Urban renewal from the inside out: Spatial and critical literacies in a low socio-economic school community

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Abstract

This paper focuses on how teachers worked to build meaningful curriculum around changes to the neighborhood and to the school grounds located in a precinct listed for urban renewal. The researchers drew on a long-term relationship with the principal and one teacher in particular to design and plan a collaborative project to involve children in the re-development process as active participants rather than passive spectators. The project involved architecture, journalism and education academics and undergraduate students working together with Grade 3/4 and 5/6 teachers and students to negotiate and re-design an area between the preschool and the school. Data include videotapes of key events, interviews with teachers and students, and an archive of school students' artifacts experimenting with spatial literacies. The project builds on the insights of community members and researchers working for social justice in high poverty areas internationally which indicate the importance of education, local action, family and youth involvement in building sustainable and equitable communities (Appadurai, 2002; Browne & Jain, 2002). The goal was to assist young people to assemble productive social practices and discursive resources that could translate into social action in their neighborhood.

Introduction

> We cannot remake the world through schooling but we can instantiate a vision through pedagogy that creates in microcosm a transformed set of relationships and possibilities for social futures; a vision that is lived in schools (New London Group, 2000:19).

Children growing up in poverty in western countries are sometimes victims of exploitation and neglect. Frequently they lack opportunities and resources in their neighborhoods to become active citizens, to enjoy the benefits of living in a wealthy society and to see themselves as represented positively in the media. They are often blamed for their poverty and represented in deficit ways. When urban renewal is undertaken many are excluded from the benefits and from having a say about what is done and where (Arthurson, 2001; Gallagher, 2004). Some even lose their homes. However it is possible for urban renewal to work, at least in part, in the interests of the community and for young people to become actively involved. In this paper we discuss one such project[1].

In South Australia, for the past decade working class and poor suburbs close to the city have been gentrified as new home-buyers look for affordable near city dwellings. Typical house-holders in these neighborhoods are likely to be occupants who moved there because there was cheap public housing available, sometimes 'emergency housing' and shelters. The inner north-western suburbs are home to many Aboriginal families, white working-class families and significant populations (including many recent refugees) from Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Serbia and a diverse range of other cultural groups. A huge program of 'urban renewal' is now in process in these poor suburbs and with it are a range of impacts on communities, schools and children – some anticipated and some not. A large national developer, Urban Pacific is working collaboratively with the South Australian Housing Trust (SAHT) to redevelop a vast area of the western suburbs, named Westwood.

> Westwood, the largest urban renewal project in Australia, is a $600 million joint development between the South Australian Housing Trust, Adelaide-based developer Urban Pacific Limited, and the City of Port Adelaide Enfield (Westwood 2005)

Labelled as Australia's largest urban renewal project, the Westwood project will see '2,400 new homes constructed, 2,000 ageing Trust homes demolished and 470 Trust homes renovated' (Department of Human Services 2000) over an area covering six square kilometres and five suburbs (Woodville Gardens, Ferryden Park, Mansfield Park, Athol Park and Angle Park) (Urban Pacific 2005).

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[1] The project was conducted by Barbara Comber, Helen Nixon & Louise Ashmore from the Centre for Studies in Literacy, Policy and Learning Cultures, Stephen Loo, Louis Laybourne School of Architecture and Design and Jackie Cook, School of Information, Communication and New Media, University of South Australia with educators and young people from Ridley Grove R-7 School, Woodville Gardens, South Australia.

Precinct by precinct, different parts of Westwood are being 're-developed' as part of a 15 year plan. Old post-war semi-detached brick houses are being demolished, their former residents moved to other areas. A range of new housing is being constructed mainly marketed towards first home buyers. None of the former residents who lease the public housing are able to afford the new houses. Children growing up in the area are witnessing the demolition of property (sometimes their family homes) and the building of new dwellings, side-walks, curbs, plus parks and garden areas. On occasion the process takes longer and partially demolished houses remain that way, attracting vandalism and burning. Sometimes it is no longer safe for people to move through the neighborhood and their networks of connections are vulnerable to say the least. The kinds of strong communities that Moll and others (Moll et al., 1992) have documented are threatened by 'renewal' projects such as these. In the meantime in the state press this area remains demonized as a haunt for alleged drug-dealers and criminals.

