abiding commitment to respecting student diversity and to designing literacy curriculum and pedagogy that inspires young people to learn is the subject of ongoing research and considerable fascination for me. Marg Wells and Ruth Trim-

boli work in a multicultural neighborhood with a high level of poverty in an area undergoing urban regeneration. For the last decade, they have directly engaged with the urban renewal process by working with the council, urban planners, architects, and project managers. They have positioned their students as journalists, researchers, and designers—investigators and placemakers in their own right.

From the nineties when the Westwood Urban Renewal Project was first mooted, Wells, a resident and teacher in the western suburbs, became actively involved; in various ways, she educated successive cohorts of students about the planned changes to the local area—from the demolition of old buildings (including houses currently occupied by families with children attending the school), to the development of local parks, to new housing and infrastructure, such as improved roads, lighting, and so on (Comber & Thomson, 2001). Examples of place-based literacy curriculum over the extended period included:

- research reports for the urban planners and community garden designers about indigenous flora and fauna;
- reports on the health and numbers of neighborhood trees;
- a student-authored and illustrated alphabet book of meaningful places in the neighbourhood undergoing change (to be shared with their peers in a South African elementary school);
- an analysis of specific places in the school (using a *plus*, *minus*, or *interesting* framework);
- a set of designs for Grove Gardens (new garden to be built and cultivated on school grounds);
- a set of designs for the new school;
- two books documenting former and current students', teachers', administrators', and community members' memories about the school.

Along with these larger projects, students prepared oral reports for school assemblies, wrote poster autobiographies and magazine biographies,

and produced a range of multimodal, multimedia artefacts and digital texts to represent or describe buildings, neighbourhoods, school grounds, belonging places, views, and so on. They kept visual diaries and photographic records of the changes that occurred on the school grounds in the years the new garden and school were constructed. Because teachers made place the object of study, all students were included, as all had experiences with a range of places, including the shared spaces of the school. In addition, students were positioned as analysts. As much as they were encouraged to share places where they belonged and the desired places of their imaginations, they were also encouraged to engage in critique of current (and future planned) classroom, school, and neighborhood places. For example, after noticing the absence of a space for drama in the design of the new school, they wrote persuasively to the principal, successfully arguing for a design modification, explaining that drama assisted them in becoming confident speakers of English in public.

This approach to literacy curriculum is both critical and inclusive in that teachers lead students to develop deep understandings of content and discourses usually reserved for adults and the more privileged. For instance, they were introduced to the concepts, vocabularies, processes, and practices of architects, urban planners, and project managers (Comber & Nixon, 2011; Comber, Nixon, Ashmore, Loo, & Cook, 2006). For these children—growing up in urban poverty and learning English as a second language—such discursive practices were not likely to be part of their everyday lives. However, these are the very discursive practices that are exercised in urban renewal and the subsequent remaking of neighbourhoods and schools.

Guiding children in reading powerful texts and deconstructing their effects is a form of place-based critical literacy that is not locked into a time and place, but takes the everyday world and its textual practices as its focus for inquiry. It is inclusive in that all children can participate in discussions and reimaginings of place and space. In making their changing places the object of study, the teachers recognise that access to shared space is an asset for learning.

In addition to field trips, school ground observations, library research, and research with extended family, students also learned to conduct interviews and surveys and to explore their own and others' memories. For reasons of space, I discuss here only their most recent project conducted in 2009 and 2010—a classroom design experiment about the affordances of place-based pedagogy for students' literacy learning in the context of the building of a new school on the existing school grounds. In the next section, I discuss how memories of place—in this case the school—gathered by student researchers across the school's communities is a powerful collective process for meaning making and recording subjugated knowledges and experiences.

## Memories as Resources for Collective Meaning Making

At the end of 2010, the elementary school where Wells and Trimboli taught was due to be closed. Two other neighborhood elementary schools within a few miles were also to be closed. The three schools were to be replaced by a larger school (accommodating around 600 students), it was initially called a *Superschool*, which would open its doors in 2011. The new school was to be built on the grounds of Wells's existing school. Hence, her students had the opportunity to observe (within occupational health and safety limits) the new school being constructed. Building the school was part of a wider plan to provide better edu-

cational facilities in areas undergoing significant population growth, and it also involved economies of scale (in that less support staff and infrastructure would be required). Given that the school would need to accommodate children from the three former schools,

many of whom were from recently arrived refugee families from Europe, the Middle East, and Africa, the image of "throwntogetherness" is apt. The challenge: how to reposition this rich cultural mix with

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diverse histories, languages, and trajectories as a positive classroom learning community with collective meaning-making potential.

The concept of the “neighbourhood school” was overtaken by the rhetoric of a state-of-the-art education facility. In the light of these developments, both Wells and Trimboli designed curriculum related to the history and closure of the old

school and the design and building of the new school. Wells assisted her Grade 4/5 class in conducting research with current students, staff, and volunteers about their particular memories of the school. Trimboli’s Grade 5/6 class conducted research with former teachers and staff, school graduates, and local community members about their memories of the

school. The students planned when and where and how they would conduct the interviews, worked out the interview protocol, and recorded the conversations with field notes and digital recordings (audio and visual). They produced a range of transcripts and summaries of their interviews, and from that, submitted texts to their teachers (as editors) for inclusion in a book that would be locally published using Target Photobooks Editor™ software (<http://target.photo-products.com.au/>), which is a relatively cheap way of publishing through a service offered by a chain of discount department stores.

The resultant books, *Ridley Grove Primary School 2010: Memories* (Wells & Class, 2010) and *Memories of Ridley Grove R–7 School, 1946–2010* (Trimboli & Class, 2010), featured verbatim transcripts; paraphrased summaries and quotations from the interviewees; photographs of students, graduates, teachers, and other staff and volunteers; multiple images of the school and the grounds—just the kinds of texts that might be produced by oral historians and journalists. The Wells collection included the school canteen manager (the canteen is where

children and staff can buy snacks and lunches), the groundskeeper, office staff, current leadership team, and community volunteers, as well as a profile of each classroom and specialist teacher (including the Aboriginal education worker, ESL teacher, and the bilingual support officer) and their students. It represented the entire existing school community.

The Trimboli collection was necessarily more opportunistic, as Trimboli and her students first needed to use their networks and families to locate former staff and students. Ultimately, Trimboli and her student researchers wrote profiles of 8 former students, 1 former parent, 1 grandparent, 24 former staff (teachers, principals, office staff), 2 community volunteers, and 2 collaborating university researchers. Some of the students and teachers had been associated with the school as early as the 1940s when the school first opened.

Due to space restrictions, I discuss here a selection of entries from Wells’s book to give a sense of what was accomplished and to consider the learning processes entailed in its production. Given the length of the book, I have selected small extracts that exemplify the framing of the students’ research and the kinds of interviews that were conducted. From Wells’s book, I explore the pages about:

- the long-term School Services Officer who had worked at the school for 27 years and was currently the principal’s secretary (who retired when the school closed);
- a Grade 7 student (who would go to high school the following year);
- the canteen, cleaning, and grounds staff.

On the back cover of the book under two photographs of the school yard, the text reads: “Special thanks to the Room 15 journalists who interviewed and photographed all staff and students appearing in this book.” The positioning of students as journalists was key for the “professional” context the teacher created and wanted her students to understand. Wells has always been concerned that her students not be passive observers of the change processes going on around them as part of urban regeneration; rather, she felt it was her job to help them learn to investigate what was happening and why, disrupting

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unequal power relations and knowledge divisions that typically accompany urban redevelopment.

To accomplish this, she explicitly modelled how to undertake research as an engaged citizen and actively resisted representations of her students and the wider community as victims. She did this by continuously inviting to the school and her classroom urban planners, architects, council personnel, and project managers and modelling an investigative approach to the planned changes in the neighborhood and school. The year that the new school was being constructed, the students from Wells's and Trimboli's classes had regular meetings with the overseeing project manager, interviewing him about the design, the process, and its progress.

Wells's decision to interview the entire school community, including volunteers, part-time staff, and maintenance staff (canteen, cleaning crew, and

groundskeeper) reflects her desire for the students to understand what makes a place work. Together, Wells and her class developed a set of interview questions that were the basis of conversations, but to which students and participants could add. These included: What do you do? How has your role changed over the time you have been at Ridley Grove? How long have you worked here? What have you enjoyed about working at Ridley Grove? (This question tended to prompt responses such as the variety of events, the diversity of the community, the cooperative children, the friendly parents). What changes have you seen during your time here? What is a memory of Ridley Grove that you'd like to share? (This might be something special, exciting, funny, touching, interesting, different, or meaningful; answers often involved a festival, celebration, or special occasion.)

## MAKING MEMORIES

Students in the article put together a memory book of their school and community. The following resources from ReadWriteThink.org share additional ideas.