Educational researchers from the University of South Australia have had a long history of working collaboratively with our school-based colleagues in the north-western areas (Ferryden Park, Mansfield Park and Woodville Gardens, formerly known as *The Parks*) and northern suburbs and have watched as parts of these suburbs and the local schools change. We are interested in the impact of continuous poverty, yet changing geographies, architectures and physical places on the work of educators and families. Schools are very much placed institutions with architectural divisions and furniture within their spaces that contain and prescribe activities and bodily habitus for specified groups. People are contained there in a Foucauldian sense (Foucault, 1979). Until recently school names identified their location, their postcode, their clientele. (In South Australia there has been a recent spate of re-namings, particularly in the high school sector, as schools compete for the 'best students'. Often schools re-name themselves to signal particular traditions, e.g. through taking the name of a famous historical figure.) In these suburbs over the last decade we have documented the innovative ways that some teachers have developed critical literacies about the neighborhood and the change process and made available various representational resources for representing their identities (Comber, Thomson & Wells, 2001; Comber & Nixon, 2004). This work featured opportunities to tell counter stories about life in *The Parks* and to engage in a Freirian approach to learning to 'read the world' (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

During this period the developers have welcomed input from the children about the new parks, yet the young people's agency has been limited. Some children learned through their research at school that their current dwellings were listed for demolition. Hardly empowering! While it is significant that the children learnt to 'read' the plans and maps, to begin to anticipate their material effects and to imagine and provide ideas for the new public spaces, they were still very much positioned as responders. These children were positioned to witness and provide advice about a suburb that was being improved for someone else and someone else's children.

At the same time as we were working 'in the local' with the teachers to position young people more powerfully, and to document that work, we were also trying to connect them with young people elsewhere. Primary school children at Ridley Grove Primary School were connected through their teachers and principal and their texts with children at Phepo in Pretoria South Africa. Young people in each place produced

illustrated picture books in English to tell each other about their places and their lives. These included *A is for Arndale* and *Letters from Ridley* from the children in South Australia and *A is for Atteridgeville* and *Fun and Games* from the children in South Africa. In these books young people represented themselves and their locales in ways that they decided might be of interest to young people living somewhere else (Janks & Comber, forthcoming 2005). Teachers and the school principals from each place visited each other and saw the material realities of each other's working lives. The principal and a teacher from Ridley Grove were inspired by the vegetable garden project at Phepo, initiated by the principal, Paulina Sethole (Janks, 2003). They had already designed and built indigenous gardens but now they wanted to do something else. The area between the Ridley Grove preschool and the school was seen as a possible site for re-development within the school grounds and importantly their aim was to involve children and their parents in the project in both the short and the long-term. They imagined a garden area and walk-way that would be welcoming, offer shelter and different kinds of play and learning spaces (Fisher, 2003). Children for their part began to imagine places they could smell, hear and touch, places to hide, places to look through.

From these travels, imaginings and textual sharing arose the *Urban renewal from the inside-out* project. Specific project objectives were to design and construct a garden and structure which would connect the preschool with the school and to involve school students and community members in the design and construction processes. Key educational aims of the project were to ensure that these children had an effective voice in one aspect of urban renewal, to introduce them to the discourses of negotiation and spatial literacies and to increase their connection with schooling through relevant and challenging curriculum. As educational researchers we acted as advocates and brokers seeking funding[2] to bring the project to fruition[3]. We recognized that this project was beyond our disciplinary expertise as literacy educators. We invited an architecture academic, who is also a practicing architect, to join us on the project to ensure that proper design and consultation processes were guaranteed; that we along with the school community could really learn about landscape architecture; and that the young people would have a chance to assemble spatial literacies and the discourses of architecture. We also invited a communications/journalism academic to join us in order to support us and the young people to document the negotiation and change process as it unfolded. We wanted to work against negative representations of *The Parks* area in the press, as suggested by such headlines as 'Residents living in fear of the neighbours', published in the only state daily newspaper *The Advertiser* (November 30, 2004, page 13; see figure 1). We asked academics from other disciplines to invite their students to join us on the project so that they could learn about working with young people (in this case socio-economically disadvantaged young people) as clients and informants.

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[2] In fact we secured funding from a philanthropic foundation in Victoria, Australia, known as the Myer Foundation which supports projects related to social justice and socio-economic disadvantage, but is not a research funding body. Consequently the major percentage of the funds is directed towards the clearing of the land and the building of the garden. A small percentage is allocated to the research process.
[3] See the Myer Foundation web-site at http://www.myerfoundation.org.au/main.asp. It describes its mission in the following way: "The Myer Foundation works to build a fair, just, creative and caring society by supporting initiatives that promote positive change in Australia, and in relation to its regional setting". The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors only and do not necessarily represent those of the Myer Foundation.