### Not Your Usual History Lesson: Writing Historical Markers

Students will develop their summarizing skills while learning about local history. They will learn to consider audience while selecting topics, conducting research and interviews, and writing historical markers for their town.

<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/your-usual-history-lesson-30810.html>

### Connecting Past and Present: A Local Research Project

In this unit, students become active archivists, gathering photos, artifacts, and stories for a museum exhibit that highlights one decade in their school's history.

<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/connecting-past-present-local-1027.html>

### Walt Whitman as a Model Poet: "I Hear My School Singing"

Students first analyze Walt Whitman's "I Hear America Singing," then use Whitman's poem as a model for their own list poems.

<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/walt-whitman-model-poet-989.html>

### Memories Matter: *The Giver* and Descriptive Writing Memoirs

Using *The Giver*, students discuss the importance recorded history. This provides context for descriptive writing of students' own history in a lesson that integrates personal writing, research, and literary response.

<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/memories-matter-giver-descriptive-13.html>

—Lisa Fink

[www.readwritethink.org](http://www.readwritethink.org)

Some participants wrote answers to these prompts, but all were also interviewed and recorded. From there, the students developed the entries, selected the photographs, and submitted it all to Wells. In order to produce the text, the students needed to learn to work from their data, transforming first-person responses (i.e., *I*) into third-person reports (i.e., *she*)—something her Grade 4/5 ESL students found challenging, but mastered in the process of editing drafts.

One good example from the book is the page on Coral, who was the School Services Officer. It includes two long paragraphs and two photos. Stephen's quotation is short: "Each morning I really

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want to go to school because of the library. A spacious, peaceful place where learning has no limits and people can relax and enjoy a good book." The physical, intellectual, and emotional pleasure that Stephen reports from the library featured in

many student accounts of preferred places within the school. Many report they will always remember their teachers and friends, but more than this, they specify what they will remember about particular teachers and spaces.

Another grade 7 student, Celine, states, "In Media Studies, Mrs. Longin gives students fun projects and is always happy with a sense of humour. I have enjoyed my lessons with Mrs. Longin and I will cherish the lessons I have shared with her." Recently arrived Blessing states, "I really like working with Ms. Martin. She helps me with my literacy. I am getting better at adjectives and pronouns." Children, as well as teachers, speak of the school as "a very friendly environment" and "unique because it has many children from different cultures."

These comments indicate the ways in which people feel as though they belong, look forward to coming to school, and appreciate what it offers them individually and as members of a peer group. As a graduate of Wells's teaching, Stephen had previously participated in years of curriculum devoted to

belonging spaces—the functions of different buildings and places. It is interesting that in the month before he left his elementary school, this adolescent boy so readily announced his desire to be at school, to be in the library, and to be reading.

A two-page spread is devoted to the cleaners, the groundskeeper, and the canteen staff. One of the canteen staff had been at the school for 32 years, with others having joined more recently. In reading her entry, one can see how the school has provided her with employment and a community across a long span, in part because the canteen attracts volunteer parents, including the Vietnamese community. Other staff, including the groundskeeper, report on their appreciation of staff–student sporting occasions—The Ridley Grove Olympic Games week and netball matches. He mentions "everyone working as a team." In these two pages, the work that keeps the school going, in terms of cleaning, food provision, and building and garden maintenance, is depicted. The materiality of managing a school as a shared place and set of particular spaces emerges. Yet the reports also indicate that each person experiences Ridley Grove as a social space; it is a space of work, a space of negotiation, and a space of friendship. What were once invisible jobs and relationships are brought into the foreground.

In describing these short entries, just fragments of the entire 50-page book, I wish to foreground the complexity of Wells's undertaking and the diversity of student-researched and -authored entries. I also want to convey that this is a serious endeavour by a teacher-researcher working with her entire class as co-researchers and journalists over a period of months. The objective is not just to produce an attractive memento of the school community, although it certainly does that, but to seriously engage with the ongoing history of a place and the people who make it. In reading the texts, I can see evidence of Wells's place-based pedagogy and her interest in architecture and school design—both in the students' writing and the participants' contributions. This is a school undergoing change, but it has a high degree of consciousness about place, community, teamwork, and diversity. I cannot do justice to this richness here, but my point is to make visible



what is possible when place is made the object of study, when it is viewed as historically formed but continually changing, and when students are positioned to observe, analyse, and document.