As literacy researchers with strong interests in different meaning-making practices (including popular culture, visual literacies, ICT in and out-of-school), and understanding literacy development as assembling repertoires of literate practices in and through specific situation and sites over time, this project presented us with rich possibilities. We anticipated observing the young people at Ridley Grove as they engaged with the task of re-designing the space as a garden that would materially and symbolically connect the preschool with the school. We looked forward to documenting the rich curriculum that might be negotiated around the project. In a broad sense this project is informed by a Frierian sense of literacy as concerned with reading the word and the world (Freire, 1970; Freire & Macedo, 1987) and also by an advocacy approach to working with communities in poverty. Our work is informed by critical understandings of literacy (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993; Luke, 2000; Street, 2003) and a new literacy studies perspective towards inquiry (Barton, 2000; Gee, 2000; Street, 2003). Hence we are hyper-conscious of issues of language and power, representation and identity, people and context, space and time. Recently we have also become increasingly interested in the possible connections between critical and place-based pedagogies (Gruenewald, 2003) and the potential and limits of multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996) and new and changing literacies (Lankshear, Gee, Knobel & Searle, 1997) to re-invest school literacies with contemporary currency and relevance (Beavis, Nixon & Atkinson, 2005; Nixon, Atkinson, Beavis, in press, 2005). Whilst we are interested in looking anthropologically at how school literacies are constituted, we are equally interested in participating in school and curriculum reform at a material level. We are interested in re-making schools as different kinds of places both materially and metaphorically.

As the project began to take shape we became more and more curious about what the young people would do with the potential resources made available, what they might "take hold" of (Street, 2001, 2003). We became equally interested in the themes of place and time (Gregory & Williams, 2000; Lemke, 2000; Tusting, 2000), spatiality (Leander & McKim 2003) and the materiality of textual practices (Omerod & Ivanic, 2002; Pahl, 2002) in literacy studies. How did these ideas relate to what our architecture colleagues termed 'spatial literacies'? Or, were we speaking different languages? What would these young people make of the architects' ways of talking about the world and representing what might be? What would they do (if anything) with the resources made available – the vocabularies, the concepts, the modelling techniques? To what extent would they appropriate critical and spatial literacies through their participation in this intervention into their school world? We continue to wrestle with these questions as the project continues. We have yet to analyze the whole corpus of data, which comprises fieldnotes, video footage and still digital photographs of key events and activities, interviews (video and audio), the artifacts produced by two classes of children of curriculum work related to the project. Here we make only an initial foray into the project data in an attempt to narrate how it has unfolded thus far and to record its manifold dimensions. We do this in order to begin to explore how it might connect with the work of others in the New Literacy Studies and particularly those exploring 'the spatial turn' in social theory (e.g. Leander & Sheehy, 2004).

An educational and community consultation project by and for design

Having secured a grant to support the project, we invited two teachers recommended by the school principal to work as co-researchers on the project. Grade 3/4 teacher Marg Wells had worked on similar projects in the past (Comber, Thomson & Wells, 2001) and Grade 5/6 teacher Ruth Trimboli was keen to be involved. While Nixon and Comber were very experienced in working collaboratively with teachers to plan the related curriculum, we literally did not know where to start in working backwards from our shared goal – designing and constructing a garden and structures – with the students and community of Ridley Grove. In preparing to work together with the school community, Stephen Loo, a practicing architect and academic in the field of architecture, took the lead in our planning. Interestingly Loo's approach to community consultation in the design of buildings and spaces turned out to be very consistent with key pedagogical principles of critical literacy that we had worked with for some time:

• engaging with local realities
• researching and analyzing language-power relationships, practices and effects
• mobilizing students' knowledges and practices
• (re)designing texts with political and social intent and real-world use
• subverting taken for granted 'school' texts
• focusing upon students' use of local cultural texts
• examining how power is exercised and by whom (Comber, 2001, p. 276; see also Comber & Nixon, 1999)

Loo was insistent that he and his students in architecture needed to learn more about how to consult with the community, especially when the community to be consulted comprised mostly children, and culturally diverse children who were growing up in poverty. Further, he was clear that we needed to spend considerable time ensuring that children were in a position to be consulted. This meant that the young people needed to have time and new resources for thinking about spaces, structures, gardens – that is they needed to be inducted into the ways of thinking, vocabularies, visual literacies and conceptual resources that architects deploy. Hence he planned a program of key events and activities in which the Ridley Grove students and the University of South Australia students would participate together. We worked with the teachers to devise and design 'literacy curriculum' around those plans.