In learning to conduct interviews with people of various ages within the school environment and learning to explore memories, the students are inserted into conversational spaces that may otherwise elude them. It is important to note many of these students speak English as a second or third language or dialect; some families are recent refugees, some are children or grandchildren of migrants; some are from Aboriginal families; some are from long-term working-class white communities. There are families from Vietnam, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, Macedonia, Malaysia, Russia, Laos, Serbia, China, Cambodia, among many other countries—many of these places of significant conflict.

On this occasion, Wells's students worked with the *school community* in the sense of the people who worked and learned at Ridley Grove. Trimboli's class went beyond the people currently at the school to explore those who had previously worked and learned at the school, thereby showing young people that places, people, and institutions have histories. The books they have produced became valued artefacts for launching the new school, for creating a new meeting place, and as a site of new constellations of trajectories. The books are a joint accomplishment of the student researchers, their interviewees, and their teachers, who collectively took on the roles of curriculum designers, orchestrators of meetings, and text editors.

A distinctive feature of Wells's and Trimboli's literacy pedagogy was the frequency with which students were encouraged to produce collective texts. In other words, students were not only responsible for individual literacy work and the production of artefacts, but also for the collective production of research and products that had wider social goals and outcomes. A number of literacy researchers have noted the potential for working productively with shared classroom memories (Gregory & Williams, 2000; Vasquez, 2001). A focus on place, in this case through the collected memories of a school community, emphasized students' shared

experiences as collective resources for negotiation and representation. A literacy curriculum, in part based upon shared and individual experiences of learning about place(s) and history(ies) with/in and of places, can provide rich material for the negotiation of meaning making.

## Conclusion

Schools represent microcosms of the wider power-geometries in which places are related. Wells's school is located in the poor and multicultural western suburbs of Adelaide, which are gradually in the process of being gentrified. The new superschool is hoping to attract new families buying homes in the area, people who are likely to be more affluent than the public housing residents whom they will replace. Children are watching the construction of new housing, the demolition of the old, and the migration to outer suburbs of some of their friends whose families can no longer afford to live in the area. Each time we ignore young people's, and indeed teachers' situatedness and relations with place, when we ignore the politics of places, we lose opportunities for creating "openings for something new" (p. 109) in Massey's terms.

In this article, I have considered the school as a place that brings together a diverse community of people with distinctive histories, roles, and resources. Together they co-create the school as a particular kind of *meeting place* that produces its own affordances for learning. I have provided a snapshot of pedagogies that allow children to experience active, agentic participation in the processes of community development and change to the built environment.

If we consider the processes of production involved in the *Memories* books through Massey's concept of meeting place and the notion of thrown-togetherness, we can identify a number of key moves the teachers make in designing a critical and

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inclusive literacy curriculum around the changing local environment and its populations at this key moment. The conceptualisation of the books—texts to be researched and written by children gathering the memories of peers, teachers, former graduates, school workers, and volunteers—highlights the rich and diverse resources that exist in the multiple communities schools serve. Yet often people’s memories are not thought of as significant, and children may not be considered ideal researchers. The collection and representation of multiple accounts by student-researchers positioned as journalists involves these young people in different kinds of conversations, different kinds of listening, and ultimately new

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forms of writing. The resultant artefacts come to have symbolic value in the school and wider local community. For their part, students are being introduced to the processes of local history production, and when that history reflects significant linguistic and cultural diversity, the opportunities for learning are considerable. The formulation of this curriculum, including the range of embedded complex literacy tasks, capitalises on the fact that schools are indeed meeting places, where different people might negotiate to make common, shared, and varied meanings for and with each other.

My aim here is not to romanticise or defend place, or to privilege the local. I am aware of critiques of place-based pedagogy and the limits of the local (Ferrare & Apple, 2010; Massey, 2005; Nespor, 2008). However, I am keen to have literacy educators remember “place” as culturally negotiated and as material (Sánchez, 2011) and to not take “space” for granted. The appeal of Massey’s approach is that her framings of place emphasise contingency, specificity, and the possibility of negotiating something new. This seems a productive way to think about schools in this era of increasingly mobile and culturally diverse populations. With respect to designing critical and inclusive literacy curriculum, it allows teachers and learners to

use the resources of the remembered, the material here-and-now, the imagined and projected, to make and contest meanings.

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**Barbara Comber** is a research professor in the Faculty of Education at Queensland University of Technology. She can be reached at [barbara.comber@qut.edu.au](mailto:barbara.comber@qut.edu.au).