The concept of 'design' was significant for the *Urban renewal* project. The term 'design' is ambiguous; it refers to both structure and process, where the latter involves agency. The design of a building refers to its organisational structure – the way it is or has been designed. But the design of a building also refers to the process of designing it – a process in which an architect designs or works creatively with available concepts and design elements to produce that design. As Kress (1995) has argued, curriculum too can be understood as design - 'a design for social futures'. He writes that 'the contents and processes put forward in curriculum and in its associated pedagogy constitute the design for future human dispositions' (Kress, 2000 p. 161). As already noted, an important goal of critical literacy approaches is to develop in children the dispositions and capacities for equitable participation in social, economic and cultural life. Any critical literacy curriculum needs to be designed with this goal in mind.

An important design element of the *Urban renewal* project was for our inter-disciplinary team of university researchers to push against the disciplinary boundaries of university departments and curricula and extend university students' experiences of professional practice in architecture and journalism to include working with children. At the same time as university students extended their professional skills and experience, the researchers' complementary expertise in architecture, literacy, representation and communication enabled teachers to expand the forms of literacy – or multiliteracies– engaged with by the children and to build a critically inflected curriculum and pedagogy around the redesign of a barren outdoor space (see figure 2). Central to the 'multiliteracies' argument is the belief that in a globalised knowledge economy, people are required to negotiate increasingly complex sets of literate practices including a critical orientation to representation and communication (Cope & Kalantzis 2000, New London Group 1996). The involvement of practising and emerging architects in this research brought to Ridley Grove R-7 School an emphasis on the concepts of 'design' and 'spatial literacies' as well as new resources for developing the critical and place-based literacies with which the school had been engaged for some time.

In architectural terms, the design of the garden was staged around two main 'projects': *Learning the language* and *A belonging space*. The architectural concept of design was central to both projects, each of which provided the basis for a number of key events around which were developed short curriculum units of work differently inflected by Wells and Trimboli. Their curriculum designs spread across modes and media (expressive and reflective writing, drawings, interviews, discussion, modelling, computer imaging), spaces and places (buildings, parks, animal environments, home, school, neighbourhood, state and nation) and time (reflections on the past, descriptions of the present and projections into the future). Research data were collected from all of these events and units of work which encouraged children to use existing and new language and skills to explore ideas about space and place, and their feelings of 'belonging' to spaces and places. We are unable in this paper to provide a comprehensive discussion of the project outcomes but will instead focus on several aspects of each of the projects *Learning the language* and *A belonging space* designed by Loo and his architecture students.

Learning the language: building stories and building literacies
The work of an architect in designing spaces and sites draws upon a range of highly developed literate practices concerned with space, time and translation. Before students began to design for the redevelopment of the school site, curriculum work was carried out that aimed to develop their understanding of spatial literacies. Two early events in the *Learning the language* phase were *Building stories* and a *Visit to the university architecture studio.*

Building stories was critical in establishing the future direction of the *Urban renewal* project. Architect and university researcher Stephen Loo visited the school to present a talk and power-point presentation that showed images of a range of buildings, spaces and structures that he and other architects found interesting and 'bizarre' (see figure 3). He invited the children to 'build stories' about the buildings by imagining what kinds of buildings they are, what might happen in them, who might use them and who might 'belong' to them.

This session laid the foundations of the project in a number of ways. It introduced the main organising themes–the language of architecture, and a sense of belonging to space and place – and presented the first of many opportunities to collect data about students' spatial vocabulary and sense of place. In this presentation Loo introduced the work of the architect through the key terms of *design* and *belonging* and made the crucial distinction between firstly, a building, and secondly, the process of design that goes into its production.

> I'm an architect and, as you know, architects build, well they design and then they build buildings…
>
> One really important thing is, you know, let's think about the people that use these buildings and who they belong to, and whether we can actually feel so that we can actually belong to these, because that's very important. When we design buildings, we want them to actually be very much part of our lives. We don't want buildings that we cannot use or feel uncomfortable in, or that makes us unhappy or uncomfortable, OK?

The vocabulary and the concepts Loo introduced were taken up quickly by students, notably the process of design that incorporates a sense of belonging. For example, when asked about who might use a particular building, one student replied:

> Child: And the community (inaudible).
>
> Stephen: Ah, the community! What do you think the community would do around this building? You're right. It's designed for this community that's around the place.
>
> Child: Just the design.
>
> Stephen: The design? Yeah! What do you think is special about the design? Look let me tell you a story, OK?

Loo assisted the children to understand that the design process needs to consider the people who use a space, and how it is relevant to their lives, so that it becomes a place where they 'can actually belong'. He concluded the *Building stories* event by emphasising the agency of the community participants who take 'ownership' of the spaces that architects design:

> When they design things, [architects] might plan for the building to be something useful in the community, but it's the community that actually gives the buildings their sorts of uses and their meanings, so if for example a building is sort of interesting in the community and you're part of designing that building, then I think the architects will have a better idea of how it can become useful to a community and the users, and also most importantly, that we can kind of belong to it and own the buildings.

Students' reflections on the *Building stories* event, described through discussion, writing and mind maps, was revealing about their available vocabularies and understandings about architecture at that stage. They identified materials, shapes and uses of buildings (*titanium, stone, dentist, deli, museum*) and identified aspects of the design process (*any shape, make anything, the spiral tower, the stacked building*).

Where they struggled to access an appropriate descriptive repertoire in order to talk about some of the buildings they had seen, they referred to familiar objects with similar shapes (*looked like a telescope*). At this stage they were using adjectives to describe buildings (*red, big, old, stone*), but were not describing buildings in terms of their constituent design elements such as doorways, arches, decking, pathways, roof, walls and windows.

Some weeks after the *Building stories* event, Loo and his architecture students invited the children to visit the university architecture studio where they were able to co-participate in some of the university students' exercises (see figure 4). Following this, the children went on a tour of some of the architecturally significant buildings and public spaces in the CBD near to the university and were invited to 'see them differently' by noticing some of their design elements (see figure 5). Teacher Marg Wells reflected that when they got to the CBD, the children:

> looked instead of just walking around. We actually focused their observations on the buildings and structures, and they were feeling the pillars on Parliament House, and they were comparing the shapes and windows and edgings and roof, and they were having an opinion …. It was 'I like that better than that', and 'This is different than that because …' ….. And they came back and they wanted to talk about it.

In the classroom Wells and Trimboli applied a process similar to Loo's as they designed curriculum that met the aims of the project while remaining meaningful to the children's lives. The teachers' work in unpacking the terms design and belonging, and rebuilding them through curriculum, was clearly visible in the activities and exercises carried out in the classroom which assisted children to see, describe and create the elements of design that go into a building, structure or space. Activities included detailed surveys of the students' school and neighbourhood and analysis of a wide range of buildings and structures drawing on resources such as high quality architectural magazines, architectural online resources and visits to sites of architectural interest.

Throughout, teachers were responsive to students' interests and encouraged them to experiment with modes of meaning-making in a number of media. Wells, for example, noted that when her class came back from the architecture studio and tour of the CBD they wanted to talk about it and this led to other work such as the generation of simple computer drawings using the drawing tool in a word processing package (see figure 6). In her assessment, 'you could see the influence of the excursion' in their drawings. Similarly, 'when they did the art work with shapes, they were no longer confined by just what they had seen before … it had opened up their eyes to making more imaginative structures'.

A belonging space: building designs for spaces of belonging
A belonging space was the second organising project in *Urban renewal from the inside out*. Its goal was to develop the knowledge and ideas generated in *Learning the language* by assisting children to conceptualise, articulate and design a 'belonging space' which was eventually narrowed down to the particular space that was to be re-designed and built in their school yard. This second project was conceptualised as a liberating exercise that would allow children to rethink notions of space, shelter and

structure while also allowing the researchers and university students to explore children's sense of place.

At this stage, activities that assisted children to learn the language of design was merged skillfully by the teachers with curriculum work that explored children's sense of 'belonging'. In the process, teachers found that even young children have a strong sense of where they do and don't belong:

> we were finding out, as young as 8 and 9, [children] have very clear ideas about where they belong and where they don't belong, and how they want things to be, and what should be there and what shouldn't be there. It's given them a chance to focus on that, and to have a voice to start talking about it - and not just talk, because there's been lots of avenues that have been used - but to develop that whole idea …. but what I found was that the two didn't necessarily link together, that their ideas of structures and their ideas of belonging were not necessarily the same thing ….

With her students, Wells developed the two things separately, beginning with 'belonging' as a feeling and an idea, then moving to places where the children felt that they belonged, and finally to the design of a belonging space. She also allowed a number of iterations of these activities. For example, when they were first invited to talk about a 'belonging space', children focused on their bedrooms - how they were, and how they would like them to be. Wells encouraged them to explore their ideas further in poetry writing and drawing (see figure 7). From there, she invited the children to develop a belonging environment for a pet. This involved class discussion about general requirements such as food, water and shelter, and spaces for sleep, play and exercise, and moved to a consideration of the needs of a specific pet (see figure 8). Wells explained to us the belonging environment made by one child who had always wanted a pony:

> she doesn't have one, but she knew exactly what her pony would be like. It was going to have a fence that it couldn't jump over and get out, that it was going to have access to water and food in this enclosure, and there was somewhere to lay down on some hay if it wanted to, and there was a little gate to get in and out of, so you could shut it in there if it needed. It had grass so it was nice and soft to run around on, and it also had a little pool over here because it liked to have a little swim, and its bed. It had a roof, a shade, and something nice and soft to sleep on, and it had a bit of protection there, and its name was written above so it knows that's where it sleeps. And just the way the horse was constructed ... she thought of all the conditions, and it's just wonderful.

Trimboli's curriculum was somewhat different. For example, in order to extend her Grade 5/6 children's thinking from 'buildings' to 'spaces' she took them on a visit to a local park where she invited them to consider the space of the park through its elements (*grasses, rock with fossils, trees, branches, houses, bricks, bridge, fence, leaves, birds, people*). Prompts invited students to record what they saw and felt, and whether they felt they 'belonged' in this space. Trimboli recounted:

> From there we looked at developing a sense of belonging from an Aboriginal perspective… That was another goal, to try and get the kids to understand that

appreciation of a sense of belonging. From then they've written descriptions of their home – a favourite place in the home, a favourite place at school, a favourite place in the state – with a description about what they liked about that place and described each place - a place where they had a sense of belonging and feeling comfortable.

In much of her pedagogy Trimboli used a strategy of inviting students to move from description to evaluation, then to improvement or re-design (e.g. *more plants, shade with seats, rotunda to be painted*), and then to an assessment of the consequences of the re-design, or explanations of what could now be done or experienced in the re-designed building or space (see figure 9). She recounted how she applied this strategy in order to focus on the specific site for redevelopment:

> I've had three aims. I had the initial aim for the kids to come up with the idea that gardens or parks improve an environment, and that was done by having a look around the area here, and seeing how some people's gardens look better than others, or how the whole appearance of the house and garden looks better when it's done up. Then we had a look at the school to see what was positive, minus, and interesting, which is what we collated here. Then we had a look at that particular area between the kindy and the school, and thought about what would improve that area.

Although *Belonging day* was the culminating event of this stage of the project, several other activities were important preliminaries to it. First, Loo introduced the children to the concept of 'design elements' and the particular elements of pathways, platform, garden and walls. These were subsequently explored over time through discussion, writing, drawing and finally 3D modelling. This allowed children to focus on an individual element and to consider its design in some detail.

Groups of children[4] were allocated a design element to develop and invited to discuss how they would represent their element and develop it into a design. The session began with a brainstorming session using mindmaps, telling stories and drawing on large pieces of paper. Children considered how their element would look, feel, smell and what materials it would be made of. Out of this process children then modeled their ideas using a type of white card that architecture students use for model making.

Groups approached the task in diverse ways. Exploring the element, 'pathways', one group produced a mindmap and drew individual detailed plans of paths and trails which they brought together into a final pathway design (see figure 10). Another group divided the element 'garden' into the further elements of table, birdhouse, plants, birds and worms. The exercise was an important stage in prompting the children to consider the details and elements that go into designing a 'park', 'garden' or 'building' and developing their skills in *translating* their ideas from talk to drawing and from 2D plans to 3D modelling.

Following the elements exercise children were invited to focus on the school yard site and to imagine and create designs for it that incorporated some of these elements. In her classroom, Wells prompted children to think about developing the area at the front of the school with questions that asked them to think about what they would like to

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[4] Mixed-aged groups were formed by combining both Trimboli's and Wells' classes.

see and do in the area, to consider why, and to describe it (what would it look like?). By this time, children were able to draw on a wide and specific vocabulary with which to describe what would go into their ideal re-developed school yard space:

> **What I would like to see in the area?**
> A bird bath, a flower bed, a creek, a garden bridge, a path to walk on, a garden bench, some trees for shade, pebbles around the creek, some plants around the creek.
> **Why?**
> Because it's creative and stands out the garden. And a flower bed for looking at and the creek is safe because it's got rocks so the water doesn't flood and a bridge to walk because the creek water comes under the bridge and through the garden.
> **What would it look like? Describe:**
> The flower bed has thirty-five bright red roses on a circle shape. The creek has colourful pebbles like green, purple, brown and yellow and there are two shady trees which grow in summer, a long wriggly path to walk on and a cool solid bench.

Wells also invited her children to represent their ideas about the redesign of the space in drawing, painting or modeling (see figure 11).

With her class, Trimboli extended descriptive and persuasive writing by inviting students to design the site or sections or elements of the site between the pre-school and school. Her children too showed newly developing competence and confidence in describing their designs for the garden (*the design I have created is a bridge. It goes over a shimmering pond and has two paths connecting to it*) and writing about why their design should be incorporated into the site (*our section of the garden should be incorporated into the grove gardens because our students would like a place where it is peaceful and quiet… Here people can watch and learn about nature*). They too produced visual representations of their designs using a variety of materials (see figure 12). In both classrooms ideas and representations in writing, drawing and painting were incorporated into 'consultation books' designed to promote discussion among the school and wider community (see figure 13). Accordingly, space was left on each page for written feedback to the children's ideas (see figure 14).

The next step of 'pegging out' these designs on the site enabled children to experience taking their designs into the school yard space and allowing them to be informed by the reality and restrictions of the space to be redeveloped. In Loo's view, this is an important and creative spatial skill for children to develop. It not only allows them to transpose ideas from paper and small scale models to a real space, but also to look at a space and a design as a long term plan that can eventually be realised. This literacy is therefore not only visual and spatial and embodied (see figure 15), but is also temporal or time-based.

Belonging day was a key event for the project. On this day children displayed their work for school and pre-school students and staff, parents and other community members by arranging static displays (see figure 16) and taking people on guided tours of a re-created version of the pegged out site (see figure 17). This event performed an important consultative function and visitors were encouraged to provide

feedback to children's ideas and designs collected in their consultation books (see figure 18).

Belonging day also put on display consultation drawings and a model of the first iteration of the garden design produced by the university architecture students. This design was produced on the basis of their 'translation' of the children's ideas and designs developed during previous months. Their design showed a garden that would lead people through a series of experiences conceptualized as five gardens: the shade garden, the sound garden, the water garden, the active garden and the meeting garden. It incorporated five design elements that had been important to the children as evidenced in their work: poles, walls, water forms, canopy/shelter and garden (see figure 19).

Belonging day and the architecture students' design led to further curriculum work and consultation. Trimboli, for example, invited her Grade 5/6 children to draw the architects' design, adding in more detail to one or more of the elements, and they were able to produce quite sophisticated hand-drawn designs (see figure 20). She also used the design in conjunction with a 3D computer aided drawing (CAD) package that allowed the children to draw plans and add design elements to scale in 2D on a computer screen, and also to render these designs to scale in 3D colour. The use of CAD allowed children to engage with professional architectural tools and to experience what their preferred redesigned space might actually look (see figure 21).

Conclusion
The children's awareness of the constructedness of built environments was increasingly evident as the project developed. Buildings were no longer described as 'just a building' (*big, red, stone*) but instead were understood to have *been designed*, by a person or a group of people as part of a *design process,* incorporating consultation and negotiation, and taking into account factors of use and belonging, of materials and cost, of space and time (*I like how it is designed*, *I like how it is designed and built*). These understandings were potentially empowering within the context of the larger urban renewal project happening in the surrounding neighbourhood. If children can identify the power and authority that are needed to 'impose a vision on space' (Zukin cited in Arthurson, 2001, p. 810) then they are in a position to more actively participate in consultation processes and/or to contest their exclusion from such negotiations. In redesigning their school grounds students developed the discursive resources to conceive and articulate this vision while understanding some of the limitations inherent in the space (such as limited resources, safety, security and risk of vandalism).

Our aim was to assist young people to assemble productive social practices and discursive resources that could translate into social action in their neighborhood and beyond. It is too soon to know whether these young people will be able to transfer their new repertoires of practices to issues in the wider neighbourhood and into their futures. The project is ongoing, but already we can see and hear them speaking, acting and designing in new ways. Rather than the school limiting their literacies to a narrow range of simulated exercises, through this project they have assembled significant understandings, new language, spatial and visual literacies. While our project is very much in the local, by working across spaces and in and on particular places over time, we believe that the material and conceptual resources they are acquiring may allow

them to operate beyond the local; that their literacies will be durable (Brandt & Clinton, 2002). This durability, we believe, is partly a consequence of the fact that the children were engaged in this project in many different ways:

- Bodily (the project required physical activity, and movements and actions in and out of school, inside and outside)
- Linguistically (the project introduced - and educators and students repeatedly used - new vocabularies in the design process)
- Materially (the project provided different 'stuff' that could be experimented with for model-making and different places for displaying and considering it)
- Through multiple media (the project introduced and made available different media for children to represent and work on ideas)

Many school projects strip out the richness of everyday life and the complexity of getting things done 'in the real world'. In this project we (the teachers and the academics) tried to overturn the dominance of typical school literacies (Hull & Schultz, 2001; Street & Street, 1991), in order to make available genuine possibilities for the development of new situated literacies that would have currency beyond the project. Signs that the repertoires of literate practices have been taken up by these young people include not only their appropriation of the vocabularies of the architects, but also their continual questions about when the changes to the grounds are going to start and how they can be involved.[5] Further encouraging signs are the many children who have spoken to the researchers about 'university' and expressed interest in 'going there'. Some imagined themselves as future architects. As the grounds are cleared, the structures built and erected, the trees, shrubs and other vegetation purchased and planted, there will be new opportunities for the children to make their marks on this place. We hope too that they will document, through a variety of media, the change as it happens. In the process we hope that the spatial, documentary and critical literacies associated with this project will contribute to building their dispositions towards action and social justice in their future places.

As researchers we recognize that a project such as this has considerable potential for multiple layers of analysis. Documentation of pedagogical and curriculum practices which re-position young people to engage with significant issues are clearly important and we have begun this in the current account. Clearly the project does not represent school literacy business as usual; yet projects such as this which work against the normative also require detailed analysis to establish the effects they actually have (Luke, 2004) and how different children take up various repertoires of practices. We are eager in future renditions of the project to draw upon the theoretical resources of our colleagues from other disciplines. We anticipate that co-exploration of the large corpus of data (in multiple media) from different disciplinary perspectives will be illuminating. We envisage grappling collaboratively with analytical challenges such as:

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[5] The project began in February 2004 and continued throughout the school year. The children then went on their long summer holidays and returned to their new classes in February 2005. In March some of the children began asking Marg Wells and Ruth Trimboli for updates on the project and expressed interest in ongoing involvement even though they are now with different teachers.

- How do we 'read' children's garden designs?
- How do we analyse new purpose built literacy artifacts (such as the consultation books)?
- How might we productively analyse across artifacts (such as drawings, models, writing and computer based designs)
- How might we analyse children's ongoing material contributions to the garden (such as tiles, artworks, flower patterns etc)
- How can we do justice to curriculum built over (and beyond) a school year?

No doubt as we begin to work systematically across the events, practices and artifacts other questions will emerge.

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Appendix of figures

Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4

Figure 5

Figure 6

Figure 7

Figure 8

P.M.I. analysis of the school grounds

Figure 9

Figure 10

Figure 11

Figure 12

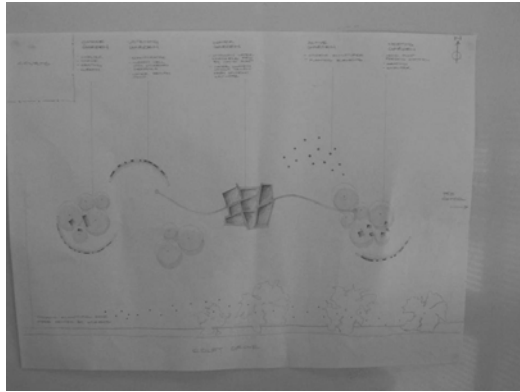Developing the area at the front of our school

Figure 13

Figure 14

Figure 15

Figure 16

Figure 17

Figure 18

Figure 19

Figure 20

Figure 21